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Portfolio submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Expressing the self in counselling psychology: "When I discover who I am, I'll be free"
(Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, 1952, p.243)

Rebecca Dixey

City, University of London

Department of Psychology

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Social Networking Sites – SNSs

Objectification Theory – OT

Thematic Analysis – TA

Love Your Body – LYB

Eating Disorder - ED

III. Declaration of Powers

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IV. Preface to the Portfolio

Expressing the self in counselling psychology: "When I discover who I am, I'll be free"
(Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man, 1952, p.243)

This portfolio comprises three sections: a qualitative piece of research; a combined client study and process report; and a publishable paper. The main portion of the work is taken up by the thesis: an exploration of the way young women represent themselves (and indeed, how they construct other women's representations of themselves) on social networking sites (SNSs). The client study focuses on an integrative piece of work with a client battling binge eating disorder (BED), who had formed a closed bond with food instead of people throughout her adult life. The participants of the thesis are generally very different to the client of the combined case study and process report in age and presentation. Nevertheless, the thread of *expressing the self* weaves its way through the work in a variety of ways, and is indeed linked with my own development from trainee to qualified counselling psychologist.

Inherent in my choice to train to become a counselling psychologist was my fascination with the way that people express who they are, and how this can often manifest in a range of complex and challenging ways. As an undergraduate, I studied an arts degree with a focus on literature and creative writing. The written word and the construction of our stories through this has always held an immense amount of power for me, in learning about human ways of expression. Moreover, the dynamics of human relationships are endlessly intricate and I am fascinated by the ways in which we express ourselves on the most intimate level in our closest human relationships. I am also interested in the ways in which the technological advances of recent years have revolutionised the ways in which we can express ourselves and communicate with one another. In particular, the ways in which SNSs facilitate not only a human expression, but also this interplay with societal constructions and ideas around who and what we 'should' be. Finally, my development as a counselling psychologist, from trainee to qualified practitioner, has relied on my ability to understand how my clients are expressing their story to me, as well as my ability to respond to this by stepping away from a prescribed model of treatment and thinking more broadly to incorporate integration into the ways in which I work. Not only this, but I am unable to divorce myself from my approach to therapy, and I have learned to not be afraid of expressing myself to a client – what I feel in the room, and how I understand their journey in order to stand by them in their pain.

It is worth noting that a number of other threads also run throughout the work. Both the thesis and client study focus – to varying degrees – on body image, food, and difficulties with both of these things. My final year of training saw me work in an eating disorder service, and I am now employed on a full-time basis as a counselling psychologist in a specialist child and adolescent eating disorder service. My own interest in food and body image is apparent throughout the forthcoming work. Despite this interest, neither piece is exclusively about these issues. Whilst food was a dominant issue for several of the thesis participants, as well as the client featured in Section B, the message at large was not really about food. Rather, it was often a way of expressing something: a desire to fit into societal expectations of how women 'should' look, or a level of emotional pain and isolation. Similarly, the thread of body image fails to completely capture the experiences of the client or participants, this being very much just one aspect of their contributions to the portfolio. As such, the main theme that links this work together is that of 'expression'; or more specifically, how we express ourselves through our bodies and appearance, a vehicle for communication. The following preface aims to demonstrate how and why the theme of expression has shaped not only this research portfolio as a whole, but also my identity as a practicing counselling psychologist.

Section A: Doctoral Thesis

An exploratory analysis of young women's experience of photo sharing on social media, and its role in body image.

"It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength," (Maya Angelou, 2014, p10).

Utilising a Thematic Analysis method, this research explores how young women construct their experience of photo sharing on SNSs, and what role this plays in body image. My own fascination with a multitude of topics in this area, such as body image, ideas of beauty, potential eating concerns, feminist ideas around women's bodies and the process of objectification inspired the research, meaning I remained engaged and interested throughout the process. Despite this, I have worked hard to remain mindful of the fact that this research was not solely about any of these components. Instead, these components work together, constructing a story of how and why participants express themselves in the way they do online. To understand how young women construct their experiences and ways of expressing themselves is the very crux of this research, as it tries to gain insight into a complex, often contradictory, phenomenon. Whilst 'expressing the self' may at first appear at odds with my constructionist epistemological standpoint, this research in fact considers how participants express their self-narrative - which is invariably negotiated and produced as a joint product - through social interaction (Burr, 2015, p.140). This phenomenon can hold a range of consequences for those involved, and to understand this form of expression is, in my view, hugely important in coming to understand how and why women are often so gripped by this form of virtual communication.

It was also vital for me that the participants benefited in some way from this research. Gill (2017) points out that historically, psychology has focussed on the narrow effects of SNSs, and these are well-documented. As such, I felt it was important that this research was not reductive and allowed participants the space to explore their online expression - whether this be their feminist beliefs, their positive formulation or things they had found difficult - in whichever direction was authentic to them. By approaching the research in a qualitative manner, my aim was the privilege the voice of the participant. This was done by open questions, remaining curious about participants' own construction of experience and not limiting responses to fit with any agenda. Indeed, as long called for by feminist scholars, I was transparent about identifying and revealing my own location within knowledge formation (Chandler, Anstey, Ross, 2015, p.2), so whilst meaning was co-constructed by

myself and the participant, being transparent about my own beliefs also ensured the participant voice remained clear. Approaching the research in this way was consistent with the way in which counselling psychology champions the voice of the client (Maggio, 2014), and was at the heart of ensuring participants were heard.

Section B: Combined Case Study and Process Report

Food, feeling safe and the self: An integrative look at one client's movement towards self-expression and fostering change

"There is no agony like bearing an untold story inside you," (Zora Neale Hurston, 1937, p15).

It is my belief that a client's expression can present in a multitude of ways. My experience over the course of training has taught me that often, what the client says verbally is only some of the story. This was never truer than with the client I have written about in Section B of this portfolio, and my understanding of her way of expressing pain was integral in providing the basis for an extremely rewarding piece of work that has taught me much about being a counselling psychologist.

This client's presentation did not 'fit' with the oft-used CBT-E model in the context of binge eating disorder, and this piece of work invoked my anxiety as a trainee whilst I sought to 'think outside the box' and work more integratively. However, taking a step back from the limits I initially imposed upon my approach to treatment, and really listening to how this client expressed her pain, ultimately set the work free. Wilkinson (as cited in Bury and Strauss, 2006, p.114) points out that the goal of a counselling psychologist is to arrive at a narrative that is personally meaningful to the client, even if this moves away from a specific theory or model. It was apparent that for this client, the narrative was of expressing her emotions through food: Anger, sadness, love, bereavement, shame. Together, we established that her attachment to food was an expression of her fear of closeness to her family, after two traumatic bereavements. Rather than impose an inflexible treatment schedule onto this client, I sat with my anxiety at not working to immediately 'fix' the issue. This allowed us both the space to understand her expression, to work together to build a formulation and a treatment plan that was true to this expression, and to work towards realistic change for the client through acknowledging her grief, expressing her pain in new ways and beginning to look forward.

Section C: Publishable Paper

The publishable paper presented a challenge. I was clear that I wanted to present the findings of my research, yet the word limit meant potentially watering down what I believed to be salient and relevant points of the findings. As such, I did consider presenting just one theme as a stand-alone finding, writing several drafts of a paper in this manner.

Nevertheless, my feeling was that the research had a strong narrative, each theme supporting and lending to the other. Given that – in my view – one of the strengths of the study is the richness of the findings, which reflect the depth, variety, and complexities of participants' ways of expressing themselves online, to produce just one theme for the paper would potentially minimise the findings of the study. As such, all three have been presented in an effort to translate participants' stories of expression effectively into a publishable piece of work.

Concluding Comments

The core of counselling psychology is to strive to help clients lend meaning to their stories (Bury & Strauss, 2006, p.120). It is my understanding that core to the strengths of being a counselling psychologist is the ability to be integrative, creative, and to foster a strong therapeutic relationship. In both practice and research, I have come to understand the importance of bracketing my theoretical assumptions and allowing space for client and participant expression, so that I might have the best understanding of their stories. As I have developed my own identity as a counselling psychologist, I have become more confident in working in this way, fascinated by the ways in which this expression presents itself in a multitude of forms. Moreover, to be a counselling psychologist is to co-exist with economic, political, and social context in which one operates (Bury & Strauss, 2006, p.113). As such, this portfolio has also sought to address issues beyond the clinical; considering the role of women in a world that can be both hostile and championing of our self-representation. My hope is that, in whatever small way, this portfolio celebrates the voice of the women involved, putting their expression at the forefront of the work and seeking ways in which to understand it.

