Innocence Lost?

The early sexualisation of tween girls in and by the media:
An examination of fashion.

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Abstract

The relationship between the mass media and children is historically fraught, characterised by a concern for the potential effects on the leaders of the future. This thesis addresses the role of the media (particularly magazines) with regard to ideas of sexualisation, examining fashion clothing and identity in relation to tween girls aged between eight and 12-years-old. The impact of mass media is undeniable, and vital to a discussion of modern sexualisation of girls, as Huston, Wartella and Donnerstein maintain there are "strong theoretical reasons to believe that media play an especially important role in the socialisation of sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour" (1998: 12).

Surveys were conducted with a total of 168 tween boys and girls, and focus groups with 28 girls in this age bracket in New Zealand, to explore the roles of fashion, media and sexualisation in the lives of young people growing up at a time of unprecedented consumerism and media exposure. The results found that parents still have great influence in the clothing choices of their tween, though they are shown to move progressively towards independence and autonomy as they approach adolescence. When looking at advertising images and fashion in magazines, these girls showed clear signs of age aspiration and an intense dislike for anything remotely 'kiddy'.

Whilst the examination of sexualisation had to be conducted on an implicit level, many girls commented explicitly about the degree of sexuality in some images, their dislike for such characterisations waning over time. As the goal of the mass media and advertising is to turn people into consumers, even commodities themselves, this research contributes to a growing discourse around the need for children to be protected and taught to engage critically with media texts to prevent sexualisation, commodification and exploitation from drowning out the tweens' unique voice.

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1. Introduction

In *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis*,* four children pass through a magical wardrobe into a world called Narnia. In this fantasy world they discover they are princes and princesses; transformed from the selves they were on the other side of the doors. The modern wardrobe fulfils much the same role. By 'passing through' the wardrobe, how children appear on the 'other-side' has implications for their identity and the people they then become (or at least appear to become). At times, selfhood seems to be put on and taken off with fashion, rendering all items of clothing elements of a costume and subsequent performance, highlighting their transformative ability.

Clothes gain this power through the meanings attached to them and their wearers. In contemporary culture, the mass media play an instrumental role in circulating these meanings. This thesis will examine the role of the media in forming and shaping the relationships girls between the ages of eight and twelve have with clothes and fashion; how they relate fashion and its representation in the media through advertising to issues of identity, femininity, and body image. In particular, this research will seek to examine issues of sexualisation in young girls and how, and to what effect, the media impacts upon these girls' perceptions of fashion and the expression of sexuality. The point at which girlhood (or tweenhood as a newly emerging phenomenon, describing the stage between childhood and adolescence) intersects with fashion and sexuality is of particular interest due to the momentum being gained by consumer culture in supplying particular identities, often conflated with particular fashion clothing products, for young girls to occupy. It is relevant to study children, especially girls, in this context as children are generally seen as more vulnerable and thus more susceptible to manipulation.

Studying the effect of media on girls in New Zealand is of great interest due to the high level of media young people are exposed to in this nation. Indeed, New Zealand is one of the most media saturated nations in the world (www.wired.com), perhaps due to our unique position of deregulation with no restrictions on foreign or cross-media ownership. Furthermore, while New Zealand is a small nation of only about 4 million inhabitants and greatly removed geographically from nations such as the United States and the United Kingdom (together with Australia, the sources of much of the large percentage of foreign media content shown on New Zealand television), we still occupy an

ideologically close, Western position in terms of our cultural values and ideals, and are characterised by neo-liberal market forces and the commodification of culture.

Fashion clothing is a particularly relevant aspect of the construction of childhood, especially girlhood, as clothes can be seen as an important external indicator of identity: the self presented on the outside. There are explicit links with the body and body image, as fashion requires the body for its display, and the body requires clothing to be present in society (at least in a socially acceptable way). Thus, fashion clothing is central to the performance of the body, the self and identity. Bourdieu refers to the act of clothing the body as a means of constructing and presenting the self (1984). As clothing is an external product, yet can have the ideas of self and identity 'interwoven' in the fabric as it were, it provides a clear illustration of the relationship between the culture of consumption and commodification, and the sexualisation of the self. This is particularly true for females as clothing is an important aspect of appearance, closely tied to the representation of femininity and gender, and even more so for young women and girls as they strive for approval from others. As Frost notes "society is able to reject you on the basis of your appearance and everyone, especially young people, wants or needs to be accepted" (2005: 77).

This thesis is concerned with girls rather than boys for several reasons. Firstly, the nature of fashion marketing and advertising has been shown to be largely gendered in the audience it seeks to capture, girls are targeted more frequently and aggressively, and report more concern with body image and interest in clothes. Secondly, when discussing sexualisation, there is a general assumption that one is referring to girls. Feminist research in particular has maintained a strong case that boys are simply not addressed to the same extent as girls in a discussion of sexualisation and fashion. This could have several meanings; one being the traditional argument that while girls and women are the objects of sexual desire, men are the owners of 'the gaze', the ones who do the looking (Mulvey, 1992). Thus, while girls are subject to this early sexualisation as 'beings', boys are 'do-ers' who somehow evade this categorisation. How sexualisation affects boys in contemporary society is an interesting point for future research, which this thesis will not address. Finally, this thesis takes the stance that boys and girls, males and females, are sexualised differently in society, largely related to power issues. This draws on feminist arguments which maintain that girls are taught to look pretty and act nicely

('sugar and spice' indeed) and encouraged to exhibit particular expressions of 'girliness' and femininity, subordinating them to men who occupy the positions of power.

The term 'sexualisation' with regard to this thesis draws on the idea that the media, fashion, and its advertising encourage girls to dress more provocatively, and promote the [early] adoption of a sexual identity. It is my belief that this undermines the 'innocence' of childhood and age appropriate expressions of sexual awareness and activity. Elements of Foucault's discussion of power in discourse are relevant here when considering the power of the advertisers and marketers to position girls in a sexualised way compared to the little power girls have to challenge these ideas and positioning. Barker and Galasinki write that, according to Foucault, "living persons are required to 'take up' subject positions in discourse in order to make sense of the world and appear coherent to others" (2001: 13, cited in Matheson, 2005: 61). This highlights the need of girls to position themselves in relation to the clothing and advertising targeted at them, and perform their identity based not only on the discourse of language they use to construct their sense of self but also the discursive power of clothing and fashion which further 'speaks' to, or others 'read' as, their identity. Winship asserts "sexuality is as culturally constructed and learnt as is the language we speak" (1987: 113). Sexuality is a key part of Foucault's work, as he maintains that "since the nineteenth century, sex has been the pre-eminent site by which identity has been controlled in western society" (Matheson, 2005: 62). The sexualisation of girls through media representation of fashion can thus be viewed as an early expression of an attempt to control their identities. Schirato and Yell argue that sexuality and sexual practices have become "virtually the principal criterion for determining social normalcy, identity and value" (2000).

This is an important area for research because of the potential repercussions for the individual and society if indeed the media and fashion affect the ways girls formulate and express their (sexual) identity. Critics show concern for related issues such as unhealthy body image, depressed mood, eating disorders and low self esteem (American Psychological Association, 2007), as well as paedophilia, precocious development and early sexual activity, teenage pregnancy and the pervasive impact of consumer culture. Arguably, the sexualisation of girls occurs along a continuum, with a sexual look or 'gaze' at one end of the spectrum, and the blatant and perverse sexual objectification of children (such as abuse and trafficking) at the other, extreme, end of the spectrum.

Valerie Walkerdine points to the construction of a gaze which is complex and contradictory, "popular representations of eroticised little girls is the theory, and child sexual abuse is the practice" (1996: 326-8). Moreover, the time of childhood as a developmental stage is held sacrosanct by many in contemporary society, a time of innocence and asexuality and thus any threats to this innocence, particularly in areas regarding sexuality and sexualisation, are considered with great suspicion. As Martin Lindstrom and Patricia Seybold acknowledge "each trend is set in the media" regarding children and their relationship to consumer practices (2003: 17), the media is the best place to start looking for reasons for these trends, and also a place to look for ways to combat them.

2. Review of Literature

Moving further into the twenty-first century there is increasing interest in the place and role media and commercialisation occupy in the lives of all members of society. With the proliferation and pervasive culture of media, there exists general concern about the content and nature of this media, particularly when considering younger members of society. Coupled with a current atmosphere that could be described as 'moral panic' regarding children's (particularly girls') ever-earlier introduction to the world of commercialism, consumption, marketing and advertising; the construction of childhood, in particular girlhood, is an issue increasingly attracting the attention of researchers. Spanning many different academic disciplines, the topics of media effects on aspects of childhood and consumer culture, and the intersection of these two fields are, deservedly, being examined with interest, although there exists relatively little academic research in the field. Indicating this topic is worth examination, increasing amounts of literature have appeared during the time this thesis was formulated and written. Modern notions of childhood being at risk can be traced to a general sense of deteriorating safety, instability and unpredictability in the world, contributed to by the breakdown of families and communities (James, Jenks and Prout, 1998). Furthermore, we now live in a world characterised primarily by flux and change, dynamic social identities and accelerated globalisation which has seen the blurring of boundaries between the concepts of global and local, public and private.

2.1 Historical views of childhood

History has often seen children characterised, and constructed, as inherently 'innocent' and therefore 'good', or alternatively as inherently 'evil' and therefore 'bad'. The innocence of children stems from the view that they occupy the position closest to God, and original perfection, which they move away from as they grow and mature (Archard, 1993). Christian Puritanism, however, moved away from this notion in the seventeenth century, as it taught that all children were born into flesh, and therefore sin, and as such had a generational inheritance of sin and depravity (ibid). These polarised views of childhood continue throughout history, being favoured at different times by different people and societal movements. The idea of childhood innocence and efforts to protect it

started to thrive during the nineteenth century, however, and can be considered to resonate strongest with contemporary western views. Notions of children inheriting 'original sin', on the other hand, have remained present in discussions of childhood, particularly drawn on when children commit reprehensible crimes such as murder, or behave in a way which contradicts their perceived innocence. Popular concerns regarding the early sexualisation of children can be seen in intense media attention around stories on this topic (including the media attention gained by this thesis based on preliminary results, prior to completion); the sexual marketing of (often young/teenaged) pop stars; provocative and/or suggestive clothing products marketed at children, including sexualised products such as padded bras and 'thong' or 'g-string' underwear for young girls; and new ranges of toys such as Bratz dolls (a more sexualised version of Barbie).

2.2 The construction of childhood

Considering that the relationship between media and children has been historically fraught, often questioned and researched especially with regards to issues of violence, language, and explicit content, this thesis seeks to address a 'hot' topic in contemporary society. Much debate exists around the degree of agency adults exert in their media consumption. By extension this debate is even more relevant to children, who are understood to be more vulnerable and in need of protection from potentially harmful material. Therefore, this research contributes to the increasing knowledge surrounding young girls and their relationship to media texts and fashion, drawing particular attention to the sexualisation of girls through fashion advertising and products targeted at a generation subject to an unprecedented level of marketing and advertising in a culture of consumption and media saturation. Certainly, the current 'popular culture' influencing girls is one in which they are "barraged with an ever more increasing and contradictory set of guidelines for how they should manage their developing sexuality" (Tolman, 2002: 8).

Within the examination of media effects on children, a debate exists between theorists located at various positions along the continuum of children as passive or active consumers of media. At one end of this continuum, children are seen to be passive,

unquestioning recipients of media messages ('dupes'), while at the other end they are increasingly competent discerners of media content, able to make their own interpretations, and discern multiple meanings from the messages transmitted by the media (Hall, 2000; Morley, 2006). Just as in the debate concerning adults, the degree of activism by children in handling media messages is highly contestable due to the very nature of childhood.

Whilst theorists query children's levels of activism, there are even more questions about the ways children use media and the positions they take in response to it; the commodification of culture and pervasion of consumerism, as well as how they perform different identities and versions of self and critically engage with media texts. Furthermore "commercial texts construct particularly institutionalised identities and relations" (Matheson, 2005: 59). This challenges many of the ideas concerning the availability of differing (and resistant) positions of active reading and interpretation of texts. As children are viewed as vulnerable and lacking socialisation skills acquired through the process of growing up, they are thus seen as less able to rationally understand or critically engage with ideologies expressed by more powerful actors in society.

2.3 Child development

One of the most recognised and respected framework for child development was developed by Jean Piaget (1966). In his "genetic epistemology" he proposed four primary stages of development – sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational and formal operational – which children move through in their development of adult cognitive ability (Driscoll, 1994). Piaget acknowledges environmental and experiential factors shape the rate at which children progress through these stages, although he maintains that in order to progress, children must fully master one stage of thought before progressing to the next. In this way, stages of thinking are likened to building blocks which need the previous stage of thinking to be firmly in place before the next block can be placed on the top of the stack. As this thesis focuses on eight to 12-year-old girls, it is worth looking at the final two stages in this progression towards adult thought, as they relate to the 'tweenager'.

Concrete operations begin to take place between the ages of approximately eight and ten, when reasoning abilities are becoming more developed. Children become less centred on their ego-centric views of the world, developing awareness of the opinions of others and starting to pay attention to these opinions, often using them to verify and validate their own opinions and ideas. The next stage of formal operations takes place between the ages of approximately eleven and fifteen, by the end of which, conceptual and abstract thinking abilities have been achieved. During this final stage, children take on a different type of 'ego-centric' thinking, as they begin to be able to imagine what others are thinking, they are inclined to believe that other people are thinking about them, and can therefore become more self-critical. Teenagers often develop a heightened sense of concern about their identity and other social, particularly appearance-related, issues, but this can begin in the pre-adolescent stage also (Sands, 2000; Woods et. al, 1996; Sands and Wardle, 2003; Maloney et. al, 1989). Furthermore, as these children become tweens and then teens the degree to which they question parental authority rises, and their trust in their parents as the source of 'absolute truth' evaporates. Thus, this transition into adolescence is often characterised by a pulling away from family and move towards independence (Driscoll, 2004). In discussing Piaget's theories, it is important to note that developmental psychologists debate whether children go through these stages in the way Piaget posits, and propose that not all children even reach the final 'formal operations' stage (Atherton, 2005). Despite these (and other) criticisms, Piaget has nevertheless had an enormous influence on modern developmental psychologists, and is an important inclusion in the discussion of child development. Indeed, the works of other constructivists, such as Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1983) build on Piaget's work, emphasising the role of language and other people in the learning and development of children.

Child development is further said to occur in three principal areas. Cognitive development is concerned with learning how to collate information about the world and how to think critically; physical development with growth of the body and movement towards sexual maturation; and emotional development deals with psychological and social development, developing an understanding of the self and related factors such as gender, family, peers and identity, also including sexual identity (Matsui and Johnson Evans, 2000). These three areas are closely inter-related, and advancement in all is vital to the progression of healthy child development. However, it appears in contemporary

society that they are not operating in sync with each other. While cognitive and physical development may be accelerated, it is often not the case that emotional development is keeping pace. This can be problematic as emotional development is pivotal in the young person's ability to process changes which occur due to their physical and cognitive progression (ibid).

The role of 'modelling' is also considered very important in development. This process teaches girls what is (and what is not) socially acceptable through observing the modelling roles played by other women in their daily lives and mimicking the ways women are depicted in the media, affecting their identity formation and their perception of how to conduct 'intimate relationships' (Huston and Wright, 1998; Bussey and Bandura, 1992). Alongside this, other adults and parents may, by their actions and statements, intentionally or unintentionally, reinforce ideas about girls adopting positions, attitudes, behaviours, and appearances embodied by sexualised adult women. In Bandura's theorising on "social learning theory" he has developed a way to "discuss the implications of learning via symbolic processes such as language formation and exchange through symbolic formats like television and other mass media" (Bandura, 2002). He suggests that people re-enact behaviours they have seen be rewarding for others, and avoid behaviours which have been punished (ibid). Without question, contemporary girls are growing up in an environment saturated with sexualised and sexualising messages.

2.4 Physical development – puberty and sexuality

There is an interesting relationship between the time puberty begins to occur and the degree of satisfaction with body image (Graber and Sontag, 2006). Early-maturing boys show more satisfaction with their bodies whereas early-maturing girls show increased dissatisfaction, perhaps as puberty is linked to weight gain in females (Carr, 1999: 8-10). In addition, early-maturing girls are more likely to develop conduct problems, be less educationally advantaged and show greater heterosexual behaviour than their typically maturing peers (ibid: 10). As the beginning of menstruation indicates the ability to reproduce, the development of breasts can be linked to an external expression of sexuality. Breasts are often considered as the 'marker' of femininity and sexual

attractiveness for women, particularly in media and advertising; "breasts are a defining attribute of all that is female: timeless icons representing female sexuality and motherhood throughout history" (Pederson, 2004: 8). Identity formation also gains momentum with this physical development and increasing autonomy is sought from the girls' parents. Moreover, the average age for the onset of puberty is decreasing over time, currently beginning on average between the ages of nine and 10 for girls, and about two years later for boys (Huston, Wartella and Donnerstein, 1998: 20). Indeed, the average age of first menstruation for girls was 12-years-old in the 1990s, five years younger than one hundred years previous (in Carr, 1999: 10). This can be put down to largely environmental factors such as health care, diet and living conditions, but, whatever the reasons, it remains an important consideration when examining the effects of early sexualisation as it relates to early maturation. At this time of physical change, psycho-social change is also occurring as, around the time of puberty, many young people begin to think about, and embark on, sexual relationships (Bennett, 1984).

According to statistics released by the Ministry of Health in 2002, up to 30% of New Zealand young people have had sexual intercourse before they reach the age of 15, rising to over half by the age of 16 or 17. This is in line with other international research, as The National Survey for Family Growth, taken in America in 2002, indicated that 53% of girls between 15 and 19 years old had had sexual intercourse. This is particularly relevant in a discussion of girls, as early sexual activity is more likely for girls than boys. Furthermore, one study indicated 70 percent of the females who said they experienced sex for the first time before they were 16 years old thought they "should have waited longer" when questioned at age 21 (Dickson, Paul, and Herbison, 1998; see also Pipher, 1994). Research suggests that women in New Zealand are starting to have sex at younger ages than previous generations (Ministry of Health, 2002), supported by Pipher's assertions that adolescent girls are not only sexually active earlier, but also with more partners (1994: 207). Certainly, ideas of pre-marital teen sex are no longer taboo for a sizeable proportion of teenagers; in some cases, teens state their eagerness to be 'rid' of their virginity (Liebau, 2007) and take onboard the Nike slogan – "just do it".

2.5 Sexualisation

Sexualisation needs to be viewed separately from healthy sexuality, which is a natural and important component of every individual, including children. However, this task of identifying oneself as a sexual being, usually achieved in adolescence, may be made more difficult by the presence of sexualisation (American Psychological Association, 2007: 3). Literature on the 'normal' sexual behaviour of children is relatively difficult to find, compared to literature on sexual 'deviance' or abnormal sexual behaviour. Nevertheless, sexuality itself need not be vilified, although the sexualisation of children (in the case of this thesis, particularly girls), does need to be treated as problematic. The American Psychological Association (2007: 2) defines sexualisation as occurring when:

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

These four different manifestations of sexualisation need not all be present, as the presence of one alone is an indication of sexualisation. Certainly, the final definition of inappropriately imposing sexuality is of particular relevance, however, elements of the other factors are also present in the treatment of children. This report also proposes that sexualisation occurs in three inter-related spheres; contribution by society (including cultural norms and values, including communication that takes place via the media); interpersonal contribution (the roles played by peers, friends, family members and others); and self-sexualisation (when girls internalise standards of appearance and behaviour endorsed by others, and thus treat themselves as sexual objects) (2007: 3). If sexualisation occurs in these three spheres, repercussions therefore affect the same spheres, with consequences felt on an individual, inter-personal, and wider societal level. Considering research "suggests that viewing material that is sexually objectifying can contribute to body dissatisfaction, eating disorders, low self-esteem, depressive affect,

and even physical health problems in high-school-aged girls and in young women" (ibid: 3), this topic must not be taken lightly.

Indeed, the inappropriate imposition of sexuality upon (and arguably within) tweenage girls lies at the heart of this thesis. Many girls who took part in this research also displayed certain elements of holding themselves and others to a narrow ('thin') ideal of beauty (Hesse-Biber, 1996; Grogan, 1999), and numerous advertising images examined also positioned girls in a place of sexual objectification by others and themselves. The crux of the matter, and stance of this researcher, is that this imposition of sexuality on pre-teen girls strips girls of their girlhood to a large extent, as media, fashion, and its advertising encourage girls to dress more provocatively, and promote the [early] adoption of a sexual identity; undermining the 'innocence' of childhood and age appropriate expressions of sexual awareness and activity.

In this vein, Tolman argued that girls (in this case, teenaged girls) in the modern environment are encouraged to take on a 'sexy' appearance without being aware of the implications of what being sexy or sexual means, or what it means to have sexual desires (2002). As what is considered attractive and sexy in contemporary society is conflated more and more with youth, the line between sexual maturity and sexual immaturity is becoming more ambiguous (Cook and Kaiser, 2004). This further complicates how sexualisation is to be addressed in society as older women strive for youth as an ideal for attractiveness and desirability, imbuing youth with overtly sexual undertones. When adult sexuality is instilled in younger, under-aged girls, they start to be viewed as sexually appealing; which could confer on them status as being not only sexually available, but also as 'appropriate' sexual objects. Naomi Wolf is aware of this pervasive dichotomy as she comments in contemporary society girls are "expected to be sexually available but not sexually in charge of themselves" (1997: 136). Merskin writes of the "fetishisation of young girls' innocence" (2004: 120) in a similar way to Walkerdine's assertion that "there is a hidden and covered-over eroticisation of little girls in the everyday gaze at them" (1997: 162). Society, and particularly the media, throws ambiguous and often contradictory messages at girls regarding how their blossoming sexuality ought to be managed. They are faced with the challenge of not being a 'prude', but also not being a 'slut', precariously tiptoeing the tightrope of acceptable behaviour that stretches between these two undesirable ends. The same social

stigma does not seem to be applicable for boys however, as it is commonly acknowledged that being sexually experienced makes a boy a 'stud' and admired by other boys whereas a sexually experienced girl is a 'slut' and often scorned by her peers. This sexual double standard remains present even in contemporary society (Hird and Jackson, 2001).

Research has been conducted extensively into the areas of body image and media effects, especially in relation to females and adolescents (Frost, 2001; Kelly et. al, 2005; Hargreaves and Tiggemann, 2004; Rauste-von Wright, 1989; Groesz et. al, 2002; Ogden and Mundray, 1996; Ward, 2002; Munro and Huon, 2005). However, there appears to be a paucity of research in girls younger than the 13-year-old threshold (when children become 'teenagers' and are deemed to enter adolescence); and particularly failing to address sexuality and sexualisation. Since the mid 1990s there have been an increasing number of studies examining younger children and body image (Wood et. al, 1996; Sands, 2000; Sands and Wardle, 2003; Cusumano and Thompson, 2001), often also referring to the role of the media. Typically though, much research with children focuses on the development of infants from birth to the time they enter educational facilities and begin attending schools around the age of five, as can be seen with any search of a library catalogue on such topics. Psychology and education text books, and research more generally, tend to focus on the early stages of development in infancy, and then the stage of adolescence, not completely missing the times in between, but tending to focus on other points instead (see, for example, Carr, 1999; Cole and Cole, 2001). This leaves a substantial gap in the middle where certain aspects of childhood are largely unknown. Increasingly, theorists are tackling the topic of childhood and its construction in the contemporary consumer culture, as can be seen by the emergence of literature around the 'tween' phenomenon (Sutherland and Thompson, 2003; Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003; Siegel, Coffey and Livingston, 2004; Linn, 2004; Schor, 2005). As adolescence appears to be downwardly elongated, starting earlier and lasting longer, the discussion of topics previously considered relevant to teenagers become increasingly relevant for 'tweenagers'; in between childhood, adolescence and, arguably, adulthood. As adolescence is recognised as a time when girls become more vulnerable, and are "full of contradictions" (Pipher, 1994: 21); it is worth examining the period leading up to their entry into this stage, setting the stage for these changes.

2.6 The body

Literature also refers to the continually evolving and transformative role of the body, described by some as a 'project', in performing and (re)presenting gender and identity (Shilling, 1993; Brumberg, 1998). This is of significant interest when discussing young girls and fashion considering the modern clothing styles for children, tweens and teens are often miniature versions of women's fashion items, despite the lack of physical maturity and development often required for these clothing items to be filled out as they were designed to be worn. Moreover, the time of middle childhood, through the 'tween' stage into adolescence, is known to be when intense changes begin in the body with the onset of puberty and menstruation for girls. These physical changes impact greatly on the transition into womanhood as the girls' bodies start to take on womanly looks and functions. While little research has been done specifically in this area with tweenage girls, some attention has been paid to potential (harmful) consequences for teenage girls in this "formative" stage of their lives, making choices which have "implications for the rest of their lives" (Pipher 1994: 72). Frost discussed shame (a response advertising incites by making girls and women feel inferior in comparison to the body images they are presented to 'live up to') as a type of internalised stigma, and argued that it has "a particular resonance in work on teenage girls and the body" (2005: 81). Graber and Sontag note that "taught by media, friends and family that a particular physique is attractive to the opposite sex, girls begin to evaluate their sexual attractiveness and their overall view of themselves based on these ideals" (2006: 27), highlighting the important role occupied by the body.

A new area of study has emerged, known as "body studies", which builds largely on the works of Michel Foucault (1978) and Judith Butler (1993, 1999). While the study of the body may seem to focus entirely on the individual, it is also important to recognise the different functions which can be performed by the body; from personal to social, cultural and even political. Indeed, as Schiebinger purports "the primary force of body history… has been to show that universal, transhistorical masculine and feminine bodies do not exist apart from culture" (2000: 2). One way of making bodies cultural is through certain types of clothes, and other factors such as tattoos or ornaments, which can express identity and belonging.

Butler argues that bodies have meaning ascribed to them through discourses which fragment them into parts, which are then problematised (1993; 1997; 1999). The sexualising of the body and identity construction which follows occurs through the performances of these identities over time, reiterating what is to be considered the 'norm'. Thus, Butler is asserting that identity can not be seen as static, but instead, is performed, as a concept always under construction, drawing on the work of Giddens, who characterises self-identity as a reflexive project (ibid). Goffman also points to the performance of the presentation of self, and the important role played by the body in expressing this identity (or these identities) as often controlled by social rules about what is appropriate and inappropriate 'body behaviour' (1972: 27).

2.7 Identity

The concept of the "feminine mystique", as proposed by Friedan, puts forward that "the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity" (1963: 327), which is not to be underestimated. Mary Pipher describes how girls become fragmented in adolescence and "try on new roles every week" (1994: 20). Sexuality can be seen as a part of this gender identity, and Schmidt and Voss assert it is a way to define one's identity from the inside out, although they also highlight the difficulty in defining 'sexuality' because of its context specificity, likening it to the way gender is contextually defined (2000:5). Indeed, Schirato and Yell discuss how sexual practices and sexuality have come to be "virtually the principle criterion for determining social normality, identity and value" (2000: 95).

In approaching research regarding young people and sexualisation, it is important to consider the impact on identity. Here, identity can be seen to be expressed on the outside in many ways, through speech and actions as well as clothing choices. "The boundary between the inside and the outside, just as much as between self and other and subject and object, must not be regarded as a limit to be transgressed so much as a boundary to be traversed" (Grosz 1995: 131). Moore comments on Foucault's influence in the social sciences to view the self as "not ontologically prior to the relations in which it finds itself: it is therefore culturally and historically constructed and formed" (1994); highlighting that the idea of self and identity are not a 'given' but something actively

created. In any society, consumers have varying amounts of cultural capital with which to create their own identities, as described by Hebdige's '*bricollage*' (1988). James Lull refers to the "push and pull" of culture; seeing the 'pull' as able to define the "provisional self under constant construction" (2006: 44-45). This construction of identity is often done subconsciously, but is always made through choices. Particularly in the time leading up to adolescence, children gain a heightened awareness of the range of identities available to them, and the relatively narrow set of socially acceptable choices. McRobbie describes choice as "a modality of constraint" within lifestyle culture, as an individual is expected to be able to choose 'correctly' (2006: 66). She describes this as the "burden of self-management" (ibid: 67), which can be seen in the lives of many young girls. One way this can be seen, is through their use of language. This was an important tool in the analysis of focus groups conducted for this research, warranting a discussion of discourse analysis at this stage.

2.8 Discourse analysis

When looking at the use of language, this can often be reduced to a version of the 'chicken and egg' discussion; questioning whether we say things because of who we are, or whether what we say dictates, indicates, or creates who we are. In other words, is our identity created through our words, or do we use words to reinforce who we already are?

In relation to speech, there are so many pre-established identities and positions to occupy that it could be argued we no longer speak language, but the "language speaks us" (see Heidegger, 1976; Gadamer in Dostal, 2002). John Paul Gee describes discourses (which he gives a capital 'D')[1] as

"different ways in which we humans integrate language with non-language 'stuff', such as different ways of thinking, acting, interacting, valuing, feeling, believing, and using symbols, tools and objects in the right places and at the right time so as to enact and recognise different identities and activities, give the material world certain meanings, distribute social goods in a certain way, make certain sorts of meaningful connections in

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[1] for discussion of discourses, see Foucault (1980), and Gee 1999 for further examples.

our experience, and privilege certain symbol systems and ways of knowing over others"
(1999: 13).

Indeed, language is not the only factor to be observed when identity is constructed and performed (often occurring simultaneously), but there is a wider sphere of influence to consider. As Gee maintains, who we are and what we are doing needs more than language to make sense; "to be a particular *who* and to pull of a particular *what* requires that we act, value, interact and use language *in sync with* or *in co-ordination with* other people and with various objects ('props') in appropriate locations at appropriate times" (ibid: 14). What makes 'Discourses' important is the element of recognition; putting different parts together to create an identity that is recognised by others, allowing comparison with other similar performances of the same identity, therefore validating expressions of this identity which line up with their past experiences of how that identity has been performed. This constrains the performance of identity as only recognisable within established framework, and anything outside this framework is discarded. That said however, discourses are (by nature) fluid and thus unable to fit within particularly strict boundaries; described by Gee as a "dance", he acknowledges every 'dance' always differs at least slightly from the last performance (op cit:19).

Judith Butler discusses the concept of performativity in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1999). This post-modern reconceptualisation of gender sees gender as something we 'do' (hence a performance) rather than something we 'have' or traits we inherently possess. In this book, Butler follows the traditional feminist approach of gender as a social construction, echoing Simone de Beauvoir's dictum that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (1973). As such, the repetition of performing certain acts (within the accepted cultural norms) is what constructs the self as a gendered being; performing the role of 'masculine' or 'feminine'. This public performance of gender is defined not only by the physical body and representation of femininity or masculinity, but is also linked with speech and the way one verbally expresses ones identity.

A post-modern interpretation proposes that "people are who they are because of (amongst other things) the way that they talk" in contrast to a sociolinguistic approach which traditionally views the way people talk as indicative of the person they already are

(Cameron, 1999: 444). Gee refers to a similar concept, called "recognition work" as the process by which people try to make their identity, or their performance of 'who' they are and 'what' they are doing, seen by other people (1999:20). This may be done consciously and indeed calculatedly, or it could also be done sub or unconsciously. It is important to consider the "performance, negotiation and recognition work that goes into creating, sustaining and transforming [Discourses], and the role of language (always with other things) in this process" (Gee, 1999:21).

This acknowledges the active role individuals play in producing their gendered behaviour, as well as recognising that gendered identities are variable and unstable. Butler's concept of performativity also allows for the performance of gender to be context specific, and also for the boundaries of 'masculine' and 'feminine' to be crossed as individuals are able to perform identities or possess traits which may be more readily associated with the other gender.

Within the norm of 'femininity' (and the same can be said for masculinity) there are degrees of conformity to the norm; different identities can be, and are, produced by one individual. Indeed, men and women can resist or subvert the pre-established codes of gender performance and expression. Conversations are, therefore, not only about femininity but the sustained performance of femininity; positioning people as gendered beings. Gender is also a relative term, defined as much by what it is not as what it is; as such, the minimum expression or requirement for being a woman is *not* being a man.

Many factors such as ethnicity and class, together with gender, are often thought to provide the boundaries within which we create our social identities. However, as Gumperz argues, "the study of language as interactional discourse demonstrates that these parameters are not constants that can be taken for granted, but are communicatively produced" (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1997:1). Therefore, examining discourse is of great importance when addressing the topic of identity, seeing where these 'parameters' are created.

When discussing language and its role in creating or helping to express identity, it is also important to look at other ways in which someone can be seen to 'self-manage', as McRobbie put it (1996). With regard to identity and negotiation of ideas of self, this

thesis therefore examines the role of clothing and fashion choices, and media. The link between fashion/clothing and language is made explicit by several theorists who see both as stemming from the same basic human concern for communication (see Barnard, 1996; Barthes, 1985; Eco, 1979).

2.9 Fashion

Examining the area of fashion/clothing is particularly relevant due to the performative and communicative nature of clothing previously mentioned; the ability one has to express outwardly how one feels on the inside. Rocha, Hammond and Hawkins conducted research looking at the preferences of fashion and clothing of Chinese, British, and Brazilian consumers, examining their similarities and differences (2005). Although they focused largely on older consumers, their sample did include subjects as young as fifteen years-old. Indeed, in the United Kingdom, 'identity variables' such as boldness, sensuality, beauty, detachment and elegance were found to be important to younger (adolescent) consumers, more so than their older counterparts (Roche et al, 2005:386-7). A different study with adolescents found that, relative to clothing choices, "the media is the most important self-perceived influence on Black adolescents, is less influential with females, gains influence as adolescents age, and has almost twice as much influence on urban adolescents as rural" (Wilson and MacGillivray, 1998: 426).

Chua suggests that clothes have five functions:
1. They are chosen for a particular audience.
2. They are chosen for a particular event.
3. They are prefigured in preparation for the actual display.
4. The identity formation forms a whole
5. Once public, only limited modification is possible.

<div align="center">(1992; in Guy et al. 2001: 25)</div>

These different functions highlight the interrelation of fashion and the performance of identity. It is important to note, however, that the range of clothes available are limited, thus limiting the different identities able to be constructed by the wearer.

Clothing can also be seen to present certain ideas regarding identity and sexualisation. Early in 2008, the clothing store Jay Jays gained national media attention when it added new t-shirts to its stock which had suggestive slogans across the chest and pictures of cartoon-style characters such as 'Miss Bitch' and 'Mr Well-Hung'. The reason this gained so much attention was that the t-shirts were marketed for children as young as 10 years old. The director of Family First New Zealand took issue with these t-shirts as he felt they were exposing young children to adult concepts before it was appropriate for them to deal with these (sexual) concepts. ("Parents urged to boycott sexy-slogan T-shirts"; The Press, 2008).

Jason Murray, the managing director of Just Group (which owns Jay Jays) maintained that the brand was in fact popular in multiple countries, and the t-shirts were 'light hearted'. He claimed that because they did not "send offensive messages about other people" (instead labeling the person wearing the t-shirt themselves with an offensive slogan) that consumers should be able to "decide for themselves" (ibid). As identity can be seen to be put on or taken off through clothing, these controversial t-shirts demonstrate how clothing puts labels on people, in this case the labels being literally written across their chests. Similarly, Abercrombie and Fitch came under considerable public attack in the United States when they introduced a range of g-string underwear for girls as young as seven-years-old with captions such as "eye candy" and "wink wink" printed on them (Odell, 2002).

In *Body Dressing* (2001), Entwistle and Wilson address the relationship between fashion/dress and the body, referring to the idea that "fashion and dress are ubiquitous to culture, a fundamental feature which defines humanity" (2001: 2). Indeed, Bordieu considers how people use consumer goods to differentiate themselves from others, referring to this concept as 'distinction', stating that putting on clothes is a way of adding attraction to the body, and constructing the (internal) self onto an (external) body, "presenting self to others in the way we wish to be seen" (1984 in Guy et al, 2001: 28). He refers to young women specifically, and the pleasure they gain from fashion. Another pleasurable and important site for girls in negotiating their identity is the media.

2.10 The media

The media play a central role in the lives of children the world over. Children and adolescents spend more time with entertainment media during their day than with any other activity. Indeed, the only things they spend more time doing are attending school, or sleeping (Roberts, Foehr, and Rideout, 2005). That said, there are also many other socialising factors in the lives of children, such as parents, siblings, friends, school, extra curricular activities, church, other adults and authority figures in their lives. The media, therefore, need to be considered in conjunction with these factors, rather than in isolation from them. Furthermore, the media serve multi-faceted purposes, creating and reinforcing cultural values, while presenting them to members of society hand-in-hand with consumer culture. As the mass media occupy a place of greater significance and influence together with an ever-increasing presence in the daily lives of people, tendencies towards individualism and autonomy become more prevalent and marked (Lull, 2006). "The media have become the key site for defining codes of sexual conduct. They cast judgement and establish the rules of play" (McRobbie, 1996: 62). Specific to sexuality, Tolman states that the media continue to portray ideas that encourage girls to believe they should be sexy for boys, rather than acknowledging their own sexual desires, however subtly these ideas may be represented (2002: 7). Indeed, the media are purveyors of social norms and guidelines for all members of society, young and old, including the guidelines and social norms relating to sexual socialisation.

Studies of media effects on different social behaviours are wide-ranging, the most extensive research exploring the relationship between the media (particularly television) and violence. Most social scientists would seem to agree there is a relationship between being exposed to violent media and the performance of aggressive behaviour (see for example, Comstock, 1991; Huston et.al. 1992). The effect of sexual content in the media has not been studied to nearly the same extent. Despite this, there are "strong theoretical reasons to believe that media play an especially important role in the socialisation of sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour" (Huston, Wartella and Donnerstein, 1998: 12). Elizabeth Roberts pointed to these ideas in 1982, naming four main points of contention – "the adult nature of most programming children watch; children's limited access to or experience with countervailing information of ideas; the 'realism' with which roles, relationships and lifestyles are portrayed; and the overwhelming

consistency of the messages about sexuality that are communicated" (Roberts, 1982: 209). If these statements carried weight 15 years ago, they ought to be considered even more relevant now, considering the current media environment. With the increase in reality television programming; the number of children with televisions in their bedrooms, and consequently unmediated viewing habits; the increased explicitness in content (including language and nudity) shown on national, free-to-air television (as well as pay television)[2]; and access to the internet which has information on almost any subject at the click of a mouse[3]; modern day children are growing up in a media saturated culture, with increasingly sexual content more readily available to them. Certainly, contemporary culture has moved from an environment where information about sex and sexuality was hard to get, to one where it is virtually impossible to avoid (Pipher, 1994: 244). Moreover, Ward asserts that "overall trends indicate that media exposure is linked to sexual outcomes" (2002: 363). Tensions are inherently present here as the media is often vilified for explicit content (particularly sex and violence), yet such offerings are often the most popular with the viewing public, as seen in ratings and box office success (Singer, 1993:178).

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[2] A report to the Kaiser Family Foundation in 1995 stated that on prime time television in the 20 years previous, "references to sexual content [had] increased and [had] become much more explicit, but many of the 'messages' [had] remained unchanged" (Huston, Wartella and Donnerstein, 1995: 6). These 'messages' relate to depictions of sexual behaviour being between two unmarried adults; the lack of reference or handling of consequences of sexual activity (such as contraception, pregnancy, sexually transmitted illnesses) and the frequent 'talk' about sex, as well as "implied" sexual contact which may not be visually presented, but were still present in the programmes (see ibid pp 6-7). Liebau asserts that "TV often sends girls the message that sexiness and appearance constitute the core of their appeal to boys – intelligence, kindness and other truly important qualities are routinely minimized" (2007: 92). Two different studies showed that "more frequent exposure to sex-oriented prime-time programming and talk shows was associated with stronger support for recreational sex amongst teens and young women up to twenty years old (Ward and Friedman, 2006; Ward and Rivadeneyra, 1999).
[3] Specific to exposure to sexual content online, a 2002 study by the London School of Economics found that 90 percent of children aged between eight and sixteen years of age had been exposed to pornography online (Gains, 2002). Other research has shown that more than a third of the teenagers who are online report to having received a link leading them to sexually explicit content, almost a quarter having received links at least four times (Polly Klaas Foundation, 2005). Dr. Adria O'Donnell notes that "[girls] can try [their sexuality] out on the Internet" as it fosters a "false sense of anonymity and security that … may convince girls that engaging in a variety of virtual sexual activities … is essentially harmless" (Liebau, 2007: 57). Furthermore, "careless online behaviour can ultimately damage girls' developing sense of self and sexual identity" (ibid).

2.11 Young women's magazines

Ideas of passivity/activity in consumption are at the forefront of the discussion of sexual content and young women's magazines. While Angela McRobbie argues that new magazines geared towards young female readers are progressive, representing a more educated and assertive approach to female sexuality and celebrating diversity (1996), Stevi Jackson disagrees with her optimism (1996). She maintains that, although young women's magazines may address readers as "more knowing and active" in their sexuality and often position their tone as "ironic and self-mocking", the extent to which this undermines the "fairly conventional range of femininities represented in these magazines", is questionable (ibid: 57). According to Jackson, femininity is restricted to specific expressions culturally constructed and reinforced by the magazines in both appearance and structure. Young women are thus limited in the positions they can occupy with regard to these texts, rather than the 'celebration of plurality' McRobbie exalts these magazines to be. Furthermore, Jackson highlights that far from childhood being typically asexual and innocent, young girls have been taught for a long time how to be pretty and engage in what Simone de Beauvoir terms "childish coquetry" (1973: 306); sexualising themselves in order to get what they want (1996: 52). In fact, McCracken describes magazine content aimed at young women as "ideological and consumerist training of young girls" making them "ripe for other beauty and fashion magazines that will continue this formation" (1993: 143). On many different levels, children have developed finely tuned skills in guiding the purchases of their parents/care-givers, commonly known as 'pester power'. This power extends from the individual child to the consideration of children as a consumer group in their own right.

Other tensions also exist in women's magazines. They often situate the reader as an independent, strong and powerful person with the power of informed choice, whilst simultaneously positioning her as inherently flawed, in need of guidance and improvement (through the advice and advertising they provide to help attain this betterment of self). On one hand it "offers a counter culture, but in another sense it is an extension of the cult" of femininity (Ferguson, 1983:187). It is often difficult to distinguish editorial content from advertising, and important to recognise the dual purpose of the magazine to deliver particular messages to the readers, but also to deliver these readers to the advertisers as potential clientele (McCracken, 1993). This also

relates to the discussion of feminism, and its move into mainstream popular culture. While many women's magazines claim to support a feminist agenda and empower women, in many ways they also undermine the message and goals of feminism through their proliferation of images and attitudes which continue to objectify and sexualise women. Taken one step further, this could be seen to be even more insidious as magazines then encourage women and girls to objectify and sexualise themselves, under the guise of self-improvement and conformity. Still, "the relationship between girls and magazines is one of perceived mutual benefit" (Liebau, 2007: 68), and a significant one at that, as it has been estimated 77% of teenage girls consume beauty and fashion magazines (smartgirl.org in ibid), other research finding that three-quarters of white early-teenage girls (aged 12-14) reported they read at least one (teen) magazine monthly (Klein et al. 1993). Arguably these benefits fall largely on the side of the magazines, while they perform a primarily exploitative role. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation indicated magazines "play an important role in the lives of young girls" and teenagers see magazines as "trusted advisors" and indictors of new cool trends (2004: 2). Twelve and thirteen-year-old girls interviewed said that they looked to magazines (if not depended on it) to guide their behaviour in relationships with boys, and shape their ideas of femininity (Duke and Kreshel, 1998). Many teens, particularly girls, depend on magazines as an information source about relationships, sex and the consequences of being sexually active such as birth control, pregnancy and sexually transmitted illnesses (Kaiser Family Foundation, 1996). Furthermore, many young girls are choosing to read magazines aimed at (older) teenagers or young adult women, and are thus being exposed to more explicit content (Ballaster et. al, 1991; McRobbie, 1996; McCracken, 1993). Liebau notes that even when magazines are not overtly (or actively) encouraging young girls to engage in sexual behaviours, "titillating material creates the perception that sex is all-important and that it is everywhere… Over time, a steady diet of sexually charged stories featuring sexually active protagonists makes sex seem common, appropriate (at least between mutually attracted partners), and even integral to teen experience" (2007: 77).

The study of such women's magazines has been justified by many different theorists for a multiplicity of reasons. However, throughout a range of studies, the common and dominant stance appears to be that women's magazines are not merely innocent sites for consumption and pleasure, but rather are agents for socialisation, and sites which

encourage (and often assist) identity construction (Frazer, 1983; McRobbie, 1991; Hermes, 1995; Tyler, 2004). They do not encourage just any identity construction, however, instead focussing on narrow parameters within which a particular feminine identity can be constructed. Magazines present themselves as a solution "a friend, advisor and instructor in the difficult task of being a woman" (Ballaster et. al 1991:124-5); a task they arguably only serve to complicate. Critics of women's magazines see them as largely anti-feminist, and supporting, if not promulgating, patriarchal gender relations and prejudices.

2.12 Children, marketing and advertising

Children are becoming one of the most sought-after marketing groups, targeted in a similar fashion as teenagers were when they were identified as a distinct (and profitable) consumer group in the economic boom that followed the Second World War (Hebdige, 1979). This could be related to numerous developments and social trends in modern society. Grant and Stephen identify "couples are having fewer children later in life, have established career paths and have more discretionary income to spend on their offspring" (2005: 451). Susan Linn asserts that the 'tween' demographic and phenomenon were created by advertisers and marketers who exploit the desire and anticipation pre-adolescents possess for growing up, and thus target these children with campaigns "designed to encourage them to dress and act like teenagers and young adults" (2004: 131). Almost ten years ago, over $1 billion (U.S.) annually was spent on media advertising to children, with this amount only expected to grow (McNeal, 1999: 14). Advertising and marketing to children are thus big business; "tweens are a consumer segment that can create a $100+ million brand" (Siegel, Coffey and Livingston, 2004: viii) 'Tween' markets are also very lucrative for the advertisers and marketers that can attract and capture these young consumers as "a generation with economic power unlike anyone before them" (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004; see also Levinson, 2001; Strong, 1998; Dwek, 1998; Russell and Tyler, 2002). Indeed, 'tweens' have been dubbed "the richest generation" in history, the spending of the age group ranging from pre-adolescent to approximately 14 years having "roughly doubled every ten years over the last three decades" (Lindstrom, 2003: 26). Within the range of items children are spending their money on, apparel is the fastest growing expenditure category in the United States, from

$40 million in 1984 to $690 million in 1987, $2.5 billion in 1994 and $3.6 billion in 1997 (McNeal 1999: 62). Girls are particular targets as market growth has shown to be the greatest in the 'fashion conscious' demographic of 10 to 14 year-olds, where sales of designer clothes for girls have benefited (Key Note, 2002: 2). This is further illustrated in statistics which showed the total market value for children's wear in the United Kingdom in 2001 to be over five and a half million pounds, with girls' clothing dominating the market by value (ibid; see also Mintel International Group, 2001 in Grant and Stephen, 2005: 452). Market research in both the United States and the United Kingdom has also shown that pre-teen girls are two times more likely to visit a shopping centre during the weekend than any other demographic group (Brooke, 1998 and Cleaver, 1999 in Russell and Tyler, 2002). When considered together with the wealth of research around identity formation of young people, and the fact that clothing (the 'right look') and belongings and accessories (the right 'stuff') are central concepts to fitting in in youth culture (North and Kotze, 2001), it is no surprise that young girls are subject to increased media coverage.

The power of the tween in making consumer choices is growing in importance as they dictate not only their own expenditure, but also have great power to influence the consumption of their parents and family (Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003). Furthermore, once brand loyalty is established in a tween they have a long future ahead for marketers and brands to benefit from, providing the brand and products grow as the tween does. This is where marketing to this age group can be very delicate and needs to be approached carefully. In this time of transition it is highly beneficial (in marketing terms) for a product or brand to become linked closely with the identity of the tween child without seeming patronising, offering simultaneously the means for fitting in and being cool as well as the means for standing out and being an individual. As tweens seek to emulate older teenagers they seek to express their own sophistication and brand-savviness. Research has shown brand loyalty established in adolescence can continue through to consumption choices in adulthood (Moschis, 1985 in Grant and Stephen, 2005: 451), and it would be interesting to see whether the same is true for tweens as they enter the market at earlier ages, but often with the same expectations from products as teenagers.

Here, another debate rages in the discussion of how children ought to be treated with regard to marketing and advertising. One side of this debate maintains that by marketing directly to children they are upholding the ideals of neo-liberalism and the ideology of the free market, casting themselves as liberating and empowering children to make their own choices regarding consumption and not treating them as subservient to their parents and adult counterparts (Lindstrom, 2003; Sutherland and Thompson, 2003). The other side of this debate, however, takes a more protective and critical stance, maintaining that children need to be shielded from consumer culture and exploitation (Linn, 2004; Schor, 2005). What needs to be kept in mind, however, is the fact that marketing and advertising are not the only external sources which influence young girls; the influential roles of parents and peers who can serve to mediate or often reinforce media messages need to be considered also. "The family" North and Kotze argue "can be regarded as the primary source [agent] of consumer socialisation" (2001: 91). Peers are of great importance in the life of the tween as Lawrence asserts: "for tweenagers, the brand is king and the ferocity of the peer community and the overwhelming compulsion to be accepted by their peers has driven a strong sense of brand kinship for this demographic" (2003: 44). Consumer socialisation of children has been defined as "processes by which young people acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the market-place" (Ward, 1974: 37 in Grant and Stephen 2005: 453). Children do not grow up in a vacuum, but, as they develop, are influenced by the (consumer) behaviours of others around them. As such, the wider influences of friends and family members are vital to any discussion of their consumer attitudes.

Furthermore, there are also the internal processes of the girl to consider: her ability to negotiate her position in relation to the media messages she is exposed to, and mediate her opinion through her experiences and the way in which she expresses her personal identity. All these things considered, the positions girls embody in relation to media texts and the representation of fashion can indeed be seen as multi-dimensional and dynamic, changing not only as the fashion and trends change but as the girls themselves grow and develop as individuals.

2.13 Previous studies – girls and consumer culture

Cultivation theory argues that the exposure to themes consistently and over time encourages particular views and perspectives to be established in line with the images and ideas which have been presented (Gerbner et al 1994; Bussey and Bandura, 2002; Bandura, 2002). With this in mind; examining the attitudes and beliefs of (particularly younger and teenage) women are relevant in the discussion of younger girls as these older females have been shaped by their experiences and the things they were exposed to in their childhoods. This reinforces the need to examine the young women's responses to and feelings about sexualisation in order to more fully understand the responses and feelings of girls in relation to this also.

Few previous studies have examined the relationship of girls and consumer culture in different dimensions. Isabel Grant and Graeme Stephen explored the buying behaviour of 'tweenage' girls in the United Kingdom in 2005. In four focus groups, each consisting of six girls aged 12 or 13-years-old, the participants were questioned as to the key factors influencing their behaviour in buying fashion clothing. The findings showed the girls' parents, particularly their mothers, and peers, including older sisters, were key in the decisions the participants made in their purchasing. Media was also shown to be very influential, with magazines aimed at teenagers and young women (both paid for and free) seen as possessing the most influence, followed by billboard advertising, cinema, satellite and 'free-view' shopping channels on television (ibid: 459). While advertising was recognised as influential by all the groups with 'edgier' adverts more likely to attract attention, the girls did not regard it as the most important factor. The following comment, said to be indicative of the responses from all groups, shows: *"I do take notice of the magazines and other adverts for the brands I know, but they are not enough to make me buy. I would also ask the opinion of my girlfriends, or my mum and sisters"* (Interviewee remark in Grant and Stephen, 2005: 460). Purchasing behaviour is subject to many different influencing factors both consciously and subconsciously. These include social factors such as family, peers, class, culture and sub-culture; technological, political and economic factors; and personal factors which can include beliefs, attitude, self-image and personality.

Interestingly, in this study the girls were shown to express an element of individualism in acknowledging different people suit different styles of clothing, and maintaining their

own 'style', as well as wishing to be 'innovative' in introducing new fashion items (ibid: 460). These girls also consciously considered where they were going and who they were going with when deciding what to wear (ibid). This did not undermine the girls' ability to clearly express their likes and dislikes when considering which clothes to buy; they were confident and enjoyed making these decisions for themselves (ibid: 460-1). Somewhat contradictorily to their desire to be 'innovative', the girls also expressed a desire for branded clothing, with the visibility of the brand actively sought: "*something to be recognised in*" (Interviewee remark in ibid). Indeed, when asked what they spent their money on, the respondents' top spend was on clothing, followed by beauty products (ibid).

Of significantly different construction, and therefore different possibilities for application, is the research conducted in the United Kingdom by Rachel Russell and Melissa Tyler into the girl's retail outlet "Girl Heaven", aimed primarily at girls aged 3-13 years-old (2002). This critical analysis of the way in which this particular retail outlet provides the means for girls "to 'do' feminine childhood against the backdrop of contemporary consumer culture" specifically examined the behaviour of eight girls aged between ten and eleven years-old (ibid: 619). Here, the relationship between the process of growing up, becoming a woman and contemporary consumer culture is examined. 'Girl Heaven' was purposely created in the spirit of 'Girl Power' as it rose to popularity in the 1990's, arguably embodied by the manufactured pop group "The Spice Girls". The store provides a "cultural celebration of what it means to be 'girlie'" not only through the physical products it sells; clothes, accessories, cosmetics, and hair products, but also by offering the opportunity for the 'client', young girls, to have a make-over in store, "to be transformed into a princess" (ibid: 620). The researchers observed the behaviour of the eight girls browsing and shopping in 'Girl Heaven' and conducted a group interview directly afterwards to gain greater understanding of how the girls engaged with this environment. The girls in this study highlighted the degree to which shopping was seen as an activity for females, 'in their nature' and a 'girlie thing' to do; whereas boys were thought to shop only 'when they have to' (op cit: 629). Furthermore, the participants acknowledged their awareness of the societal pressure on girls to think about how they look, stating girls 'feel they have to care about their appearance' (ibid). In this regard, femininity was defined largely as an aesthetic ideal, directly related to products and items which held the intrinsic value of femininity and 'girliness' which

would transfer these qualities from the product to the possessor in their purchase and application. Similar to the Grant and Stephen study (2005), the girls in this study showed themselves to be complex and somewhat contradictory in the positions they occupied in relation to femininity and identity; rejecting being labelled as 'girly girls' but then later conceding 'well, maybe I'm a bit girlie' and arriving at the conclusion that they were, to use their terminology, 'half girlie' and 'half normal' (Russell and Tyler, 2002: 630). Moreover, while the girls agreed the 'make-over' station in the store was 'too over the top', they were happy with the idea of being 'made-up'. The distinction between the two seemed to be "one of degrees of hyper-femininity", thus displaying an understanding that femininity could move into the realms of being 'excessive' and was something that needed to be controlled and contained (ibid).

In this analysis of 'Girl Heaven' the relationship between femininity and consumption is explored in relation to childhood, more specifically girlhood. Constructing 'Girl Heaven' as a space and experience in and of itself conflates the ideas of consumption and leisure. This store suggests it is never to early for girls to feel self conscious about their appearance, encouraging an ideal femininity and female identity set within fairly narrow parameters, while packaging it as fun and empowering. Femininity is thus actively performed by the individual. Judith Butler asserts the constant reiteration of particular expressions and representations of gender serve to normalise certain kinds of masculinity and femininity, in the case of this research, the way a 'girl' looks (1993). This then constrains the degree of choice an individual is able to exert over their expression of femininity, which is often reduced to fall within certain socially constructed and consumer perpetuated norms.

3. Methodology

Primary research for this examination of girls between the ages of eight and twelve: the relationships they have with clothes or fashion and the media, specifically advertising; and the roles these play in their performance of identity and sexualisation, consisted principally of focus groups. These groups engaged in various activities and discussion which were then subjected to critical discourse analysis, extrapolating meaning from the content. Surveys were also conducted with a larger population of children (approximately 170 girls and boys) than were involved in the focus groups (approximately 30 girls). This research thus set out to arrive at conclusions in the nature of qualitative research.

3.1 Conducting research with children

The large amount of research that has been conducted with (and on) children has generally demonstrated that a multi-disciplinary approach is the best, if not only, way to encompass the diverse and complex nature of children and the worlds in which they live. Children are not a homogeneous group, but rather individuals with a multitude of differences. An increasing amount of work in the field of childhood research is concerned with ensuring the voices of children are heard. This focuses on the rights and power held by children as 'participants in' and 'contributors to' research, rather than the passive position of research 'subjects' or worse yet, 'objects' (Mauthner, 1997; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000; Fraser et. al., 2004; Soto and Swadener, 2005; Smyth and Williamson, 2004). A wide range of challenges surface in undertaking research involving children. Legal and ethical issues; informed consent; and creating research methods which are appropriate to the level of development and maturity are just some points which need to be taken into account. While this can seem very daunting, especially to the well-intentioned student researcher wanting to gain insight into a modern child's world, these 'obstacles' (as they can be seen) are set in place to ensure the best for the children in the research process, as well as the researcher and the quality of research they produce. It is also worth noting that any research with children also has an inherent power imbalance. Children in contemporary New Zealand (generally speaking) are taught to listen to and obey adults, reinforced by societal institutions such

as the school system. This can potentially impact on the type of information a child gives to a researcher, given their experiences with authority figures, and the ways a researcher may interpret the actions of a child.

From an interactionist perspective, the results of any research are dependant on the interaction between the different components of the research; the participant(s) and the research task(s) (Lindsay, 2000:3). Mediating factors may also be age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, as well as cognitive ability and emotional status at the time of the research. When creating an appropriate methodology for research with children, such factors need to be taken into account, together with the setting and context of the research and the research question (Solberg, 1996).

Consent for research with children must be informed. It is highly debated in academic circles the extent to which 'informed' consent can be achieved with children (Burgess, 1989; Lindsay, 2000; David, Edwards and Alldred, 2001). Researchers are considered to have extra responsibilities to ensure those taking part in the research understand what they are doing, as well as potential short and long-term implications. This can be a very arduous task, especially when comprehension of consent information tends to be poor, even for adults (Stanley et al. 1995 in Lindsay, 2000:12).

The law also plays a significant role in how research ought to be conducted, in some cases specifically addressing children. In New Zealand there are two main areas which impact on the conduct of research where codes (as guides to behaviour) are enshrined in law; the Health and Disability Code (1994) and the Privacy Act (1993) (see Tolich, 2004). Research conducted in New Zealand also needs to take into account global treaties regarding the treatment of children. The first Declaration of the Rights of Children was issued by the United Nations in 1959; focussing on the care and protection of children from exploitation, and the topics of nutrition, medicine and education. While this was attempting to take greater responsibility for the treatment of children, it was also rooted in the historical view of childhood and children as subordinate to and "property of their parents, as passive recipients of decision making about their lives" (Taylor, 2000:22). Only in the 1980s did the approach to childhood begin to recognise a more participatory and active role for the children it concerned. Nevertheless, the

Convention makes some important points regarding children's rights as can be seen in the following articles:

- *Article 3: the duty in all actions to consider the best interests of the child.*
- *Article 12: the child's right to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child.*
- *Article 2: all rights in the Convention must apply without discrimination of any kind irrespective of race, colour, language, religion, national, ethnic or social origin, disability or other status.*
- *Article 19: the right to protection from all forms of violence, injury, abuse, neglect or exploitation.*
- *Article 29: the duty of the government to direct education at developing the child's fullest personality and talents and promoting respect for human rights.*

Research with children is also largely shaped by the ideas about childhood and child development held by the researcher. Widely recognised treaties tend to have homogenised concepts of what a child is, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child where a 'child' is anyone under the age of 18. However, children are a highly diverse and complex group of people from a range of circumstances and communities. The view of the construction of childhood is thus an important aspect of how children are approached in research. Reluctance to give children a voice has both cultural and historical roots, and many contemporary examinations of childhood and children are putting forward an argument for the reconceptualisation of these domains (Lloyd-Smith and Tarr, 2000).

New Zealand ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1993, ensuring that all the laws in this nation fit the minimum standards it outlines. Traditionally and legally children are referred to as 'infants' or 'minors', placing them in a position of 'less-than' their adult counterparts and thus denied some rights extended to older members of society, such as the right to vote. In the New Zealand legal system, based on British common law, children were considered to be under the direct control of their parents until they became adults. Children were liberated from this state of legal incapacity with the Gillick decision in the English House of Lords in 1985. This asserted that as a child develops and matures parental control and authority diminishes, allowing

children to make decisions concerning themselves. The Gillick principle is important in legal matters with children, as it specifies that children are able to make their own decisions when they can consider the options and the risks, benefits and consequences of making different choices (www.youthlaw.co.nz). Other laws see the rights and opinions of children as important to consider in various cases and circumstances; for example the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1989; Adoption Act of 1955, Guardianship Act of 1968 and Education Act of 1989 (see ibid).

In approaching research with children, judgements about their relevant maturity and competence as determined by age are very difficult to make. Thus, drawing boundaries will always be contentious.

In light of such information, the research for this thesis was formulated and approached within specific ethical and moral guidelines. This was to ensure the protection of the children involved, the validity of the process and results which followed. Fundamentally, it takes a child-centred approach, emphasising that the voice of the child in research ought to be heard.

3.2 Ethical considerations

In approaching any research with children, ethical considerations form a considerable part of the structure and execution of the research. This is compounded when wishing to examine issues of sexualisation or sexuality in young girls. Children are more vulnerable than adult participants, due to their diminished capacity to comprehend the significance of their involvement in research and potential repercussions or consequences. There is also an inherent power imbalance as children are typically placed in positions of subordination to adults. Considering this research took part at a school, a flexible, open, and reflexive approach was adopted in attempt to counter-balance or equalise the 'power balance' (Mauthner, 1997: 19-20). Issues of informed consent are also in the forefront of considerations; to what extent informed consent is possible to achieve and then whether consent is sufficient from a parent or teacher as care-giver, or whether the child herself needs to give consent. There is much research and differing opinions on these matters (see Tolich, 2001).

For this research, I took the stance that it was important to gain as informed consent as possible from the young participants, and thus consent was sought from all focus group participants after consent had been granted by the school and parents. It was attempted to inform these participants by sending a simplified version of the parental consent letter to the girls invited to take part describing what the focus groups entailed and inviting them personally to participate (See Appendices 1 and 2). All the girls who attended the focus groups were asked at the start for their consent to take part, and asked several times throughout the group to confirm they wanted to continue.

Physical, emotional and biological developments are also important considerations in approaching research with young participants. Specific research methods need to be employed which are developmentally appropriate and yet still informative to the highest possible degree. The type of responses one could expect from an eight-year-old regarding a fashion advertisement, for example, will be different from a twelve-year-old presented with the same advertisement. Furthermore, while children in the eight to twelve-year-old age group could all arguably be classified as in the stage of 'middle childhood' preceding adolescence, one also needs to take into consideration the varying rates at which children develop and achieve particular milestones. Thus, it is important to realise, although age may be one factor by which the girls are classified, this needs to be considered in relation to where the girl is on the developmental scale and acquisition of specific skills. For the purpose of this thesis, the research participants were assumed to be 'typically developing' for their age and school year, with the focus groups therefore consisting of age-appropriate questions and tasks. While these questions and tasks were kept as consistent as possible across the different ages to enable comparison, the degree of analysis and depth of responses was expected to increase with participants' ages. Moreover, as the groups involving the older girls aged eleven and twelve were smaller (four and three girls respectively), the depth of responses differed, as having fewer participants offered more opportunities to question individual responses. Free-flowing discussion also differed in each group, as this was authentically generated from the participants of each group and thus unable (and not desired) to be controlled by myself as the researcher.

It is also important to note that the activities and questions posed to the children in this research were of a benign nature; the analysis of the degree of sexualisation of the girls

was conducted entirely post-focus groups. It is my belief that as most of the messages sent by the media of a sexual nature to young girls are largely implicit and covert (rather than explicit and overt) the outright mention of sexuality or sexualisation was not required. Just as the messages of sexualisation are often found between the lines in media text, so too, I believe, tones of sexualisation and different interpretations can be found in the girls' responses and interpretations.

3.4 Surveys

Survey one asked respondents to identify who or what has the most influence on their clothing or fashion choices. Survey two questioned magazine readership in the previous 12 months (see Appendices 3 and 4).

The first survey was designed to give an overall snapshot of girls and boys in the eight to twelve-year-old age range at the chosen school, and provide some greater context within which to relate focus group responses. It also allowed for a larger sample size than was possible for the focus groups, showing the opinions of a greater number of children of both sexes. Children filling out the survey were given eight different options including family, peer and different media influences, to select as having the most influence on what they wear. They were asked to circle one answer, or provide an 'other' should they not choose one of the provided options. A minority of completed surveys did however have more than one (and up to five) options selected.

The second survey asked whether the respondent had read or bought a magazine in the last 12 months. This allowed the level of exposure the children had to magazine images to be gauged, specifically the girls who were to take part in the focus groups. This was important ethically and developmentally. Research (particularly with younger participants) needs to ensure new concepts are not being introduced to those who have not had previous exposure. Participants were asked to name (if they could) any magazines they had read or bought in this time period, to see which publications were more popular or identified with by those within this age bracket.

Surveys were administered by the teacher during class time, as this allowed for the greatest flexibility. Both surveys asked children to provide their age, gender and

ethnicity. A letter detailing how the surveys were to be administered and possible explanations of difficult terms such as 'ethnicity' was supplied to each teacher (Appendix 5). It was requested that the two surveys be completed in order, first the survey on what/who influences their clothing choices, then the survey on magazine readership. This was so as to not plant the idea of magazines in each participant's mind immediately before questioning them regarding influences on fashion choices. In total, 76 boys and 92 girls completed and returned surveys. Socio-economic status was not able to be obtained due to the nature of younger children being the participants. According to the Ministry of Education, however, the school selected to take part is a decile 10 state primary school, (the most affluent ranking possible), and this can be seen as indicative of the socio-economic status of the respondents (http://www.tki.org.nz/e/schools/index.php).

3.4 Focus groups

Five focus groups were organised according to the age of the girls taking part; one group for each year of age between eight and twelve-years-old. Groups were organised around participants coming from the same class, and as such there was some minor variation in age (if girls' birthdays fell before/after the group was conducted). Thus, one group was for Year Four students (average of eight years old), another for Year Five students (average of nine years old) and so forth. The aim was for between five and seven participants in each group of each age, as this number allows for optimal interaction and group dynamics without being overwhelming for the girls taking part or the researcher (Greig and Taylor, 1999). As my presence as the researcher was an integral part of the groups in terms of facilitation and interaction, this was classified as participant observation (ibid: 85).

Focus groups were chosen as the primary source of research because they provide an in-depth understanding of these young girls' views. Furthermore, they allow for the consideration of group dynamics, which also play a role in consumer culture. This technique "enables the explicit use of group interaction to produce insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group" and "allow[s] for participant focus over researcher emphasis" (Morgan, 1990 and Threlfall, 1999 in Grant and

Stephen, 2005: 457). Focus groups have been successfully adapted from research with adults to be used with children (see Hill, Laybourn and Borland, 1996; and Jones, Atkin and Ahmad, 2001 in Kellett and Ding, 2004:166-167). Particularly with children, peers can be supportive but they can also be hurtful when regarding the opinions and responses of others, highlighting the need to consider group dynamics and participant interaction. Techniques showing success are those which are more participatory and flexible, engaging the interest of young people, such as the Mosaic approach pioneered by Clark and Moss (in Kellett and Ding, 2004). This type of research involves the researcher as more of a facilitator than direct authority figure, allowing the child to be more involved in deciding what they talk about and attempting to minimise power imbalance, as contrasted with, for example, a question-answer structured interview. This type of interaction and facilitation was how I aimed to conduct these groups, although with some set topics to cover.

Conducting research with children directly, allows for the consideration of both verbal and non-verbal responses. This can shape how responses ought to be interpreted; what is not said can often be as important as what is. Other cues also need to be considered, for example; tone, expression, gestures, blushing, lack of eye contact, fidgeting, and posture (Sattler, 1988). Using both audio and video recording allowed more complete transcription of the focus groups after their completion, and facilitated more involvement in the groups and discussion on my part. Considering the young ages of the girls involved in the focus groups and their unfamiliarity with me as the researcher, it was decided a group setting would provide more comfort for the participants in the current research and encourage more "self-disclosure and self-validation" (Madriz, 1998:116 in Grant and Stephen, 2005). Having multiple participants in a discussion allows for more variety in responses, as other group members can spark a memory, thought or response from someone else, thus broadening the scope from one-on-one interaction with a child. It also replicates the small group setting with which children are familiar with in the classroom or playground. This fit well into the school environment where the groups took place. The group setting also allows for a range of perceptions to be examined, and the focus group participants have arguably more control over the direction of the discussion. Moreover, in a group setting I could organise questions or activities around themes rather than a more confrontational and rigid question/answer format of a one-on-one interview (Mauthner, 1997).

As young girls were the participants in these focus groups it was also important that the groups consisted of more diverse activities than just asking questions and discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Including activities which required active participation allowed the girls to have fun with different aspects of the topic, as well as providing visual aids to stimulate discussion, or a reference point to return to. It also helped to gain their co-operation, and keep the group stimulating. As the media and the different ways they are aimed at and used or interpreted by girls lies at the heart of this research, it was integral to the focus group that examples from the media were used. This allowed the girls to show some of the ways in which they interact with such media, and provided a platform upon which the girls were able to position themselves (perhaps) differently or more critically than they may normally have done.

The groups were organised and implemented as follows:

Girls with returned, consenting permission forms were invited to leave their classroom at a previously arranged time. All girls in all groups keenly agreed to take part. Groups were conducted in a separate room away from other classes; a video camera was erected in the corner of the room, and voice recorder placed in clear view on the table. Seating was not pre-assigned to encourage feelings of comfort and autonomy for the girls taking part, and girls were invited to find a seat when they entered the room. The video and audio recording devices were pointed out immediately and girls asked for their permission to record the group, restating (as the information sheet had detailed) it would not be viewed by anyone else. All girls agreed without complications, seeming to show they had been informed by the consent letter that recording devices would be present.

All groups began with a brief introduction of myself and the purpose of the group as part of research for my university study, looking at tween girls and how they interact and deal with such things as the media, advertising, clothes, fashion and shopping; or as some girls taking part identified it "*girlie things*" or "*stuff that girls do*". Confidentiality was discussed and explained, as was the privacy and non-disclosure of their identities in the resulting research. All girls were reassured that their participation was voluntary and their comfort was of utmost importance. They were also advised they could cease their involvement at any point and were under no obligation to answer any questions or take

part in any activities if they did not wish to. At this point, all girls were asked again for their consent to continue with the group, which they all gave.

First of all, all girls (me included) made name tags and drew a picture to describe themselves or something they liked. This was used as an 'ice-breaker' and was practical in terms of identification, as well as starting to build a rapport with the group. It also allowed the girls to identify and represent themselves to me (and each other) in a way of their choosing. Each girl then in turn introduced herself and explained what she put on her name tag and why, before continuing with the focus group activities.

Activity One consisted of each girl being given two sheets of laminated A4 paper with pictures of clothes which had been cut out of girl's and women's magazines. One sheet featured 'tops' (clothes for the top half of the body), while the other sheet featured 'bottoms' (clothes for the bottom half of the body), and both also included several dresses (Appendices 6 and 7). Each girl was given stickers, half with smiley faces and half with sad faces pictured on them. One sheet at a time, the girls were asked to put two smiley face stickers on the items of clothing they liked the most and two sad face stickers on the items they liked the least. After adequate time was given, the girls were then asked which items they selected and why. Flowing on from this activity, discussion was initiated around the topic of clothing; asking the girls where they got their clothes from, who chose their clothing, and shops they liked when purchasing clothing for themselves.

For Activity Two, each girl was given another two sheets of laminated A4 paper, this time showing pictures of women cut out of magazines (Appendices 8 and 9). Heart-shaped stickers were placed over the faces of the people in the pictures before laminating to obscure their identity. Numbered stickers were then given to the girls. I then read out a series of descriptions, and the girls were requested to place a particular sticker on the picture of the person they felt best fitted that description. The girls were asked to select the person based on the clothing shown in the picture rather than by attempting to identify who the person pictured was, and basing their choice on that assumption and/or knowledge of the different celebrities. In total, eight descriptions given, and after all selections made, discussion followed. The descriptions were:

1. Which outfit/picture do you like the best?
2. Which outfit/picture do you like the least?
3. Which girl do you think would be the most fun to be friends with?
4. Which girl do you think would be most liked by boys?
5. Which girl do you think would be the best behaved?
6. Which girl do you think would be the naughtiest?
7. Which girl do you think your parents would most like you to dress like?
8. Which girl would you most like to look like?

Following these activities, the focus group turned to a discussion of magazines. Girls were asked whether they read magazines, which ones, and what they liked about them. All the girls who took part in the focus groups had experienced some degree of exposure to magazines, ranging from magazines aimed at young girls, or those with specific interests (such as pets), to magazines targeted at teenage or even more adult markets. Specifically, girls were asked if they had seen or read *Crème*, many participants being familiar with this girls' magazine. This magazine was singled out as many of the advertising images the girls were shown in the next exercise were taken from *Crème*, and I wanted to establish their familiarity with this publication.

In order to facilitate a discussion of magazine advertising, three separate exercises were created using advertisements taken from several magazines aimed at young girls; *Crème*, *Disney Girl* and *Barbie Magazine*. Initially, group participants were asked to write down the first impression they had of five different advertisements they were shown, and whether or not they liked the advertisement. Secondly, six different advertisements were displayed, and the girls were asked which ones they liked or disliked, and which one they thought stood out the most. Finally, five advertisements specifically for clothes were displayed and the girls asked a series of questions about which ones they liked or disliked, and whether they would feel compelled to buy those clothes, or shop in the advertised stores, based on those advertisements.

To conclude the groups, each girl was asked to revisit the pictures of the women used for the second exercise. Given another sticker, they were asked again to select the picture of the person they would most like to look like. This repeated the last question they had been asked in this exercise previously, to see whether their opinions had changed after

having viewed the magazine advertisements or any of the resulting conversation. The girls were told they could choose the same picture they had before or change their mind, and to think about everything that had been discussed in the focus group before making their final selection. The girls were then thanked for their participation, asked if they had any questions, and escorted back to their classroom. Each girl was advised she could contact me through the principal should she, or her parents, have any queries.

In two of the five groups, girls were also asked to draw a picture of themselves in their favourite outfit, or clothes they particularly like. Due to time constraints, this was unable to be replicated across all groups, and only occurred in the oldest group (Year Eight - 12 year-olds) and youngest group (Year Four - 8 year-olds); consequently the activity was not included in any further discussion, or the results for this research.

3.4.1 Apparatus

The primary research consisted of focus groups with girls between the ages of eight and twelve. Pre-focus group surveys were conducted with children (boys and girls) at the participating school in the eight to twelve-year-old age bracket (school Years Four to Eight). The surveys provided a type of screening measure to ascertain the degree of exposure the children had experienced with regard to media images; specifically magazines. This constitutes a cross-sectional analysis, examining children of different ages at the same point in time, as opposed to a longitudinal study examining the same children across different time periods (Deacon et. al. 1999).