"Everyone has their own ways of expression. I believe we all have a lot to say, but finding ways to say it is more than half the battle," (Criss Jami, 2011, p.vii).

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Section A: Doctoral Research Project

An Exploratory Analysis of Young Women's Experience of Photo Sharing on Social Media, and its Role in Body Image

"It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength," *(Maya Angelou, 2014, p10).*

Abstract

Feminists have long maintained that women's bodies are socially constructed as objects to be looked at, often through a male gaze of desire. In turn, it is theorised that women internalise this perspective, viewing themselves as objects, rather than evaluating their worth according to their personal traits. Research has demonstrated that this can have a range of negative consequences for women. The advent of mass media provided ample space to perpetuate this objectification of women, in advertising, television, magazines and music videos. The subsequent development of social networking sites (SNSs) has created a space in which women's bodies are displayed and depicted even more routinely than before.

Adding a new dynamic to traditional media platforms, SNSs also provide a platform from which girls and women are able to turn the camera on themselves, sharing photos to both peers and unknown viewers. Literature demonstrates that this process can result in negative experiences. At the same time championing the female body through SNSs might be experienced as empowering. The aim of this research was to gain an insight into the ways in which young women construct their experience of both viewing and sharing photos on SNSs, and its potential role in body image.

Nine young women were recruited as participants to take part in this study, aged between 18 and 20 years old. They all took part in individual, semi-structured interviews, which were later transcribed and analysed according to the process of thematic analysis. I positioned myself within a feminist, constructionist epistemological paradigm.

Three themes were generated from the analysed data: objectifying other women, which explores the way in which participants were caught in a cycle of objectifying other women through their own use of SNSs; creating the online self, which explores the variations in how and why participants constructed versions of themselves to post online; the question of feminism, which considers the feminist – or lack thereof – discourses around posting certain types of photos on SNSs.

The ways in which the young women in this study constructed their experiences of online photo sharing were rich, complex and varied. Several highlighted inherent negative consequences, from low self-esteem to a desire to restrict food intake because of the oft perpetuated thin ideal on SNSs. Others formulated positive experiences, in which SNSs act as a vehicle for their empowerment and autonomy, challenging patriarchal norms. In terms of cultural competency, it's important that

counselling psychologists have an awareness of the role of SNS in the lives of most young women today, and the ways in which this relates to their view of themselves and their bodies.

Key words: Objectification theory; young women; social networking sites; body image; feminist; thematic analysis.

1. Chapter One: Review of the Literature

1.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter will explore the current literature around social networking sites (SNSs) and girls' and young women's body image. The chapter will give a brief overview of one of the dominant theoretical constructs – Objectification theory (OT) (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which underpins the research, followed by an overview of the development of SNSs in recent years. The main body of the chapter provides a critical literature review of recent research with respect to this, identifying limitations and therefore recognising gaps. The chapter concludes by providing a rationale for the current research, in response to the overview and critique of current literature.

1.2. Aims

The predominant aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experience of young women in relation to online photo sharing and its role in body image. The secondary aim was to consider the implications for counselling psychology. This is relevant because the field of counselling psychology champions giving a voice to the marginalised and the oppressed – in this instance young women who are marginalised by virtue of both age and gender. The third and final aim was to provide recommendations for future research and clinical practice in this area.

1.3. Background

It is generally understood that the pressures on women in terms of weight and shape are more profound than those on men (Grogan, 2008). In western culture, a slim body is routinely appraised as an appealing one for women, a reflection of its carrier's self-control and attractiveness (Orbach, 1993). Although there are a variety of social factors that may be cited as contributing to this, it cannot be denied that the media plays a significant role in perpetuating what has come to be considered a body ideal. A report by the British Medical Association criticised the cult of 'bodily perfection' perpetuated by media outlets (BMA, cited in Morant, 2000). Through this ongoing promotion and dissemination of images that represent beauty ideals, those who do not conform to these requirements can experience a range of negative consequences, such as perceived unattractiveness and body dissatisfaction (Grogan, 2008). Body dissatisfaction is typically understood as when a person evaluates their body negatively;

when there is an inconsistency between their ideal body and how they perceive themselves to look (Grogan, 2008). Research demonstrates that this can lead to negative consequences for those who experience it, such as low self- esteem (O'Dea, 2012); sexual difficulties (Wiederman, 2012); and eating disorders (EDs) (Stice & Shaw, 2002).

The media's role in this is particularly salient (Thompson et al., 1999). Indeed, Tiggemann (2011) argues that the media is the most culpable influence over women's poor body image and dissatisfaction. For years, we have been witness to the repeated promotion of unattainable standards of beauty, through fashion magazines, advertising, television and film. Historically, these images feature women who are tall, thin, toned (but not muscular) and moderately breasted (Grogan, 2008; Tiggemann, 2011).

Before the arrival of mass media, images of socially constructed beauty ideals were communicated through art, music and literature. As this 'ideal' has shifted to a focus on women who are tall and thin, this ideal is reinforced by social norms, including the social denigration of obesity and the praise of those who adhere to the aforementioned beauty standards (Thompson et al., 1999). A variety of social influences – including family, peers and health care professionals – perpetuate this ideal, yet the mass media is identified as the most powerful of them all (Groesz, Levine, & Murnen, 2002). There has been a significant amount of empirical research which demonstrates that not only is there a correlation between exposure to the media and problems with body image, but that the relationship is (deemed to be) causative. Initially, fashion magazines were accused of leading the charge in the thin ideal (Silverstein et al., 1986). Research suggests that repeated exposure to media such as this content actually means that viewers begin to accept these portrayals as representations of reality (Gerbner et al., 2002). Groesz et al. (2002) presented a meta-analysis of 25 experimental studies, which demonstrated the consistently significant effect of viewing thin media images on women's body image. It was notable that the effect size was greater for participants of 19 years or younger, providing rationale for studies that focus on a younger population. Similarly, Grabe, Ward & Hyde's 2008 meta-analysis of both correlational and experimental studies showed that media exposure to ultra-thin images is related to body image concerns in women. As such, a level of responsibility ultimately falls into the hands of the media. With millions of women accessing the images the media chooses to manipulate and produce on a weekly basis, one would hope to find that they represent some level of diversity and reality. However, a content analysis of 69 magazines showed that 94% displayed images of thin-idealised models, or celebrities, on the cover (Malkin, Wornian & Chrisler, 1999). Various theories have tried to offer an

understanding of the impact of the media on body image (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). One of the most influential frameworks is Fredrickson and Roberts' OT, from which this research draws inspiration.

1.3.1. Objectification theory

Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) formally proposed an integrative framework designed to help understand the impact of ongoing, pervasive and normalised experience of sexual objectification for girls and women. Bartky (1990) gives the following summary of sexual objectification:

Sexual objectification occurs when a woman's sexual parts or functions are separated out from her person, reduced to status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her. To be dealt with in this way is to have one's entire being identified with the body… (p. 35).

Though formally theorised in 1997, the objectification of women's bodies is hardly a new phenomenon. The literature on the topic is pervasive (de Beauvoir, 1988; Argyle & Williams, 1969; Gardener, 1980; Bartky, 1990; Orbach, 1993). It is commonly understood that, in line with this framework, women's bodies are socially constructed, to be seen through the eyes of an observer. In this way, they are reduced to a vessel to be looked at, evaluated, and used by others, rather than encountered as human and individual (intelligent and warm, for instance; Harris & Fiske, 2009).

Fredrickson and Roberts' theory posits that girls and women are used to seeing women objectified on a routine basis through media outlets. In turn, girls and women are long habituated to internalising this view, judging themselves through the eyes of a heteronormative society. In this world, our genders are constructed as binary and assigned at birth, whilst there exists institutional, cultural propagation of heterosexual relationships alone being the acceptable form of attraction (Schilt & Westbrook, 2009; Kitzinger, 2005). Moreover, in this world, men are the central characters and women (or indeed, anyone who doesn't identify as a cis, heterosexual and gender binary male) are subordinate to them.
Through this subordination, women are habituated to being objects that are gazed at, internalising this view in response.

Whether separating out or viewing certain parts of our bodies, or focusing on an overall aesthetic, the process of looking at ourselves via the perspective of an ever-present

observer is known is self-objectification (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). From direct personal experience such as cat calls on the street, to the saturation of media platforms with woman's shape, the objectification of the female body in western society is unavoidable (Kilbourne & Jhally, 2000). Research demonstrates that the depiction of women as sexual objects infiltrates virtually every medium, including prime-time television, adverts and music videos (Calogero, 2011). The saturation of prime-time media that is concerned with a woman's appearance, rather than who she is as a person or what she can do, has led to the casual acceptance and repetitive reproduction of women as objects and sexual beings. The impact of this is the manifestation of ongoing body surveillance, which in turn is posited to promote body anxiety and shame, sexual dysfunction and EDs (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).

Evidence in support of Fredrickson and Roberts' theory demonstrates that self-objectification can be associated with a multitude of other negative effects. Fredrickson and Roberts (1998) supported this link by finding that women in swimsuits were more likely to experience self- objectification than those wearing sweaters, and as a result scored higher on body shame and negative affect. The act of wearing a swimsuit meant that women not only evaluated themselves, but also evaluated themselves as they believed others would see them, through the gaze of an imagined third person. Body shame was also proven to positively predict restrained eating.

Other studies corroborate these findings with other manipulations of self-objectification. For instance, Burney and Irwin (2000) directly link self-objectification with body surveillance, one of the symptoms of disordered eating. This is consistent with other research, which implicates the 'thin ideal' body image promoted in the media (Stice & Shaw, 1994), in increasing the likelihood of body shame. This in turn develops negative beliefs about one's body and has a negative effect on eating patterns (Burney & Irwin, 2000). Further studies support these findings. For example, Calogero (2009) aimed to extend previous findings to a British sample, and her findings were largely concurrent with research trends. Self- objectification was found to lead to body surveillance, which in turn was found to lead to body shame and, finally, unhealthy eating habits.

It is clear that there is sufficient evidence to corroborate the theory that self-objectification, in a range of settings, can have a negative effect on women. This study is in part informed by a feminist paradigm, in that it will aim to 'centre and make problematic women's diverse situations and institutions that frame those situations' (Cresswell & Poth, 2018, p. 69). The inclusion of OT as forming part of my own basis for understanding is consistent with this, in that feminist perspectives are central to OT, in

which women are reduced to objects and appraised according to their physical attributes (Moffitt & Szymanski 2011).

1.3.2. Alternative theory

OT is essentially an integration of a variety of threads and constructs, representing a cohesive framework to help us understand how the pressures women experience in relation to body image can translate into psychological risk factors (Moradi, 2010). The literature review in this chapter critiques a variety of research, some of which is positioned under OT, and some of which draws on other constructs which overlap or compete with one another. Whilst Moradi (2010) posits that the threads of OT run implicitly or explicitly through much of the recent research, it is nonetheless important at this stage to address the other key dominant existing theoretical frameworks of understanding.

Sociocultural theory (Thompson et al., 1999) is the other primary framework of understanding which arises in a significant portion of recent theory seeking to gain a better understanding of how body image and eating difficulties co-exist (Holland and Tiggemann, 2016). It proposes that women routinely internalise societal standards of beauty, which are propagated by peers, parents and the media. Said standards are subsequently mistaken for the woman's own standards and, when she fails to live up to them, she is put at risk of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Thompson et al., 1999).
The Internet, and in particular social media, provides the perfect place to facilitate images of beauty ideals being promoted, with peer influence being a key part of the feedback loops which feed into the internalisation of ideals, and make ongoing social comparison rife.

There are a variety of other theories which propose an understanding of body image concerns, disordered eating and Internet use. The dual pathway model (Stice & Agras, 1999); the tripartite influence model (Keery, Van Den Berg, & Thompson, 2004) and the objectified body conscious framework (McKinley & Hyde, 1996) to name but a few. However, Moradi (2010) proposes that rather than OT being seen as a single construct, there needs to be a 'conceptual shift' in our understanding (Moradi, 2010, p. 46). Instead of being seen as a singular process, we need to broaden our thinking to see OT as a multifaceted process, involving self-objectification, the internalisation of beauty standards, and body surveillance, which is linked with increased shame and anxiety (Moradi, 2010). Vandenbosch and Eggermont (2012) suggest that a broader

understanding of OT, in which these constructs are included, can enhance our understanding of the experience of sexual objectification and the media, rather than viewing all constructs separately. Whilst this approach is yet to be formalised and the majority of research references these various constructs as separate entities, it is important to acknowledge the ongoing dialogue in terms of how we formulate and understand the frameworks which make sense of this experience.

1.4. Self-Objectification and Social Media

The literature on objectification in relation to traditional media platforms is far reaching. It has routinely been demonstrated that exposure to the promotion of sexually objectifying images on television (Aubrey, 2006; Ward & Friedman, 2006), in magazines (Morry & Staska, 2001), in music videos (Prichard & Tiggemann, 2012; Aubrey & Frisby, 2011) and in advertising (Halliwell, Malson, & Tischner, 2011; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008) leads to greater self- objectification in women. The empirical evidence demonstrates that this can lead to negative outcomes for women's well-being (Moradi & Huang, 2008). For instance, Prichard and Tiggemann's (2012) experimental study found that women who were exposed to sexually objectifying music videos that promulgated a thin-ideal body type and women as sex objects were more likely to self-objectify. Halliwell et al. (2011) also found that under experimental conditions, women who were exposed to media images of thin women that were both sexually agentic and sexually passive experienced an increase in both weight dissatisfaction and self-objectification. Of intrigue, the study also opened up a new angle in this field by adding the (active/passive) framing of the women as a variable, and results demonstrated that exposure to images of seemingly sexually agentic women increased self-objectification even more so than in both the control photos and the sexually passive photos. So, it seems that it is not only the body types represented in images that might have a negative impact on women, but the gaze through which the observers of images are forced to look; the way in which the image is framed.

It is widely accepted that media images, in a variety of forms, can affect women negatively. However, the nature of media has changed considerably in the last 15 years. The arrival of the Internet and, latterly, social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook and Instagram has meant that our interaction with media, as well as the things we access, has changed radically. Rather than actively having to buy a magazine or be at the mercy of television programming, we now have the ability to access almost anything we want online, whenever we want.

Whilst there is a well-established research link between traditional media platforms, self-objectification and the negative consequences to the well-being of women, given the relatively recent arrival of the SNSs there is invariably less research focusing specifically on this medium.

The body of research that has been growing over the last five years predominantly focuses on Facebook. From its creation in 2004 to its current standing with two billion registered users (Facebook, 2017), the site accelerated the phenomenon that is online social networking. Paving the way for new sites such as Instagram and changing the face of how we interact with one another, Facebook has given us new and unique online space in which to represent ourselves. We can choose to share personal bits of information and experiences; connect with like-minded individuals; share ideas and photos with people freely.

In relation to existing research, the literature shows that young women spend significantly more time using SNSs than men, also viewing online appearance-oriented media instead of reading image-focused magazines (Kimbrough, Guadagno, Muscanell, & Dill, 2013). Over half of Facebook users are female (Aslam, 2017) and recent studies in both the United States and Australia have shown that adolescents and young women are estimated to spend at least 2 hours a day on Facebook (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015; Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Eminently popular with adolescents, Facebook is particularly popular with girls between the ages of 8 and 18 (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). Research demonstrates that women post more photos of themselves than men (Sorokowski et al., 2016). Given these numbers, ongoing investigation into social media, self-objectification and body image is essential.

1.5. Review of the Quantitative Literature

The bulk of this literature review focuses on quantitative studies. The reason for this is two-fold. Given that SNSs are a relatively recent development, it felt necessary to give a trajectory of key research since its inception, so as to situate the current thesis in relation to this in terms of developing existing findings. Secondly, there is a distinct lack of qualitative literature, so starting with quantitative approaches was deemed necessary. Nevertheless, the perspectives that are considered in the literature review and subsequent analysis will be drawn upon in the discussion.