It was desired that the surveys would be completed by all children in the selected age group prior to handing out permission slips for participants in the focus groups. This was unable to be realised, however, due to the busy nature of the school calendar and varying commitments of the teachers. Permission slips were therefore given to all female students in Years Four through Eight, and asked to be returned as soon as possible. It was left to the teacher's discretion when they conducted the surveys. Due to the brief and benign nature of the survey questions, they were administered in the classroom to all children without parental consent, as the principal and school consented on their behalf. All of the children completing the surveys were, however, asked to complete it

voluntarily. Completed surveys were collected before the focus group participants were finalised to ensure those taking part were familiar with the concepts to be discussed.

Forms were handed out to potential participants outlining the content and format of the focus group. On the bottom of this information sheet was a permission slip which parents/caregivers were asked to sign and indicate their willingness for their daughter to take part (Appendix 1). Another letter was included for the girl herself to read, (printed on yellow paper to distinguish it from the parental form) giving information about the focus groups, using a child-friendly format, and simple language to aid understanding (Appendix 2).

3.4.2 Participants

In order to gain access to the desired sample of girls between the ages of eight and twelve, it was decided the school setting would be the most accessible and structured environment from which to obtain participants. This was for many reasons, including access to multiple children of the same age in the same place, ethical consent procedures, and provision of suitable environment in which to conduct the focus groups. Before any school was able to be approached, a considerable amount of time and effort needed to be invested in obtaining approval for the research from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee. Especially considering the nature of my research and involvement of young participants, this procedure was necessarily very detailed and involved. Perhaps the biggest change that resulted from the feedback from the Human Ethics Committee was shifting the minimum age of girls to be involved in this research from six years-old to eight years-old. The initial intent of the research was to include girls from the age of six in focus groups, as it was (and still is) my belief that young girls are affected by and involved in many aspects of consumer culture from a very young age; even younger than eight-years-old, where this research begins. Considering ethical boundaries, however, it was advised by the Human Ethics Committee, and followed, that only girls over the age of eight with sufficient previous exposure to media such as magazines would take part in focus group activities.

The school used for this research was selected due to a degree of personal association with the school, allowing greater access and co-operation than perhaps would be provided from a school with which there was no previous association. Furthermore, this school was a high-decile school with a relatively large school roll spanning from Year One to Year Eight (http://www.tki.org.nz/e/schools/index.php). This allowed for all age groups to be accessed through the same school, providing some consistency, instead of having to use one primary and one intermediate school. Upon meeting with the principal, school policy was explained with relation to care and safety of children in school, sensitive situations, or information arising from contact with the pupils (such as disclosure of abuse etc). All information regarding permission slips, consent procedures, group activity outlines and images to be used in different exercises were left with the principal to take to the next Board of Trustees meeting. The research was discussed at the board meeting and approved, allowing me to begin the consent process with students and parents.

For each focus group the aim was for between five and seven girls to take part. The number of girls participating in each focus group was anticipated to vary slightly due to willing participants, responses and consent from parents, as well as inevitable absences or unforeseen circumstances. All girls in school Years Four to Eight (spanning the eight to twelve year-old age bracket) were considered eligible to take part, and given a letter to take home to parents/caregivers. This letter outlined the process and required a slip to be completed stating consent or dissent to be returned to the child's teacher. A total of 130 permission slips and information letters were given to the school to be distributed to female students in Years Four to Eight. According to the school roll, 124 of a total of 234 students enrolled in this bracket were girls. The number of girls in each year, and therefore possible participants for focus groups, averaged at nearly 25 girls per year. As focus groups were conducted on a class-by-class basis, the average number of girls per class was 15.5, therefore requiring a response and consent rate of approximately fifty percent to reach the desired number of participants from each class.

Signed permission forms were collected from the school two weeks after they were given to the students. Forms were then divided into classes and ages, and consent and dissent. The class with the most responses for each school year was chosen for the focus groups as this allowed for more participants. The Year Four class selected for the focus

group for eight-year-olds had nine forms returned, seven giving permission and two denying permission. Nine signed permission slips were returned for nine-year-olds, all of which consented to participation and the focus group consisted of eight of these girls as one girl was absent on the day the group was conducted. Eight forms were returned for girls aged ten-years-old, six consenting and two dissenting participation. Four forms were returned from Year Seven girls consenting to participation in the focus group, so the focus group for eleven-year-olds went ahead with four participants. Only three Year Eight girls returned signed forms allowing them to take part, so the focus group was conducted with only these three twelve-year-old girls. It was decided that, to provide a more consistent environment for the groups, it was better for them to consist of girls from the same classroom, rather than introducing girls from other classes which could create a different dynamic. Participants were thus chosen by non-random sampling as the research required a sample of girls between the ages of eight and twelve, studying in Years Four to Eight. The selection of the girls was arbitrary, as no (female) student at this school was more likely to be selected than any other, provided they had the required consent (Deacon et al, 1999).

In all, 40 forms were returned, 36 giving and four denying consent. This response rate was considerably lower than was expected and hoped for, which could be due to many reasons. As the school was not approached until late in the year, the school calendar was already very full and teachers not as flexible with class time or allowing student absence. This was also evident in conducting the surveys, as some teachers needed to be followed up several times; one teacher only giving the surveys to those students who had consent to take part in the focus group; another not conducting the surveys at all. Unfortunately, both of the classes with particularly low response rates were Year Seven and Eight students, thus providing less information on eleven and twelve-year-olds. That fewer girls of older ages took part in the surveys and focus groups could also be indicative of their increased capacity to recognise their ability to deny consent; it could also reflect the shift in attitudes of children from wanting to take part in things, to being more resistant to being involved with (perceived) school (optional) activities. Another reason for this could be the unreliability of the girls giving the letters and permission slips to their parents, and then returning them to the school. Furthermore, at the time when the permission slips were distributed and collected, students were involved in school camps and extra-curricular activities, making them harder to contact.

3.4.3 Limitations

As with any piece of academic work, this research was subject to limitations throughout the process.

The scope of this research was limited by the resources available, such as time and money, as well the availability of, and access to, participants. There were limitations regarding access and the number of respondents who made themselves available for the research, constricting the amount and type of information able to be gathered. This was particularly true for the number of girls who took part in the focus groups for eleven and twelve-year-olds, as well as the survey responses from classes of children that same age, as detailed previously. Focus groups and surveys were conducted at only one school, limiting the diversity of results gained. Furthermore, due to financial and temporal constraints, coupled with a lack of specific technical expertise in this (psychological assessment) field, girls participating in groups were not able to be placed on a developmental scale to assess their degree of physical and sexual development, nor their cognitive and educational competencies.

While this research neither attempts nor claims to obtain a representative sample of the New Zealand population, it is important to note that different results and insights may be found should a different group of girls take part in similar exercises. This is could be particularly true if research were to be conducted with girls of different socio-economic standing (different [including low] decile schools), in different gendered environments (single-sex schools), and different geographic settings throughout the country (urban schools). This research was conducted at a co-educational, semi-rural, high-decile, public primary school. As such, it is important that this research is taken as a snapshot of the opinions, experiences and thoughts of a particular group of girls, in a particular place, at a particular time. While this does not diminish the importance or validity of what the girls in this research had to say, it does highlight the caution with which one ought to consider the results as 'representative' or 'indicative' of a larger population. Therefore, this research is less a case of casting broad brushstrokes across a large landscape, as it is a detailed portrait of specific individuals within that landscape.

There are also inherent limitations in specific research methods, such as focus groups. An interview or focus group "represents an interpersonal encounter in which there is an exchange of information" (Sattler, 1988: 402). While this may in some cases allow the researcher to gain information in a way that tests or questionnaires may not be able to, there are also some disadvantages; such as the difficulty in establishing validity and reliability (ibid). Furthermore, participants can give inaccurate information and may respond based on (often) subtle, unintentional cues from the researcher. Bias is also another concern. Flexibility is an essential component in conducting focus groups or interviews with children, highlighting the importance of exercising good judgement in knowing where to lead the discussion and recognising the limits of how much information can be obtained in any one session. The researcher also needs to be aware of the responses they may elicit from, and the effect they may have on, the children taking part, as well as the effect these children may have on the researcher in return.

Location and context of a study with children are also important to consider when regarding the impact they can have on research. Conducting research at a primary school, for example, may pose the benefits of having a more accessible desired population; however this could be seen to challenge the idea of informed consent as children may see it as an extension of the school system in which they are required to do whatever the teacher/adult in charge dictates, and not be aware they can dissent. Lower response rates in this research may then indicate the sufficient recognition of potential participants that they could dissent from their involvement. Schools can also pose challenges in the requirement of the researcher to work around the boundaries and limitations put in place by the school as a pre-requisite to gain access, which may include having to negotiate and manage the agendas of school management. The context of the research is also important as it establishes the dynamic between the researcher as an adult and the child participants. Rather than assume the researcher can gain access to the world of a child by attempting to become 'one of them' (as an adult cannot do, no matter how hard they may attempt to), I thought it more realistic to invite the children participating to enlighten me, and try to help me understand their perspective (see Kellett and Ding, 2004:171).

One must also note the interpretation of the focus groups and comments of the girls taking place is necessarily subjective; filtered through my experience as being physically present with the girls in the group, although all attempts are made to be as objective as

possible. This limitation is somewhat tempered, however, by the presence of both a video and audio recorder, allowing for post-group analysis and transcription to take into account things which I may have overlooked, or been unaware of, at the time the group was conducted. Nevertheless, in discourse analysis, there are always multiple possible readings of things which are expressed, and these diverse possibilities need to be considered when assessing the results gained from this research.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Survey 1

Surveys administered in the classrooms yielded some interesting results. The first survey asked the children to identify who or what had the most influence on what they wear. They were asked to circle one of the eight options given (parents, friends, movies, television, brothers/sisters, magazines, music videos and celebrities) or write what most influenced what they wear, if it was something not listed on the survey ('other'). 76 boys and 92 girls aged between eight and twelve years old took part in answering the surveys, a total of 168 respondents. Results are discussed here focusing first on overall results, and then looking at any interesting results on an individual class basis. More specific class-by-class (year-by-year) findings can be found in Appendix 10.

Overall, parents were reported as the most influential factor in children's choices of what to wear, with one-third of all respondents selecting parents over any other factor (Figure 1). The next most popular choice, friends, had half the number of responses (16%). This supports the findings of Grant and Stephen, that parents, followed by peer group, were key to tween decisions about clothing (2005:459). Interestingly, the third most influential factor selected was 'other', which offered the children a chance to specify an influence other than those listed on the survey. In fourth place, brothers and sisters were seen as having the most influence over their clothing choices by a total of 11% of the children. These results show fairly conclusively that the people in the immediate life and environment of the children surveyed had a stronger influence than outside (or media) factors.

Even collating the different media sources, parents still maintain the most influential role; media sources collectively accounting for 26% (or 22% when excluding 'celebrities' from this category). Of the media categories, magazines were seen as the most influential, followed by music videos and television, then by movies and celebrities. This could be because of the focus on fashion in the majority of women's magazines, and indeed in many young girl magazines, as they follow the same format as the magazines targeted at older demographics. Music videos and television may be seen as

more influential than movies due to the level of access and exposure children have to them. This shall be addressed in more depth later in the discussion of results.
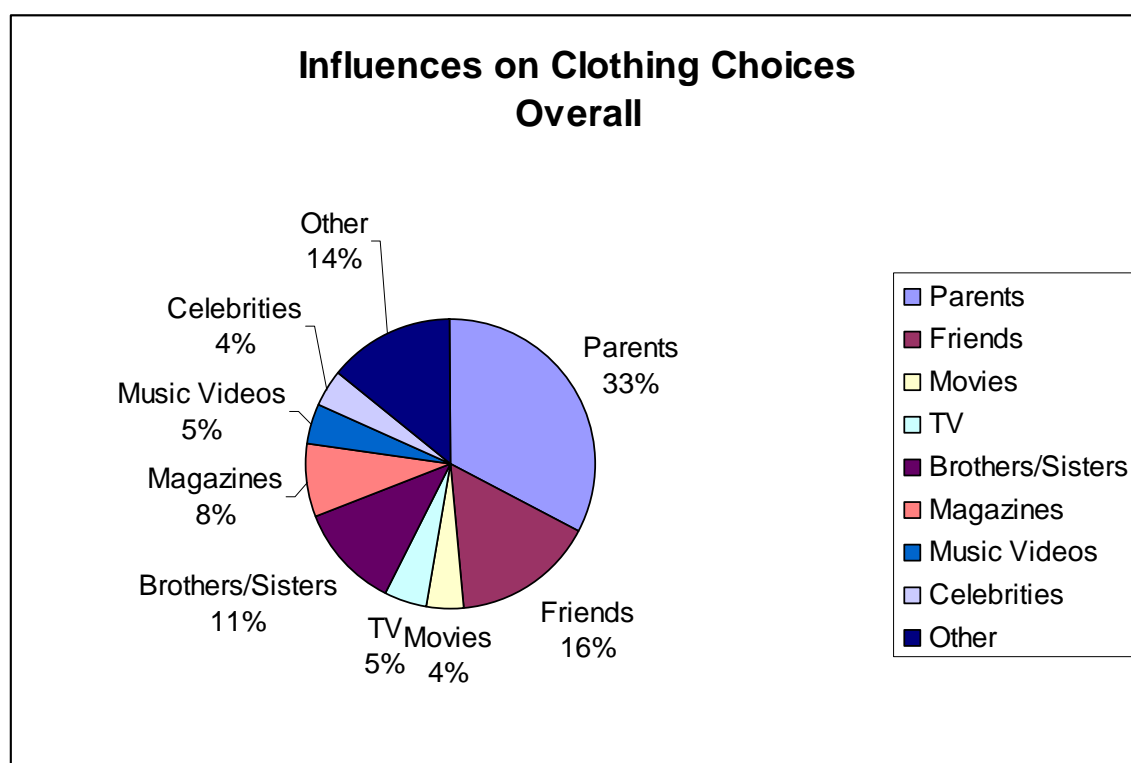
Figure 1: Overall influences on clothing choices

When these results are further broken down and analysed according to gender, certain differences are visible (Figure 2). Overall, the boys in this sample considered parents to be the most influential factor on what they wore by a clear margin. Indeed, more than double the number of respondents selected 'parents' than the next most popular category 'friends'. The top three reported influences on clothing choice related to people in the immediate environment of the boy – parents, friends and brothers/sisters - together accounting for over two-thirds (71%) of the responses. Moreover, of the boys who selected 'other', a great proportion of these spontaneous responses stated they considered themselves as having the greatest influence (67%).

Collectively, media sources accounted for 18% of the influence on clothing choices of the male respondents to this survey, the same as 'friends'. Of the different media sources, the reportedly most influential on clothing choice was movies, followed by music videos and magazines, with a small number selecting television and celebrities. One boy also

specified video games in the 'other' category. These results indicate that the sources of influence in the lives of tween boys are still dominated by family members and friends; the people whom physically inhabit their world, and those they interact with on a regular basis.
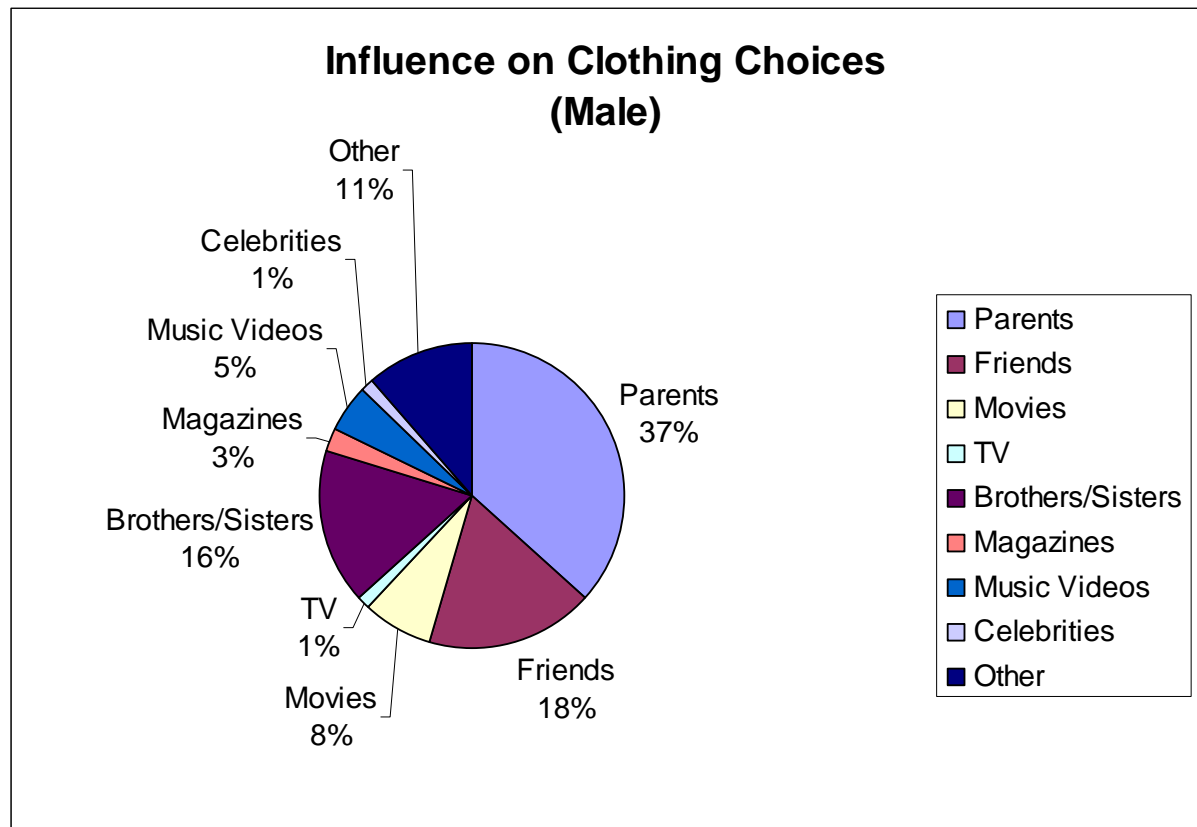
Figure 2: Influence on clothing choices – male

As with the boys' findings, the most influential factor on clothing choices overall for girls were their parents, although not quite to the same extent; as 6% less of the girls chose this category than their male counterparts (see Figure 3). Sixteen percent of the girls wrote a different influence that was not listed on the survey, 5% more than the male respondents, with the majority, as with the boys, stating that they ("*me*") had the most influence on what they wear (72%). This could be seen to indicate that from a young age, girls are increasingly aware of the choices they make regarding their clothing, and are eager to take ownership of these choices and assert their 'individuality' by taking control of the image and 'self' presented through clothing. It also shows a higher level of personal investment in their clothing choices, in keeping with research which finds girls

to be more appearance oriented and generally more concerned with their clothes than boys, who tend to see clothes as primarily functional.
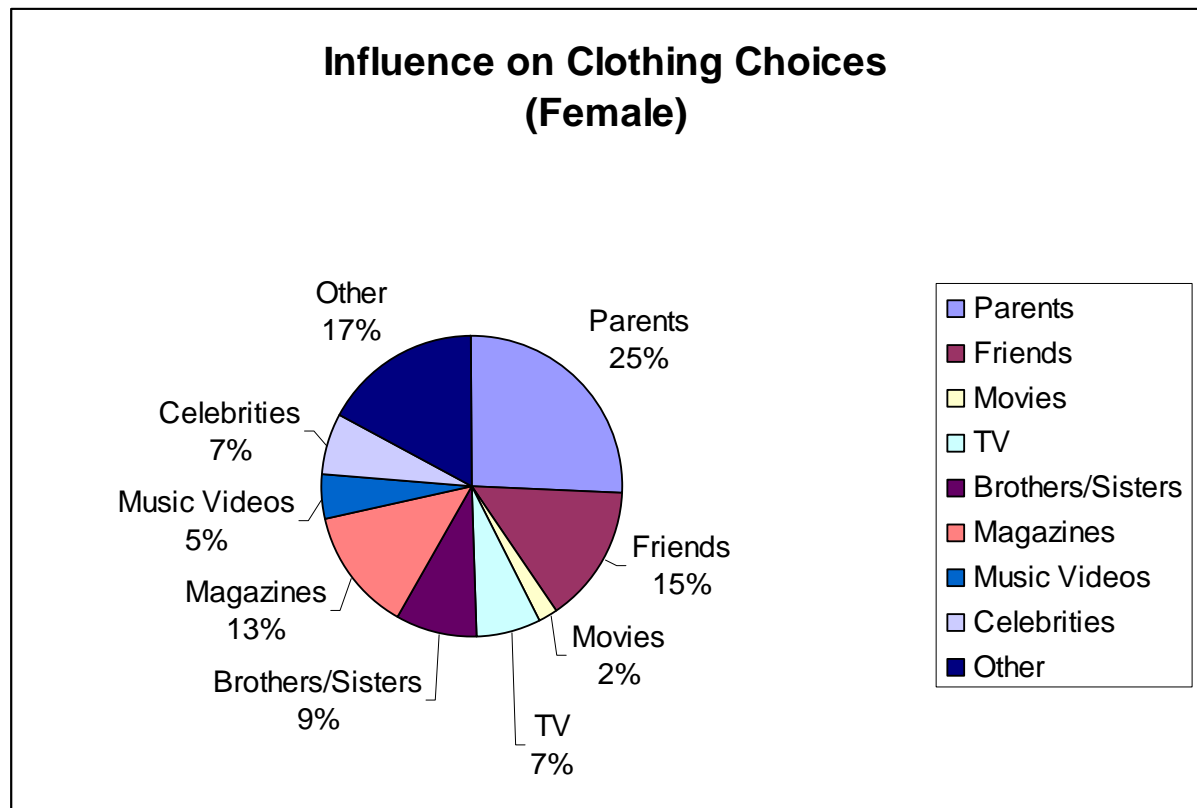
Figure 3: Influence on clothing choices – female

The influence of the environment was highlighted by several of the 16% of the girls who answered 'other' and indicated that physical locations where clothes are sold ('shops' and 'malls') influenced their choice of clothing. These results show that many young girls may enter stores to buy clothes without fully formed opinions about what they want to have; allowing the clothes and products for sale to influence their opinions and choices more than other potential factors. This is also highlighted in the work of Russell and Tyler (2002) about the retail outlet "Girl Heaven" in the United Kingdom.

It makes sense that the products for sale in a store necessarily influence the choices able to be made by those who shop there; they can either choose something that is there or chose not to buy anything, however they cannot choose to buy something that is not being sold. Consumption remains shaped by the stores in terms of what they have available for purchase. A type of 'cause and effect' is also questionable here; whether what is available for purchase in stores creates the fashion choices of those who shop

there, or if people enter a certain shop to find clothes which fit with the fashion choices (or personal style) they have already formulated. Thus, these shops may be creating the desire for specific products and certain fashion 'looks' rather than supplying the products that are already desired by the girls under the influence of other factors. The locus of control in this case is centred on the places selling the goods, rather than the child as a consumer in these shopping environments. A change occurs in children during these pre-adolescent years, from viewing stores as a place for "sweets and snacks" at age 5, to "a necessary part of life" at age 9, according to John (1999: 194). Indeed girls in this research showed that as they got older, shopping was more likely to be mentioned as a fun pass-time, and focused on as an activity in and of itself, often without even the idea of purchasing something.

While people are still the most influential factors for girls (53% of their responses accounted for by parents, friends, and siblings) the media is significantly more influential for the girls in this survey than for the boys.

Magazines top the media sources as the most influential (12%), seen by the girls in this survey as more influential than their brothers and sisters (8%). This is different from the boys; not only as girls found magazines four times more influential than boys, but also in that girls ascribed more influence in general to the media than the boys. Collectively, media sources account for 31% of the girls' responses (the same as the option 'parents') compared to only 18% of the boys' responses.

The types of media seen to be influential were also very different. Movies were rated the most influential for boys, and the least influential for girls. Alternatively, while televison and celebrities were the second and third-most influential media sources for girls, they were least influential for boys. Music videos were relatively consistent for both boys and girls in their level of influence, although low, at 5% and 4% respectively.

While celebrities are (usually!) people, the influence they have on others is facilitated by the media, as the vehicle through which celebrities are made accessible to the public. Celebrities are often significantly removed from the public in many ways, not only geographically but also in experience, age, status and socio-economic standing. The children surveyed experience celebrities as presented by the media, thus constituting an

influence exerted primarily by the media representation of the celebrity, rather than the 'person' of the celebrity themselves. For this reason, celebrities are included in the discussion of 'media' influences rather than in the discussion of people.

Overall, this data shows that parents are still considerably the most important influence on the clothing choices of children aged between eight and twelve years-of-age. People in their immediate environment (parents, friends and brothers/sisters) have more influence on the fashion of these children than do media sources, even more so for boys than girls. As children transition from being a child, to a 'tween', to an adolescent, parental influence decreases as peer influence increases, supporting findings in similar research (Grant and Stephen, 2005; Wilson and MacGillivray, 1998). Certain kinds of media have more influence on one gender than the other with those cited as most influential for one sex often the least influential for the opposite sex. Magazines appear to play an important role in the clothing choices of girls, as this was the only media source to be attributed with more influence than a group of people in their physical world (their siblings). Multiple studies have examined the role of magazines in socialising young girls, particularly relative to body image and clothing choices, and found their influnce to be greater than other media sources (Grant and Stephen, 2005; Casumano and Thompson, 2001; Sands and Wardle, 2003, Wilson and MacGillivray, 1998). The majority of the children who selected 'other' and chose to specify a different factor from those listed, asserted that they saw themselves as having the most influence over what they wear. This shows that children of a (relatively) young age are ready and willing to take responsibility and ownership over their own role in chosing the clothes they wear. This is significant as it shows a move away from parental authority in a physical way over the physical objects of clothing which the children chose for themselves, and is indicative of a move towards more independent thought and identity performance as an individual. Here, it can be seen that children are beginning (or wanting to begin) to indicate (through their clothes) who they are and who they want to be, rather than performing an identity chosen for them by their parents. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge this independence is to a large extent only perceived, as the adult still holds the majority of control by allowing the child to own and wear certain kinds of clothing, assuming that they are an active participant in the child's life, and ultimate financier of the purchases. Therefore, although the child may believe they are

creating their own identity and making their own choices, this is still under the control of the parent, who deems what is 'appropriate' 'suitable' or 'allowed'.

Certain trends and shifts also became evident when looking at the responses in relation to age. At the youngest end of the spectrum of students surveyed (Class A and Class B), parents represented the most important influence on their clothing choices. Furthermore, girls appeared to place more importance on the influences of people in their lives, such as friends and siblings, than boys did. While boys of this age did acknowledge the influence of siblings, none of them considered friends to have the most influence on their clothing choices. Differences were also apparent in the types of media the two genders deemed as influential; girls in Year 4 selected television and magazines, while boys selected movies, music videos and celebrities (see Figures A and B in Appendix 10).

Of Year 5 students, (Class C), the vast majority of boys cited people in their immediate environment (parents, siblings and friends) as the most influential, only one boy selected a media source (television). Girls on the other hand, selected more media sources as having the most influence on clothing choices – movies, magazines, music videos and celebrities, and over one-third selected an influence other than one already listed by choosing the option 'other' (Figure C in Appendix 10).

Data from Class D, a mix of Year 5 and 6 students, showed that parents were the leading cited influence on clothing choice, accounting for over half (53%) of the female students and 61% of the male students. Boys also acknowledged their friends had some influence, but the media less so, while the girls also acknowledged the role of media; notably television (Figure D in Appendix 10).

Year 6 boys from Class E still saw their parents as having the most influence; although this was now equal to the influence of their friends. People remain the most important influences, as brothers and sisters are the next most influential factor for boys. Girls in this class indicated the most influence on their clothing choices came from their friends and magazines (27% each), followed by their parents (20%). These results again show the differences between the sexes in the types of media they perceive as impacting on their clothing choices (Figure E in Appendix 10). In this case, magazines are seen to have the highest level of influence on girls, equal with friends, showing a move away from the influence of parents and more one-directional media such as television or movies which limit, if not preclude, interaction. Magazines are able to be read in an

individual or group setting, at a time and pace dictated by the consumer/s of the magazine; their portability allowing for greater flexibility. Permanence could also be seen as a large benefit of having a magazine; it is able to be held in the hands of the girls reading it and once it is published, it exists in that form until it is disposed of, or passed on to someone else. People remain the most influential factors on the clothing choices of these Year 6 students aged between 9 and 11 years old. However, at this age, *which* people have the most influence is beginning to change. Moving from the responses of the younger aged children who clearly afforded the most influence to their parents, friends are seen to have as much (if not more) influence at this age as their parents, and siblings are also seen to have an increasing level of influence. Two girls in this class selected two options as having the most influence. Both acknowledged the influence of friends and then also referred to a (different) media source.

For the first time, the influence of a media source is reported to be greater for girls than the influence of friends or parents in Class F (Year 7) (Figure F in Appendix 10). Boys still see parents and friends as the greatest influence, again on the same level, but girls from this class selected magazines as most influential, followed by friends and celebrities. Parents trailed these three influences. Three girls chose multiple answers; one selecting all the options of people in her immediate world: parents, friends, and brothers/sisters. Another selected parents, magazines, music videos and celebrities; while another girl selected friends, movies, television, magazines, music videos and 'other' ("*where I buy it*"). This remark highlights the impact of shopping and clothing outlets on some girls. Not only are they a place where girls can pick clothes (perhaps according to the influence of others such as friends or parents), but the shops themselves also have an important role to play in shaping, and providing, the clothes girls can buy. With this group, one can see the locus of control shifting from the family and parents, to the friends and other media sources that these children see as 'authoritative' in providing advice and an example to follow regarding fashion.

It is important to consider potential impacts of the reliance of children on media sources to shape their perceptions of the world. Television typically does not accurately reflect the gender balance or racial diversity of the (American) population (Children Now, 2000), representations on screen falling along clearly demarcated gender lines. One study showed that one-third of the female characters on 'sitcoms' on television were of

below average weight, and that the thinner the female character was, the more positive comments she received during the show from the male characters (Fouts and Burggraf, 1999). Sexual content on television is becoming more frequent; comparing their results from research in 1997-98 to results in 2004-05, Kunkel et al. found that "the base of programs that convey sexual messages has increased by exactly 25%, while at the same time the amount of scenes with sexual topics in those shows has risen 56%". They go on to say these results are "multiplicative" as the "total number of sexual scenes identified in [their] sample has nearly doubled (96% increase) since the study began, while the number of programs examined has remained virtually identical over time" (2005: 58). Television is a broad medium, and its role is well established in the lives of today's tweens. The majority of children live in homes with multiple television sets, and two-thirds of children between the ages of 8 and 18 have a television in their bedroom (Brody, 2005). This could be seen to indicate less parental control or awareness of what the children are consuming in the media, making it not surprising, then, that television exerts some influence on children's choices, including those relating to clothing.

Magazines can claim some responsibility for influencing (primarily) girls in the area of clothing, as well as sending specific and often narrow messages on societal standards of attractiveness and beauty. In a 1999 study, messages about cosmetic surgery, exercise and diet were found to be featured on the covers of 78% of the twelve most popular women's magazines (Malkin et. al, 1999). Furthermore, an analysis of the four most popular adolescent girl's magazines found that they were more likely to have feature articles on topics around ideas of fashion and beauty than about mental or physical health. Indeed, as the most popular of the four magazines, '*Seventeen*' was 22 times more likely to include an article on fashion or beauty than physical or mental health (Curie, 1999). One American study with more than 500 girls between the ages of ten and eighteen years-of-age found that those who read women's fashion magazines more frequently were more likely (when compared to girls in the same study who rarely read these sort of magazines) to say they "have dieted to lose weight because of a magazine article", that "pictures in a magazine make them want to lose weight" and that "pictures in a magazine influence their ideas of a perfect body shape" (Field et al. 1999). In research conducted in Christchurch only a few years ago, Angela Pyke found that the majority of adolescent readers and non-readers of DOLLY magazine, from her sample at two high schools, believed that "the media attempt to influence the way they look"

(2006:61). This is problematic, as the images portrayed in the media, and particularly in advertising, present an unattainable ideal of femininity. Nevertheless, these are the images young girls are confronted with over and over again when looking at magazines and in the media at large, and therefore these depictions become normalised and internalised, leading to increased dissatisfaction with their own appearance (Cusumano and Thompson, 2001; Groesz et. al, 2002; Ward, 2002; Hargreaves and Tiggemann, 2004; Munro and Huon, 2005). Women featured in women's magazines, particularly in the advertising images they contain, make no attempt to represent "normal women, and perhaps have never aimed to represent the 'average' woman reader" (Pawlowski, 2007: 181).

Music television is typically popular with young people, and music videos are one of the primary areas of consumption of popular culture for the younger members of society (Tiggemann and Slater, 2003). Programmes of music videos are shown in New Zealand on Saturday morning free-to-air television, prime time viewing for children. Although these programmes are often rated 'PG' (parental guidance necessary); each video's duration of only around three or four minutes (the average length of a 'pop song') makes them ideal for a child's shorter attention span. New Zealand also has a free-to-air music-only channel (C4), making music videos accessible 24 hours a day. Pay television (SKY TV) also has several music-only channels such as MTV, which some children may have access to. Sexual content is common in music videos; many of the artists who target their videos at an adolescent (or younger) audience have videos "rife with sexuality or eroticism" (Brody, 2005; see also McKee and Pardun, 1996). Gender inequalities also seem magnified as nearly two-thirds of women featured in music videos are portrayed as 'background' to the performer, or even more disenfranchised, as 'props' (Children Now, 1999). Research from the 1980s found that while sexuality was stressed on channels such as MTV, it was often more implicit than explicit; "like other studies of televised sexual content, music video sexual content was understated, relying on innuendo through clothing, suggestiveness, and light physical contact rather than more overt behaviors" (Baxter et al. 1985:336). More recent studies, however, have shown sexual content on television in general is getting more explicit (Brown and Newcomer, 1991; Kunkel et al 2005).

The lower influence of movies on clothing choice could be due to the relative difficulty in accessibility, and narrow range of media which fit in this category when compared with, for example, television or magazines. Also, televised movies often do not start until after the watershed at 8.30pm, which may be considered 'late' for young children. This makes movies less likely to be seen, perhaps contributing to an explanation of why less influence has been attributed to them here. Still, movies perpetuate similar messages about masculine and feminine identities. A study in 1997 showed more than half of the women portrayed in film were shown making (or receiving) comments about their appearance, more than twice as often as men, and approximately one-third were shown 'grooming' or 'preening' as contrasted to only 7% of men (Signorelli, 1997). Research by Blumer also showed that since the 1930s, young people have learned and emulated behaviours witnessed on a movie screen; including ways of dressing and beautification processes (Laurer and Handel, 1983).

The role of the media is not to be underestimated, as it is seen to act as a powerful sexualising agent in the lives of children and young people (Ward, 2002; Kundel et al. 2005; Collins et al., 2004; Brown and Newcomer, 1991; and Brown, 2002). Indeed, media have been called a "sexual super peer" in terms of the influence it has on young people (Brown, Halper and L'Engle, 2005), and the increasing reliance young people have in looking to media for answers, advice and guidance on sexual matters.

As for Year 8 students, only three girls completed the surveys (the girls who were to take part in the focus group), although why this number was so low was not conclusively established. All three of these girls cited that friends had the most influence on deciding what they wear.

Responses in the 'other' category deserve special attention, as they show the spontaneous remarks of children, providing original insight into how these girls and boys think about influences on their clothing choices. Fourteen percent of the total survey respondents selected 'other' and dictated their own perceived most influential factor. This was the third most popular response overall, selected more by girls (coming in second, after parents) than boys (fourth most popular response).
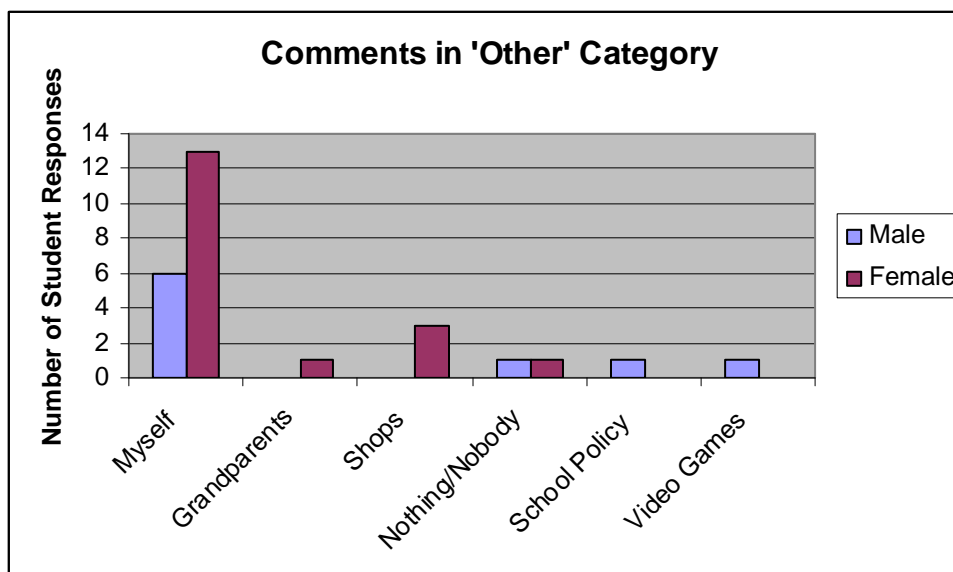
Figure 4: Breakdown of comments made in 'other' category

In what appears to be an anomaly, a large number of students from Class B (Year 4 – nine year-olds) selected 'other' as having the most influence on their clothing choices, significantly more than any other class surveyed. Of the 15 students who selected 'other' from this class (twice as many girls than boys), almost all replied that they considered themselves as having the most influence on what they wear (7 girls and 5 boys writing '*me*' for their response). One girl each also cited grandparents, shops and malls as influential (see Figure 4).