1.5.1. Correlational research

As noted, there is a well-established body of research into body image and traditional media platforms. Tiggemann and Slater's (2013) study was an early investigation into the use of the Internet and body image concerns, extending on an earlier study by Tiggemann and Miller (2010) in which a regression analysis found that there was a positive correlation between Internet exposure, weight dissatisfaction and drive for thinness. More specifically, those participants who spent more time on SNSs – the two sites that were measured for in this study were Myspace and Facebook – had a higher drive for thinness, whilst those who spent more time specifically on Facebook had a greater internalisation of the thin ideal and had lower weight satisfaction. Tiggemann and Slater's (2013) sought to replicate these finding on a larger, more diverse scale which was intended to accommodate for some of the earlier study's weakness. For instance, participants from the initial 2010 study were recruited according to convenience from a school, which the researchers note as relatively limited in terms of diversity. No account was made to ensure a range of socio-economic backgrounds or ethnicity, and the school was single sex. Given that research suggests that girls who attend, or have attended, a same-sex school are likely to have a higher drive for thinness (Davey, Jones, & Harris, 2011; Tiggemann & Dyer, 1996), it might be argued that participants in this study were more likely to be weight concerned than those attending a co- educational school, and that may have had an effect on the findings.

Tiggemann and Slater (2013) asked participants from across 18 different schools to complete a variety of self-report questionnaires regarding their Internet use and a range of body image concerns. As predicted, results also demonstrated that participants' Internet exposure was positively correlated with an internalisation of the thin ideal, body surveillance and drive for thinness in its sample of adolescent girls. Whilst all participants in the study utilised Internet sites which featured images likely to propagate beauty ideals (such as fashion and celebrity sites), the most frequent use of the Internet was to access social networking sites (SNSs), particularly Facebook, which is actively associated with negative body image (Tiggemann & Slater, 2013). Results demonstrated that those who used Facebook reported higher levels of body-related concerns compared with participants who did not engage in the use of the website. Time spent on Facebook predicted higher levels of body surveillance, drive for thinness and internalisation of a thin ideal. Finally, when considering the results, the researchers hypothesised that the ease of connecting to Facebook and viewing images of their peers encourages multiple comparisons to others, which is known to be associated with impaired body image (Arigo, Schumacher, & Martin, 2014; Sheldon, 2013).

There are a number of limitations with both of these studies. Primarily, neither study focused specifically on the role of SNSs sites; rather they both looked at a range of Internet uses by the participants and the measures were generally broad, self-reported and retrospective. As such, neither study gained an insight into real-time Internet and SNSs usage, which would have helped develop a more in-depth understanding of the pattern of Internet use amongst participants. Indeed, Tiggemann and Slater (2013) proposed the development of more sophisticated means of obtaining information on participants' Internet use, which in turn would aid with the development of more specific research objectives and precise measures.

Neither study made allowance for the huge variety in online content that its participants may or may not have accessed. Whilst participants' primary use of the Internet was to access sites via the search engine Google in the 2010 study, no provision was made to account for the various uses of the site. For instance, it was not specified where participants went through the search engine, and whether the follow-on content of their searches was appearance-related in nature. Furthermore, when considering SNSs, neither study accounted for the vast possibility of uses of Facebook. From private messaging, status updates, chatting, writing on one another's wall, looking at others' profiles, sharing and posting things of interest, viewing and commenting on photos and videos, Facebook is a diverse application. As such, this needs to be considered when measuring participant time spent using these sites. Given that the participants could be doing any number of things, time measurement is relatively uninformative. Though these studies provide a helpful first investigation into the role of the Internet in body image, they both lack specificity in terms of the participants' use of SNSs. A more targeted approach might have lent weight and focus to their findings, giving a more detailed understanding of the particulars of SNSs and their role in body image, as well as pinpointing areas for further research.

Methodologically speaking, both studies are correlational in nature, which does not account for any sort of causality. Whilst results demonstrate a link between Internet use and body image concern, it cannot be concluded that such use has increased participants' concern. Indeed, Meier and Gray (2014) point out that it might be the case that the inverse is true; that is, those with higher body image concerns spend more time online looking at image- focused content. Theoretically speaking, these papers fall short of the in-depth exploration of their theoretical underpinnings, and cite a range of models as the basis of their understanding and rationale. Tiggemann and Miller (2010) reference sociocultural theory as the most accepted framework for understanding body dissatisfaction and disordered eating (Thompson et al., 1999). In an extension of this

work, Tiggemann and Slater (2013) also make reference to sociocultural theory (Thompson et al., 1999), but offer no further exploration of this theory in terms of their proposal or findings.

To note, neither study makes any reference to OT, nor the mechanisms of said theory, rather positioning themselves under sociocultural theory (Thompson et al., 1999). Given the level of research that supports the theory of the media's harmful impact on body image (Tiggemann, 2005; Morry & Staska, 2001; Aubrey, 2006), it is interesting that neither study references this as part of its framework for understanding, as it could have served to lend weight to their findings and contribute to directions for future research.

In contrast to these studies, Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian and Halliwell (2015a) sought to specifically establish predictors for self-objectification in young women, speculating that self-objectification is associated with media use as it provokes appearance comparison between other women we encounter. The researchers' aim was three-fold. First, to investigate the relationship between the media (Internet, Facebook, television, music videos and fashion magazines) and self-objectification in young women; second, to see if general appearance comparisons mediated this relationship, and, finally, to see if more specific appearance comparisons (to friends, family and celebrities) mediated the relationship between Facebook and self-objectification. The design was cross-sectional in nature, asking participants to fill out a series of self-report measures relating to media use, appearance comparison, self-objectification and other appearance-related measures.

In support of Vandenbosch and Eggermont's findings (2012), magazines and Facebook were positively correlated with self-objectification, whilst the other variables were not. General appearance comparison and appearance comparison to peers both mediated the relationship between Facebook and self-objectification, demonstrating the potential role of SNSs in body image disturbance. Of interest, researchers highlighted the unique opportunity that Facebook provides to make appearance comparisons with ourselves. That is, users are able to look at pictures of themselves on Facebook posted in the past, and compare their current self to these images. Researchers found that Facebook use was positively correlated with appearance comparison to past pictures of the self. It was a relatively weak relationship, however, and they hypothesised that this was because photos of ourselves may be easier to replicate, and thus seem more attainable, in comparison to those of our peers. The study provides a new perspective on ways in which new media can play a role in body image disturbance, and this deserves further

attention (Fardouly et al., 2015a).

Limitations of this study are similar to those already mentioned. Again, a relatively small, homogenous sample was used of female university students, from a psychology department. Given that all participants were educated to university level and from the same department for convenience, further studies would benefit from utilising a larger, more diverse sample. Methodologically speaking, a correlation means that it is not possible to infer any causality. Thus, it is not possible to say whether time spent on Facebook causes self-objectification, or whether those who already have a high level of preoccupation with shape and weight spend more time online, viewing image-focused content. Once again, this study did not specify the type of media its participants were engaging with, rather quoting another study (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012) in saying that young women spend 40% their time on SNSs looking at image-related content. As such, it was again impossible to specify where participants 'go' when they are online, and what they are looking at. However, it is important to note that the study found a correlation between appearance comparison with peers and self-objectification. This is significant, in that this study actually specifies an aspect of SNSs and its role in the context of body image. As such, these findings certainly warrant further experimental research in this respect (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

Finally, it is worth noting that all studies thus far included only Facebook in their research, despite the availability of other SNSs which are more image focused. Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis and Kruck (2012) note that women are more likely to upload pictures onto Facebook of their face, rather than ones that feature their bodies. The implications of these photos in terms of OT are unclear. Fardouly et al. (2015a) suggest that further research should consider whether facial comparison and body comparison have different effects on girls and women, and how this fits with our theoretical understanding of body image.

Of note theoretically, Vandenbosch and Eggermont's 2012 paper took its theoretical lead from Moradi (2010), in conducting research which sought to not only investigate the impact of media and SNSs on adolescent body image, but to also develop body image theories.
The authors argue that self-objectification should not be seen as a singular process but rather a multidimensional one which is made up of self-objectification, body surveillance and internalisation. In respect of this, they sought to explore the relationship between sexually objectifying media and the multidimensional process of internalisation, self-

objectification and body surveillance (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). A total of 1,513 participants, aged between 13 and 18, took part in the study, which required them to fill in questionnaires relating to their exposure to sexually objectifying media and levels of self-objectification, body surveillance and thin internalisation. Results presented a range of findings in terms of the constructs of body image theory in demonstrating that internalisation of beauty ideals acts as the pivot between media exposure on the one hand, and self-objectification and body surveillance on the other hand (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). Moreover, as body surveillance was seldom related directly to media exposure, the researchers suggested that the cognitive aspects of the process – that is, internalisation and self-objectification upon exposure to sexually objectifying media – precede the behavioural aspect of the process: body surveillance (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012).

In relation to the current study, however, perhaps the most salient aspect of the findings was that body surveillance – the active manifestation of self-objectification (Calogero, 2010, p.31) – was directly related *only* to social networking sites. The researchers suggest that indeed it is not just exposure to sexually objectifying images in general that can lead to body surveillance, but specifically when our attention is focused on ourselves, for instance, in posting pictures (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). This raises a particularly pertinent question with regard to SNSs which has yet to be addressed, in that there is reason to examine the function of posting pictures on SNSs, just as much as looking at photos of others. Given that the arrival of SNSs has given us the platform upon which to share pictures of ourselves and latterly put ourselves in a position to being objectified, this warrants further investigation.

As with previous studies, this one has its own limitations. Once again, the cross-sectional design does not enable any exploration of causality, so inferences in this respect are purely speculative at this point. Again, as the study used self-report questionnaires, the responses are open to participant bias or inaccuracy, given that they are not made in real time or observed under experimental conditions. Nevertheless, this paper builds on previous literature examining the role of media in body image, extending this to include SNSs whilst also proposing developments to our understanding of OT as a whole.

There are a range of other early studies that are correlational in nature and support the finding that there is a relationship between the use of SNSs and body image disturbance: Fardouly and Vartanian (2015); de Vries, Peter, Nikken, and Graad (2015); Kim and Chock (2015); Meier and Grey (2014) to name but a few. Despite the various

limitations of these studies – predominantly that correlational approaches cannot infer causality – they form an important inroad into bridging the gap between research on traditional media, body image, and technological advances. The findings support the extensive literature investigating traditional media's correlation with sexual objectification, including television (Aubrey, 2006) and magazines promoting female standards of beauty (Morry & Staska, 2001). To the researchers' credit, the studies depicted do acknowledge the limitations of their work and recommend further research that is either longitudinal, content analysis or experimental in nature in order to gain a useful insight into causality.

1.5.2. Experimental research

In development of existing correlational research, several experimental studies sought to investigate if any causality between SNSs and body image disturbance could be identified empirically. Experimental research of this nature is hard to do well, as capturing the fluctuating and varied nature of Facebook in a controlled environment is a challenge (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Several studies with experimental designs make advancements in terms of the other methodological weaknesses of the aforementioned pieces of research. Mabe, Forney and Keel (2014) asked participants to spend 20 minutes on their Facebook account, after which they answered questionnaires relating to weight and shape preoccupation, eating attitudes and state anxiety; these were questionnaires also completed before Facebook exposure. A control group was used, who viewed Internet material matching the text and photographic content of Facebook, but with no exposure to content relating to the human body. Researchers hypothesised that not only would there be a positive correlation between increased Facebook use and higher symptoms of disordered eating, but that the use of Facebook would cause momentary increases in body dissatisfaction, urges to exercise, and anxiety.

Consistent with the previous findings of Tiggemann and Slater (2013), Mabe et al. (2014) found a small but significant correlation between use of Facebook and levels of disordered eating in samples of college-aged women. Though weight and shape preoccupation did decrease for both groups after viewing online content, it decreased less for those who had viewed Facebook compared to the control content, suggesting that that the use of Facebook may contribute more than other websites to weight shape concerns. Both weight and shape concerns can be considered as risk factors for EDs (Mabe et al., 2014). The researchers note that these effects were measured after just 20 minutes in a laboratory setting. Given that the global average in time that we spend

on social media is estimated to have risen in 2017 to over 2 hours per day (33% of which time is spent on SNSs), and that the most frequent users are women and younger groups (Young, 2017), there must be concern as to how these findings would translate into everyday life.

Next, Fardouly, Diedrichs, Vartanian and Halliwell (2015b) sought to determine whether a brief exposure to Facebook would lead to both body dissatisfaction as well as hair, skin and face-related concerns. Secondly, it sought to determine whether this exposure differed to that of viewing an online magazine which was not appearance focused. No hypothesis was made in relation to Facebook vs. the online magazine (Fardouly et al., 2015b).

Interestingly, Facebook exposure did not cause dissatisfaction with body image for participants, though those who were concerned with their appearance reported a greater desire to change things about their face, skin or hair. Researchers hypothesised the reasoning for this to be two-fold. First, that women upload more portrait photos on Facebook (that is, of our heads and faces) than shots of their whole bodies (Haferkampf et al., 2012) and secondly, that there are a range of body types represented on Facebook, in comparison to online fashion sites, where a thin ideal is propagated. Indeed, results showed that exposure to these websites led to more weight and shape discrepancy in participants (Fardouly et al., 2015b).

Once again, there are a number of methodological weaknesses with these studies. As with some of the correlational studies, neither of the experimental studies limited, encouraged nor controlled the content of what their participants looked at whilst on Facebook. Consequently, there can be no certainty in whether or not participants were viewing image-focused content. Given the diverse array of applications and actions on Facebook, the variety of pages its users follow and like, and the variety of connections with friends and family available, participants could have encountered any nature of content that had little or nothing to do with appearance. Moreover, given the brief nature of these experimental conditions – participants spent just 10-20 minutes viewing Facebook – any effect of viewing content which might have caused body dissatisfaction may have been limited (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016). Time spent on SNSs has risen over the last five years from 1 hour and 30 minutes to over 2 hours (Young, 2017), so such a small amount of time spent on Facebook may not have been substantial enough to have incurred an effect. Whilst both studies were ecologically valid in that they were close to a true reflection of the real-world Facebook activities of the participants, this also leaves much of their encounters to chance, in that participants may not have been

exposed to image focussed content, and so results might not provide an accurate reflection of whether and to what extent appearance-based images on SNSs can impact body image disturbance.

Another significant limitation of the research is that it was limited to Facebook only. Whilst the findings are both valid and important, in that body dissatisfaction is linked to EDs (Peat & Muehlenkamp, 2011) and depression in young women (Paxton, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, & Eisenberg, 2006), there is further room for investigation. Other SNSs have grown rapidly in use and popularity, particularly Instagram. As of August 2017, it has 700 million monthly users, 68% of whom are female. In comparison, Facebook has a more balanced ratio of male to female users, with a reported 53% falling into the latter group (Aslam, 2017). Given these statistics, and that Instagram is a platform with the primary purpose of sharing photos, making it inherently more visual in content than Facebook, it would seem that further investigation is warranted (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2016).

In answer to this gap in the research, Fardouly, Willburger and Vartanian (2017) designed a correlational study, which primarily sought to establish whether or not there was a relationship between the use of Instagram and both body image concern and self-objectification. Beyond this, researchers tested to see whether or not both general appearance comparison and comparison to specific target groups mediated this relationship. This study also added viewing 'fitspiration' images into the procedure. Such images purport to encourage and motivate viewers to engage in healthy, active lifestyles through eating and exercising. The women in the photos typically meet societal standards of beauty, and feature toned, slim women (Simpson & Mazzeo, 2016). Researchers aimed to see if there was a relationship between these images and body image concern/self-objectification, whilst also testing whether the viewing of specific fitspiration images mediated any relationship (Fardouly et al., 2017). To note, research was consistent with previous literature in that there was a positive correlation between Instagram and self-objectification.

The studies thus far provide the beginnings of valuable insight into understanding the role of SNSs in adolescent and young women's body image. Nevertheless, given the multitude of uses and applications available in terms of SNSs, there are a number of weaknesses as a whole, which need to be addressed. To begin with, a major aspect of SNSs, aside from looking at others' photos, is the opportunity to post photos of ourselves.