I suspect there was a reason why a large number of respondents selected 'other', as this stands out from the other results. Perhaps the teacher emphasised that they could write a different answer, possibly even giving the example of writing 'themselves', which students then followed. Alternatively, one or more students may have been vocal in expressing that they were selecting the 'other' option and choosing themselves as having the most influence, which may have influenced other students to follow suit. Whatever the reason, children of both genders in this class seemed more eager to select a factor outside of those specified on the survey, and the majority of the responses indicated the child him or herself as the most influential.

Over one-third of the female respondents in Class C selected a different influence not mentioned in the survey; declaring *themselves* as having the most influence on their clothing choices. These comments included "*nobody*" (implying that they have the most

influence themselves), "*Me, because I wear what I want to wear*", and comments highlighting their sense of individuality "*my own style*". These girls appear eager to take ownership over their clothing choices, two girls referring to a sense of 'style' which accentuates the importance of their individuality, or at least their personal opinion and expression. This was also found in the focus groups of Grant and Stephen, as girls commented "*I know best what suits me*" (2005: 461).

One boy in Class E (Year 6) who selected 'other' and wrote '*myself*' as having the most influence on what he wore, also circled 'parents' on the survey. Perhaps this indicates a shift in the level of independence taken on by children at this stage, and the amount of influence they allow (or perceive) their parents to have over the choices they make. This has particular relevance regarding clothing as it can be seen as an external marker of identity. Thus, these results could be read as indicative of the shift in children wanting to be more autonomous and responsible for the way they perform their identity, rather than performing an identity as an extension of their parents, or being more explicitly guided by their parents in the way their identity 'ought' to be presented. Given the influence of others is still important to children of this age, any self-expression correspondingly needs to remain within 'socially acceptable' boundaries as defined (and enforced) by other people, such as friends and parents. Another boy selected both 'parents' and 'friends' as having the most influence, showing that these two groups are as important as each other for many children of this age. These examples can be seen to embody the conflict and tension in children of this age as they transition from taking their cues almost exclusively from their parents, to becoming more independent and taking increasing ownership of their opinions and aspects of their identity, such as their clothing, looking to wider sources of information (and people) to guide their choices, and (hopefully) gain social acceptance.

Two boys from Class F (Year 7) deemed '*school policy*' and '*video games*' as the most influential factor in clothing choice (one response each). Mentioning '*school policy*' indicates the wider societal pressures and influences present in the lives of children, showing that children of this age are indeed aware that there are also (often explicit) rules and policies guiding what they can wear in specific places at specific times. Considering that children spend a large portion of their day at school, what they can wear to school can have a considerable impact on what clothes they own. By drawing

attention to the compulsory uniform at this school, this could be taken to infer that the clothing choices would be likely to vary greatly if there was no school policy dictating what the students were to wear. Acknowledging video games also drew attention to the role of the media, and the fact that different kinds of media can be seen to affect clothing choices, even those that may not traditionally be associated with fashion or the presentation of self.

The majority of the remarks made by the children about 'other' influential factors on their clothing choice attributed the influence to their own opinions, taste, and style, as can be seen by the 72% of girls and 63% of boys who selected 'other' and wrote '*myself*' (or some version thereof) (see Figure 4). These comments ranged from the simple and direct "*me*" to more explicit comments such as "*my own style*". Sixteen percent of the girls who wrote their own remarks referred to the place ("*shops*") or environment ("*malls*") where clothes were sold.

4.2 Survey 2

The second survey administered to the children in the classroom asked whether they had read or bought a magazine this year. As can be seen in Figure 5, a significant proportion of the girls (83%) and a majority of the boys (67%) surveyed had consumed (read or bought) a magazine in that year. It was not considered important whether or not they owned the magazine, but was used to gauge the level of exposure these children had to magazines as a specific media source. When considered in conjunction with Survey 1 results, this confirms that magazines appear to have more influence on girls than boys; as these girls consume magazines more than the boys, their ability to be influenced is therefore increased. This is not to suggest causation, but rather correlation; it is unable to be conclusively ascertained whether girls are more influenced by magazines because they consume them more, or that they consume magazines more because they view them as being an influential media source of information.

Have You Read or Bought a Magazine This Year?
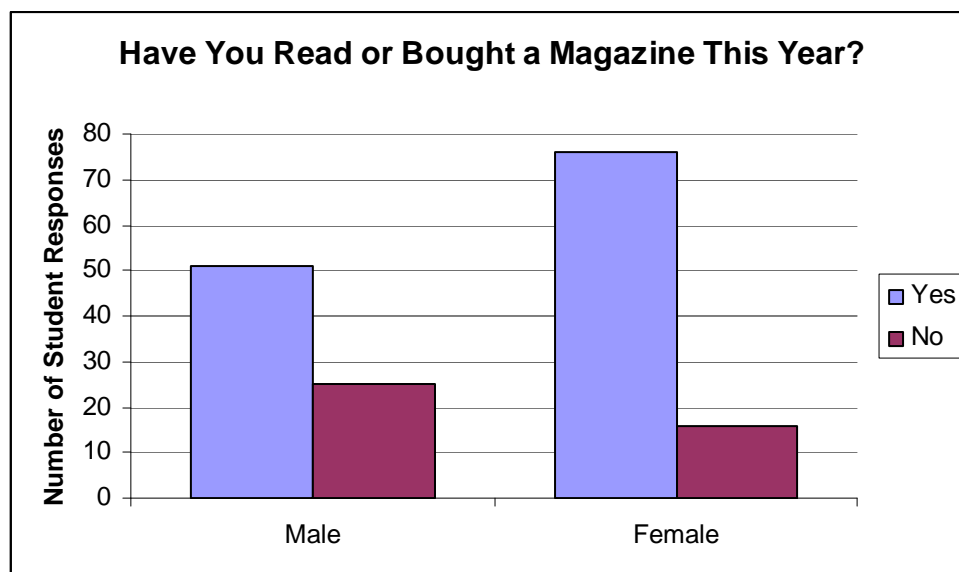
Figure 5: Number of males and females who have/ have not consumed a magazine

It is also noted that the number of children who have read a magazine increases as their age increases, indicating that consuming magazines is positively correlated to the age of the child. This is to be expected; relating to multiple factors such as rising levels of literacy, the amount of (pocket)money able to be spent on such items, as well as the impact of peer pressure and the socialisation process in which the media, including magazines, play an important part. This is true for boys as well as girls, although girls

consistently report they read/buy magazines more than boys. Media's role in how children learn about the world, and their socialisation into this world, is a valid area of concern, as McLeod claims

"As a major source of cultural information, the mass media serve as agents of social control shaping public tastes, preferences, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. One of the most powerful ways media play this social control role is by communicating the boundaries of what is acceptable and what is deviant." (1995: 5).

Although fewer boys answered that they had read or bought a magazine that year, the range of magazines they identified was greater than for girls. Fifty one boys who reported they had read or bought a magazine named 57 different magazines that they had consumed, compared to the 51 magazines named by 76 girls (see Appendix 11 and 12) . Girls, however, read more magazines each on average; 3.18 magazines each, compared to 1.82 magazines per boy.

Which magazines were read by the respective genders were, however, very different. Only twelve magazines appeared on both gender's lists of what they read or bought out of 96 magazines identified. These magazines were, by majority, gender neutral, about activities and cartoons which appeal to both genders: for example, *The Simpsons*, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, *Mad*, *Mania*, *Adventures*, *National Geographic*, *Roald Dahl*, *K-Zone* and *D-Mag*. Other magazines such as *Smash Hits* (music) and *TV Guide* (television) related to other types of media and were read by both genders, although the latter was identified by more girls than boys. This also supports the findings of Survey 1 in which girls found television more influential than boys did, making girls' greater consumption of a magazine about television consistent with such responses.

Children who answered these surveys tended to stay in fairly clearly demarcated gender divisions when reporting the magazines they consumed. While three girls said they had looked at magazines on 'cars', 'motorbikes' and 'bikes' (magazines aimed primarily at males), this same gender-transience did not seem to be available to, or expressed by, the boys' choice of magazines. This could indicate that girls are able to take up more gender-transient roles, or play with the different ideas of expressing their 'femininity' or taking up oppositional roles, than boys are. On the other hand, it could be that boys have

this same ability to explore magazines on topics which are not typically 'masculine' but do not admit to it.

The type of magazines read also changed significantly as age increased. Girls at the younger end of the spectrum tended to read magazines related to stories, with a link in to other products or media sources; *Saddle Club*, *Roald Dahl*, *Narnia*, and *SpongeBob* magazines all stem from a different media source (books, movies or television shows). They also reported to consume magazines which involved activities such as *Art Alive*, *Mania* and *K-Zone*.

K-Zone is described by the publishers as "*the coolest magazine for kids. Packed with fun and information … K-Zone gives kids the chance to read about topics important to them, to keep up-to-date with all the latest trends hitting the playground. It arms them with the latest gossip on new music, movies, TV shows and games. K-Zone educates, fostering curiosity with information about the world kids live in, and providing them with inspirational activities to fill in rainy afternoons.*" (http://www.isubscribe.co.nz). This magazine is targeted at younger children and does not express gender specificity: this is reflected in the survey results as both boys and girls reported to have read or bought it, although it was more popular with boys. Furthermore, as it promotes itself as educational and entertaining, increased readership may be accounted for by the fact that this will appeal to the adult purchasing it for their child, seeing it to be beneficial developmentally, as well as amusing.

For younger boys, their magazine consumption centred on specific interests – sport (particularly rugby), cars and motorbikes, computer/video games as well as the general/interactive *Art Alive* and *Mania* and cartoon-style magazines such as *Mad*, *SpongeBob, K-Zone* and *Mania*.

While girls are blatant targets of certain magazines – titles such as "*Girl Power*" and "*Total Girl*" not leaving much to the imagination when working out their target audience; there are no magazines which seem to target boys (and exclude girls) in such an overt way. Magazines targeted at boys tend to stick within 'tried and true' formulae for things stereotypically popular with this gender; sports, computer and video games, and automobiles; implicitly considered more 'suitable' or 'appropriate' for boys.

There was some continuity across the ages for the consumption of certain magazines. Boys of all ages questioned in these surveys reported to read about automobiles/transportation (bikes, cars, motorbikes, aeroplanes), cartoons and general interest magazines such as *K-Zone*. Girls in this sample generally read magazines about fashion and gossip, pets (particularly horses), as well as general interest magazines.

The most popular magazine for girls was *Total Girl* magazine, read by 38 girls across the eight to 12-year-old age bracket. *Total Girl* magazine is described by the publishers as "*a … magazine for girls only!*" and "*the coolest new accessory for every 6-12 year old girl!*" In this sample, the magazine is clearly reaching its target market, although interest appeared to be waning by the time girls turned twelve, as only one of the three respondents of this age referred to *Total Girl* compared to ten or more girls per year in the nine to eleven age bracket. *Total Girl* is capitalising on the newly defined market of 'tweens', targeting them very specifically. A description of the magazine on www.isubscribe.com.au says *Total Girl* is "*a complete Lifestyle magazine for tweens, Total Girl has everything a girl wants including the coolest fashion and beauty, the hottest gossip and the most amazing competitions! Plus every month there's an activities based section bursting with great ideas to keep readers entertained all month long!*" Although it could be debated whether a girl of this age needs a 'lifestyle' magazine (and whether they even have a 'lifestyle'); the girls involved in this research clearly were interested in *Total Girl* and whatever they saw it to stand for. It also fills the needs of the tween as in-between childhood and adolescence – incorporating elements found in teenage magazines such as fashion, beauty and gossip as well as activities, generally found in magazines or activity books for young children.

Crème magazine was the second-most popular magazine with girls in this demographic, 27 girls having read or bought it in the past twelve months. Similar to *Total Girl*, *Crème* magazine is described as "*a girl's best friend*", "*cool older sister*" and "*confidante*", but is targeted at slightly older girls between the ages of 10 and 15 years old. That so many girls from the surveys were familiar with this magazine made the use of *Crème* and its advertising a useful tool in the focus groups.

Age aspiration was also clearly evident in the types of magazines read by these girls. They reported reading *Dolly*, *Girlfriend*, *Cleo* and *Cosmopolitan*. *Cleo* and

Cosmopolitan both have the core target of women aged between 18 and 34, the majority of readers in 2005 being aged between 18 and 24 (http://www.acpmagazines.com.au). *Dolly* is aimed at the teenage market of 14-17 year old girls (http://www.acpmagazines.com.au). *Girlfriend* is similarly targeted at 13-17 year old girls (http://au.youth.yahoo.com/girlfriend). The youngest girls studied in this research reported that they read *Girlfriend* and *Dolly*, despite being five or six years younger than the bottom end of the target markets as stated by the publishers. This is in line with research stating that magazine readership is generally a few years younger than the target market (Ballaster et. al, 1991; McCracken, 1993; McRobbie, 1996). While this is good news for the publishers, as it increases their sales and enhances their brand identification and magazine recognition with younger consumers – encouraging brand loyalty for increased years, it is not necessarily so good for younger girls to read these magazines aimed at an older market. A magazine targeted at the 13 to 17 year demographic will include much different content to one targeted at the 6 to 12 demographic, and even the 10 to 15 demographic. This spans a period in a girl's life which could easily be described as tumultuous, a time of great change into adolescence and early adulthood. Indeed, it is in adolescence when many girls become sexually active and are exposed to information which could be seen as inappropriate for a six, eight, or even 12-year-old. Furthermore, as many teen magazines are downward extensions of older magazines such as Vogue and Cosmopolitan, it is fitting that their content follows a similar format, and women's magazines in general have been found to be very sexual in content and advertising. Indeed, as a recent study showed in comparing magazine advertising across different demographics of women's magazines, the youngest demographic (18-24 years) had the highest degree of sexuality in their advertising (Pawlowski, 2007).

Flipping through the pages of such teen magazines makes this immediately apparent. February 2007 edition of *Dolly* magazine, for example, has a "DOLLY DOCTOR" advice column on herpes; a quiz to find "your perfect cosmic love match"; an "EYE CANDY" section which features Jesse McCartney in that month's 'shrine' who readers are asked to "rate his hotness"; and a story on drugs featured on the cover (http://dolly.ninemsn.com.au/dolly). *Cleo* February 2007 includes sections on fashion, hair, body makeover, love & sex, and this month's beauty section features the headline story "24/7 sexy … make-up for making out" (http://cleo.ninemsn.com.au/cleo).

Cosmopolitan includes in their February 2007 edition "erotic beach reads", "body language sex-ifier" and a membership to the gym (http://cosmo.ninemsn.com.au/) while *Girlfriend* details stories on their cover about "fashion lust"; "the diary of a promiscuous girl" and the "hooking up handbook" which includes, amongst other things, a how-to guide on being a "crazy-good" kisser (http://au.blogs.yahoo.com/girlfriend). How necessary or appropriate such reading material is for an eight or even 12-year-old girl is highly debatable, but girls of these ages report reading them.

Also of interest is the number of girls who reported reading weekly women's magazines, a large portion of the content of which can be classified as gossip, for example *Woman's Day*, *Woman's Weekly* (both Australian and New Zealand editions), *New Idea,* and (the arguably purely gossip magazine) *NW*. These magazines have generally older target markets, with a wide range of women consuming them. *Woman's Day*, for example, is aimed at the "core target" of women aged between 25 and 54, the majority of which are aged over 34 years-of-age (http://www.acpmagazines.com.au). It is not necessarily surprising that younger girls are reading these magazines as they are commonly purchased by women in the same age bracket as most of these girls' mothers would fit in, and would be easily accessible if available at home. Furthermore, these magazines are amongst the cheaper magazines on sale, and highly visible in almost every supermarket, petrol station and various other stores. It therefore logically follows that these are familiar magazine titles which young girls are likely to come into contact with, as this survey indeed indicates. Convenience appears to be a large factor here (as with other magazines mentioned such as House and Garden); because these magazines are easily accessible, they will look at them, regardless of whether they are 'relevant' or 'age appropriate'.

As only three 12-year-old girls and no boys of that age responded to the surveys, it is difficult to make many claims about other children of the same age. The girls who answered the surveys, however, did show a tendency to consume magazines aimed at older teenagers or young women, mentioning different titles than younger respondents. All the titles they named were fashion or gossip related, not 'interest-based' as many of the magazines named by younger girls were.
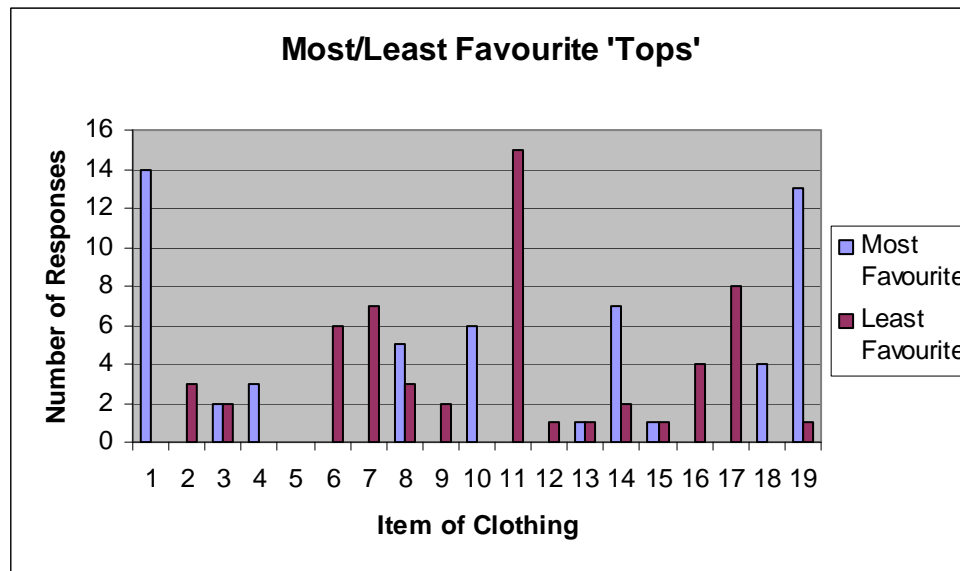
4.3 Focus Groups

A total of five focus groups were conducted according to the age of the girls taking part. Groups were arranged per class (and therefore school Year); one group for each year of age between eight and twelve years old. There was slight variation in age with some girls having birthdays before others, and some classes being 'composite classes' containing students from two school years. It was therefore taken that the girls' school year was of more importance than their physical age. Thus, one group was for Year Four students (eight years old), another for Year Five students (nine years old) and so forth. The aim was for at least five girls to participate in each group; this was achieved in the three groups with the youngest participants. Only four 11-year-old and three 12-year-old girls consented and were available to take part; making for a total of 28 participants in the five focus groups. Their responses to activities and comments in discussion still provide an interesting glimpse into the thoughts and opinions of girls of their age and further enrich the findings of this thesis.

Results can be gleaned in a variety of ways from the focus groups. As some of the exercises involved ranking items of clothing, writing responses to advertisements or selecting outfits according to different descriptions, these can be compared within and across groups and girls of different ages. Other information and findings come from times of discussion or questioning and answering. In these instances, discourse analysis can be applied to the answers and dialogue of the girls to extrapolate possible wider and deeper meanings.

Exercise One – Most/least liked items of clothing

The first exercise in the focus groups asked the girls to place two 'smiley face' stickers on two pictures of items of clothing they liked the best and the two 'sad faces' on two pictures of items of clothing they liked the least. This was done once each for two sheets of different pictures; one showing items of clothing worn on the top half of the body ('tops') and the other showing items of clothing worn on the bottom half of the body ('bottoms'). Both sheets also included pictures of dresses.

As can be seen in Figure 6, the two most liked items of clothing for the top half were number 1 and number 19, followed by numbers 14, 8 and 18. The most disliked top, as selected by over half of the participants in the groups, was number 11, followed by number 17, 7, 6 and 16.

Figure 6: Most and least favourite 'tops' as reported by girls in focus groups

The reasons for selecting top number 1 ranged from comments on the black and white colour combination and the use of stripes to comments regarding the style and fit *"because I just like the style"* (age 9), *"I just think [it] looks cool"* (age 12). Some of the comments were very specific; *"because I kind of like baggy when it is kind of hot but you still want to wear something that doesn't make you feel too cold or too hot. And kind of prints are quite in, cos that is kind of a zebra print"* (age 9), *"because I think it has a sort of pirate-y effect or look"* (age 11). [4]

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[4] All comments appear in text as they were said by the girls in the focus groups unless otherwise stated, or for purposes of making sense of the comment and intention of meaning.

The second-most popular item of clothing on this sheet was number 19, a bronze/gold dress. Selection reasons were diverse, such as the colour being "*cool*" and "*different*", and the material "*silky*". Various girls mentioned "*the look*" of the dress, inferring something seemingly indescribable about the dress that made it appealing; "*It is so cute*" (age 9), "*[it] look[s] … pretty*" (age 10). Many girls also thought of the dress as 'good' to wear; "'*cos it looks nice and so it would like fit good, so it would look good*" (age 12). This is an interesting assertion, as the dress is obviously designed for a more developed female body, with a relatively low neck-line (to emphasise cleavage) and accentuation of the waist. The popularity of this dress could indicate that the girls like clothing with a more adult, 'developed' appearance as opposed to other, more child-like (or child-'appropriate') items, targeted at their age group. Such preferences could also be seen as appealing to the sense of 'dressing up', a common play activity for young girls, which may still be present in these tweenage girls. It is worth considering, then, when 'dressing up' ceases to be 'play', and when it becomes part of a girl's identity as her desired way of dressing on a regular basis. The boundary between fantasy and reality is often blurred in clothing, particularly in their representation in magazines, as aspects of femininity and sexuality as well as practicality (being able to wear it), merge together (Winship, 1987). Also interesting is that many girls liked this dress because it was 'different', allowing them to stand out (in a positive way) from their peers or other girls in general; "*you don't really find those dresses much places [sic]*" (age 9).

Younger participants seemed more likely to provide lengthier reasons for their choices (as can be seen in the comment from nine-year-old above). Perhaps this is indicative of their stage of development where they are justifying (to themselves, as much as to anyone else) their tastes; expressing their reasons at length aloud as much for their own processing. It could also suggest younger participants are seeking approval; justifying their choices as 'right' by giving appropriate 'evidence'. However, many of the youngest participants also gave more basic, uncomplicated feedback on the clothing items; "*because I like stripes and dark colours*" (age 8). Older participants seemed more

comfortable to simply state "*I like it*" or "*it looks cool*" as reason enough for their selections.

Other popular items of clothing on this page included number 14 (another one of the more 'adult' items of clothing), number 10 (Billabong t-shirt) and number 8 (red dress). Multiple t-shirts were pictured here, however, the only one which was liked by the girls was the 'Billabong' t-shirt. Girls commented they liked the "*style*" and the "*stars and colours*", however the brand name of Billabong is the primary point of difference between this and other (disliked) t-shirts. Certainly, the girls were familiar with this brand name, and it is sold in popular surf/street wear stores such as *Amazon* and *Snow and Surf*; stores that were previously mentioned as popular and preferred places to purchase clothing. The red dress appeared to polarise opinions; although many girls chose it as one of their favourites, others indicated it as one of their most disliked items.

While the items of clothing rated most popular by the girls were more 'adult' in their appeal (or at least appeared suited to more developed or mature body types); the most disliked items of clothing were those deemed too '*young*' or '*kidd-ish*'. Top number 11 was distinctly the most disliked item of clothing, selected by fifteen of the twenty eight focus group participants of all ages. The most common reason for disliking this t-shirt was that it looked "*really little kidd-ish*" (age 12), was "*too girl-ish*" and "*too baby-ish*" (both age 8). Girls also said it was too crowded, with too many colours, and looked "*a bit weird*" (age 9). It elicited strong responses from a few participants, one 12-year-old stating it "*is really disgusting because it's got too many colours, and it's all, like, mushed together and it doesn't look good. Yuck.*" A nine-year-old girl was quite specific in why she did not like it: "*it's kind of like what a person at pre-school would wear on a really hot day.*" In making this analogy of a pre-schooler wearing this top, this girl was drawing a clear line of definition that she (as a nine year-old) was too old to wear something that someone who wasn't at school yet would wear. The girls discussed this t-shirt in the nine-year-old focus group in some depth. After they had made comments that they did not like this item of clothing due to its 'younger child' appeal, I questioned them further on their opinions:

LC: So is that what most of you think? That number 11 looks a bit young?
All: Yea.
9B: It's like…
9C: It's too bright.
9F: Yea, it's not that bad. I mean it depends how old you are, heaps of people dress in different things.
*9C: It's alright; it's just not **our** age.*
*9B: It's like **we are 9**, and 6 year olds and 7 year olds could kinda wear that stuff.*
*9F: It just depends how **old** you are…*

Here, they make their opinions clear that while the top may not be "*that bad*", they do not want to be associated with something a 'six or seven-year-old' may wear. Clearly, something that a six or seven-year-old would find appealing (according to a nine-year-old) is classified as 'uncool', or, at the least, disliked, by a nine-year-old. These nine-year-olds show they appreciate different people can have different tastes, but in this conversation they see these differences as primarily due to age, rather than other factors. Interestingly, the same disdain for items which are 'age-inappropriate in a younger sense does not apply to 'older' 'age-inappropriate' items. In this case, girls indicate age-aspiration as a desire to associate themselves with 'older' items of clothing, liking them more than 'age-appropriate' or 'younger' items. For example; the dress (number 19) which was the second-most popular item on this sheet, was advertised as sold in Principals, a store targeting teenagers and young women. These findings show clear indications of age-aspiration in clothing likes and dislikes as items aimed at those older than the tween girls were seen as more attractive and desirable than clothing targeted at their age group, and certainly better than clothing perceived to be something a girl (even remotely) younger than themselves would wear. Retailers are not only aware of these desires, but take advantage of them: as a vice-president of a teen and tween mail-order company and 'lifestyle' website states "tweens aspire to look like older teenagers, so our assortment for them encompasses the look of the average fifteen-year old" (Linn, 2004:132).

Another girl commented she did not like top number 11 "*because it doesn't really explain **who I am** kind of thing*" (age 9). An explicit link between clothing and identity is made in this instance; this girl does not like this top as it is not reflective of who she is. Here, this girl is showing sophisticated knowledge that the clothes which she wears express a message on the outside about who she is on the inside. In the focus groups, comments expressly linking clothing choices or likes/dislikes to identity were commonly

negatively associated (an item does *not* fit in with the girls' self perception, and is therefore *dis*liked) rather than *positively* associated (an item *is* liked because it fits [and expresses] the girls' self perception). Referring to a different item of clothing, another 9 year-old girl stated *"it's just not my type"*; implying not only that the girl has a 'type', but also that her 'type' is not what she associates with this item of clothing. This could be seen to indicate the process of identity formation (and regulation) is present here by indicating who the girl is *not*, showing that girls of a young age are, at least to some extent, aware of the identity creating and expressing properties clothes possess. Girls of this young age may not be so active in defining who they are, but are beginning to decide and assert who they *are not*.

Top number 17 was the next most reportedly disliked item, for similar reasons as number 11; the girls thought it was too colourful and *"a bit too much"* (age 9). In this case, the 'busy-ness' of the top was unattractive to the girls, making it more childlike than tween, teen or adult like. The use of more than one colour on one item of clothing was associated with younger, 'kidd-ish' clothes by these girls, whereas bolder stripes and colours were seen as 'cool' and 'stylish', and more likely for these tweens to consider attractive. The next most disliked top, number 7 (a pink, checked shirt) was disliked for the colour, as well as associations made by the girls that this was the sort of shirt that would be worn on a farm (which many of them did not want to be associated with); *"It was like what you wear on a farm, going around, riding horses and everything, **and I don't do that**! And I don't like the colour"* (age 9).

It is also pertinent to note that while the twenty-eight girls across the five focus groups chose ten different items of clothing as the most liked items, there was greater variety in what they did not like with 14 different items selected. This could be reflective of the greater constraints on what is deemed 'fashionable' or 'in style' (and therefore liked by these girls), than what is not; leaving choices for disliked items more open to interpretation. It could also be evidence of peer pressure and conformity at work, as girls repetitively checked what others had selected (both obviously and surreptitiously), which could have swayed their opinions. Although this was dissuaded, and it was stated

at the beginning of each activity that it was important for the girls to express their opinions and preferences, the girls in every group naturally chatted about their likes, dislikes, and general thoughts on each topic throughout. This is not uncommon for girls in the transitioning tween stage, where the acceptance of their peers and need to fit in is of great importance.

Therefore, while the results may be seen to reflect each girl's own tastes, one cannot disregard the effects of self-censorship based on staying within the bounds of what was deemed an 'acceptable' response in comparison to other girls in the focus groups. It appears that while girls wanted to be seen to like the same things, there was more leeway in expressing their dislikes. Noticeably, when two girls selected the same item of clothing, one saying they liked it and the other disliking it, they were more likely to say they 'didn't know why' they didn't like it and attempt to gloss over that choice. This was particularly true in the younger age brackets, as there was a lot of conversation about different choices. The girls in the eleven and 12-year-old focus groups seemed to be more open and secure regarding their opinions and reasons for selections.
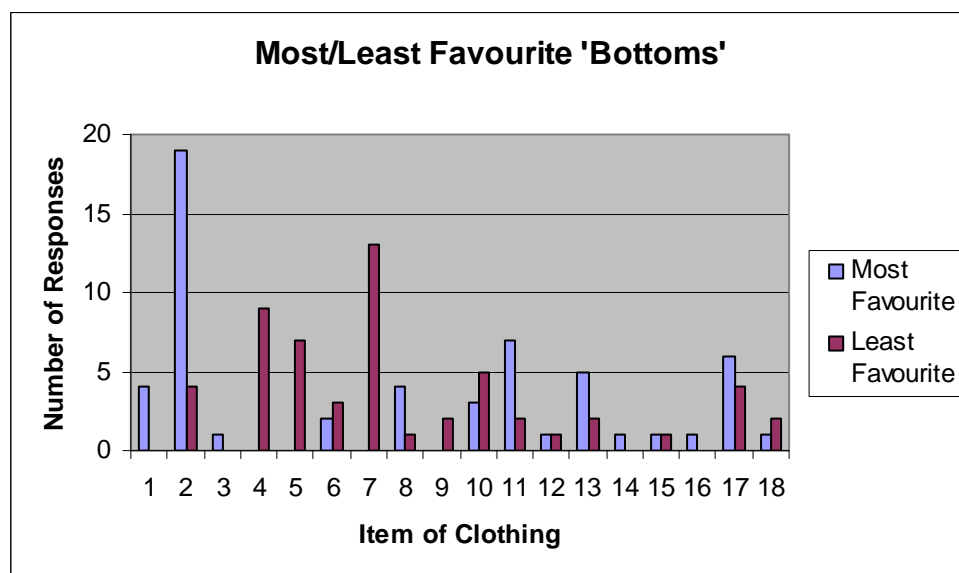
Figure 7: Most and least favourite 'bottoms' as reported by girls in focus groups

The standout favourite item of clothing for the bottom half of the body was number 2 (a black strapless polka-dot dress). Nineteen girls picked this dress, over two-thirds of the

75

participants, across all ages. Reasons for selecting this dress ranged from a general like of dresses or polka dots "*it's nice and dotty and girly, well, girly*" (age 12), to its comfort and being 'in fashion', some comments mentioning multiple factors; "*it's very wow-ing, black and white and those colours go together, it's got the frilly bit at the bottom and it looks quite comfortable*" (age 9). Again, younger focus group participants were more likely to give more extensive justification for choosing this dress. One girl, who liked the most popular top because she said she supported the All Blacks, gave the same reason for liking the black and white dress. Here she was performing the same identity through another item of clothing, making it more explicit that she wanted the connection made between herself and New Zealand's national rugby team. Multiple girls commented the dress was 'in fashion', making them fashionable by association for liking it. This is reflected in multiple remarks: "*it is sort of following the fashion*", "*spots are, like, a new fashion kind of*", "*because, like, spots are like the new fashion*" (all age 9). That several girls in the same group made similar comments ties in with the concepts of performativity and conformity; wanting to fit in with other members of the group and increasing their cultural capital with their peers by portraying themselves as fashionable.

The second-most popular item of clothing on the 'bottoms' sheet was a purple dress, number 11. Once again, reasons for liking this dress included the colour, that it looked comfortable, and the simple fact that it was a dress. Interestingly, while many girls expressed dislike for other items of patterned clothing as "*too much*" or "*too busy*", this did not appear to be the case with this dress and pattern; "*[unlike] number 7, it hasn't got too much patterns at once*" (age 9).

Number 17 (a pink mini-skirt) was also popular, some girls liking it particularly *because* it was a ***mini***-skirt, but other girls disliking it for this reason; "*because I like mini skirts*", "*I like the colour, but I would only really like it if it was like longer, because I don't like really mini ones*",

"*because of the colour, I don't like mini skirts*" (all age 10). This skirt was more popular with younger participants, only one ten year old and no eleven or twelve year olds selecting it as one of their favourites.

The most disliked item on the 'bottoms' sheet was number 7, selected by thirteen girls across all the age groups. This patterned skirt was particularly disliked by older girls; two of the three 12-year-old participants and all four of the 11-year-old participants disliking this skirt. The pattern and colours were the most cited reasons for disliking the skirt, explicitly mentioned by nine and six girls respectively. Girls described it as "*yuck*", and "*weird*" was used by four girls to describe the skirt in three different groups (aged 10, 11 and 12). The skirt pictured was from the most recent Urban Angel catalogue, where many girls (later) said they bought clothes, and as such, was an item targeted at this age group. In the groups, however, it was overlooked for 'older' clothing items, from shops targeting 'older' consumers.

While this skirt was disliked because of the 'excessive' pattern (number 5 also disliked for this reason), ironically, number 4 was "*too plain*"; the most common reason nine girls selected this as one of their most disliked items. According to the girls, these red Puma shorts were "*too red*", "*too short*" and "*too bright*". This indicates that being '*too...*' anything is seen as being a bad thing for tweens.

These clothing selections highlight the contradictions that abound with tweens, and the difficulties facing the fashion world in marketing clothes to this demographic. Girls in these focus groups considered one of their most favourite items to be a black and white striped top. However, one of their least favourite items was also a striped top, although more colourful, pink, and 'busy'. They liked a pink checked mini-skirt, but disliked a pink checked shirt. A colourful, patterned skirt was the most disliked item of clothing

for the bottom half, but a purple, patterned dress was one of their favourites on the same page. Furthermore, a pair of red shorts was the second highest disliked item of clothing on this page, because they were "*too plain*". Moreover, these shorts were seen to be "*too red*", while some girls said they liked a dress on the 'tops' sheet because of the colour; a similar shade of red. The most disliked top was too crowded, busy and child-like. Dresses were amongst the most popular items despite their relative age 'inappropriateness' as they were targeted at older (teenage) girls or young women due to the type of figure needed to 'fill them out'. Liking 'older' items of clothing, was not seen as problematic by the girls, on the contrary, these items were amongst those most desired. 'Younger' items, however, were the most unpopular and 'uncool'.

Where do you get your clothes from?

Girls in the focus groups cited a wide variety of places their clothing came from. Overwhelmingly they listed shops rather than other sources; only three girls mentioned 'hand-me-downs' from family members or acquaintances and one girl said she received clothes for Christmas or birthday gifts. The most common shop named was *The Warehouse*, mentioned by ten girls; over a third of total focus group participants. *Amazon* was the second most mentioned store (seven girls), followed by *Urban Angel* and *Supre* (6 girls each). *Just Jeans* and *Postie Plus* were also popular responses (five girls each).

The Warehouse was acknowledged by the most girls as the place where they bought their clothes. As a large 'bargain' store, it is an economical place to shop, and thus not surprising that parents would buy clothing for their children there. It was clearly not a 'cool' place however, as when many girls said they got their clothes from *The Warehouse* they often made fun of it (by referring to it in a mocking tone of voice, using the slang name '*Ware-whare*', or singing the advertising jingle) or quickly laughing afterwards. This served to lighten their comment, and protect them from potential negative judgements from the other members of their focus group, as *The Warehouse* is not known for selling 'high fashion' or recognised as a 'trendy' place to buy clothing. Seeking approval from class members was fairly clear in all the focus groups, as girls were likely to agree with places others had already mentioned, and perhaps add another, rather than be completely original. One example of this was when a girl mentioned

shopping at *Farmers*, premising the statement with *"I know it sounds a bit weird but…"* before going on to justify her reason for shopping at this store *"I like going to Farmers because they have a big variety"*. Her confession of shopping at *Farmers* was couched in language that protected her from judgement, as she pre-empted potential thoughts of *Farmers* as a "weird" or unfashionable store by her peers.

While *The Warehouse* is a cheap store, the second-most popular shop mentioned – *Amazon* - is a skate/surf shop which stocks 'label' clothing, and is located at the opposite end of the affordability scale. *Amazon's* website describes their store as the place to "get all the hottest Surfwear, Street and Denim labels" (www.amazonsurf.co.nz). This can be seen to show that while girls may shop at cheaper stores, they also want to shop at places where they stock more expensive, label clothing, highly recognisable to others. It also shows that, in the presence of other girls their age, they want to be identified with *Amazon* and the type of clothing they sell. *Amazon* was a particularly popular response from the older focus group participants. One eight and one nine-year-old responded that they shopped at *Amazon*, while three out of four 11-year-olds and two out of three 12-year-olds said they did. This points to the increasing power of peer conformity and wanting to fit in, particularly by having the 'right' clothes from the 'right store. Grant and Stephen's study with girls the same age as this research sample also found that department type stores (such as Farmers and The Warehouse for New Zealand children) were more commonly mentioned by younger participants, who were not as overtly concerned with buying their clothes from the 'right' places as older girls (2005). Particular labels or brands identify the clothing items as more expensive, and therefore afford the girls who wear them more cultural capital for having 'cool' or 'expensive' clothes. As Ross and Harradine found, young children (aged 5-6-years-old) were aware of different brands and which ones were (socially) desirable, while older children showed clear preference for branded items, saying that they would rather have a good 'fake' of a branded product than something not branded at all (2004:18).

Postie Plus was a somewhat unexpected response, although it became more understandable once it was established this is where the school's uniforms are sold. Although it appears its popularity was initially born of necessity in buying school uniforms, it seems that this then moved to a general like for the store for some of the girls. It was primarily eight-year-old girls who mentioned *Postie Plus*, none of the older

and (arguably) more fashion conscious 11 and 12-year-old girls named this store, despite them also having to purchase their school uniform there. Here, the younger girls indicated their clothing choices were more closely tied to necessity and parental involvement; buying clothes from stores they 'need' to go to, rather than choose to visit. This was expressly obvious as a 10 year-old girl pointedly pulled on her uniform as she mentioned *Postie Plus*. Its website describes *Posite Plus* as a place for "affordable family fashion" (www.postie.co.nz). That the older girls did not acknowledge *Postie Plus* could indicate that as girls grow and approach their teenage years, they see school uniform as something they *have* to wear, and thus in a separate category from clothes they choose.

Getting clothes second-hand was mentioned by three girls, all in the 8 and nine-year-old age bracket, while receiving clothing as a gift was mentioned by only one eight-year-old girl. In the same way that older girls did not mention the store where they purchased their school uniform, they similarly did not discuss other ways they obtained clothes through gifts or hand-me-downs, which it is fair to assume they, like the younger girls, also did. It is also important to consider dynamics in the focus groups; some girls may not have wanted to talk about second-hand clothing in front of their classmates. Also, some of the girls may not have considered the clothing which they did not have an active role in choosing as relevant to this particular discussion, only referring to clothing they helped to choose and bought from stores.

As the ages of the girls increased, different types of stores were reported as places where the girls bought clothing with clothing stores targeted at older consumers gaining popularity. *Glassons, Dotti* and *Jay Jays* were all mentioned by 11-year-olds, and cater to a primarily teenage and young women market. *Supre* was mentioned by 11 and 12 year-olds, yet also popular with the 9 year-old girls in this research, despite *Supre* marketing themselves as the "market leader in teen female fashion" (www.supre.com.au). *Amazon* was also more popular with older focus group participants. On one hand this makes sense; as girls grow and mature they need larger sizes and therefore 'older' clothing stores. On the other hand, however, large department or warehouse-style stores (such as *The Warehouse*) still cater for girls throughout this time into larger sizes and through to teenage and adult sized (and style) clothing. Nevertheless, girls showed a shift from shopping in general, department style stores, to

specific female and often teenage-girl-oriented stores as they got closer to adolescence and teenage years. In these 'older' stores they are able to purchase the same items of clothing as older teens and women, in smaller sizes. Stores such as *Supre* make it possible for younger, smaller girls to fit their clothes by providing sizes as small as XXXS. Furthermore, as age increases so does the sense of wanting (or often 'needing') to fit in, thus the desire to shop in more popular stores, associated with being 'older' and 'cooler' becomes more manifestly obvious around this time.

The only clothing store mentioned by girls in every focus group was *Urban Angel*. *Urban Angel* is the female tween continuation of the clothing store *Pumpkin Patch*, targeting children from birth to age 11 (www.pumpkinpatch.co.nz). Indeed, it was the only chain clothing store in Christchurch, and perhaps New Zealand, dedicated solely to this demographic at the time of this research. Six girls mentioned shopping at *Urban Angel,* and one eight-year-old girl also mentioned *Pumpkin Patch*. According to their website, *Urban Angel* caters to girls between the ages of eight and fourteen or sixteen years old (www.urbanangel.co.nz), with the site divided into different links for fashion, accessories and 'more' which includes sleepwear, shoes, hosiery and underwear. It is also pertinent to note that while *Urban Angel* comes under the umbrella of the parent company *Pumpkin Patch*, there is no tween boy equivalent store which boys can 'graduate' to in the same way as girls. The oldest girls commented that *Urban Angel* was not as popular with them anymore compared to other ('older') clothing stores, not because the clothes sold there did not fit them (they still did), but because they had 'moved on' in their sense of fashion. They argued that the clothes from Urban Angel were too common and "*when everybody wears them, they all look the same*". These 12-year-old girls said they did not want to look the same as everyone else, and sought variety and diversity in their clothing choices;

12C: Yea. So they kind of like all look the same. So when everybody wears them they all look the same. Hmmm.
LC: And you don't want to look the same as everyone else?
12C: Nope.
12B: Yea cos at the moment there is heaps of stripes everywhere.
12C: And polka dots and head bands and stuff.
12A: Yea, head bands.
LC: Is that a good thing or a bad thing?
12C: Ummm

12B: I don't like it when um like all the shops have heaps and heaps of the same stuff cos then you, and if everyone is wearing it.
12C: Yea, you need a variety. Of clothes.
12B: Yea 'cos everything has stripes.
12A: Well, yea, that's cos stripes are in.
12C: And all the jeans are like, tight.
12A: Yea, skinny jeans.
12C: Yip. Those are cool jeans though.
LC: Just hard to get into!
12C: Yip!
12A: Well, I've got a pair. I find them easy to get into but I can't get my foot out, it gets stuck.

Many paradoxes are exposed in this excerpt. The girls state they do not want to look like everyone else, that there are too many things with '*stripes*' and '*polka dots*' and '*head bands*'; but then justify wearing these things because they are 'in' and 'cool'. Thus, while the girls complain about the lack of diversity on one hand, on the other, they contribute to the predicament by owning and wearing these things, and conforming to this narrow definition of what is 'in fashion', indicating a vicious cycle. These girls did not want to look exactly like everyone else who shopped in particular store, but, by the same token, they did not want to stand out from the crowd in a negative way. These older girls also named more 'label' brand clothing stores as places they liked to shop, indicating more concern for owning the 'right' clothes and appearing within the established ideas of 'cool' to their peers. This draws on the idea that the girls want to be different, but just like everyone else. This supports the findings of Grant and Stephens, that girls "are prepared to pay a premium price for a branded product and place much emphasis on the fact that the product is deemed "cool" and is respected by their peer group"; wanting to remain close to the idea of what was fashionable at the time, to not stand out in a negative way, but be recognised as wearing a brand "if it is the right one" (2005:461-2).

Here, the differences between the sexes are made apparent. Girls are seen as a profitable and justifiable target niche market for clothing, presumably as girls are more concerned about their appearance and their clothing than boys, who are not targeted in the same way. This can be seen as a further manifestation, and downward extension, of the greater number of clothing stores for women over those for men. In contemporary society, women are targeted primarily as consumers, particularly when it comes to matters relating to their appearance and this can be seen to extend to girls as they are socialised

into this role over time (Polivy et. al, 1986). Findings in this research support this assertion, as the number of different places the girls mentioned buying their clothes from was much higher for the 11 and 12-year-olds than for the eight, nine and 10-year-olds, despite having less participants in the focus groups for these older age brackets. While the eight-year-olds mentioned an average of 1.9 places each, the 11-year-olds mentioned an average of 3.5 each and 12-year-olds 2.7 places each. Furthermore, the 12-year-olds did not necessarily have specific names of shops where they bought their clothes, but rather admitted *"I just go [shopping] to look around places"*. Thus, as the girls get older, they explore more options and look in different places for clothing which they feel fits them, in both a physical and symbolic way.

Who do you go shopping for clothes with?

All the ten and 11-year-olds stated that they went shopping with their mother, this topic only covered in these two focus groups, due to time restraints. One 10-year-old girl said she went shopping with her Mum or Dad, and two 11-year-old girls also mentioned going with their sister, family in general, and sometimes "Mum's friends" joined also.

These girls showed a clear preference for clothes shopping with their mothers, or other (usually older) females. When one girl said she went shopping with her Mum or Dad, this sparked a discussion about what it was like to go shopping with "Dads";

*10F: Because Dads are, like, **guys** not **girls**.*
10D: But Dads sometimes let their children go off with it, they maybe would let us get these long skirts and they just need to check the price, they would probably give it to us otherwise.
*10E: My Dad **never** goes into a girls shop.*
10F: But guys and girls have different fashions.
*10C: My Dad wears the ugliest clothes, he chooses, like… **boy clothes.***
(all laugh)
*10C: And it is like, **no**, Dad, I am a **GIRL**!*
…
*10F: I usually go with my Mum because if I go with Dad he only looks at guy clothes he doesn't … he looks at **his** fashion, not **my** fashion.*
*10C: Yea, my Dad always says 'come on we'll go look in Rebel Sport, come on we'll go look in Stirling Sports'. It's really annoying, we never get to get what **I** want.*
10F: That's why I always want to go with my Mum.
10B: Exactly.

It is evident from these comments that by the age of ten, girls are already beginning to be socialised into seeing shopping as more than just filling a physical need (for a particular product), but a social activity, which it is hard to enjoy with someone who does not have the same attitude towards it. While some of their reasoning is very rudimentary; *"guys and girls have different fashions","" My Dad wears the ugliest clothes, he chooses, like... boy clothes"*, these girls still indicate that they are aware of distinct differences between the sexes, and how these differences can translate into the arena of clothes and shopping. Whilst a few of the participants in the focus groups very readily and happily identified themselves (or were identified by other group members) as *"tomboys"*, most were very keen to identify themselves as *"girls"*, which was indicative of far more than just a biological fact. There was also a level of acknowledgement that one could be *"too girly"* and that this was not to be encouraged or sought after either. The girls were therefore seen to be monitoring and controlling the limits of their performance of girlhood and femininity (Butler, 1999; Frost, 2005).

Do you think what you wear is important?

When asked if they thought what they wore was important, the significant majority answered emphatically "***yes***", only two less emphatic responses coming from the youngest participants. Two eight-year-old girls answered *"It's just what you think you want to look like"* and *"I don't usually care what I look like"* respectively. While the girl who made the former comment may be downplaying the importance of clothes in her opinion, her words show that there is still a relatively significant level of association between clothes and expressing the sort of person you want to, or do not want to, look like; pointing to the role of clothing in the performance of identity. Indeed, this could be viewed as placing significant importance on what one wears, as it is explicitly linked here with the concept of self identity and the presentation of self. The girl who commented *"I don't usually care what I look like"* and said *"I just throw clothes on"* was one of the girls who actively constructed her identity as a tomboy throughout the different activities and conversations in the group. This included her expressly labelling herself a *"tomboy"* and constant reiteration of disliking things she considered *"too girlie"*. Throughout the focus group she maintained the performance of a 'tomboy' identity; and actively constructed a picture of herself as rejecting traditional notions of girlhood and femininity.

Moreover, girls of all ages were able to differentiate times and situations when they ought to be more concerned about their appearance. Such comments showed relatively sophisticated knowledge that clothing and the external presentation of self can be altered, with different aspects of oneself presented at different times, in accordance with different situations; "*it really does depend where I am going, like, if I am at the mall then I would like to have the latest fashion sort of thing. But ... if I am just at home, then I will just hang out in like a tracksuit or track pants or something*" (age 9). Regulating their appearance based on who may be seeing (and possibly 'assessing') them appears to be considered even at this young age. Therefore, when girls are choosing clothing they are aware of a multiplicity of factors and regulating their appearance based on many of these influences (Grant and Stephen, 2005; Wilson and MacGillivray, 1998). This girl also identifies the mall as a place where she performs a certain identity and is to be looked at, as much as she goes to look at others and the store.

More specifically, girls in the focus groups thought it was important for clothing to 'match', as an important part of 'fitting in', as discussed with the 10-year-old girls;

LC: So is it quite important what you wear do you think?
All: Yes (x 6 girls)
10D: Cos if the colours don't match... you could come in pink and like black and they don't match.
*10A: Well **actually,** they do. Pink and black go **AWESOME** together!*
10F: Cos like if you had a chequered hat, a bright yellow shirt and pink pants and like purple shoes...
LC: So it is important that you match?
All: Yes
10F: Cos otherwise ...
10D: My Mum says that all the time actually.
*10F: Cos if you are in a shop and like everyone else has like matching clothes then **you** will be the one that **stands out**!!*
10A: Exactly!
LC: Is standing out a good thing or a bad thing?
10E: Bad thing.
*10D: **Bad thing**.*
10F: Well ... it is kind of a bad thing cos people will stare at you.
*10C: Sometimes you see these little kids and they are dressed in the **ugliest** clothes when they could be dressed in these really nice clothes because sometimes they have clothes from when like my Mum was little!*
10D: Well some people don't have all that money to buy all that pretty stuff. Some people just have to get it off their brothers or sisters.

...[girls continue...]

10D: Some people don't have enough money to buy things like that.
LC: There are a lot of different things to think about.
10F: But then they wouldn't have a house would they?
10D: Well maybe they spent all their money on food and stuff
*10A: You can't just worry about what you **wear**, what clothes...*
*10D: Yea, you need to worry about **other things** in your life.*

Using this segment of dialogue as an example, one sees that, for this demographic, clothes are an important indicator of identity and expression of 'fitting in', supporting the findings of Ross and Harradine (2004). In this sense, 'standing out' is seen as an expressly bad thing as it draws more attention to oneself, presumably for the 'wrong' reasons. In saying clothes should 'match' the girls are referring to different items of clothing on one person at the same time. Taken another way, however, it could also be said that it is important for girls to 'match' with each other. In this way, the girls not only want their own clothes to match and look good together, but also match the way other girls look, to avoid standing out and attracting negative attention.

Other comments indicate that these girls are aware of other constraining factors on why some girls may not be able to fit in with specific clothing ideals and standards. Not having enough money to buy "*all that pretty stuff*" is mentioned by one girl, acknowledging they may '*have to*' get their clothes from their siblings. The same girl then makes several comments to reinforce her assertion of clothing as less important than more basic needs such as food. As another girl agrees, "*You can't just worry about what you **wear**, what clothes...*" this girl re-emphasises her point; "*Yea, you need to worry about **other things** in your life.*" Not all of the girls seem to have the same opinion or understanding, or at least do not express it. This could be seen as reflective of younger children from relatively privileged backgrounds (a decile 10 school) who may have little personal experience with not being able to afford such 'luxuries' or 'necessities' (depending on how one looks at it) as the latest clothing items. It is still interesting to note that girls of this young age are aware of bigger social issues, and have some idea of the effects they may have on some people, and girls, even if they are not themselves in that position.

Do you choose what you wear, or who chooses for you?

When asked who chooses what they wear, the girls overwhelmingly responded that they chose, but many also conceded that their parents, particularly their mother, played some role in the process. Whilst almost all of the girls began by strongly asserting that they chose their clothes, as the discussion progressed, admission of the degree to which their parents were involved tended to increase. For example, one eight year-old girl stated that she chose her clothes, then went on to qualify this with *"if I choose something and Mum says no I have to get something else."* Many girls willingly admitted their parents' involvement *"Sometimes I choose, sometimes my Mum and Dad choose."* (age 9), while others were more reluctant to be seen to relinquish control in this area. Some of the girls clearly weighed up the distribution of choice, as one girl stated *"Probably 60/40 to me"* (the 40% belonging to her parents) (age 9). The girls thought it very important to be, at the very least, involved in their clothing choice, even if they could not have complete ownership of these decisions.

Many girls admitted they were 'trusted' to decide what they wore around home, but this was often not the case when going out, or for special occasions. It was also acknowledged that as parents (particularly mothers) played an important role in choosing the clothes they purchased in the first place, this meant that, even when the girls seemed to be making autonomous choices from clothes they already owned, they were still within parameters of clothing which had been 'screened' and deemed 'appropriate'.

As the age of the girls increased, so did their level of activity in choosing their clothes; their parents often reduced to having secondary input - giving opinions on items the girls had already selected themselves (maintaining the power to deny a girl a particular item of clothing by refusing to pay for it). When discussing purchasing clothes, the oldest girls in particular were unimpressed by the idea of clothes being bought for them without their presence; for these three 12-year-old girls, their own choice was paramount. Younger girls were more relaxed about others buying clothes on their behalf; particularly mothers as they *"know what I like"*. The example of the recent school dance was used to gauge whether the girls were also allowed to choose their clothes for a social event with boys and girls of their own age. All the girls responded that they chose

their own clothes for the dance. Moreover, if any advice was sought on what to wear, it was from their older sisters or friends, rather than their parents, in keeping with Grant and Stephen's findings that these older role models were admired, and their opinions valued (2005: 461).

There still appears to still be an element of negotiation in what girls wear; all the ten year old girls agreed with one girl's statement "*I pick what I wear, but sometimes my Mum and Dad make me change what I wear*". When asked why their parents would make them change, they replied:

10A: Well, I think they don't like what we are wearing.
10C: Well, sometimes they don't match, the colours, and sometimes they just don't go well together.
10F: And sometimes, maybe it's just not their fashion. Like they don't...
*10C: Yea, they don't get **young** fashion.*
10F: Yea.
*10D: And sometimes maybe the clothes size are too small, so maybe they **think** it is too small, but sometimes it might be too big*
*10A: Or maybe they just don't like it, and they think it's, like, not **good**...*
10F: It doesn't match...
10A: Yea.
10E: They think that it is a bit too ... going somewhere that it is not...
*10D: Like going a bit too far, like maybe we are already up in the **teenage** style when we are maybe meant to be a bit **down** still?*

Here the girls show they are aware of concerns their parents may have, such as wearing clothes which are '*teenage style*' and perhaps not the way they are 'meant' to be dressing. By acknowledging these concerns they are also acknowledging the reality that many girls do (at times) try to look and dress older than they are, and that their parents do not like this. Eleven year-old girls also conceded although they made initial choices, "*if Mum doesn't like them she will say no*". Another girl agreed, "*Yea, if Mum doesn't like them then I am not allowed them. Then she gets all anti at me and I get grounded or something*". Some girls also expressed an element of rebellion against their parents in clothing choices "*but I sometimes [wear it] anyway*".

When you are looking for new clothes what do you look for?

When looking for new clothes girls mentioned a diverse range of factors they considered. These ranged from price, comfort and size, to 'the look', something that reflects who they are, and follows the current fashion. The most commonly mentioned factors were that clothes needed to be '*comfortable*', '*look good*' and '*fit well*'. Many girls looked for comfort in new clothes, but this was usually coupled with another factor, most commonly '*pretty*' and/or '*fashion[able]*'. Ten year-olds were the only ones to mention price, and only in a way that criticised their parents for being primarily concerned with cost, forcing the girls to work within certain price limits. Many girls also made a distinction between shopping for what they '*want*', and shopping for what they '*need*', expressing that often they only got what they *needed* when shopping for clothes. This was especially true for the younger girls who were less likely to go shopping with friends as a recreational activity.

That said, nine-year-olds appeared to be most concerned about getting clothing which expressed their personality and, to a certain extent, their individuality: looking for "*something that is me*", "*stuff that follows the fashion, but is still kind of me as well*". Here, the girls are indicating that clothes serve many functions, as well as communicating to others (and themselves) the '*kind of girl*' they are; signposting aspects of their identity.

While comfort initially appears to be the primary concern when looking for new clothes, if the responses "*looks good*", "*so I can feel good*", "*pretty*", "*if it is good*", and "*if I like it*" are considered collectively, comfort is secondary to the total of eleven responses indicating the appearance is most important. Girls were concerned with clothing being 'good', although what they meant by 'good' was not clearly defined. Many interpretations are possible; expensive, good quality, liked, or seen as appropriate - not 'naughty' or provocative. Other remarks pointed to clothing needing to be appropriate and fitting, "*not show bits that you don't want other people to see, so it's not really tight on you*", and practical (for example, "*warm*") and "*something that has kind of got a purpose*" (age 9). As an external indicator of identity, clothing needed to embody '*something that is me*' and portray the 'right' image so '*people know what kind of girl I am*'; with four comments made along this vein. Girls showed they actively controlled

the impression they gave with their clothing (or attempted to do so), as one girl stated "*fashion can sometimes show, like, tell people who you kind of are*"; seen in the discussion excerpt below:

9H: I wear clothes and outfits that aren't OTT [5] *because if it's like pink with all these pictures of flowers and fairies and all these glitter things and all these sequins and that sort of stuff, I wouldn't wear that. But if it did have stuff like sequins, cos I got this white kind of baggy top and it has sequins, silver sequins from here and here (indicates on her chest)...*
9A: That top is cool.
*9H: (continues) ...and it is not too OTT. And I don't try to go with the flow like **that** much because fashion can sometimes show like tell people who you kind of **are**. So if its something like pink and with fairies and stuff on it then it will show that you are kind of a ...*
9F: A fairy fan
*9E: Or a **girl** girl*
*9H: Or a kind of **believer** type of thing.*
9F: I'm a believer!   (together)
9B: I'm a believer!   (together)
(girls giggle)

This passage indicates that the girls did not want to send the wrong message about who they were with their clothing. In this case, certain things such as glitter, sequins, pictures of flowers and fairies, and even the colour pink could (or as this girl asserted *would*) lead others to see them as '*a fairy fan*', '*a believer*' or '*a girl girl*', which had blatantly negative connotations in this context. While many girls stated they want their clothes to be 'pretty', and in earlier activities often selected items of pink clothing as their favourites; they also expressed that there are limitations as to *how* pretty or *how* pink or 'girlie' clothes could be. Therefore, many girls expressed different (often strong) opinions about important factors in new clothes, but these ideas were clearly fluid. They change not only between different girls and different ages, but often within the individual girl herself depending on the item and 'look' she is trying to achieve. One girl stated that as long as clothes were *slightly* comfortable then fashion was of greatest importance; *"I wear clothes that are pretty much all in fashion and I don't really... they have got to be a least **a little bit** comfy, I don't care if they are medium or anything just as long as they are a little bit."*

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[5] OTT – over the top

How do you go about shopping? If you walk into a shop, what is the first thing you do?

All the girls in the focus groups said they enjoyed shopping, many taking this a step further stating they "*love it*" with wide smiles and gleeful expressions. Their penchant for shopping went further than shopping for clothes; girls enjoyed shopping for a wide variety of items and reasons, and as a recreational activity in itself.

This topic of shopping was covered in more depth with the girls in the eleven and twelve year old age brackets; these girls saying they enjoyed shopping more when they were buying things, or "*getting new stuff*" (age 11), rather than only browsing. Two girls commented if they went shopping 'just' to look, they got bored, indicating they were more invested in the process if they were going shopping with the intent of making a purchase.

All these girls appeared to have a specific way in which they shopped, and commented on how the physical environments of the stores they visited affected how they shop. All the girls in 11-year-old focus group said they took cues from mannequins displayed in-store for what to wear and how to wear it, and said they also looked to the displays, posters and pictures in clothing stores for advice. These girls said the mannequins and pictures were used just as guides, however, and they ultimately decided themselves what they would put together for an outfit; "*sometimes [they] have a top that I like but bottoms that I don't, so I might go and get another pair of pants...*" Twelve year-old girls also said they looked at the pictures displayed in clothing stores when browsing. Again, personal choice was a strong factor; while they look at what the store has on display, they still chose for themselves what they do or do not like. When asked whether they looked at what the shop assistants were wearing, all the girls answered that they did, although one girl admitted "*sometimes if I don't like what they are wearing I'll just like, I dunno I'll like, not really pay attention*". By the ages of 11 and 12 it appears girls are able to make more independent clothing choices, having developed (and still developing) a sense of personal taste and style. Therefore, they are more able to take cues from various sources including the salespeople (the 'clothing experts') in different stores and integrate these with their own opinions, rather than taking on ideas in a more wholesale way, as younger girls tended to (see Russell and Tyler, 2002).

Exercise Two – matching descriptions to different outfits

The second exercise in the focus groups asked the girls to place stickers on pictures of women/girls wearing different outfits based on a range of descriptions. All of the faces of the women and girls in the pictures were obscured by stickers so the participants could not identify them. This was done in an attempt to encourage the girls to make decisions based on the clothing rather than on the identity of the person wearing the clothes, as many of those pictured were celebrities who would be known to these girls. The girls participating were given stickers and asked to stick them on their chosen person for each description. Sheet A had ten pictures on it, and Sheet B eleven pictures (see Appendices 8 and 9).

Eight descriptions were read out for the girls to match with pictures;

1. Which outfit/picture do you like the best?
2. Which outfit/picture do you like the least?
3. Which girl do you think would be the most fun to be friends with?
4. Which girl do you think would be most liked by boys?
5. Which girl do you think would be the best behaved?
6. Which girl do you think would be the naughtiest?
7. Which girl do you think your parents would most like you to dress like?
8. Which girl would you most like to look like?

The majority of girls were very disappointed that the faces of the women pictured on these two sheets were obscured by stickers, although it did not deter them from attempting to decipher their identities, as they speculated with each other as to who was pictured. After analysing the pictures, some girls stated unequivocally certain pictures *were* of a particular celebrity. While they were often correct, in some cases they were also wrong. Despite my attempt to prevent this from happening, some of the girls in the focus groups kept trying to identify the people pictured, which they then (arguably) used to frame their responses in relation to their opinions of the person they thought was pictured. The true identities of the people depicted were not revealed to any of the girls during the activity, even with multiple guesses. In a few cases the identities of celebrities

were revealed in the discussion of the girls' choices, but only after their selection was firmly established and recorded.

The identity of the person pictured was very important to some of the girls, spurring many conversations postulating possible identities. Many girls seemed to be upset their 'point of reference' (the face and name of the person) had been removed, and attempted to regain this reference by guessing their identities. The girls seemed very comfortable discussing celebrities; however, they were not so confident in discussing pictures when they did not know who the person was.

Examples can be seen in the following excerpts:

8G: I know that girl, she is off …
8B: I like that girl
8A: Yea she is pretty
8B: And I like her
8F: You can see her face!
8G:I think it's Hilary Duff.
8E: (draws in breath as exclamation) Oh that is Hillary Duff!!
(All girls make exclamation noises and sit up on their chairs to look at 8E's pointing at one of the pictures).
LC: Don't pick it based on who you think it is, pick it based on what they are wearing.
8C: Where is Hilary Duff?
8E: I think it's that one. Definitely Hilary Duff.
8B: It is Hilary Duff and I'm not going to pick it.
LC: I honestly don't think that Hilary Duff is even there on these sheets.
8B: She has got the chicken pox. (laughs).
8A: Well I know Britney Spears is there!!!
LC: I honestly don't think that Britney Spears is there either, but anyway…
8A: That is her there… see… (points it out to LC)

Stating "*It is Hilary Duff and I'm not going to pick it*" indicated the identity of the celebrity may indeed have impact on the selection, or dismissal, of certain pictures.

9B: That one looks like Paris Hilton.
9A: Yea, half of them look like Paris Hilton.
LC: So I am going to read out some descriptions of people and
9C: I think I already know who they are.
9E: That one looks like Fergie.
9B: Are they all the same?
9D: That kind of looks like Britney Spears.

LC: They are all different people
9C: That is sooo Paris Hilton
9B: No I mean the sheets
LC: Oh yes everyone has got the same sheets.
9E: That is sooo Amanda Bynes
9C: Yea that one is Amanda Bynes
9G: Oh I know who that is. That's a person out of the Dolly magazine. I have seen it. It's not a celebrity though. She is also out of Dolly magazine and that is Pink. And she is also out of Dolly.
9B: I think I remember that one.

The nine-year-olds in this excerpt show they remember images from magazines, whether or not they depict celebrities or people they 'should' know. One girl, for example, pointed out several of the models from the DOLLYstyle fashion piece, could name the magazine they were from, and that they were '*not ... celebrit[ies]*'. This is particularly interesting as it indicates some girls are paying close attention to images they see in magazines; advertisements, fashion spreads, and pictures which accompany stories; whether portraying a celebrity or not. That this girl could remember these specific images shows a high level of recall, and suggests a very close reading of the magazine. This is especially noteworthy when considering *Dolly* is aimed at 13/14 to 17 year-olds, and the different content this would imply.

10A: Is that Madonna?
10F: You know Madonna is adopting a kid????
LC: We are going to look at both of these sheets at the same time, so if you can put them where you can see both of them in front of you.
(lots of noise as girls talk about the pictures with each other, comparing what they like and dislike)
*10E: Oh my God! I know that person.*

11D: I think that one is Nicole Kidman.
11C: I think that is Gwen Stefani. Number 6.
11D: I think it actually looks a bit like Christina Aguilera, sort of.
Other girls: ohhh yea.
11D: And that's Posh Beckham. Victoria. Whatever you want to call her.
11A: I reckon number 5 is Britney.
11C and 11D: Yea.

Here, the 11 year-old girls showed they were comfortable discussing celebrities and magazine images; indeed all girls across all groups found this enjoyable. The girls appeared more comfortable discussing their likes and dislikes once they had a reference point such as a face, especially considering celebrities. For example, later in the focus

groups when discussing advertising, many girls said they liked the advertisement for Paris Hilton's perfume because of Paris Hilton, often simply stating "*I like Paris Hilton*". Their opinion did not appear to be related to the advertisement or product, but the celebrity pictured. It would be of interest to repeat this exercise in future research, some participants seeing the face of the person pictured and some not, to ascertain the potential levels of influence. Another variation would be to perform the exercise twice; once without disclosing the identity of the person pictured, and then later with identity disclosure, comparing any differences.

Which picture do you like the best?

Clearly, the most favoured picture was B5 with 42% of the focus group participants selecting this picture, including girls spanning the entire age range of this research. No other picture was selected by girls from all age groups as their favourite. The gap to the next most popular picture (A4) was very large, down over 30% to 10% of girls selecting this image of Beyonce Knowles, a popular singer.
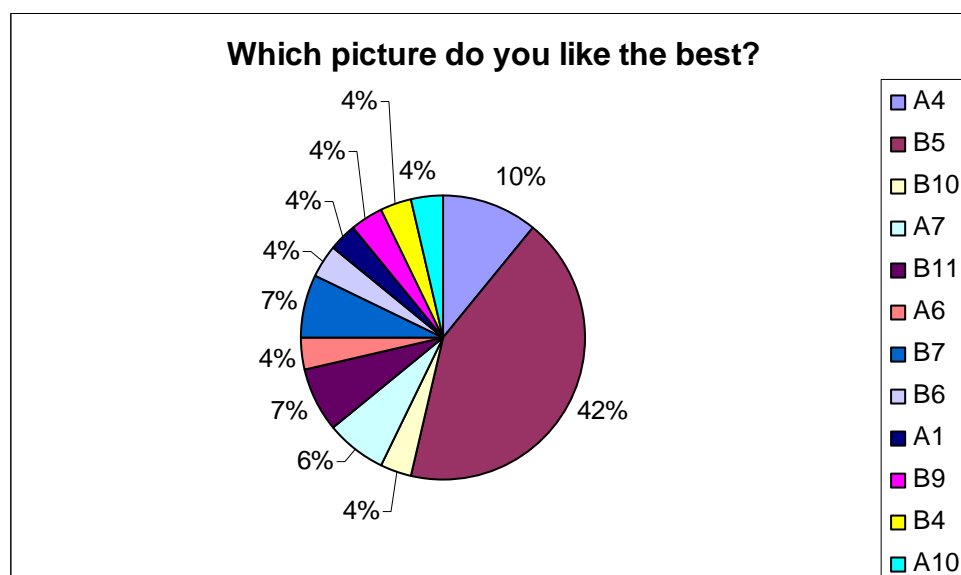
Figure 8: Most liked picture

Girls answered that they liked 'B5' because of the clothing; the scarf, shoes, and the colour of the top, girls often mentioning multiple aspects they liked. One eight-year-old girl said she chose this outfit because she liked it, but also partially out of rebellion, as she commented "*…because if I wore this at home my Mum would scream at me*".

Another girl corroborated this point; "*My Mum would scream at me if I wore those pants and shoes but, I'm not sure, I just really like it*". Here, eliciting a 'scream' from her mother (a seemingly negative response) is portrayed as part of the outfit's appeal. On the other hand, a different girl stated she liked this same outfit precisely "*because my Mum **would** let me wear it*" (emphasis added). She adds that "*I wouldn't myself wear those shoes*". This highlights the ability of girls to look at an image and accept some aspects of it, but not others. Therefore, they show themselves as able, on some level, to be active in the degree to which they consume media products and accept certain ideas while rejecting others.

Interesting, the favourite image of the most girls was not of a celebrity, but a teenage model taken from a DOLLYstyle article on how to dressing for different sizes in *Dolly* magazine. This article showed four images, all of which were used in this activity; B5, B11, B3 and B8 of size 8, 10, 12 and 14 teenage girls respectively. These images were chosen specifically to see whether being 'skinnier' had any influence on the girls' preferences, as it provided a clear gradient of different sized models to compare. Although it cannot be conclusively proven that girls liked or disliked these images as a direct reflection of their size, it is noteworthy that the degree to which these images were liked dropped as their size increased; the size 8 model was the most liked picture overall, the size 10 model was tied third-equal, while the size 12 and 14 pictures received no mention. This could also be linked to the general standard in advertising that clothes are modelled on skinny bodies, and the 'thin ideal' pervades the current media culture. Therefore, the 'smaller' sized model was more compatible with other messages sent by society and the media of what is attractive, beautiful and desirable (Grogan, 1999; Hesse-Biber, 1996; Hargreaves and Tiggemann, 2004).

Some of the choices made by girls could be related to the attraction of 'dressing up' or fantasy; one girl saying she liked B6 "*because it is kind of like Alice in Wonderland, but not too much*" (age 8), indicating this is perhaps more true for younger participants. Similar comments could be made regarding A4; the picture of a gold, sparkling, strapless evening gown is a 'princess-style' dress in which girls may envisage themselves 'dressing up' and fantasise about the chance to wear such a dress.

All but one girl in the 10-year-old focus group selected B5 as the picture they like the most, the other girl chose A6. Her reason for liking this image was "*It's pretty old fashioned, odd-fashioned, but I just like it… it's not too like the other ones, I don't know the word. It is not too teenage-y it is kind of, you know.*" When I asked if she was trying to say that it suited her age, she answered "*I think so*". This was quite a departure from the rest of the group, especially as the girls commented "*odd one out*" to her for choosing a different picture. She seemed secure in her individuality, however, as she countered with "*I am different, so 'ha'*". This again draws attention to group dynamics at work; peer pressure, and pressure to conform being common themes in adolescence, and presenting here with tween girls also. Even if it was not always overt, this pressure (recognised or not) was evident in the girls' selections, many looking to the choices of other girls before making their own, or changing their minds after looking at the choices of others.

Which picture do you like the least?
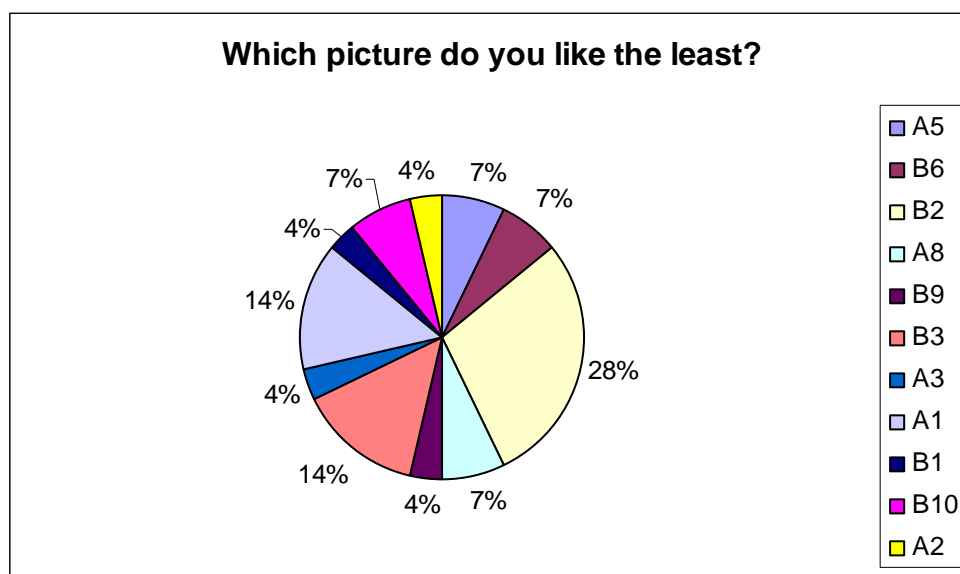
Figure 9: Least liked picture

The girls found it generally easier to choose pictures they disliked than ones they liked. When asked to pick their least favourite many exclaimed "*that is easy*", the main difficulty coming as there were multiple pictures they did not like, as one eight-year-old commented "*this is going to be hard because I don't like lots of them*". On the other

hand, some girls claimed "*but I like them all!*", just another indication of the complex nature of girls and their opinions.

The most disliked picture was B2 (pop singer Pink), chosen by 28% of the total focus group participants. Girls commented the clothes were "*too ugly*" or "*Fuggly-ugly*" (both age 10), too revealing - "*that is showing a bit too much*" (age 9), and words such as "*gross*" and "*yuck*" were also repetitively used to describe this outfit.

With half as many selections each as B2; B3 and A1 were the next 'least liked' pictures. B3 is the picture of the size 12 girl from the *Dolly* fashion spread, which was described as "*just ugly*" (age 10). A1 is a picture taken from FHM (*For Him Magazine*) and shows a woman (Melissa George; actress previously from Home and Away) in a more provocative pose, and revealing clothing. One 10-year-old described this image as "*so disgusting… it is too revealing like it has got no shoulder things and it is only 'that' short*".

Images which were more sexual in nature were more disliked, and drew more comments from girls across different groups. An 11-year-old did not like A8 "*because she looks like a slut*", and another girl agreed for "*the same reason*", seeming embarrassed to use the same 'explicit' language. Instead, she said "*it doesn't look very good*", and then agreed with the stronger statements, without having to say them herself. In the same vein, a different 11-year-old stated she "*didn't like B9 because it looks like she is in a skanky looking night-time out-wear gear thingy. On the streets it is just gross*". Other comments about different images they disliked but along these lines included "*You can nearly see her privates. It's disgusting… she looks like she doesn't have pants on!*" and "*I don't like A-3 because it's kind of see-through and I don't like that*". While it is clear that many of these girls disliked the more 'sexualised' images, many comments centring on the person wearing the clothes (for example, being a "*slut*") rather than commenting on the clothing specifically.