1.6. Selfies

The 'selfie' phenomenon has grown exponentially in the last few years along with the development of the technology with which to take and upload photos, earning it Oxford Dictionary's word of the year in 2013 (Word of the Year 2013). It has become so ingrained in popular culture and beyond that we see it everywhere; from A-listers grouping together at the Oscars to become the most retweeted entertainment tweet of the year (Jarvey, 2014) to the then-President Obama's selfie with David Cameron and the Danish Prime Minister at Nelson Mandela's funeral going viral (Soal, 2013). Of course, it is not just celebrities who post pictures. An average of 95 million photos are posted to Instagram each day (Lister, 2017), with an estimated 1,000 selfies being posted every second (Galuppo, 2017).

Research appears to have largely focused on girls and women as *receptors* of social media rather than creators, and there is a limited amount of research into how people manipulate and post images of themselves on SNSs (Ridgway & Clayton, 2016). Given that SNSs have provided us with the power to manage and curate a version of ourselves that we have never had access to before, it seems necessary that investigating how we post photos of ourselves should match research which explores the impact of looking at photos of others.

Within the context of OT (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), SNSs provides a platform from which its users can present themselves to a large body of people for evaluation. Given that we know from existing research that when people anticipate an audience, they are more likely to self-objectify (Quinn, Kallen & Cathey 2006; Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998), it seems reasonable to hypothesise that given a platform upon which we can manipulate, re-take, edit and share photographs of ourselves intended for a mass audience, self-objectification might be part of this process. Moreover, given that we know that photo based activities, rather than Facebook use in general, is correlated with a drive for thinness, thin internalisation and self-objectification, there is a necessity to investigate the specific aspects of photo sharing that might lead to body image disturbance.

In relation to this, de Vries and Peter (2013) sought to determine whether or not portraying the self, for others online, leads to self-objectification. Secondly, the researchers looked to establish whether or not exposure to 'traditional' objectifying content (for instance, scantily dressed models) would make the ideas around objectification more cognitively accessible, therefore moderating the effect of online self-

portrayal on self-objectification (de Vries & Peter, 2013). Researchers designed an experiment in which participants were exposed to either a neutral or sexually objectifying piece of advertising. Following this, they were asked to create an online profile in which they had to describe themselves in five sentences and create an avatar of themselves, including assigning body type and clothing. They were either told that no one would see it, or that an unknown group of people would see it (so as to mimic the scenario of posting a photo online, to an unknown audience).

As noted, the hypothesis was two-fold: firstly, that portraying the self to others in an online space promotes self-objectification, and that this is boosted by being exposed to sexually objectifying content. Both hypotheses were validated by the results, providing a necessary rationale for further work to be done, taking into account the recent development of the media and how women are now the creators and producers of content, as well as the audience. Moreover, results demonstrated that objectifying content can have an impact on our self-objectification.

This study is not without its limitations. Though experimental in nature, its ecological validity can be called into question, given that participants were not posting real-life pictures of themselves in which the stakes would arguably have been higher and the levels of self-objectification might have been different. Moreover, being exposed to one advert which is sexually objectifying in nature does not account for the range of other things on SNSs which might contribute to the women's own self-objectification. For instance, photos of celebrities, photos of peers, comments from other users, to name but a few. Similarly, the researchers point out that the study does not explicitly demonstrate that it is the thought of others viewing their profiles that leads to their self-objectification, and that a formalised mediating process would be needed to determine this with any certainty.

Despite these shortcomings, the findings are compelling in that they start making an inroad into the other side of social media; that is, girls and women as the producers of media, engaging with a platform that potentially facilitates the process of self-objectification in an entirely new way. Naturally, with this, new territories become apparent. With the ability to share photos with a mass crowd, curating photos for an audience, we also have the ability to manipulate and alter these images. Whilst in face-to-face meetings with those around us our appearance is somewhat at the mercy of reality, SNSs provide a space where we can alter this.

McLean, Paxton, Wertheim and Masters, (2015) focused on this specific aspect of

SNSs, seeking to establish the relationship between photo sharing, body dissatisfaction and the over-evaluation of shape and weight in adolescent girls. Secondly, they specifically looked to determine how both photo investment, and photo mutilation, might play a role in body image and eating concerns. The hypothesis was that both the sharing and manipulation would play a role in body dissatisfaction, internalisation of the thin ideal, over-evaluation of weight and shape, and dietary restraint. Participants – 101 adolescent girls – were asked to complete questionnaires relating to media exposure; photo activity; selfie-taking frequency; selfie sharing; photo investment; photo manipulation; body image; dietary restraint and internalisation of the thin ideal. Results from the measures supported researchers' hypotheses, and three interpretations were proposed in response to this. Again, a correlational study cannot infer causation; thus, researchers posit that it is possible that girls with higher body-related concerns spend more time engaging in social media activities that are appearance focused. Secondly, that presenting a finished 'look' to others, through photographs, might promote a self-scrutiny that leads to body concerns in a way that might not happen when the engagement with the media source is more passive. Finally, they posit that those with body image concerns seek gratification to reassure their concerns, and this is done through the use of SNSs and posting photos (McLean et al., 2015).

As well as the study being unable to infer any causation, neither does it enable us to conclude whether or not engagement with SNSs and the posting and manipulation of photos acts is simply a maintenance factor for body image disturbance, or if the platform poses a risk to its vulnerable users. Whilst this study makes theoretical reference to sociocultural theories and the tripartite influence model as a rationale for investigating this aspect of media and body image (Keery et al., 2004), further studies might want to extend this theoretical base to OT. Given that there is evidence that self-objectification can predict photo editing of the self before posting online in men (Fox & Rooney, 2015), and that we know that self-objectification can also lead to a host of negative experiences (Morry & Staska, 2001; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008; Prichard & Tiggemann, 2012), this relationship warrants investigation. Finally, the study fails to consider how others' manipulated photos might impact the viewer or how social comparison to others' unrealistic images might impact one's own body image.

Kleemans, Daalmans, Carbaat and Anschütz's (2016) study addresses various gaps in the existing literature, examining whether or not manipulated images – specifically on Instagram – have an impact on adolescent girls' body image. Moreover, researchers identified the unique opportunity that social media provides to make peer comparison (peers being likely to be deemed more similar to themselves than a celebrity; Miller,

Turnbull & McFarland, 1988), and hypothesised that exposure to manipulated images of peers would result in lower body satisfaction than would be the case with original photos. Researchers supported this hypothesis, whilst also finding that girls with a higher tendency to make social comparisons were more vulnerable to negative effects of the original photos, and to the manipulated photos, which promoted even lower body satisfaction. Participants were presented with ten 'selfies' of a young woman who might 'fit the mould' of a young, Dutch, social media user, which were either manipulated (impurities, such as eye bags, were removed, whilst the legs and waist were reformatted to be slimmer) or in their original, untouched format. Participants were then asked to complete questionnaires on body comparison and social comparison (Kleemans et al., 2016). Results supported previous findings that exposure to a thin ideal on social media can have a negative effect on body image (Fardouly & Vartanian, 2015).

This study provides a useful insight not only into Instagram-specific images that have been manipulated and also goes some way to considering the impact specifically of peer images, rather than those of women used in advertising or celebrities. Nonetheless, the approach was not without its shortcomings as the image used in the study was not a known peer to any of the participants, instead chosen for how researchers imagined a peer of the participants might look. Further research should look to consider how adolescents and young women interact with legitimate photos of their peers in order to gain a more accurate understanding of what – if any – effect this has on them. Moreover, participants were only briefly exposed to the photos in question. Given the nature of SNSs, now that the majority of people have constant access to their phones, and the way in which Instagram lends itself to mindlessly scrolling through images at any time, research that considers the effects of being exposed to manipulated images on a more ongoing basis would be recommended.