Which person would you most like to be friends with?
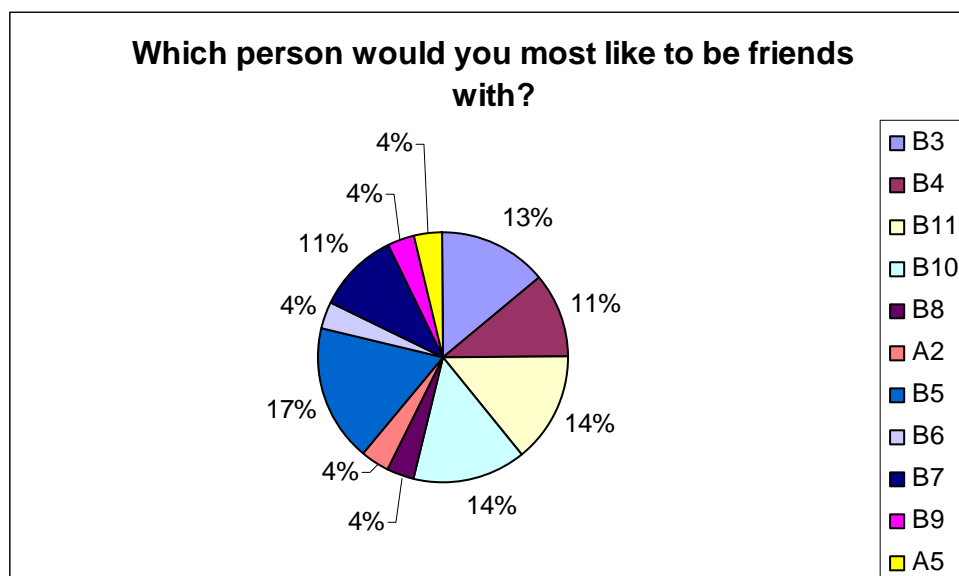
*Figure 10: Person you would most like to be friends with*

B5 was the most popular choice for the person the girls would most like to be friends with, chosen by 17% of the girls. This picture was the same as the overall favourite, therefore it is not surprising that girls would want to be friends with the person they liked the most. The next two most popular pictures in this category were B11 and B10. B11 is the size 10 girl from the DOLLYstyle spread. Girls thought "s*he looks nice and she dresses cool. Like someone who would be fun to be with*", "*sensible*" and "*trustworthy*", and she would make a good friend based on those qualities. An 11-year-old commented she liked B10 as a potential friend as she "*looks nice, quite friendly*".

Pictures of girls who looked more outgoing were the most popular selections in this category, girls in the focus groups thinking they were more likely to be fun as friends. Looking 'different' or "*out there*" (as one girl described B11) is equated with confidence and fun, which girls of this age are attracted to in a friend. Girls cited internal qualities such as "*friendly*" and "*trustworthy*" as reasons why they chose the person to be friends with, although, arguably, these sorts of characteristics are hard to attach to external appearances. Some girls found this selection more difficult than others, stating "*but I don't know them*". This highlights the tension in ascribing more personal characteristics based on clothing alone; indicating that in reality, when choosing a friend, much more is taken into consideration than external appearance. Indeed, girls commented it was

particularly difficult to make their selection for this category without seeing their faces; demonstrating that identity is particularly important when choosing a friend.

Which person would be most popular with boys?

Nine different pictures were chosen by the girls in the focus groups as the 'most popular with boys'. Two choices stood out from the rest; 31% selecting image A5; and 25% A1. A5 depicts Jessica Simpson in a revealing outfit and posed to draw attention to her large breasts. A1, which was the second 'least liked' picture, was the second most popular choice for this description also.
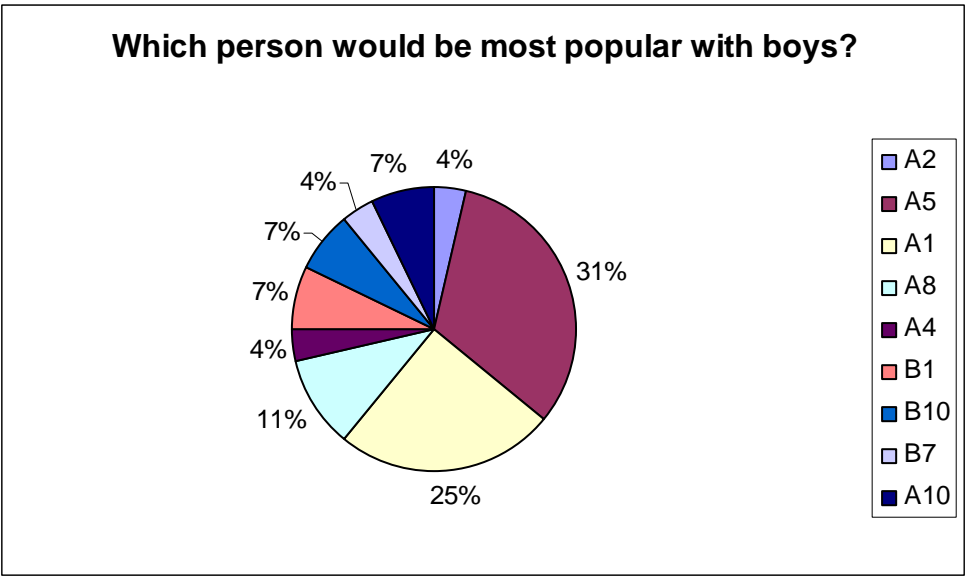
Figure 11: Person who would be most popular with boys

Indeed, the top three pictures selected by the girls for this description (A5, A1 and A8) were all taken from a series of pictures portraying FHM's '100 most sexy women'. These images, while not indecent, are certainly more sexual in nature when considering the poses, clothing, and orientation of the magazine. FHM is "the market leading men's lifestyle magazine in the world", targeted at men aged 18 to 39 (FHM, 2007), often

containing sexually explicit material and portraying women in a highly sexualised and objectified manner.

Comments about these images focused on the suggestive and sexual nature of the pictures. One response from a nine-year-old girl conflated being liked by boys with behaving badly or being 'naughty', as she answered "*A5, because it is very naughty, it is very yucky, and it's very naughty*". When questioned further about whether boys would like that, the girl replied "*Yea. Because of her clothes and her (indicates and imitates pose) ... there are holes in it*". Other girls also chose A5 because of the clothing and the pose, as can be seen in the following excerpts;

11C: I picked A5 because the way she dresses and the way she is standing or sitting down or whatever.
11D: That is Britney.
LC: So what do you think boys would like about that?
11C: The way she dresses, I don't know.
11B: I chose A5 because it's like a half top thing and has holes in the side and it's like short shorts or a skirt or something.
11A: A5. Because it shows a lot of her body and it's really tight and small. And her posing as well is something guys would go for.

12B: Because she is skinny-ish and she's got brownish skin and she's got big boobs.
(girls laugh)
LC: And you think that is what boys are after?
12C: Yip! (girls continue to giggle)

A1 was seen to be popular with boys for the same reasons, being revealing and short;

9H: I chose number 1 on sheet A. Because it's, she is showing a bit too much. And I think most teenage boys would like that.
9F: And boys like that. Some do.
9B: Well I picked number 1 on sheet A because like she is showing much, like [9H's], and it's too sick
9F: But boys like that.
9B: Yea, boys like that.
9F: Some do.
9A: And I think she's, her dress is too short 'cos boys will like it because it is too short and she is really skinny and.
*9F: She is not skinny!*
9A: She is just right, she's got blonde hair, most people like blonde hair.
9C: I picked the same one because it's got a lot showing and her dress is waaay too short.

Another 12-year-old girl remarked that "*because it is short and shows her boobs and stuff*", it would be popular with boys. According to the comments of these girls, being popular with boys requires revealing clothing, large breasts, seductive posing and a skinny body. It also helps to be tanned and have blonde hair. While the girls may not have liked these images, they had little problem in identifying that these types of images, and these types of girls, were popular with boys. They made particular reference to being popular with 'teenage' boys, although this was never mentioned as part of the question. For example, when the 11-year-old girls talked about A8, one girl said the girl pictured would be popular with boys "*because she is half dressed*" to which another girl replied "*and boys like that type of thing*". This link is particularly interesting, as Graber and Sontag note that "during adolescence, girls not only become more aware of appearance in relation to attracting boys, but they also begin to engage in social comparison at a more exaggerated level" (2006:27). The current research shows that this is also true for pre-adolescent girls. The concern is, then, that if girls associate an overt (or even implicit) sexuality in part of the requirements of being liked by boys, or considered attractive, they will emulate these looks in order to try and be liked by boys themselves, as per the theories of modelling and cultivation (Bussey and Bandura, 1992; Gerbner et. al, 1994; Bandura, 2002) . While the comments regarding being popular with boys generally centred on the degree of sexuality present in the image (implicit, rather than explicit in the girls' responses), various girls chose other images for very different reasons. For example, one nine-year-old girl chose B7 "*because like she has just put it together really nicely*". In this context, being popular with boys was a positive association rather than sexual and (by association) negative; although this was certainly the exception compared to the majority of responses.

Which person would be the best behaved?

There was a great variety of responses as to who would be the best behaved, with 14 different selections. Twenty percent of the participants chose A7 as the best behaved, the next closest choice being B7 (11%). A7 shows the youngest girl pictured, taken from a fashion 'makeover' for Disney Girl magazine.

Which person would be the best behaved?

Legend: B10, A7, B8, B4, A10, A2, A9, B7, A3, B11, A6, B9, B5, A5
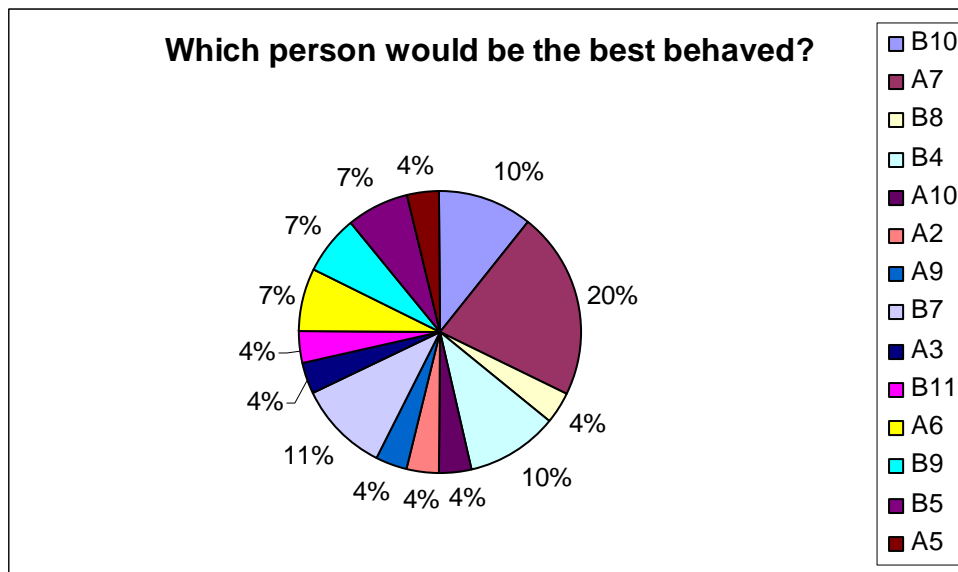
Figure 12: Person who would be best behaved

This "reader, Beci" was shown in the magazine under the heading "Dress like a Star" and dressed like Rachel Bilson from teen television show the O.C., also pictured on the same page (Disney Girl, March 2006). The reasons for a girl qualifying as the 'best behaved' included "*because she just looks normal... she is not posing lots*" (age 12 comment on A7), and "*she looks like a school person type*" (age 12 comment on B10). Talk around being "well behaved" seemed to pivot on being covered up physically; "*she's just... well behaved because she is wearing like extra... she is covered up*" (age 12 comment on B8), and echoed by four other comments; and looking 'suitable'; "*she looks like she dresses suitably and she obviously doesn't like to wear tight, tight clothes because her shorts are still hanging. She looks suitable*" (age 12 comment on A10), although 'suitable' remained undefined by these girls. Looking like a 'school kid' passed as being well behaved, presumably because it inferred a sense of age appropriateness.

Which person would be the naughtiest?

Which person would be the naughtiest?

4%

18%

18%

60%

A8
A1
A5
B2
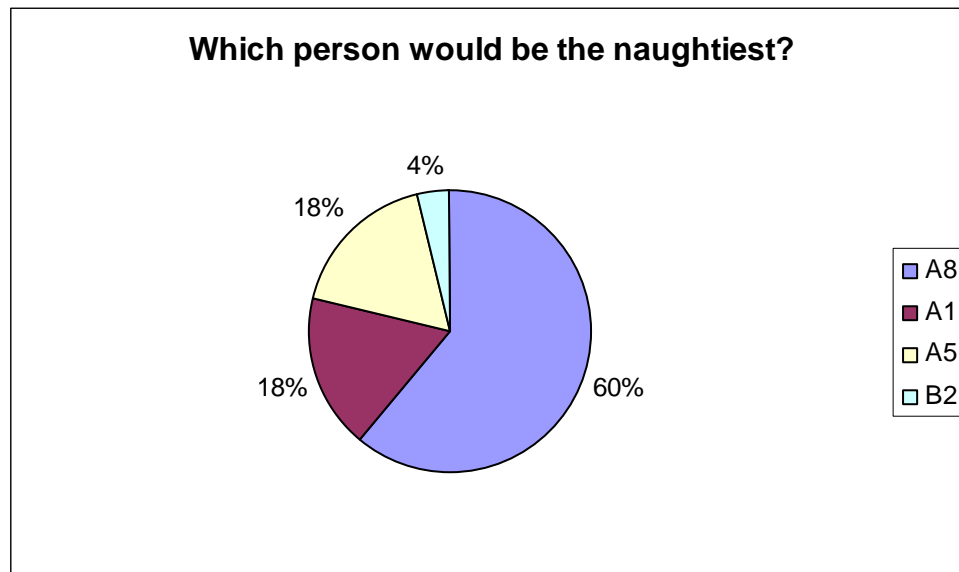
Figure 13: Person who would be the naughtiest

Girls in the focus groups only chose four different images as the naughtiest, from a possible 21. Overwhelmingly, 60% of all the participants answered that A8 was the naughtiest. The picture shows actress Jennifer Love Hewitt in a provocative pose,


wearing (what appears to be) lingerie with high heels. A1 and A5 - the two pictures the girls chose as the 'most popular with boys' - were the second equal choices for the 'naughtiest' person. A1 was also selected by girls as one of the pictures they disliked the most. These three images, all from FHM, were more sexual in their posing and attire. In these cases, overt sexuality was associated with being naughty as well as being attractive to boys. The only other choice in this category, B2, by one girl, was also one of the most popular choices for the most disliked picture.

Similar to the remarks on the images considered to be the most popular with boys, many of the comments on the 'naughtiest' person referred to the sexually provocative nature of these images, girls specifically referring to the poses and (lack of) clothing. Referring to A8, a 12-year-old girl summed up the thoughts of all the girls in her group "*Just the way she is posing and what she is wearing*". Eleven year-olds concurred with these sentiments, stating "*because the way she is posing and what*

she is wearing, she just looks naughty". One girl said she chose A1 because "*she looks very disturbing*" as "*she is not dressed properly... and she is very naughty looking, like she wants to have a lot of attention or something"*. Many girls, from both ends of the age spectrum for this research, considered this question easy to answer; they found it easier to classify girls as 'naughty' based on their clothing and poses than many other descriptions. Indeed, there seemed an obvious association made by these girls between being sexual and being naughty, as well as being sexual/sexy and the girls in the focus groups not liking such images.

Which person would your parents like you to dress like?

Four pictures stood out from the rest as images the girls thought their parents would most like them to look like. Twenty one percent of the participants in the focus groups selected A7, followed by B4 (Paris Hilton), with B5 and A10 tied for third. A7 had already been chosen by 20% of the participants as being the best behaved, thus it is not surprising that this would also extend to their parents most liking them to look like (and presumably, by extension *behave* like) this girl.
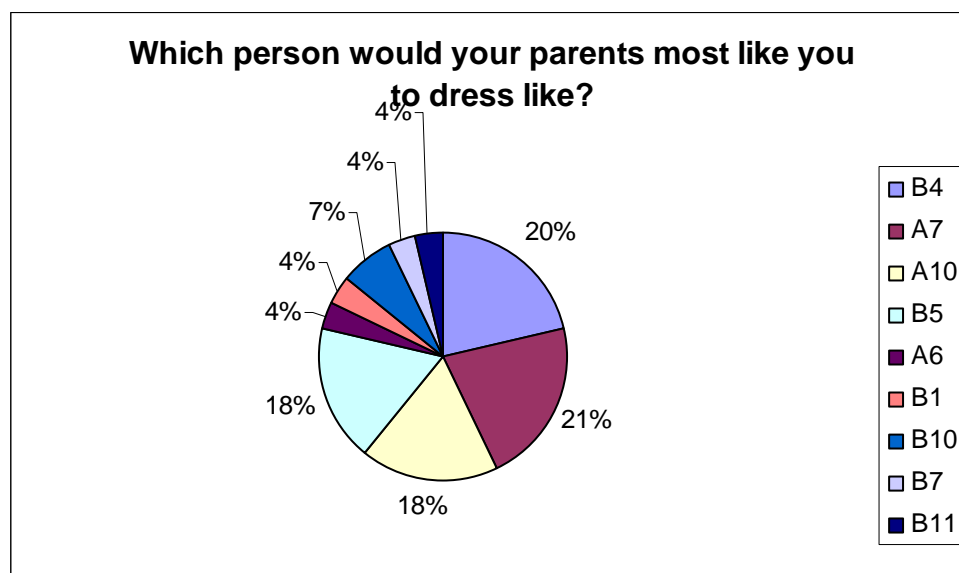

Figure 14: Person who parents would most like you to look like

The most common remark when choosing which person their parents would most like them to dress like was that the person and outfit they chose looked "casual". This applied to more than one image, and was cited multiple times by girls of different ages.

Two 12-year-old girls chose B4, for example, "*'cos it's casual and doesn't look too 'dirty', it looks like nice*". A7, the most popular choice, was described as looking "*quite casual, like what you would wear just normally*". Many of the justifications given for the selection of the best-behaved pictures were also used when discussing how the girls' parents would like them to dress, one 11-year-old choosing B4 because (it) "*covers up most of your body and is not too tight and stuff*". Several of the nine-year-old girls said that, as their mothers let them wear whatever they want, they just chose the picture they liked the best, while another girl said "*Mum wouldn't let me dress in any of them*". The eight-year-olds appeared to find this task slightly easier than their older counterparts, as they were more forthcoming in acknowledging the role their parents played in choosing their clothes. Older girls often referred to a sense of conflict, or at least a division, between what their parents (particularly mothers) liked and wanted for them, and what the girls themselves liked and wanted to wear.

Which person would you most like to look like?
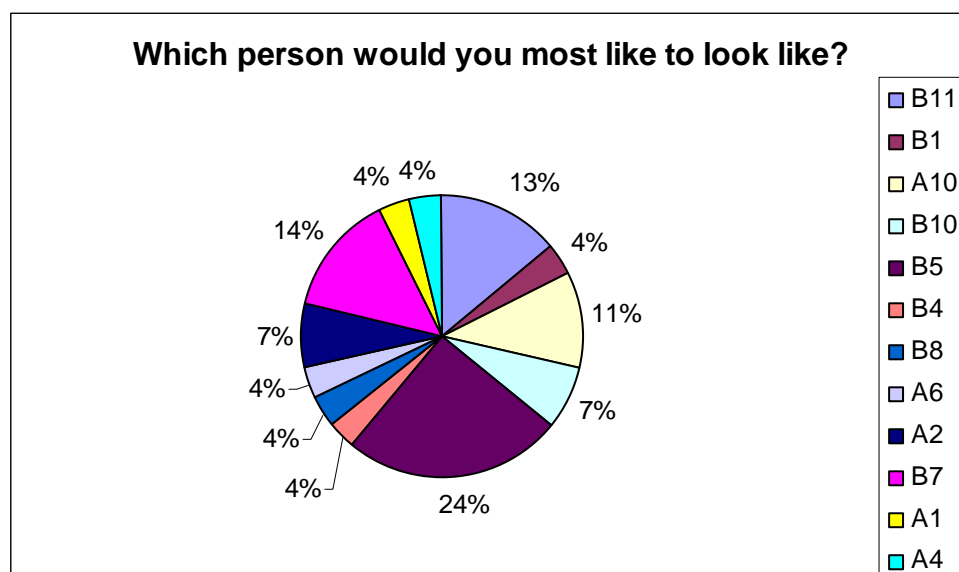
Figure 15: Person you would most like to look like

A large range of pictures was chosen as the person the girls would most like to look like; the most popular (with 24%) being B5, the same person which was liked the most. Trailing 10% behind this image was B7 (also chosen as one of the 'best behaved' people), closely followed by B11 (also chosen as someone they would like to be friends with). B11 was popular as girls thought what she was wearing was "*fun*", "*styley*",

"*nice*", "*cool*", and "*colourful*". It is a logical extension that if the girls considered her to be popular, and wanted to be friends with her, they would want to look like her also.

Girls said they wanted to look like B5 as they thought what she was wearing was "*cool*". One nine-year-old commented "*Yea, I want to look like her, she is so skinny!*" This illustrates that while the girls were commenting on the clothing on one level, on another level they were also considering many other factors about the girl/woman pictured. Throughout the different descriptions they regularly mentioned factors not relating to the clothing, but to the physical bodies of the women depicted. One telling remark was when a 12-year-old girl asked, in relation to choosing which person she would most like to look like, "*their clothes or their body?*" This girl was aware there was a difference, and also made it clear that she was aware of wanting to be like someone in how they dress, but also wanting her body to look like that of the 'model'. In this description, none of the girls chose to look like the youngest girl in the pictures, who they claimed their parents would want them to dress like. This supports previous findings in this research of the presence of an element of age aspiration in some of these girls, not only relating to clothing but also to their physical bodies. In some cases, this also related to the girls' assumption of the identity of the person pictured, as the nine-year-old girls discussed Amanda Bynes, and wanting to look like her, therefore selecting the picture they thought was her (they were correct):

9C: I like her.
9B: Yea, go girl!
9G: Amanda Bynes is like so popular.
9A: Yea, she's awesome.
9G: Yea, I want to look like her, she is so skinny!

Which person would you most like to look like? (Second Response)

After participating in the exercises regarding magazines and advertising, as a final exercise, the girls were asked to revisit the last question asked in this activity and select (again) the person they would most like to look like. Again, B5 (with 24%) was the most popular response. At 17%, the next-closest choice was A10.

Which person would you most like to look like? (Second Response)

Legend: A10, B11, B10, B5, A2, A6, B4, B6, B7, A1, herself

4% · 4% · 4% · 7% · 7% · 4% · 7% · 24% · 11% · 11% · 17%
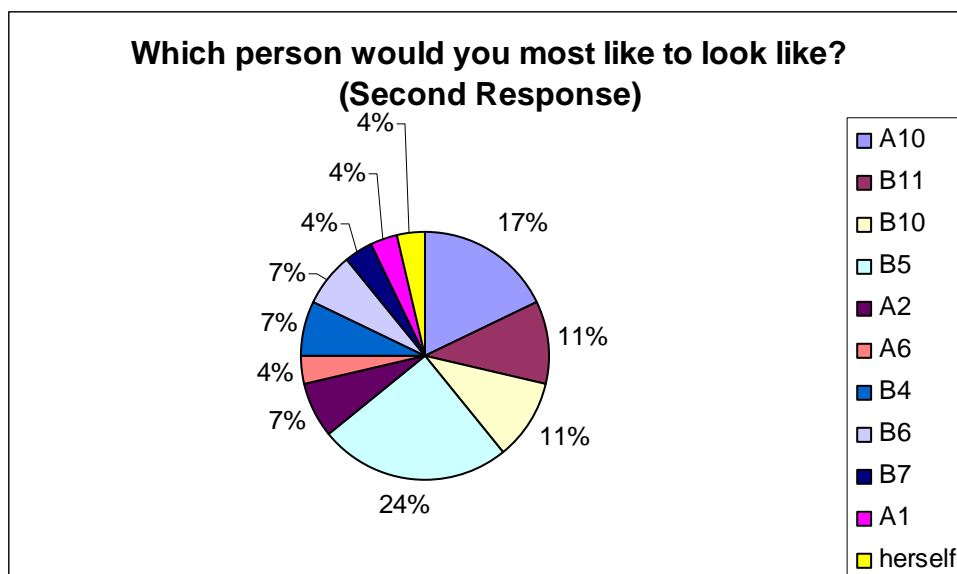
Figure 16: Person you would most like to look like (second response)

The three 12-year-old girls chose A10 as the person they most wanted to look like in their second selection, saying they liked the combination of "*just casual, but good looking*". After their selections, they wanted to know who this person was, guessing it was Ashlee Simpson (it was not). When they were told it was Mandy Moore, they were asked if this made them want to change their mind about their choice. It did not, as they thought Mandy was "*cool*". Unfortunately, as this was the last thing the girls did before leaving the focus group, there was often not enough time to discuss their choices, and reasons for change if they had changed their mind.

Thirteen girls selected a different picture the second time around; nearly half of the participants. There appeared to be more conformity at work in the oldest group, as two of the 12-year-old girls changed their answers to be the same as the other girl who kept her original choice (A10), perhaps showing this girl was a 'trend setter' or influential person in their class or friendship group. Perhaps it was the discussion about A10 after the initial selection that caused the two girls to change their mind in this final selection. Only one of the 11-year-olds changed her mind, whilst all except two of the 10-year-old girls changed choices. However, these changes were diverse and did not show obvious pressure to select particular images over others. Of the 8-year-old girls, two changed their initial selections, one choosing the same picture she had selected for how her parents would want her to dress. The other girl stated clearly "*I want to look like me…I like me*" and decided not to put the sticker on any picture on the page. When she did this,

the other girls were unsure how to respond, until I said that was fine and she could chose herself, at which time other girls agreed with her choice, although none made moves to emulate her.

Which magazines do you like?

As well as being questioned in the initial pre-screening surveys for focus group participants, the girls were also asked about magazines in the focus groups; specifically, which ones they liked and what exactly appealed to them about these magazines.

Title of Magazine	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs	Total
Barbie	2			1		3
Saddle Club	3					3
Womans Weekly	1			1	2	4
Crème	1	2	2	3	2	10
Girlfriend	1			1	1	3
Disney Girl	2					2
Total Girl	2		1	2		5
Little Angel	1		1			2
K Zone	1		1			2
Girl Power	1					1
Pet Magazines			1			1
Cleo				2		2
Woman's Day				1	2	3
Car Magazines				1		1
Dolly				1	3	4

Figure 17: Magazines liked

This table (Figure 17) shows some differing results from the original survey; with several possible reasons for this outcome. In the nine-year-olds' focus group this question was not covered in depth due to time constraints, and the only magazine mentioned was Crème magazine, prompted by mentioning the images and

advertisements they were about to see were primarily from this magazine. The two girls who commented on this magazine were ardent collectors of Crème, as their comments show; "*I read magazines, I love Crème. I've got issues starting from August*"; "*That is my favourite magazine, I've got heaps of issues since May*". Furthermore, the original surveys were conducted in a classroom setting and completed individually, thus the girls did not have the same ability to talk about different magazines named by other girls, as they could in the focus groups. Also, the group environment may have caused some girls to refrain from mentioning certain magazines due to peer pressure, or fear of embarrassing themselves by referring to an 'unpopular' magazine.

Of the 28 total participants in the focus groups; ten girls stated they read, and liked, *Crème* magazine. *Crème* was the only magazine mentioned across all ages eight through to twelve. *Total Girl* magazine was mentioned by five girls, making it the second most popular magazine with readers ranging from eight to 10 and 11-year-olds, although not mentioned by the oldest participants. Girls read it because "*sometimes, [it] come[s] with cool toys*" and "*sometimes, if I am really bored, I just read my sisters Total Girl magazines*". These comments were made by 11-year-old girls, both using a slightly mocking tone, perhaps a kind of self-protection from criticism that they were reading 'young' magazines. This is reinforced by their saying '*sometimes*' and '*if I am bored*' to qualify their consumption of *Total Girl*. One girl distanced herself further by stating she read her sister's copies; attempting to shield herself from potential flak from her peers by not taking full ownership of her readership. Nevertheless, these girls obviously read it enough to mention it in this discussion.

Dolly magazine was mentioned by four participants, all aged 11 or 12-years-old, closer to the target demographic for this magazine of girls in their early teenage years. One 12-year-old liked *Dolly* "*because it is kind of like, for young people and it's all about fashion and celebrities and all that*".

The *Woman's Weekly* and *Woman's Day* were mentioned by four and three girls respectively, spanning all ages. Most of the reasons for reading these magazines centred on them being available in the home; "*because of my Mum, if it is just lying there*", "*'cos it is what my Mum reads*". One girl liked the magazine due to the tabloid content "*Woman's Day because it has got gossip in it*", which was subsequently supported by

other girls in the group. It appears that although these magazines are not marketed directly to them, these young girls are exposed to them in family and social settings, and this exposure leads to readership.

While the younger consumers did not differentiate between magazines they read and those they owned (other than the nine-year-old girls who referred to *Crème* magazine as part of a 'collection'); the 12-year-old girls made clear distinctions between magazines which belonged to other people but they read, and ones they bought themselves. This showed that by reading what other people had these girls gained broad exposure to a range of different magazines.

Barbie, *Saddle Club* and *Girlfriend* also received three mentions. *Saddle Club* was exclusively named by eight-year-olds; *Barbie,* mostly by eight-year-olds; and *Girlfriend,* named by one eight, 11 and 12-year-old. *Cleo* was also mentioned by two 11-year-old girls, one saying she liked it because "*it has got a lot of style stuff in it*". One of the 10-year-old girls also mentioned a more adult publication (based on the content she discussed), which she could not name and did not want to say how she came into contact with, other than saying she was talking with a friend about it. In this magazine she quoted an article which "*said this yucky thing*" in a story "*'I was born with a penis and a vagina'*". In response, all the girls burst into laughter, partially in shock and partially with embarrassment. This could have been part of the reason why this girl mentioned this explicit content, for the shock value and subsequent attention she received. Nevertheless, whatever the reason she mentioned this story, it indicates that young girls are gaining access to publications with explicit content, which many would say is inappropriate for children their age to be consuming.

While the nine-year-old girls did not talk specifically about which magazines they consumed and enjoyed, they did discuss in general terms why they liked magazines. These reasons ranged from the broad and superlative "*because they are just awesome*" to finding them informative and entertaining. Many girls like magazines for their "*gossip*" content ("*they have got, like, everything about the celebrities*"), and focus on consumerism ("*they kind of know what you want, sort of thing…*"). Certainly, when discussing this topic the girls became very animated and excited.

Advertisements from magazines

After general discussion on magazines, the girls were shown a range of advertisements from tween targeted magazines and asked some specific questions. The advertisements were removed from the magazines and laminated, to identify each advertisement as a separate entity and discourage girls from transferring any feelings they may have about the magazine it was found in, to the ad itself.

Firstly, the girls were asked to write (in their own words) what their first impression was, and whether they liked or disliked the five advertisements as they were shown to them, one-at-a-time. The five advertisements were for Sketchers shoes, Barbie perfume, Paris Hilton perfume, a clothing fashion spread, and So…desirable perfume.
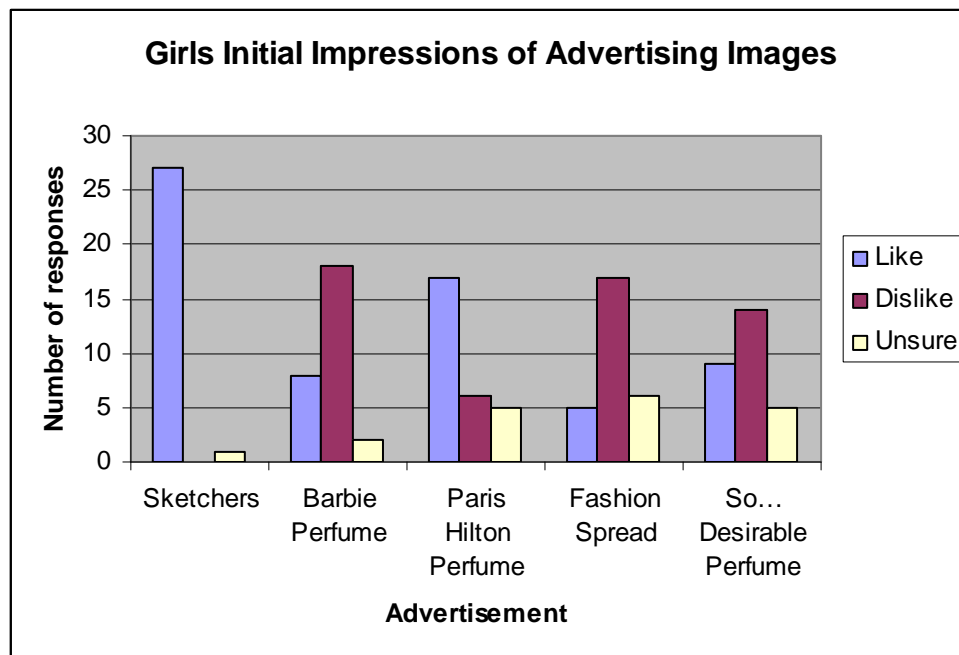

Figure 18: Girls' initial impressions of advertising images

	Girls Response	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs	Total
Ad 1. *Sketchers*	Like	7	8	6	3	3	27
	Dislike						
	Unsure				1		1
Ad 2. *Barbie Perfume*	Like	6	1		1		8
	Dislike		7	5	3	3	18
	Unsure	1		1			2
Ad 3. *Paris Hilton Perfume*	Like	6	4	1	4	2	17
	Dislike		2	4			6
	Unsure	1	2	1		1	5
Ad 4. *Fashion Spread*	Like	4			1		5
	Dislike	2	8	1	3	3	17
	Unsure	1		5			6
Ad 5. *So..Desirable Perfume*	Like	2	4			3	9
	Dislike	1	3	6	4		14
	Unsure	4	1				5

Figure 19: Initial impressions of advertisements, shown by age

Sketchers

This advertisement depicting Carrie Underwood (2005 American Idol winner) was undoubtedly the most popular advertisement across all ages; all but one of the girls in the focus groups stating they liked it. The one 11-year-old girl who was 'unsure' about the advertisement wrote that although she did like it, she thought it "*shows dogs too much*", which she did not see fitting for promoting shoes. Eighteen girls, across all ages, wrote 'shoes' as being the first thing that stood out to them, with two girls also writing the brand-name 'Sketchers'. Several girls were familiar with the brand, and were keen to make this known; one girl commented aloud "*I used to wear them [Sketchers] and they are cool*" (age 8). Fifteen girls wrote that they noticed 'puppies' first, ten that they considered the advertisement to be 'cute' and most wrote more than one comment regarding their initial impression. Here, brand identification was indeed strong with young participants (Ross and Harradine, 2004; Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003).
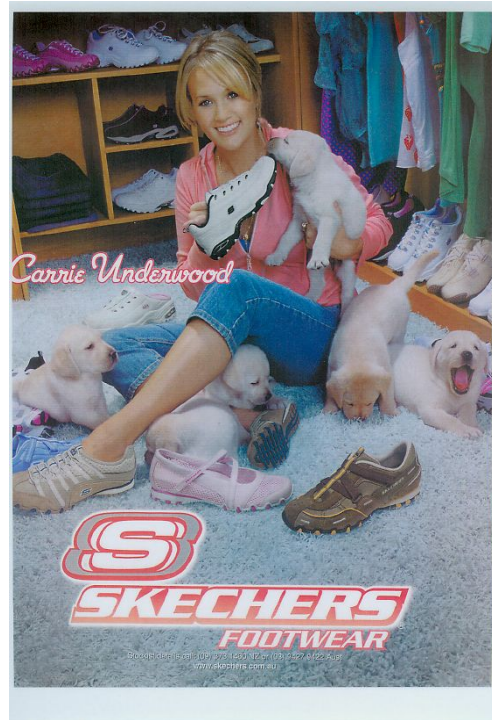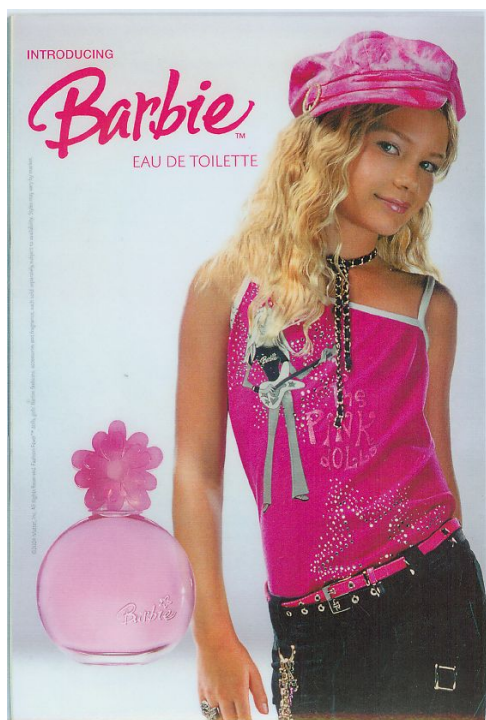
Barbie Perfume

The second advertisement (for "*Barbie eau de toilette*" perfume) was not liked nearly as much as Sketchers. Eighteen girls disliked this advertisement, eight liked it, and two girls were unclear either way. The colour "*pink*" was the most cited factor (eight girls) that struck these girls initially about the advertisement; a further five commenting there was "*too much pink*", making for a total of 13 comments about the colour. The other top two remarks related explicitly to the 'Barbie' brand, with five girls stating "*I don't like Barbie*" and another four referring to "*Barbie*", without an indication as to whether this was a positive or negative factor. Three girls did not like the advertisement as they thought it appeared "*kiddish*".