A final note on an overall flaw in quantitative studies. Much of the research thus far explored assumes a causative relationship, in which the viewer is passive. These studies referred to are experimental and positivist in nature: an environment is created in which women view body-imaged focussed media, and their subsequent body dissatisfaction is recorded or measured. However, Blood (2005) points out that this notion of causality is flawed, in that complex social processes are reduced to controllable and measurable variables, finding causal explanations for their findings (p.35). Experimental research assumes a position in which scientific knowledge is created, and in this instance a complete understanding of body image disturbance is (apparently) achieved. However, positivist, empirical approaches fail to consider participants' individual and unique characteristics and traits. As Blood points out, there is a perceptual input (in this instance, magazine images)

and a produced output (viewer's measurable responses on psychological scales) (p.35). There is a cause and effect, yet no comment on the social context. Considering a social constructionist ontological standpoint in relation to this, Blood notes that the person, body and world are not fixed entities and identity is multi-faceted. Though each participant is assumed to have an individual pathology in relation to body image problems, social context is not considered and the viewer having a role – that is, actively negotiating their relationship with what is viewed within this social context – is disregarded. Herein lies a fundamental flaw of the positivist body of research that makes up the bulk of the current literature and further indicates the need for qualitative approaches, which is addressed later in this chapter.

1.7. Qualitative Research

The quantitative research presented thus far forms the bulk of the research. Nevertheless, inroads have been made into qualitative approaches. Chua and Chang (2016) explored the ways in which teenage girls recount the relationship between self-presentation and peer comparison on SNSs, in the context of beauty. Researchers point out that teenage yearsare a transitionary period, in which young girls are susceptible to feeling self-conscious and anxious about how other people perceive them. Whilst this has been already demonstrated in existing literature (Rosenbaum, 1993), researchers instead point out that the interactive natures of SNSs provide a new platform 'in which self-representation and peer influence interact to co-construct the standards of beauty' (Meier & Grey, 2014, as cited in Chua & Chang, 2016, p. 190). Informed by Goffman's (1959) theory of self-presentation, which posits that people adopt 'stage behaviour' (the performance in front of others) and 'backstage behaviour' which is constituted by the private preparation for presenting a good image to other. Under the framework of social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) which posits that we evaluate ourselves and establish a sense of self-understanding through comparison to others – and in this instance, through peer comparison - researchers sought to establish how teenage girls narrate their engagement in self-presentation on SNSs, and how teenage girls depict this self-presentation (Chau & Chang, 2016).

Researchers were based in Singapore and interviewed 24 participants between the ages of 12 and 16, who all engaged in selfie posting. Interviews were analysed independently via open coding by both authors and then compared results, settling on final themes and sub- themes. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion.

The first main theme that was established was 'presentation of edited beauty'. Researchers found that participants generally evaluated their peers through physical

appraisals, referring to them as 'pretty' or 'slim'. These standards were generally defined as being informed by popular-culture and recreated by participants and their peers on SNS, who would engage in acts of comparison to one another. Furthermore, participants framed the posting, editing and extensive manipulation of selfies as a means with which to garner positive feedback from peers (Chau & Chang, 2016).

The second theme was 'feedback from peers', which demonstrated that peers acted as comparison targets in terms of how participants presented themselves. Participants described comparing their amount of 'likes' on Instagram to peers who they considered prettier, as well as those with fewer likes than themselves in an act of downward social comparison (Festinger, 1954). Most participants recognised negative effects from peer comparison which, motivated by low self-esteem, could leave them feeling worse. The researchers point out that whist the findings replicate what occurs with self-presentation and peer comparison in the real world, this process is enhanced by the 'accessibility, intensity and dynamics' of the virtual world (Chua & Chang, 2016, p. 195).

This study holds a number of important strengths. Firstly, the methodological approach makes an important inroad into bridging the gap between quantitative and qualitative approaches in this area. Whilst quantitative studies have formed an important basis of understanding in the context of SNSs, body image and girls and young women, this study complements existing literature by giving participants the space to explore how they understand their experiences. Moreover, the study was designed to recruit a variety of participants, meaning that results are more generalisable to a wider context (Braun & Clarke, 2013). By adopting a qualitative methodology, researchers were able to access a certain nuance and level of complexity that is not necessarily reached by quantitative approaches, which do not champion participant voices. In this, researchers were able to draw out how upwards social comparison can hold potential negative consequences in a vulnerable population, enhanced by the accessibility of SNSs. Furthermore, the qualitative approach lends weight and further, more nuanced understanding to existing theoretical frameworks which have typical informed quantitative research in this area of study, which can hold further clinical implications – for instance, highlighting the interplay of low self-esteem, peer comparison and online photo editing (Chau & Chang, 2016). Researchers suggest practical approaches to help girls manage these pressures.

The study also contains a number of limitations. Whilst the researchers note that they use open coding to analyse data, they do not expand further on their methodical approach to the research, and whether this is part of a wider methodology (for instance,

grounded theory). Researchers make no mention of their philosophical underpinnings. By employing a qualitative approach, where researcher interpretation makes up a significant portion of the analysis process, researchers are essentially constructing meaning from participants through a frame of knowledge, which needs to be illustrated in a transparent way (Braun & Clarke 2006; 2013). Furthermore, it is suggested that when a research team is conducting open coding, it should be done in a group environment to start with, as problems can arise when it takes place separately (Sarker, Lau, & Sahay 2000). Nonetheless, researchers in this study opted to code separately, later comparing findings. There is a lack of reflexivity of the research process and as such, a lack of clarity as to why various methodological decisions were taken.

Theoretically speaking, the study fails to take into account alternative theories which might lend weight and a further dynamic to the findings. For instance, researchers note how participants evaluate their peers in terms of their physical attributes, rather than evaluating them by their individual dynamics as a person. These are key ideas of OT (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and to incorporate this theory into the discussion could lend further weight to the findings. Similarly, researchers repeatedly refer to beauty as being constructed, and this beauty being of particular importance. This notion has long been particular interest to feminine scholars (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). However, the study makes no mention of feminist discourse and the wider social context in respect of this, which could have added a further, relevant aspect to the findings, considering the importance participants placed on physical desirability

Though there is a significant amount of research and data to support the theory that the media and SNSs can have a negative relationship and impact on body image, and indeed the evidence presented thus far is in support of this, the variables in these studies are typically to do with size and shape (i.e. 'thin') rather than to do with an overall look or image (e.g. 'sexy'). However, evidence demonstrates that teenagers can see, and emulate, acts of sexiness on in media outlets (Renold & Ringrose, 2011) and it is pointed out by Daniels & Zurbriggen (2016) that girls and young women are caught in a contradiction, simultaneously surrounded by the cultural pressure to embody sexiness whilst facing reprimands if they do so. Their 2016 study sought to better understand participants' attitudes towards sexualised behaviour on SNSs. Participants were asked to complete an online survey, followed by taking part in an interview of five questions with a member of the research team. Screenshots of participants' Facebook profile pictures were also taken (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016).

Overall, participants demonstrated negative attitudes to displays of sexuality on

Facebook. Participants disapproved of posting any photos in lingerie, and only felt certain photos posted in swimwear were acceptable, if a range of conditions were met. There was a commonality amongst participants in that the appraisal of those who posted sexy pictures was generally negative ('slut', 'whore' and 'skank' were common descriptors) and researchers remarked on the fact that none of the participants tapped into how posting sexualised photos might be empowering for women (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016). This is interesting, given that this debate is commonly held at the moment – not just in academic spaces that might not be accessed by all participants – but frequently in the domains of popular culture, more likely to be frequented by teens and young women. Emily Ratajkowsk (famously, of the 'Blurred Lines' video); Kim Kardashian-West (indeed, most of the Kardashian/Jenner clan) and Lena Dunham, to name but a few, have routinely addressed the Madonna/Whore dichotomy.

Finally, younger participants were more vocal in their disapproval of their peers expressing sexuality, whilst the older participants in the study were able to offer a balanced perspective. Researchers suggest this might be in part due to the ability to reflect and evaluate evidence being a cognitive ability that develops over the teenage years, and one which might be more accessible to the older participants in the study (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016). Older participants were able to consider multiple perspectives of an argument, whilst the younger ones were typically more rigid in their views. Interestingly, researchers did not consider the impact of participants' age on their confidence or level of sexual experience, and how this might have playing into the way in which they evaluated others expressing their sexuality. Given that participants who were in their twenties demonstrated more balanced perspectives on these expressions, seeking to understand this in the context of participants' social and development, as well as their cognitive development, may have broadened the perspective of the discussion.