This advertisement was particularly unpopular with the older girls, with all the 12-year-olds and all but one of each of the 11, 10 and nine-year-olds disliking it. Contrarily, all but one of the eight-year-old girls liked this Barbie advertisement, with one girl's response unclear. The 12-year-old girls expressed a strong dislike for the advertisement, commenting it looked like "*little kids*", "*cheap*", "*too pink*" and "*way too girlie*". They later elaborated that they thought the perfume bottle looked "*really cheap [and]... plastic looking*"; and that on a whole it was "*too pink*", "*too cheesy*" and "*too girlie*". The *Barbie* brand was correlated with being "*little kiddish*", and too young for these 12-year-old girls on the verge of their teenage years. Furthermore, as previously mentioned in regard to girls liking/disliking specific clothing items; being "*too*" anything has negative connotations. The 11-year-old girls disliked the young girl model, and thought she "*look[ed] like a show off*". They also found it strange that Barbie made perfume; asking "*Barbie perfume?*" in a sceptical tone. One 10-year-old girl commented on the girl's pose and conflated her appearance with the doll of the brand she was endorsing: "*she looks like a Barbie doll with that pose*". The nine-year-old girls also seemed eager to distance themselves from this '*kiddish*' product and *Barbie* brand. While one girl conceded the girl in the advertisement was "*pretty*", she disliked the advertisement overall. One girl labelled the model in the advertisement a "*poser*" and "*too prissy*".

Many of the eight-year-old participants saw themselves reflected in this advertisement; appropriate for a product targeted at younger girls. Indeed, some of their comments saw these girls literally placing themselves in the advertisement, substituting for the model. For example, one girl's first impression when she saw the advertisement was "*Me playing the guitar*", while another commented "*It's like me*". In their conversations about this *Barbie* advert, the girls were very enthusiastic about the young girl model, her clothes, and the advertisement in general, one girl letting out an impressed "*Oh my God!*" when the advertisement was first revealed.

The responses to this advertisement indicate that while it seems acceptable for girls to like advertisements which depict models, fashions and products targeted at an older market or 'ideal consumer', this same degree of flexibility and fluidity is not extended downward. These tween girls stage are actively distancing themselves from 'child like' things, wanting to look, feel and act older. As the Barbie brand is strongly linked to (a certain kind of) girlhood, older girls did not want to align themselves with the *Barbie* name and brand.

Paris Hilton Perfume

Paris Hilton's advertisement for her new fragrance "Just Me" was the second-most popular advertisement in this segment of the research. Seventeen girls liked this advertisement, six did not, and five responses were unclear either way. Girls across all five age groups liked it, with Paris Hilton herself the most commonly reported 'stand out' factor of the advert.

All the girls were familiar with Paris Hilton as a celebrity, and in most cases, it was hard to separate the girls' responses to the person of Paris, and the advertisement. Many comments written by the girls said "*I like Paris Hilton*" and, therefore, they liked the advertisement. One eight-year-old commented "*I've written four things about her because ... I'm her biggest fan*". Girls in the nine-year-old focus group had a conversation about Paris; different girls commenting about her as "pretty", "mean", and unable to sing (this group was conducted at the same time her first single and music video was released). The discussion did not centre on the advertisement, however, (one girl did say she liked the dress) but on Paris Hilton's personality, appearance, celebrity status and reputation. Other negative comments seemed to identify Paris Hilton as a person more than the advertisement or product, as one girl commented "*I hate it because she's got too much eye liner on and she's a*

diz!!!" The eye-liner comment is specific to the advertisement, but the fact that this girl 'hates' it seems to be more a result of her opinion of Paris as '*a diz*' rather than because of the eye liner. Others were explicit in their like or dislike of Paris, and, by extension, her perfume. One of the 12-year-old girls was undecided about whether she liked the advertisement, saying "It's *all right, but it's mostly about Paris*", expressing that it seemed to be more about selling her than selling the perfume. Paris Hilton is thus identified as a brand herself; regardless of what she is selling, she is really trading on her name and image. She is the real commodity the people are purchasing (not the actual product, in this case perfume), the products she endorses becoming imbued with the status and mythic quality of 'Paris Hilton', making them attractive to purchasers by association (Ferris: 2007).

Fashion Spread

The fourth advertisement shown to the girls was the second-most disliked advertisement overall, and the one which drew the most diverse responses. Perhaps this was partially because it was not a 'typical' advert like those which appear in glossy women's magazines.

This was a two-page spread (fitting onto one A4 page) advertising clothing, taken from *Barbie* magazine. In total, 17 girls disliked this advertisement, six were unclear either way and only five girls said they liked the advertisement, the lowest number for any of the five advertisements shown in this exercise. What struck the girls first about this advertisement was the bicycle, which was the main focus of the left hand side of the page; followed by the dog next to the girl on the bicycle. Many girls made negative associations immediately; two girls writing that their initial impression of the advertisement was that it was "*weird*" and the girls pictured had "*weird fashion*". Other comments remarked it was "*too kidish*", had "*too*

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much pink", "*they look funny*", "it's *a bit ugly*", "*it's just kind of stupid*", "*it's a bit busy*" and was "*Barbie,*" and therefore they did not like it, one girl asking "*Can I just put hate?*". Of the five girls who stated they liked this advertisement, four were 8-years-old, the other who liked it doing so because it featured "Chucks", a brand of shoe which she had previously mentioned several times in discussion. Stating she liked this ad then was a chance for her to reinforce her performance of the identity she had established as liking this particular brand of shoes.

Many girls appeared to dislike the advertisement primarily because of it's non-conformity to the standard format of a magazine advertisement, therefore making it appeal to younger children, which the majority of these girls wanted to differentiate themselves from.

So… desirable

Lastly in this exercise, the groups were shown an advertisement for "So…? desirable" perfume. This advertisement appeared to more evenly divide those who did and those who did not like it, with fourteen girls answering that they did not like it, compared to nine who did and five who were unclear of their position. Interestingly, while all the 12-year-olds liked this advertisement, all the 10 and 11-year-olds, did not. The younger girls were more split in their opinions; with eight-year-olds unclear of their position, while the nine-year-olds were fairly evenly split between four who liked it, three who did not, and one who was uncertain. The comments of the younger girls were more generic and superficial than many of those made by the older girls which seemed to be stronger and more polarised, tending to be drawn from more complex associations with the picture and product. For example, nine-year-old girls made comments about the advertisement being "*different*", showing a woman with an exposed "*tummy*" with "*see through*" clothes in a "*bad pose*". One girl stated "I *don't*

like seeing bad sights like the advirtisments [sic]". Another girl reiterated this sentiment, saying it was "*yuck*". One girl who liked this advertisement based this on her personal experience with the product, as she said she owned the related perfume "*So... kiss me*". She then said she liked the current advert because "*the 'so...' smells good*", although this advertisement had no scent. Another girl made a similar comment, liking the advertisement because "*I like the perfume range So...*" ten-year-olds commented that the image was "*gross*", the majority writing "*ewwww*" as their initial impression. One girl also wrote "*breast implants*" drawing attention to the relatively prominent breasts of the woman in the advertisement. The 11-year-old girls made a range of negative comments, including remarks about the woman pictured being "*[too] revealing*", "*open*", "*not covered*", "*disturbing*" and "*half-dressed*". The 12-year-old girls, on the other hand, liked the image and gave positive feedback; the woman had a "*good body*" and a "*nice flat stomach*", and they saw the advertisement on the whole as "*colourful*" and "*cool, because it is a cool pink*". These older girls thought the model "*looks nice*" rather than the negative associations made by younger girls.

Some interesting conclusions can be drawn here. These reactions to, and reflections on, this particular image show that while the younger girls saw the image to be inappropriate and sexualised, the 12-year-olds liked this image and thought it was "*cool*". This highlights the position of these older girls as transitioning into adolescence. Foremost in the years of transition into adolescence are issues of sexuality and development. This is a time when body image is seen to drop significantly in girls, particularly as they start to go through puberty and compare themselves not only to girls their own age and older, but also to idealised bodies and images represented in the media (Graber and Sontag, 2006). It was telling that two of the 12-year-old girls included comments about the body, particularly the stomach, of the woman pictured, and in their conversation about this image, all three girls agreed she looked good, which had a significant impact on them liking the advertisement. Nevertheless, while fourteen girls disliked this advertisement, this was still less than those who did not like the *Barbie* advertisement or the fashion spread from Barbie magazine. This indicates a stronger dislike for an advertisement aimed at a younger audience than that for an advertisement targeting an older (10-15 year-old) audience.

Different advertisements on the table

In this next activity, six different advertisements were placed together on the table, and the girls asked what they liked, or disliked, and which advertisement they thought stood out more than the others. The six advertisements they viewed were all from *Crème* magazine; and were for Maybelline, Casio, Impulse, So… Sinful, NZ Natural and Guess.
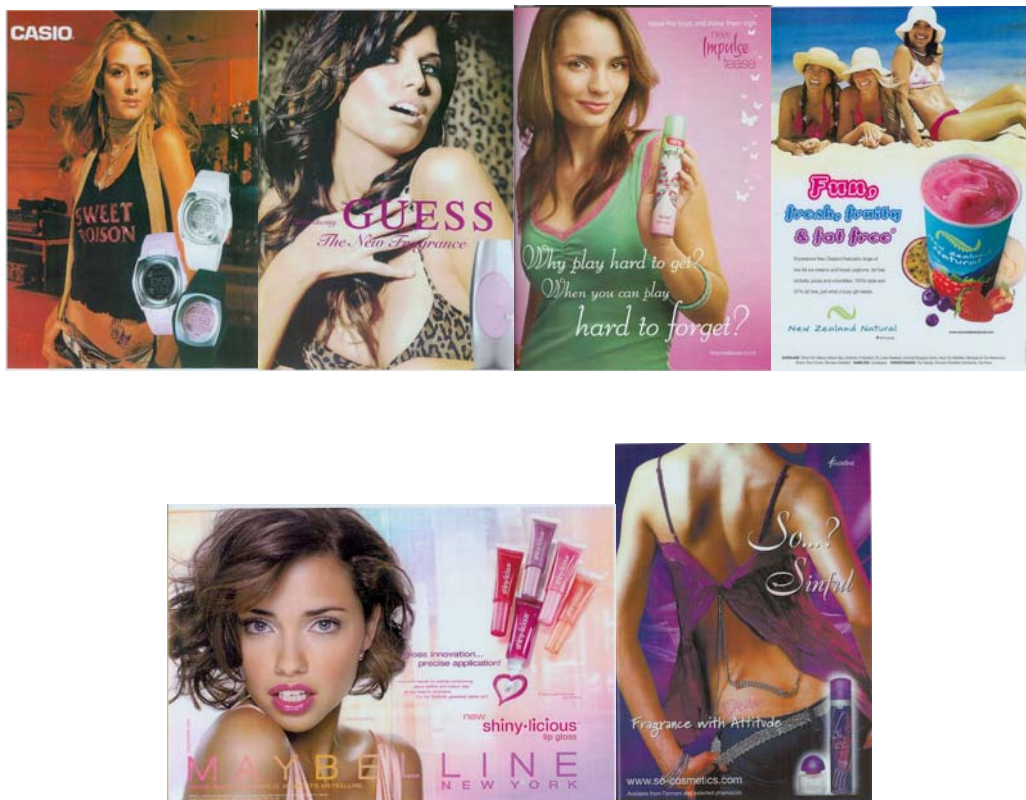
Which advertisement do you like best?

The Impulse advertisement was the most liked of the six displayed; more than twice as many girls liking it over the other images. Maybelline was the second-most liked advertisement, followed by the Casio and New Zealand Natural advertisements. Both the Guess and So…? Sinful advertisements were only the most liked by one girl each. Two of the 12-year-old girls gave two answers for this question, saying they liked two of the advertisements equally.

'Impulse' was the only advertisement cited by girls of all age groups as being their favourite. 'Guess' was cited by one twelve year old as her favourite, and "So…? Sinful" was the favourite of one eight-year-old. The latter advertisement was also the least favourite of three other girls of that age, and a total of eleven out of the 28 participants. Overall, the advertisement the girls reported to like the least was 'Guess'. Fifteen girls from all but the oldest groups chose this option, followed by 'So…? Sinful' (eleven girls). When considering these numbers it is also important to note that all the ten year old girls selected both these advertisements as their least favourites, far ahead of the other four in the stakes of being disliked. Indeed, the other four advertisements combined were chosen by only seven girls.

When asked which advertisement stood out the most and had the most impact, 'Impulse' was again the clear favourite. Of the nineteen responses from all age groups (except for the nine-year-olds, who did not answer this question) twelve chose the Impulse advert. New Zealand Natural was selected by three girls, with all other ads chosen by only one girl each. While all the ten-year-olds and all but two of the eight-year-olds responded that Impulse stood out the most, the two older groups had more diverse opinions. This highlighted that, although there may be certain 'routine' things about advertising images that stand out, their appeal remains very subjective. Furthermore, this subjectivity is not necessarily shared by all girls of the same age, particularly as they get older and develop their own ideas and preferences. One eight-year-old verbalised another important factor when she asked, *"what if you don't like it?",* indicating that advertising images can often have impact despite (or precisely because of) the fact that they may be disliked.

Impulse, as the most popular advertisement, gained the most positive feedback regarding the colours of the advertisement; the top worn by the woman pictured (matching the colours of the product), the background, and the advertisement as a whole. Another reason for its popularity lay in the woman pictured in the advertisement being recognised as the actress who plays Belle in the Australian soap opera Home and Away (Jessica Tovey - www.tv.com). Certainly, this was one of the most common reasons girls gave for its standing out. It was the least favourite advertisement of only one 12-year-old girl, claiming it was "*too cheesy*". What exactly the girl meant by "*cheesy*" is unsure, as she also used this as a criticism of the So…? Sinful advertisement. Perhaps this is an indication that she thought these images were inauthentic or insincere.

The positive comments girls made about the Casio advertisement included liking the watches, colours, background, and model's clothes and that the advertisement as a whole was "*cool*". That the Casio advertisement showed the brand clearly and displayed some samples on the page, as well as on the model (although partially obscured) was seen favourably by these girls. This is interesting, considering that many of the other favourable comments about the advertisement focused on aspects which were unrelated to the actual product. One of the most common reasons girls gave for disliking advertisements in general was if the images did not seem to correspond with the product, but the Casio advertisement appeared to have avoided this pitfall and the display of the products made it stand out to at least some of the girls.

Maybelline's 'Shiny-licious' lip gloss advertisement was liked for many reasons, the most common being the "*pretty*" model. While only one 11-year-old girl selected Maybelline as her least favourite, many negative comments were made about this advertisement by the 10 and 11-year-olds, although these comments were not particularly strong in their conviction, as some girls saw the ad as "*alright*" or "*average*". Some disliked it as they thought the model "*looks like a show off*" wearing "*too much makeup*" and appeared "*too still*" or "*frozen*". Interestingly, however, when this comment was made, one 11-year-old defended the image, arguing that "*because of that [the makeup, including the lip gloss], it stands out*". Another girl then conceded "*the lips make it stand out*". Girls mentioned the lips, hair and eyes of the model amongst the reasons why this advertisement stood out. Many of the reasons for liking advertisements, however, were multifaceted, as can be seen in the remark from a nine-year-old; "*Well I like this one because I like the colour on her lips and I like all those lip gloss things, and my Mum has actually got some of that and it is really good. And it has got lots of colours in the back and it's got her and I think it looks good*". This girl mentions approximately six discrete reasons why she likes the advertisement, all as part of one continuous statement.

Similarly, another nine-year-old goes into significant depth explaining why she likes the New Zealand Natural advertisement; "*I like this one because I like fruit and it shows that it has got a nutritious thing 'cos it says "Fun, fresh, fruity and fat free". And it like shows that it has got fruit in it, and that is quite summery 'cos they have got people on the beach and it is good for nutrition*". The large picture of the product in a central

photograph looking "*yummy*" was the most popular reason for girls liking this advertisement. One of the 11-year-old girls particularly liked this advertisement as she said "*it is like New Zealand, and they look like they are having a good time and having lots of fun*". The three girls who selected this advertisement as their least favourite found it "*too white*" in comparison to the other advertisements, inferring it was not as visually stimulating and appealing. In stating why this advertisement stood out from the rest however, as three girls thought it did, the colour ("bright blue sky") was a positive factor, as well as the big picture of the product. As an 11-year-old girl stated "*It is good to show a picture of what is actually is*", which reinforced many girls' dislike for more ambiguous advertisements.

'Guess' was the least favourite advertisement of fifteen girls, more than half of the focus group participants, uniformly unpopular across all four younger groups. One 12-year-old selected this as her favourite advertisement, although she could not give a definitive reason why she liked it. The most cited reason for dislike was the sexuality exuded by the woman in the image; four girls explicitly did not like her provocative pose. Further comments alluded to the element of seduction in the advertisement. As one girl commented "*she is kind of... aarrr*" she mimicked the pose - held her hands to her chest and threw her head back exaggeratedly, mocking the image, but also underlining its sexual, seductive tones. Two girls commented they did not like this advertisement as they did not know what she was advertising. All the ten-year-olds made noises indicating their disapproval, and one 10 and one 11-year-old said "*eww, no*" when asked why they disliked this Guess advertisement. Another 11-year-old said she thought it was "jus*t gross*", other comments including "*it's just wrong*" and "*it's disgusting*". While these girls did not express *why* they thought it was wrong and disgusting, it was fairly implicit. Other girls related their dislike of the image directly back to the (relative) nakedness of the model, saying the image was "*too revealing*", "*showing some things it shouldn't*", that she was "*not dressed properly*" and more comments directed specifically at the visual display of private parts of her anatomy; "*I don't like the boobs*". Many girls viewed this advertisement as inappropriate; their dislike largely due to what they saw as an overly sexualised image (based on the implicit inferences in their comments), together with the lack of any strong link from the image to the product being advertised. A total of 23 comments detailed why the girls did not like this image, while the other five advertisements collectively had only 22 comments. This Guess

advertisement evoked the strongest responses and prompted the most discussion. This was not limited only to those girls selected it as their least favourite, as other girls who did not select 'Guess' as their least favourite had negative comments to make regarding this advertisement. Girls in both the 11 and 12-year-old focus groups were able to see past their (often expressed) dislike for the advertisement and acknowledge the advertisement did stand out. Interestingly, in an analysis of the degree of sexuality in women's magazines across different age demographics, another version of this Guess advert was found to be "the most sexual", with another Guess advertisement in the 'most sexual advertisements top ten' (Pawlowski, 2007: 74). While this advertisement taken from Crème magazine differs slightly from the one featured in this research, it is the same model in the same leopard-skin bra, in a similarly provocative, sexual pose. This then reinforces that tween magazines target child consumers in a similar way they do adolescent, indeed young adult, consumers, once again highlighting the importance of addressing issues regarding sexuality and sexualisation in relation to the tween market.

The 'So…? Sinful' advertisement was selected by eleven girls as the advertisement they liked the least. It was the most-liked advertisement of only one girl, an eight-year-old, who said she liked it because of the dark colours, the other advertisements brightly coloured in comparison. Similar to the 'Guess' image, girls did not like the 'So…? Sinful' advertisement, primarily because they did not see the connection between the image and the product – the naked back of a woman shown to sell perfume. This was reinforced by comments relating to the model as "*half naked*", or "*not dressed properly*", and the general sentiment of one girl "*it's gross*", as another girl had similarly commented on the 'Guess' image. They also noted the passivity of the woman in the advertisement; one nine-year-old commenting "*she's not doing anything*". There was also an apparent disassociation of the product being advertised from the image displayed, according to these girls. One nine-year-old girl's comment sums up the general sentiment of the focus groups; "*it doesn't really look like they are advertising anything, because… it kind of looks like they are advertising her tan. Because they are just showing her with a top on and they are not showing… If she was spraying something on her it would be alright. But… she is not really doing anything*". Nevertheless, one 11-year-old girl acknowledged this advertisement stood out from the others, as she commented; "*I think [it] stands out because of the purple, the colour. It sort of comes*

out at you", and later echoed *"I mean, I don't like the picture but it just stands out to me"*.

When explicitly asked whether any of the advertisements made the girls want to buy their product, the eight-year-olds agreed they liked the Casio watch advertisement. They then proceeded to point out what they liked and what they would like to buy, however the majority of their comments had nothing to do with the actual Casio product;

8G: I would like to buy that top, it looks awesome.
8A: I would like to buy that top too.
8E: I would like to buy everything she is wearing except for the jewellery.
8D: Same.
8E: Oh and except the makeup.
8B: You want her tattoo?
8E: No! Ewww.   (girls laugh)

This excerpt indicates that the girls do indeed look at advertisements with consumption in mind; but it is not dependent on, or restricted to, the product being advertised. These eight-year-old girls focussed on aspects of the advertisement other than the watches (the products actually being advertised) when discussing whether the images made them want to buy the product. Here, it is evident magazine advertising is encouraging the development of a culture of consumerism in young girls. This culture is not necessarily dependent on making the girl want to buy their particular product (although this is the ultimate goal of advertising), but is at the least contributing to the socialisation of girls to view everything as a commodity, encouraging them to literally 'buy into' these ideas (John, 1999). Ultimately, any positive association the girls make with the advertisement works in the favour of the product being advertised, even if it is not the product the girls are directly attracted by. This still increases brand identification and visibility, which can equate later to purchasing power by association (Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003).

If you know the person in the ad are you more likely to like the product?

Girls were divided about whether recognising a person in an advertisement made them more likely to like the product or not. In the nine-year-old focus group, one girl highlighted the element of conflict in considering this question, as she commented; *"Yea it depends who it is, because if you know that person and you don't like them it is*

probably a no. But, it is mostly about the product that they are advertising instead of them". She intimates that if you do not like the person in the advertisement you are less likely to like the product, even though she adds a 'disclaimer' that it is possible to divorce your opinion of the person from the product. Still, her initial thought expresses that personal opinions about the person featured may indeed be a factor in liking or disliking an advertisement or a product. This was confirmed by another girl in the focus group as she argued "*it depends who it is. Like, if it is Paris I would say no, because she's a real big dizz and she can't sing*".

This is a clear example of how a celebrity can shape whether someone likes an advertisement or not, as her response to the Paris Hilton perfume advertisement was "*I hate it because she's got too much eye liner on and she's a diz!!![sic]*". However, as this advertisement was specifically for a product ('Just Me' perfume) that is intrinsically intertwined with the identity of Paris Hilton, perhaps this girl's comments regarding Paris are not out of place. After all, it is essentially the branding of herself that Paris is selling here, albeit in a perfume bottle. It would be interesting to note whether a similar response would be elicited from this girl if Paris Hilton were advertising a product unrelated to her as a person (for example, a car or watch), and therefore less likely to blur the boundaries between the product and the person endorsing it. Ultimately, though, that blurring between the celebrity endorser and the product is exactly what advertisers are aiming to achieve, as people buy into the mythic qualities of products and their 'fantasy' representation, rather than their 'reality' or actual properties and functional qualities. Certainly, this is why advertisers pay huge sums for celebrity endorsements; to raise the profile of their brand or product and exploit the power celebrities have to encourage or persuade people to buy products they may not otherwise consider (Kilbourne, 1999). As Pipher notes, popular culture on a broad level encourages young girls to model themselves on celebrities rather than parental ideals (1994:38). Often these celebrities are marketed on little more than their appearance and sexuality (such as Paris), or at least these traits emphasised in relation to their other reasons for 'stardom' (for example Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, The Pussycat Dolls or most other young, female, pop-stars).

When this was discussed with the 11-year-old focus group, one girl felt if you did not know who the celebrity was, you could still like the advertisement, using the Impulse advertisement as an example; "*I didn't know who she is and I like the ad [sic]*". Other

girls felt that because they knew the woman pictured on the Impulse advertisement was Jessica Tovey from Home and Away, this had a positive effect on their impression of the advertisement; "*Yes. I think it does [make a difference to whether I like the ad or not] because it makes me look at it more*"; "*Well, since I know who she is it does kind of make me look at it more*". This does not completely outweigh other contributing factors, however, girls acknowledging that the presence of a celebrity is not necessarily, in and of itself, enough, but works with other dimensions of the advertisements they may, or may not, like.

The 12-year-old girls believed that recognising a person in an advertisement "*probably*" had an effect on the degree to which they liked it, depending on their opinion of that person. They admitted that having "*a celebrity*" "*off a t.v. programme or something*" may make a difference and make you "*kind of want [what they are advertising], maybe*". One of the girls tried to illustrate her point by indicating that putting Jessica Tovey from Home and Away in the Casio advertisement (replacing the unknown model) may make you want the watch more, because you knew and (presumably) liked the actress. In this example, this girl also stated that the celebrity pictured would need to match the product in order for the advertisement to be really effective, as she did not think in this circumstance that Jessica Tovey suited the Casio advert. This indicates that it is not as easy as simply putting a celebrity in to make an advertisement, or product, popular. If the celebrity endorser is not liked by a potential customer, their dislike for the person can be (but is not always) transferred to the advertisement and the product. Certainly, however, it can be very rewarding for the product that features the 'right' celebrity in an advertisement, as seemed to be the case with the Impulse advertisement. According to the responses of these girls it was liked the best, stood out the most, and received the least negative feedback. Whether this hinged on the celebrity presence cannot be proven, however it is plausible to consider it at least a contributing factor, as supported by the girls' remarks.

Advertisements specifically for clothes

The last exercise involved advertisements specifically for clothing. Five advertisements were placed on the table, and the girls asked similar questions to the previous exercise about the advertisements and the clothing depicted in them. The five advertisements

chosen were for Urban Angel; Barbie clothing; Supre; and two fashion spreads, one taken from Barbie magazine, and the other from Disney Girl.

Which clothes do you like best?

Girls liked the clothing from the Supre advertisement the best, closely followed by Urban Angel. The pink fashion spread from Disney Girl showing some girls shopping, and the theme park fashion spread from Barbie magazine only received one vote each, both from eight-year-old girls. One nine-year-old girl did not like any of the clothes in the advertisements, and the Barbie advertisement was not selected as anyone's favourite. Both the Urban Angel and Supre advertisements were popular across all of the ages who discussed this question (the 11-year-old girls instead discussed which advertisement stood out the best). The girls who liked Urban Angel tended to be slightly younger than those who liked Supre, with six out of eight nine-year-olds liking Supre clothing the best and four out of six ten-year-olds preferring Urban Angel. Interestingly, while none of the girls answered that they liked the Barbie clothing the best, when the 11-year-olds discussed which clothing advertisement stood out the most, three out of four girls chose

the Barbie advertisement, although careful to justify that, just because it stood out, this did not necessarily mean they liked it.

The main reason girls gave for liking the Supre advertisement was the background and setting; girls also commented they liked the shorts, and that the advertisement was not "*too girlie*" or "*too kiddish*". Interestingly, the 11-year-old girls also liked the image as, according to them, it was not so traditional, and did not reflect girlhood (or womanhood) in a 'hyper-feminine' way as other advertisements tended to do.

11D: I like it because it is a dirty sort of background and they have like overall type clothes on and I think it looks cool because they are doing a men's job but it is a woman's job, you know like women who are doing a men's job. Like doing what men do but just dressed in good clothes.
11A: Like women can do what men do.

These statements show that the girls are clearly aware of (perceived) socially acceptable gender roles, and this image is liked because the women pictured are 'going against' these social norms. In this case, these two girls show that they read more into advertisements than what is merely presented on the page, and can be relatively sophisticated consumers of media products at their young age. However, it once again indicates a significant paradox. The girls see these models as presenting the idea that women can do what men do; yet, they are still depicted as passive objects for the gaze of the reader of the magazine. In this case, it is not so much the 'male gaze' that the women are subject to (although this may still be applicable), but the gaze of the young girl or adolescent for whom this magazine and advertisement is designed, and by extension the gaze of the self. Although these girls see the models as doing 'a man's job', they are not doing a job at all (other than posing for the camera), and it is very hard to actually picture men in similar poses to the ones occupied by these women. The paradox is perhaps most evident in the comment that "*[women] can [do] what men do but just dressed in good clothes*". This comment alludes to the fact that while women may be able to function in previously male-dominated arenas, they are still constrained by the need (or perceived need) to do this 'well dressed'. This highlights one of the downsides of the feminist movement, that now women are not only expected to compete with men in traditionally masculine arenas, such as in the workplace, but also still perform traditionally feminine roles/identities, such as family and maintaining their appearance.

This places significantly more pressure on women, rather than alleviating it, as Ferguson claims "in one sense the women's movement offers a counter culture, but in another sense it is an extension of the cult [of femininity]" (1983:187)..

Ten girls answered that they liked the clothing in the Urban Angel advertisement the best, only one response less than the Supre advertisement. Four eight-year-olds also answered that they would most like to have clothes like those pictured in this advertisement than any of the others. The girls were not as forthcoming with reasons why they liked this clothing; however, one of the eight-year-olds said she liked these clothes best, pointing out items she actually already owned. One 10-year-old was very enthusiastic about the Urban Angel advertisement, stating "*that is my shop*" in a possessive, proud way, which another girl then agreed with.

Similar to the Supre advertisement, there were not many negative comments about the Urban Angel clothes; although the 11-year-old girls did not like the colours "*green and brown*", describing it as "*earthy*" and "*dull*". They also commented that they seemed slightly masculine: "*look like boys clothes*", "*like what a guy would wear*". One exception was one of the tops pictured said "*Babe*", which one girl pointed out when saying they were like boys clothing, prompting laughter from the rest of the group. One 12-year-old girl commented on the difference between studio shot advertisements and those shot on location, as she observed "*whenever Urban Angel does something they are always, like, in the country and on the beach and stuff*". When asked if this was a good or bad thing, she was indecisive, answering "*I think it is a good thing, but they should do it in, like, a studio ... I dunno*".

Shooting advertisements on location, however, would seem to be a way to advertise products in a more natural, context specific way, as girls in these focus groups frequently commented on their dislike for advertisements which they did not see as relevant to the product for sale. An interesting shift is visible here; the oldest participants certainly seeing the difference between the more 'childish' advertising, using 'normal', younger girls, shot on location; and the 'older' advertisements, which were more posed, typically more adult in their orientation, and set in studios, resulting in a more 'professional' appearance, preferring the latter. Again, as with the references to clothing,

an advertisement being 'kiddish' was the most insulting comment a girl could make; such comment always associated with dislike for the advertisement.

Minimal positive remarks were made regarding the fashion spreads from Barbie and Disney Girl magazines; each had only one girl say that they liked the clothes in these advertisements best, but there was significant talk about why these advertisements were disliked. For both advertisements, several girls commented that they did not "*know the point of it*" or "*what they are for*", even asking "*are they meant to be advertising anything or not?*" (age 12). Regarding the 'theme park' fashion spread from Barbie magazine, girls commented the "*background is weird*", it was "*too colourful*", and that "*it looks like it is not showing her, but the stuff in the background*" (age 10). For the pink shopping fashion spread from Disney Girl magazine, girls commented it was "*too pink*" and that when one girl first saw it "*I thought it was Hi-5*" (a children's 'pop group'), in response to which the girls burst out in laughter. In both advertisements girls commented the writing was too hard to read. Furthermore, as it was not explicitly advertising one shop or product, they found this to be confusing, and not as obvious and specific as other advertisements, which they preferred.

12A: Yea these ones, they don't, it's actually not like an ad like specific for a specific shop
12C: It doesn't look obvious.
12A: It's like lots of different ones.
12C: Cos these three have got like the names like right there and this has got one down the sides.
LC: Do you like it when it is a bit more obvious?
All: Yes.
LC: So you know that's the shop that it's from?
12B: So it's easier.
LC: So if you were to look at ads and you didn't know what shop it was from, do you think that would make you pay more attention to it or less attention? Like, does the name mean anything in the advertising?
All: Yea.
12A: Yea because you kind of like, In those you don't really pay attention to where it is from kinda.
12B: Cos there is so much writing it's just, you have to read it all.
12A: And then 'cos you see it is from Supre and they have nice clothes and you will go there and get all those clothes. From that place.

As girls of ten commented they did not know the point of the advertisement, this indicates that by this age they already have a framework to use when considering

advertisements, including not only how they look at them, but how they expect them to be presented. They show a preference for expressly posed and commercial advertisements. The younger girls did not seem to have such negative comments about these two fashion spreads, instead commenting negatively on the Barbie advertisement as "*too babyish*" "*too girlie*" and "*too pink*". One possible interpretation of such comments could be that these younger girls are attempting to distance themselves from the younger girl depicted in the Barbie advertisement, contemporaneously distancing themselves from being considered 'babyish' or 'girlie'.

Undoubtedly, the Barbie advertisement prompted the most negative comments overall, from girls in all age groups. While a few girls made minor positive concessions "*I like the top*", "*I like the background*" and "*It comes out at you*", with several girls commenting that this advertisement stood out, these were often hedged in terms which conveyed that, although they were admitting some positive points, they still disliked the advertisement overall. This is perhaps best seen in the comment of a 12-year-old , "*No (I don't like it). She has got a cute top on. For a little kid!*" Here, the positive comment made is glossed over; while the top may be cute, it is only appropriate for a little kid, and therefore not liked overall. One nine-year-old girl commented; "*To be honest, I kind of do like that. It's not like it is the Barbie dolls, it is just what she is wearing and it says Barbie, but like it is just a bit young and that is all. It depends who was looking at that and who would want it*". Seven girls commented that the advertisement was "*too pink*", five that it was "*too girlie*", four that it was "*too baby-ish*", and three that it was "*too Barbie-ish*". When asked to expand on these comments, generally the girls used another of these answers to support their first statement. Many of the reasons given by girls for disliking certain advertising images appeared to overlap and negatively reinforce each other. Again, as with the Barbie perfume advertisement shown in the first advertising exercise, the prominent display of the Barbie logo was disliked; four girls referring to Barbie in their reasons why they disliked this image.

While only one 12-year-old expressly stated "*[I] don't like her clothes*", and one eight-year-old didn't like the buttons on the girl's top, the majority of feedback did not refer to the clothing at all. This could be seen to support an argument that when a (young) girl looks at an advertisement for clothing, other factors which have essentially nothing to do with the clothing are just as important. This was the case in the Casio advertisement,

where many of the girls commented on the clothing of the model and attributed their approval of the image to the clothing, rather than the watches being promoted. An 11-year-old girl commented that this "*shows you all the colour, and just really advertises Barbie*" rather than advertising the clothes, reinforced by another girl in this group; "*the clothing doesn't stand out. The background does*".

Nevertheless, their dislike for the Barbie clothing advertisement did not stop some girls from expressing that they thought it was the image which stood out the best. Three out of the four 11-year-old girls thought that the Barbie advertisement stood out the most, the other girl choosing the Supre advertisement. Despite many comments that it was "*too*" pink, these girls commented that the pink did "*come out at you*", getting their attention.

One girl said she had been on the Barbie website the previous day, and described it to the rest of the group; "*Yea, it goes …[sings] "be who you wanna be. B-A-R-B-I-E*". Thus, while making assertions about Barbie being too young and childlike, this girl's visit to the Barbie website indicates that (some) girls at this older end of tweenhood are still involved in elements of childhood play, and not yet fully established in their adolescence. It also highlights that, as many products are beginning to include website addresses in their print or television advertisements, the internet is becoming a space where girls are increasingly going in their recreational time, whether it be for consumption purposes or not. This could be an interesting topic for further research, exploring what role these websites play in the socialisation of girls as both consumers and individuals.

When you are looking at clothes in magazines, what makes an advert for clothing stand out? What do you like?

The three middle groups (nine, 10 and 11-year-olds) were further asked what stood out or what they liked in advertisements for clothes in a magazine. The most popular responses were "*good clothes*" and a "*good background*", closely followed by "*colour*". Girls agreed that models needed to be wearing the clothes being advertised, rather than showing the clothing in a shop, or pictured on the page without being worn. A range of other comments were made, including nine-year-olds asserting that the model needed to be good looking ("*doesn't have like pimples and stuff*"), without "*too much makeup*"; that the advertisement needed to look "*natural and fresh*" rather than posed

(contradictorily to other girls' previous comments), and that advertisements needed to be "*full page*" sized. The 11-year-old girls echoed these sentiments, referring to the importance of the background for getting your attention, then colours and patterns, with models needing to wear clothes from the shop they are advertising consistent with the image that shop is trying to convey.

The 10-year-old girls took a slightly different approach, stating that the most important thing was finding clothes in a magazine that were specifically good for you, seeing the process as more personal and individualised than about the advertising. This can be seen in their discussion below:

10D: What you would like to have and what you think could be good for you. Not like for other people, you shouldn't worry about your friends…
10A: Think about yourself.
10D: Yea think about yourself when you do it.
10F: I just look at the clothes.
10D: Don't worry about…
10A: Don't worry about anything else, worry about yourself.

5. Conclusion

Little Miss Sunshine tells the story of Olive, an average, slightly tubby, seven-year-old American girl, with the dream of entering the Little Miss Sunshine beauty pageant. The climax of the movie comes when she takes the stage for the 'talent' section of the competition, and promptly starts to (albeit innocently) perform a striptease, as choreographed by her recently deceased grandfather. Mothers of other pageant competitors who look like miniature dolls (complete with elaborate costumes, full make-up, spray tans, huge fake smiles, and batting false eyelashes) stand up and walk out in protest at what they deem is an inappropriately sexual display by young Olive (Turtletaub et al. 2006). Here, the screenwriter and directors of this movie are drawing attention to the way sexualisation is problematised in relation to girlhood in modern society. They also point to the paradox often presented by aspects of contemporary culture; that the covert and implicit sexualisation of girls (such as that of the 'normal competitors' in the beauty pageant) is normalised, while overt expressions of the sexualisation of children, particularly girls, create a sense of moral panic and shock.

This thesis has examined the role of the media with regard to ideas of sexualisation, discussing fashion and clothing in relation to tween girls aged between eight and 12-years-old in New Zealand. The presence of mass media is pervasive and undeniable in the lives of contemporary young people, including its impact on their sexuality and sexualisation. Indeed, it is described as a "sexual super peer" (Brown, Halper and L'Engle, 2005), and "key site for defining codes of sexual conduct" (McRobbie, 1996). As Huston, Wartella and Donnerstein maintain there are "strong theoretical reasons to believe that media play an especially important role in the socialisation of sexual knowledge, attitudes and behaviour" (1998: 12). Discussing advertising and magazines formed a large part of this research with girls, as media is important in the circulation of ideas about fashion and its relation to sexualisation.

The role of fashion is an important factor in this discussion, considering its close relation to the construction, performance, and management of self, and expression of identity (see Bordieu, 1984; Butler, 1999; Craik, 1994; McCracken, 1988). Indeed, Entwistle and Wilson state that "fashion and dress are ubiquitous to culture" (2001: 2). Using clothing as a vehicle for the expression of self allows for the literal putting on, or taking off, of

different identities. This illustrates the socialisation of girls into consumer culture from a young age; consumption presented to girls as the primary (if not only) method of expressing and presenting their identity, both to themselves and wider society.

Consumer culture plays an important role in the lives of children, promulgated largely by the media and demonstrated in many ways, one of which being the purchase, and subsequent display on the body, of clothing. The very creation of the 'tweenage' demographic is attributed to advertisers and marketers capitalising on the age-aspiration present in this group and encouraging them to behave and dress like older teenagers by offering for sale the goods and services which make this possible (Linn, 2004). McCracken highlights the interplay of the media with consumer culture, in regard to how girls grow and develop, describing magazine content as "ideological and consumerist training of young girls" (1993: 143).

Using primarily qualitative methods, the results from this primary research allow access to some interesting insights into the world of the modern tween in relation to fashion, identity and the media.

Survey results found that parents remain the most influential factor on the clothing choices of tweens. As the children got older, however, the influence of their parents fell as other influences rose in importance. For girls, these other influences were magazines and friends. For boys, the top three reported influences related to people in their immediate environment; parents, friends and brothers/sisters, together accounting for over two-thirds of their responses. Certainly, different media forms were considered more influential by the different genders. While boys were oriented more towards the influence of people they physically encountered in their world; girls attributed magazines with more importance than their siblings, although parents and friends were still of primary importance. In general, the media was consistently more important to girls, who seemed to place the media in the role of 'advisor' in multiple areas of their lives. Interestingly, and somewhat unexpectedly, the second-most common response for girls and fourth-most response for boys was the category of 'other', these children then dictating an influence other than one already listed. The majority of these responses pointed to the child him or herself as having the most influence, indicating that from a relatively young age, these children actively sought to be responsible for their own

appearance. This posits the beginning of a shift towards independence and autonomy, as they approach adolescence. However, as the overall results show parents to be the most influential factor in clothing choices, this casts them in a strong position to be considered influential in other areas of their child's life. Therefore, although many reports on the commercialisation and commodification of childhood seem fatalistic and entirely damning, with the rate at which these dangers are advancing on the notion of 'the innocent child' increasing like a train speeding into a dark tunnel; it appears there is a light at the end of this tunnel, and indeed, possibly a way out the other side, if parents are able to maintain their influence and positively guide their children in matters such as clothing and identity presentation.

The second survey found that a significant proportion of the girls (83%) and a majority of the boys (67%) had read or bought a magazine that year, readership positively correlating to increasing age. When considered in conjunction with the above results, this confirms that magazines appeal more to girls than boys, and as these girls consume magazines more, their ability to be influenced is thereby increased. Girls read more magazines on average than boys, although boys named a greater variety of magazine titles, postulating that girls read within narrower parameters. The types of magazines they read were also clearly demarcated down gender lines; boys read about bikes, cars, planes and cartoons, while girls tended to read about pets, and found fashion and gossip magazines popular from a young age.

Focus groups provided a discursively rich site for information gathering about the tween girls who took part. While such a small and specific sample cannot be used to extrapolate conclusive broader meaning, or be considered representative; it certainly provides a depth of personal disclosure from the participants unable to be gathered from research conducted in a more impersonal style, regardless of scale.

Items of clothing that appealed most when choosing from pictures were considered feminine, but within acceptable boundaries of femininity (not "*too girlie*"); and more adult (or teen) oriented than 'age appropriate' articles. Indeed, the worst insult these girls could use to describe anything in these groups was to label it "*little kiddish*". Even the youngest participants actively sought to separate themselves from being aligned with anything they considered 'too young'; the comments from these eight-year-old girls

possibly the most vehement in disassociating themselves from such items. Many girls expressed their desire for adult type clothing; padded bras, sexy underwear/lingerie, boob tubes, mini skirts and high heeled shoes. They were often referring directly to pictures in magazines when talking about such products, or in relation to going shopping with friends. Whilst many of the girls conceded that their parents would not allow them to buy padded bras or 'sexy' items of clothing, this did not prevent them from wanting them. Indeed, many talked about buying such items with their own money when they could afford to.

Overwhelmingly, girls maintained that what they wore, and how they looked, was very important, and they actively controlled (or attempted to control) what they wore on different occasions. Although most participants said their parents still had a say in what they wore, as they progressed towards their teenage years this appeared to be of a more cursory nature; paying for the clothing, but not choosing it. Girls said they looked to advertising and clothing stores to guide what they ought to be wearing and looking like. When purchasing new clothes, girls generally agreed that it had to be comfortable, but also that 'the look' and style were important, appearance often outweighing comfort. Giving detailed accounts of how (and where) they shopped, these tween girls showed themselves to be savvy and experienced consumers.

When shown pictures of people and asked to match them to certain descriptions, girls related the most sexualised pictures to being popular with boys, and 'naughty'. The pictures they liked the most, and wanted to look like, were of skinny women in fashionable clothing. While the more sexualised images were amongst the least popular with these girls, there were other non-sexualised images they liked less. As girls increased in age, their acceptance of sexualised images was more pronounced, as they did not react as strongly or negatively to sexually suggestive advertisements or provocative items of clothing.

A range of magazines were mentioned by the girls in the focus groups as ones they read and enjoyed; from Barbie magazine to Total Girl and Crème. Teen magazines Cleo, Dolly and Girlfriend were also named, as well as the 'older' Woman's Day and Woman's Weekly. Indeed, teen style magazines were liked for their fashion, celebrity

and gossip content, as well as their focus on consumerism; several girls speaking of collecting magazines, thus labeling them as a desirable commodity.

When discussing advertising specifically, comments echoed the sentiments expressed with regard to the different images of women used for the activities in which the girls ranked different outfits and classified different women according to given descriptions. Generally, sexualised advertisements were disliked, although the intensity of this dislike started to abate as the girls approached adolescence. Moreover, by the time girls were nearing the end of the tweenage years, they seemed to have developed a preference for advertisements which fit the standard representation found in a teenage or women's glossy, fashion magazine, rejecting advertisements which did not fit this format.

The sexualisation of girls in the media is a problem attracting increasing attention in contemporary society, and (somewhat ironically) in the media itself. As sexual content has spread across a raft of media sources, exposure to media ideals of beauty, success, love, normalcy and sexuality are more accessible to a younger audience than ever before. More explicit clothing is being targeted at young consumers, and adult clothing styles replicated in child sizes. Recent media attention centred on sexually suggestive t-shirts sporting slogans such as 'Miss Bitch' and 'Mr. Well-Hung' being stocked in popular clothing store Jay Jays for children as young as 10 years old (although the store decided not to stock 'Miss Slut', 'Miss BJ', and "Mr. Masturbation' from the same range). Jay Jays was indeed mentioned by girls in the current research as a store they liked to go shopping for clothes in. Family First New Zealand's national director Bob McCoskrie argued these t-shirts were another example of consumerism and profits being exalted over the consideration of the well-being of young people; "We should not be subjecting [children] to adult concepts, experiences or identity before they are mature enough to cope with them" ("Parents urged to boycott sexy-slogan T-shirts"; The Press, 2008).

Tweenage girls are in a time of transition; moving from childhood into adolescence, and searching for identities and positions to embody in relation to the changes they are going through. Clothing offers these girls a variety of different identities to 'put on' through the act of consumption. The question remains, however, whether the identities on offer for these young girls are beneficial to them, or more beneficial to society and consumer culture. If (as appears to be the case) sexualised identities are being presented to young

girls, and a certain amount of social reward accrues to them if they then perform such identities, what happens to the notion of childhood?

The whole subject of the sexualisation of girls in the media is a 'scary' topic, and certainly one worthy of academic exploration. We live in a media saturated global village, where viewing children as objects for sexual pleasure is deemed abhorrent (and illegal), and those who perpetrate sexual crimes against young children are vilified. What does it say, then, if we dress children in clothing which essentially encourages them to sexualise themselves, and reward them for achieving this 'ideal' of desirability as put forward by contemporary Western culture? This is problematic not only because of the negative consequences linked to early sexualisation of girls, but also because this then normalises and rationalises the sexual treatment of girls too young to emotionally or socially handle the implications of embodying a sexualised identity.

Modern society, through the prevalence of advertising, has become a culture offering instant solutions to deeply complex social and personal problems. These solutions come in the form of consumption, almost always aimed at the external self, rather than addressing societal systems (such as the media) which perpetuate inequality and render anything other than the (unattainable) ideal, failure. As the line between what is attractive and what is sexy is being blurred, so too are the lines between youth and adulthood, internal and external, public and private, and appropriate and inappropriate. Girls in the world today are only offered a narrow set of 'acceptable' identities to embody, particularly in relation to fashion and appearance.

As is often the case, this thesis has most likely posed more questions than it has answered; many are important questions which ought not be overlooked. On a positive note, this research found that tweenage children are still relatively open to the influence of their parents, which needs to be taken advantage of before they move into adolescence where they typically want little to do with Mum and Dad. Media education may indeed be one answer to holding early sexualisation at bay. While these tweens were certainly media savvy, knowing how to use media and technology, this does not mean they were media critical. Focusing on critiquing the media and teaching children from a young age about the reasons behind media messages and images may place these children in better stead to resist particular messages they may encounter as they develop.

This is an area which deserves further research and exploration. While this thesis has dealt with tween girls and only given a cursory mention to boys, it would be beneficial to continue to study both boys and girls and the areas of identity formation, fashion, and media exposure in relation to issues of sexualisation. Conducting research with different socio-economic and ethnic groups, and larger sample sizes, would provide more of an insight into this fascinating topic. As a popular tune from the 1980s says "I believe that children are our future. Teach them well and let them lead the way. Show them all the beauty they possess inside. Give them a sense of pride to make it easier. Let the children's laughter remind us how it used to be" (Masser and Creed, 1986). As adults we cannot retrieve our own childhoods, they are gone for good, but, perhaps, we can help our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and young citizens of the world to enjoy theirs while they can, and not see their innocence lost.

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YouthLaw Tino Rangatiratanga Tamariki (www.youthlaw.co.nz)

http://www.isubscribe.co.nz K-Zone; Total Girl;

http://www.acpmagazines.com.au Cleo; Cosmopolitan; Dolly; Woman's Day
http://au.youth.yahoo.com/girlfriend Girlfriend

http://dolly.ninemsn.com.au/dolly Dolly, February 2007

http://cleo.ninemsn.com.au/cleo Cleo, February 2007

http://cosmo.ninemsn.com.au/ Cosmopolitan, February 2007

http://au.blogs.yahoo.com/girlfriend) Girlfriend, February 2007

www.girlsinc.org

www.postie.co.nz

www.amazonsurf.co.nz

www.supre.com.au

www.pumpkinpatch.co.nz

www.urbanangel.co.nz

www.fhm.com

http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/6.11/mediamap_pr.html

Lorie Clark
School of Political Science and Communication
University of Canterbury

Dear parent/care-giver,

My name is Lorie Clark and I am a current Masters student in Mass Communication studying at the University of Canterbury. For my Masters I am looking at the relationships girls aged 6 to 12 years old have with clothing and fashion. Particularly, I am looking at how the media and advertising encourage girls to participate in consumer culture and to emulate certain ideals.

For my primary research, I am conducting focus groups with 5 - 7 girls per group of the same age. The activity will take place at school during allotted class time and will last approximately one hour. The focus group will include discussion on clothes and shopping, drawing pictures of their favourite clothes, selecting pictures of different outfits reflecting different personality descriptions and looking at and discussing advertisements from young girl magazines. The group will be videotaped to enable me to transcribe what was said, and look at the interaction between the group participants. All information will be confidential and any content used in my thesis will not reveal the identities of the girls who participated, or their school.

I have discussed this with both the school principal and your child's teacher, and they have given approval for this research to be conducted. This study has also been approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

In order for your child to participate I require signed permission from you as care-giver to state you approve of your child's involvement. Please complete the form below and return to your child's teacher as soon as possible. Should more than seven girls have consent, participants will be randomly selected. At any stage, you or your child can withdraw from the study.

Should you wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email is ljc61@student.canterbury.ac.nz, or via telephone 0274 738 779 or 3667001 ext 8677.

Kind regards,
Lorie Clark
Masters Student – University of Canterbury

I give/do not give permission for my child to take part in a focus group on fashion with Lorie Clark (Masters student at Canterbury University). I am aware this will be videotaped and all information collected is confidential. I understand that at any time my child can withdraw from the group and any information they have shared can be removed from this study.

Signed: _____   Date:_____

Child's name, class and age:_____

Lorie Clark
School of Political Science and Communication
University of Canterbury

Dear (Year …. student),

Hi, my name is Lorie and I am studying at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch. For my studies, I am looking at media and fashion and the different effects it has on girls between the ages of 8 and 12 (like you). I want to know more about what girls today think about and what you do with fashion and advertising.

- For my research, I will be holding small group discussions (of between five and seven girls from your class) about fashion and advertising. If you are willing, I would like you to be involved.

- The discussion will be videotaped so I can later write down what people in the group said and did. Only I will watch the videotape, and anything you say will be kept confidential, this means it will not be shared with anyone else, including your teacher or parents.

- I will be asking you some questions and we will be doing some activities including looking at pictures and drawing.

- Your name will not be used in the write up of my studies. You also have the option of withdrawing any information you give me at any stage for any reason.

- If you have any more questions, you can contact me with your parents' permission and I can answer anything you may want to know before you decide whether you want to take part or not.

- If more than seven girls give their permission to participate in the group discussion, I will pick names out of a hat.

Thank you for reading this and thinking about taking part!

Lorie Clark

Survey 1

Age: _____

Male / Female   (circle one)

Ethnicity: _____

Who or what has the most influence on what you wear?   (Please circle **one**)

Parents   Brothers / Sisters

Friends   Magazines

Movies   Music Videos

Television   Celebrities (e.g. movie/t.v. star)

Other _____

Survey 2

Age: _____

Male / Female   (circle one)

Ethnicity: _____

Have you read or bought a magazine this year?   Yes / No (circle one)

Please list the name/s of the magazine/s you have read or bought:

_____

_____

_____

_____

____

Thank you ☺

Research for Lorie Clark

Information on Surveys

First of all, thank you for taking the time to allow this research to take place.
I have included in the envelope marked for your class two surveys, one of each for each member of your class to fill out. They should not take longer than a couple of minutes each to complete. I have also included some extra copies and there are more copies available in the office should you need some.

PLEASE hand out the survey on the **larger piece of paper first**. This one asks who or what has the most influence on what [the children] wear, and gives options for them to circle. Please ask them to **circle only one option** which influences them the **most**. There is also an option to write another influence if what influences them most is not on the list. They **don't need to write their names** on this survey, only their age.

After that survey, please have the children fill out the **smaller survey** which asks the children about magazines. It is important this survey doesn't precede the other. This survey asks whether they have read or bought a magazine this year. It doesn't have to be their own, they just need to answer whether they have read or bought any magazine at all. It then asks them to list the names of the magazines they have come in contact with. If they cannot remember specific titles, they can write what it was about; it is not vital they know the title, but would be helpful. This survey **does need to have their name** on it please.

The only other thing that may cause questions is where they are asked to specify their ethnicity, as many kids haven't come into contact with such a word. If you could explain this to them that would be great, I generally explain along the lines of your ethnicity being the culture with which you identify and where your heritage comes from. Writing 'Kiwi' is fine as it's a lot easier to spell than 'European'.

When the surveys are completed please just put them back in the envelope and return to the office where I will collect them.

Thanks again for taking the time to do this. It is much appreciated.

Kind regards,

Lorie Clark
MA Student, University of Canterbury

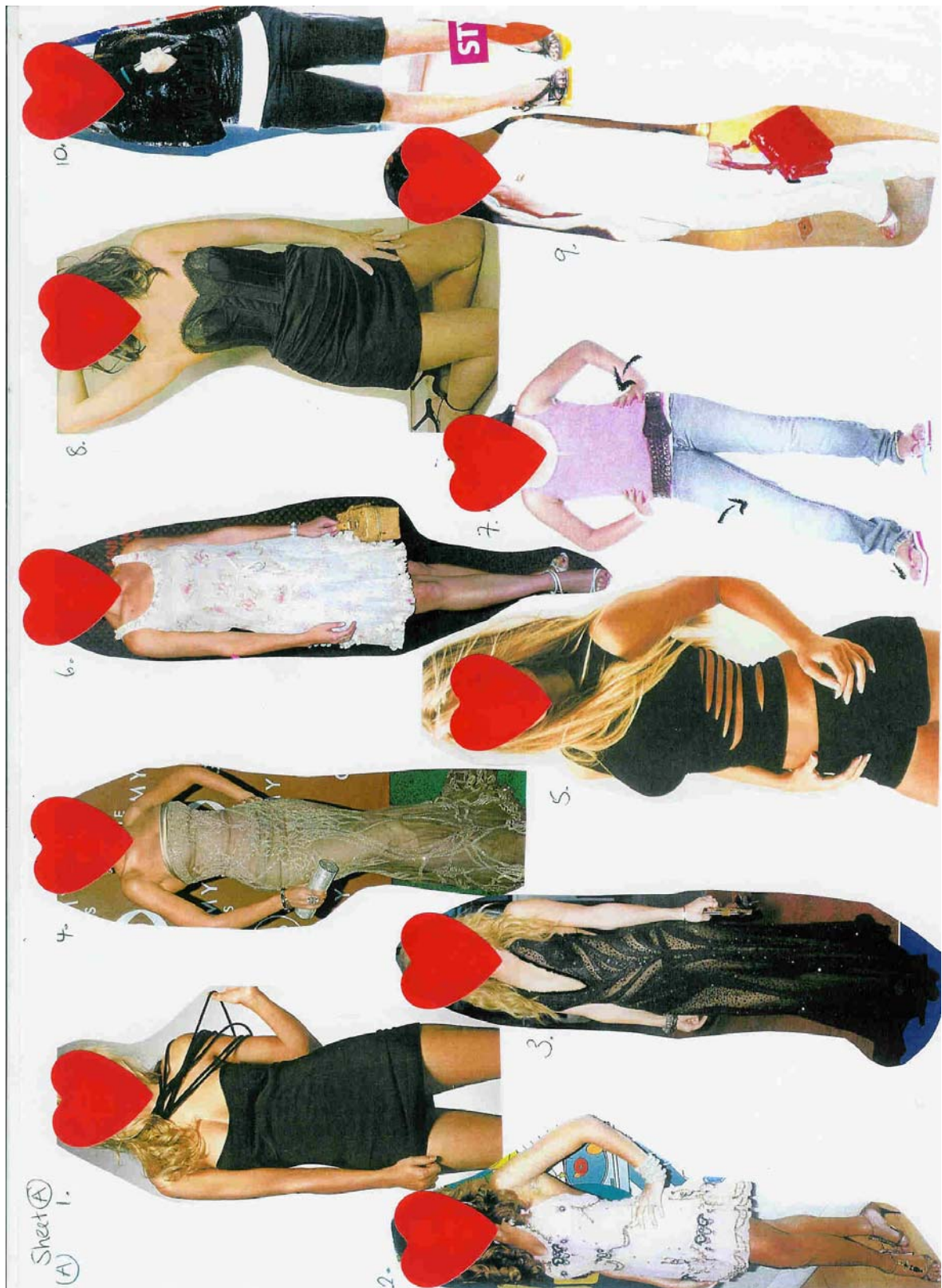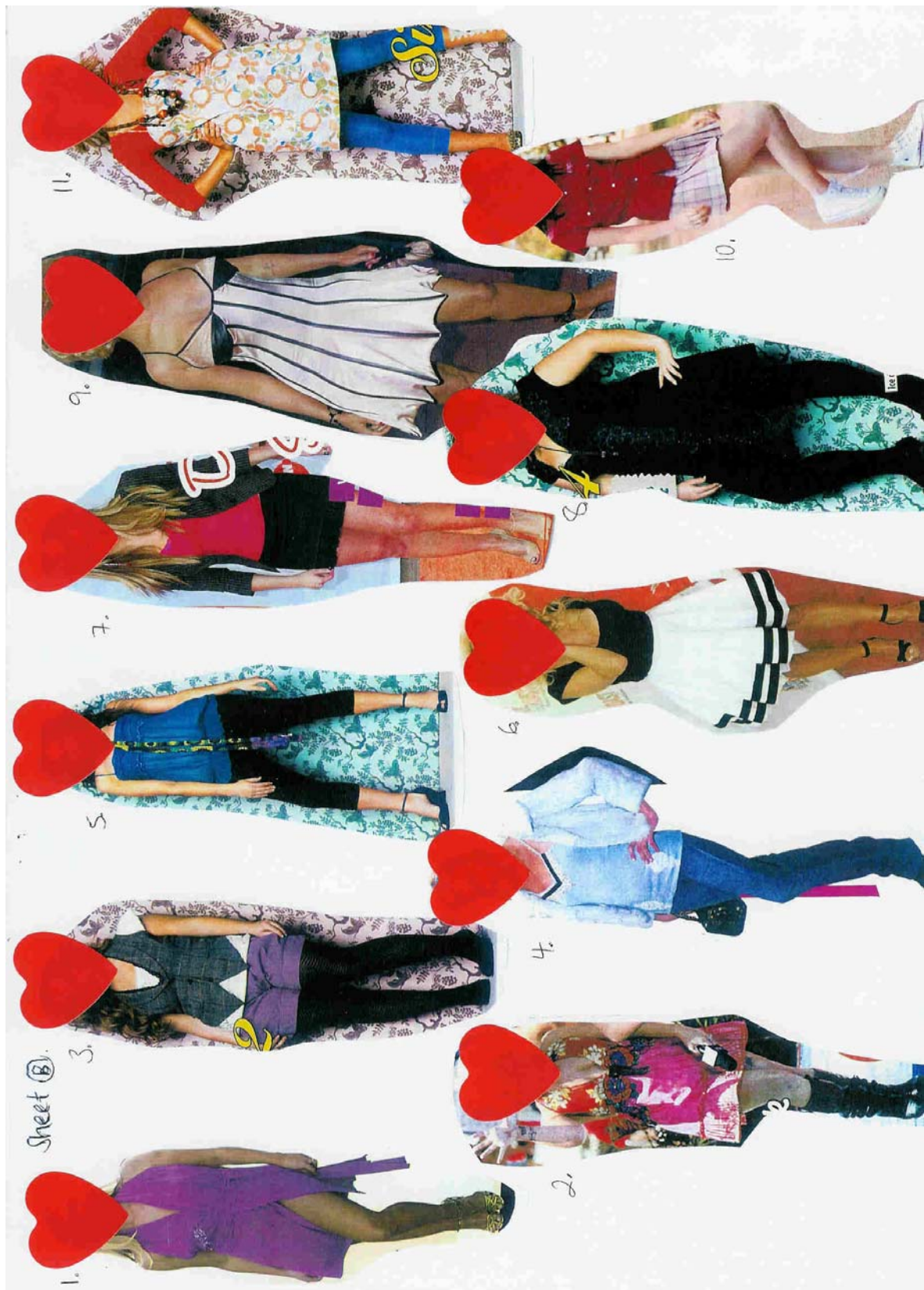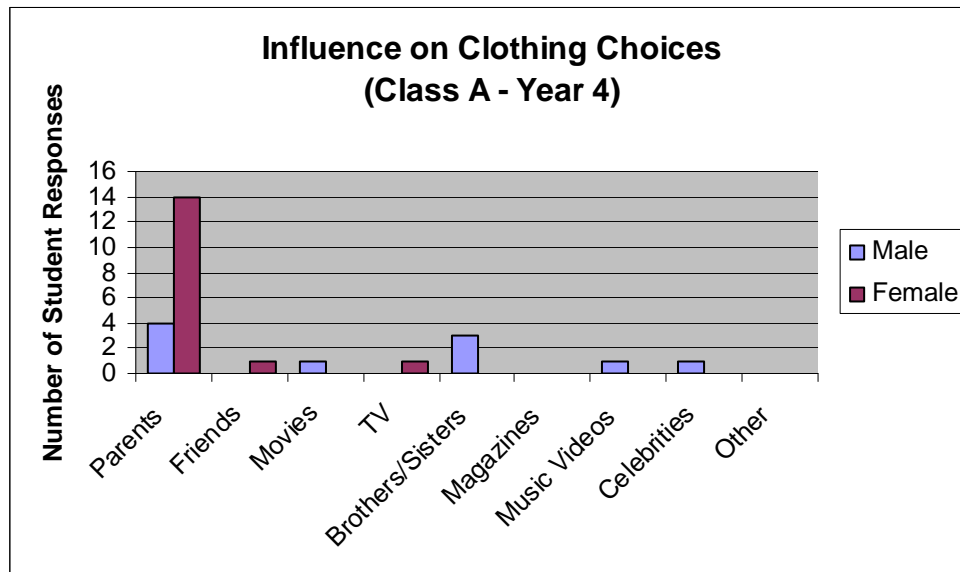*Figure A: Influences on clothing choices shown by class – Class A – Year 4*
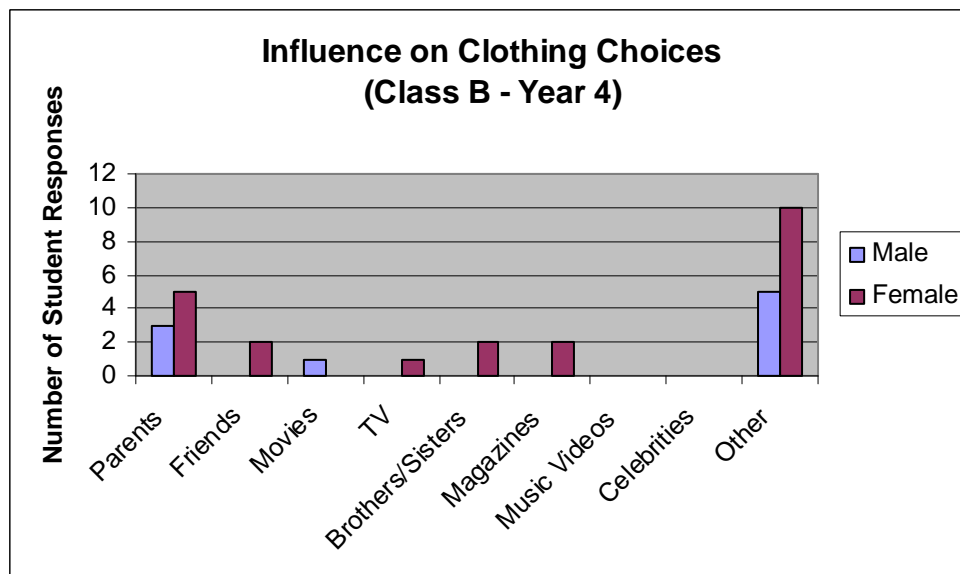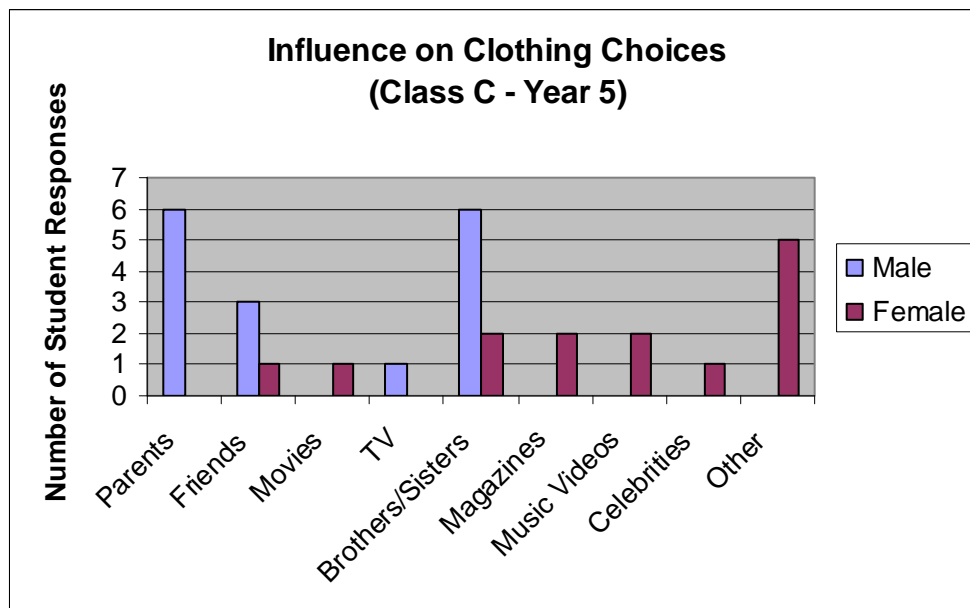

Figure B: Influences on clothing choices shown by class – Class B – Year 4

Figure C: Influences on clothing choices shown by class – Class C – Year 5

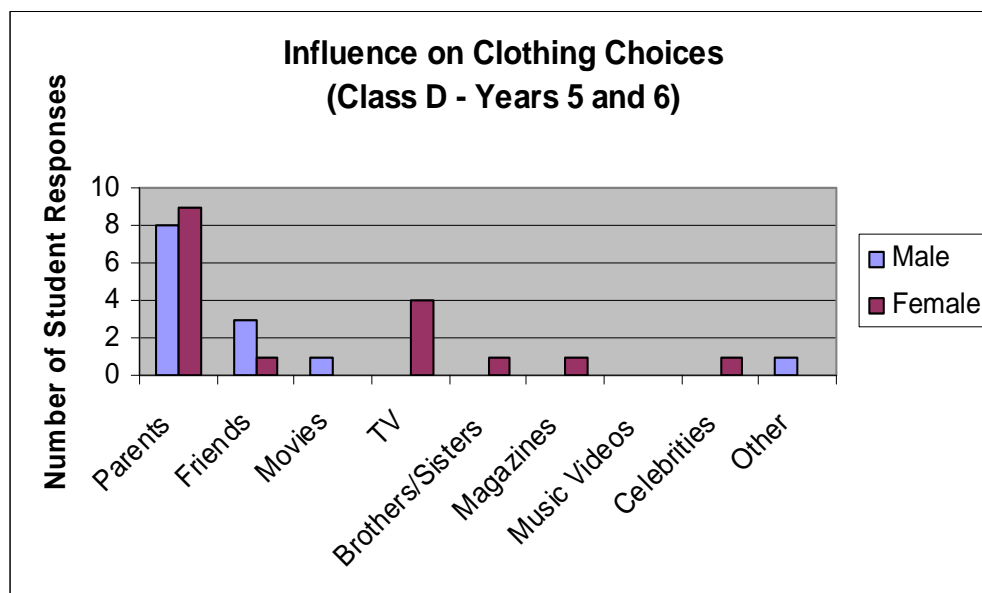*Figure D: Influences on clothing choices shown by class – Class D – Years 5 & 6*
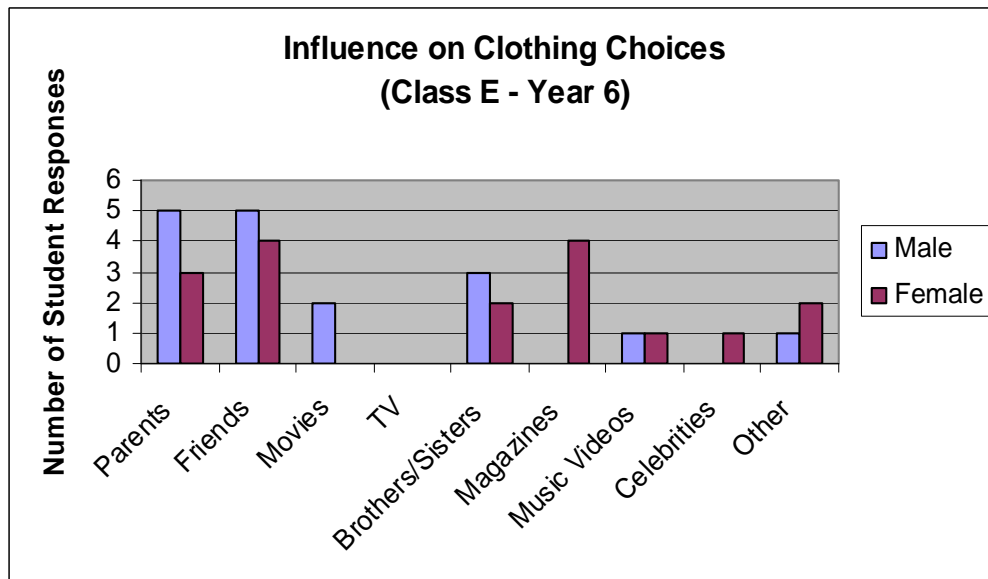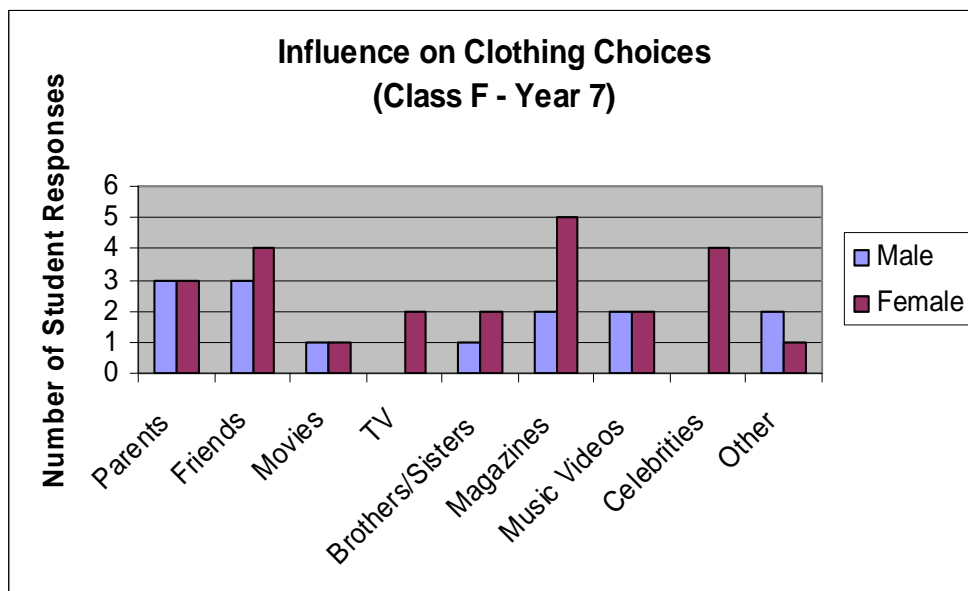
Figure E: Influences on clothing choices shown by class – Class E – Year 6

Figure F: Influences on clothing choices shown by class – Class F – Year 7

K-Zone	14		Beano	1
Krash	6		Dr Who	1
Simpsons	5		Fishing NZ	1
Mania	3		D-Mag	1
Sponge Bob	3		4WD Monthly	1
Performance Cars	3		TV Guide	1
Rugby	2		Stormbreaker	1
Total Gamer	2		Fast Cars	1
Dirt Bike	2		PC Gaming	1
Adventures	2		EB Games	1
National Geographic	2		Rugby News	1
Australian Aviation	2		Pacific Wings	1
Wheels	2		NZ Aviation	1
Hot Fours	2		Aeroplane	1
Motor Cross	1		Motorcycle Trader	1
Mad	1		PC World	1
V8	1		Flatout Gaming	1
Cars	1		Street Magician	1
Art Alive	1		Urban Hitz	1
Smash Hits	1		White Dwarf	1
PS 2	1		Lord of the Rings	1
Big Cars	1		New Scientist	1
Super Cross	1		RCME	1
NZ Street Rod	1		Skymall	1
Nats Mx	1		Fly RC	1
Crusty Demons	1		Herpa Wings	1
Kiwi Rider	1		Fast Fours	1
Roald Dahl	1		Auto Car	1
James Bond	1			

Table of magazines listed by male respondents in survey

as being consumed in the last year

Total Girl	38		Sponge Bob	1
Crème	27		Art Alive	1
Girlfriend	20		Mad	1
Dolly	16		Mania	1
Womens Weekly	14		Mystery World	1
Girl Power	13		Angel	1
Woman's Day	13		Motorbike	1
K-Zone	8		Its Hot	1
Pets	8		Shout	1
Barbie	8		NW	1
Disney Girl	7		Dog	1
Roald Dahl	5		Bikes	1
Little Angel	5		Australian Womans Day	1
Saddle Club	4		No Boys Allowed	1
Scooby Doo	4		Cars	1
D-Mag	3		National Geographic	1
Tracy Beaker	3		New Idea	1
Adventures	3		Horse Wise	1
TV Guide	3		Pony	1
Cleo	3		Smash Hits	1
Witches	2		Art Crazy	1
Horrible Histories	2		Cosmopolitan	1
Simpsons	2		Horse Trader	1
Home and Garden	2		Australian Womens Weekly	1
Horse and Pony	2		Narnia	1
TV Hits	2			

Table of magazines listed by female respondents in survey

as being consumed in the last year