This study provides an alternative perspective to the dominant research on SNSs and body image. The similarities in themes identify that teens and young women typically have negative attitudes towards overt displays of sexuality. Valenti (2010) points out how, in US culture, purity is seen as intrinsically linked to a girl or woman's moral fibre and value and the findings of this research lend weight to the long-held notion that a woman's morality is tied to her sexual status (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016). However, though the views of participants appeared strongly held, the style of questioning may have inadvertently contributed to this in its phrasing. For instance, 'do you think it's ok to post a photo of yourself in a swimsuit', and 'what is your opinion of another girl/young woman who would post a profile photo of herself in her underwear' are examples of the style of questioning (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016). It might be argued that these

questions are both closed and loaded, in that they are open to a 'yes' or 'no' response, and that the phrasing suggests that there is, in fact, something 'not-OK' about posting the sorts of photos in question. Agee (2009) points out that researchers often come to a study with an assumption already in place, and can write leading questions that are based around those expectations. In the interest of avoiding bias and maintaining credibility, questions in a qualitative study must be open and not leading (Agee, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2013).

There are a range of other limitations with this study. There was lack of diversity in the participants' social class, ethnicity and sexuality. Whilst a homogeneous sample might allow for stronger, more defined themes, a heterogeneous sample means that researchers are more able to generalise findings, rather than just presenting those that are specific to one group or context (Robinson, 2014). Moreover, the researchers make no reference to their philosophical underpinnings; that is, there is no reference to either their epistemological or ontological standpoint. Though Thematic analysis (TA) is a flexible approach in that it can be applied across a range of paradigms, it is still important that researchers make their epistemological positioning and assumptions clear (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). In qualitative research, it is a common criticism that researchers do not make this explicit, instead omitting the 'how' and 'why' of their research (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Whilst the researchers of this study note that their approach is inductive – that is, data driven and not coded into a pre-existing theoretical frame – proponents of this approach are clear that despite the methodological freedom, researchers cannot code in an 'epistemological vacuum' and must make their standpoint clear (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.12). Indeed, the researchers note that the coding was done by undergraduate research assistants rather than themselves. As such, there is a lack of ongoing reflexivity throughout the paper and no transparency as to why various decisions were made throughout the analytic process, other than saying that any disagreements during the coding process were resolved through discussion.

1.8. Qualitative Research and Sexual Objectification

Whilst existing qualitative research on SNSs and body image is currently limited, it is also necessary to point out that there is existing literature into the experiences of women who have experienced sexual objectification. Moffitt and Szymanski's (2010) study sought to explore a contextual understanding of women's experience of objectification – in this instance, the restaurant environment. Using OT as a framework, researchers point out that not all women are affected equally by it, and that little attempt has been

made to understand the specific sub-cultures in which sexual objectification occurs, nor the complex and multifaceted experience of the process (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2010). The study firmly positions itself within a feminist paradigm, and took the form of semi-structured interviews, whilst observational data was gathered by various observation sessions. Results produced a range of themes, from 'counterfeit intimacy' (in which a falsely close relationship with male customers existed) and 'resistance strategies' (employing methods to ensure their own safety) to 'ambivalence', in which a significant portion of the women interviewed expressed ambivalence towards working in the restaurant environment. Of note, every single woman interviewed described experiences of being sexually objectified, and in turn recounted the negative emotions that corresponded with this, such as disgust, shame, guilt and anxiety. Moreover, in keeping with OT, several participants reported sadness and depressed mood (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2010). However, to balance these findings some participants reflected that working in a sexually objectifying environment actually boosted their self-esteem and confidence, helping them to feel more able to approach people and talk with more self-assurance.

This study is valuable in furthering our understanding of women's experience of sexual objectification with a qualitative approach; the use of semi-structured interviews means the approach is not reductionist in communicating their experience; participants were given ample space to talk, whilst the researchers were clear on their feminist paradigm in the approach and their desire to further understand the experience of women and contribute research which might work towards their protection.

Despite the inherent values to this research, the study nonetheless provides a relatively narrow view of sexual objectification experiences in terms of its environment. Researchers chose Hooters as their location, which is perhaps distinctive amongst restaurants in that waitresses who work there are encouraged to amplify their sexuality (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2010). Whilst it is vital to stress here that this is *not* an unusual thing for women to be required to do in everyday life in order to 'get by', it might be argued that Hooters is an environment that encourages sexualised behaviour more so than others. As such, there is ample space for other studies to explore whether these qualitative results translate into other environments more generalisable to other women.

Qualitative research is concerned with 'how people make sense of the world and how they experience events' (Willig, 2013, p. 8). Given the nuance, complexities and variation in girls' and young women's experience of the representations of women's bodies in online spaces, the field could benefit from more research which places the

participants' experience and understanding at the forefront of its agenda. Rather than quantifying participants' experience, qualitative analysis might provide space for new ideas to be generated in response to the rapidly changing and evolving world of SNSs. Though empirical research has routinely supported the link between self-objectification and adverse, psychological outcomes (Moradi & Huang, 2008), these studies lack the capacity to delve deeper into the experience of girls and women who experience sexual and self-objectification (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2010).

1.9. 'Love Your Body' Discourse

To provide some balance to this literature review, it is worth acknowledging that the research has been heavy on the possible negative effects of SNSs – both the viewing and sharing of images. However, given the prevalence of the phenomenon of online photo sharing, it stands to reason that there are positive gains for those who engage in this activity. Livingstone (2008) points out that online spaces which accommodate displays of identity have both risks and opportunities. However, the majority of available research instead focuses on the possible negative implications for girls' and women's body image. Whether positioned under sociocultural theories (Thompson et al., 1999) or OT, the overall implications are that the impact on our body image is negative. Whilst this is important, evidence-based research, there is another narrative to be heard, which is of body positivity and self-empowerment.

Given the 'love your body' (LYB) discourse that has emerged over the last decade, in part due to the growth in social media (Messaris, 2012), the lack of research on this is intriguing. Responding to the overwhelming amount of unnatural, unrealistic and often unhealthy bodies that are elevated to such levels of desirability in both traditional and online media, LYB discourse makes use of a new platform in which the rhetoric can be re-claimed, and women's bodies celebrated in whatever size and shape they come. Gill and Elias (2014) point out that for women, who are used to viewing the bodies of both themselves and others in terms of 'flaws' and 'battles', a discourse that instead invites us to interrupt the hostile, ongoing and pervasive judgement of women's bodies is surely welcome. Moreover, given that we know that the bodies we see in the media and online can have a profound effect on the girls and young women that view them, there is a significant argument for investigating how the role of LYB discourse might be able to counterbalance this.

It is important to acknowledge that this is not a straightforward discussion, and there are several different discourses for young women to draw on in relation to their bodies. As

well as the LYB discourse – often propagated for commercial gain in advertising campaigns in which companies such as Dove utilise the mantra and reassure women they are beautiful the way they are (Gill & Elias, 2014) – Gill (2009) argues that women are now invited to take part in their re-sexualistation; a response to feminist critiques in which women are sexually autonomous and empowered, all the while being encouraged to be themselves and authentic. Essentially, heterosexual women are encouraged to embrace who they are – free, empowered and agents of their own sexuality – in an act of sexual subjectification (that is, making themselves a sexual object) rather than objectification (in which they are *made* a sexual object by another).

On the surface, this is perhaps an empowering message. No longer do women have to be looked at – they can reclaim their bodies and own their sexuality, to applause rather than shame. However, the women in the most prolific of these sexually agentic images are, typically, ones who 'fit' within the heteronormative box of being slim and conventionally attractive. Debate is rife in feminist circles and popular culture as to whether this is *truly* empowerment, when so many women (who don't fit into the straight/cis/predominantly white/slim category) are still routinely excluded from the conversation. Whilst Emily Ratajkowski – model, actress, frequent Instagram poster and contributor to the discussion – remarks that '"sexy" is a kind of beauty, a kind of self-expression, one that is to be celebrated, one that is wonderfully female', and reports being frequently shamed for her sexuality (Ratajkowski, 2016), one might question whether her ongoing self-publication of her sexuality is empowering for women who do not look like her. Gill (2009) suggests that this form of representation reveals a higher, or deeper form of exploitation than objectification, in that women are trained to believe their subjectification is their own choice and that something (i.e. objectification) is not being done 'to' them, when in reality they still remain situated within the realms of male desire.

It would be relevant here to mention the impact of neo-liberal thinking on sexuality and women's bodies, in order to further situate this issue of sexual subjectification within the context of feminist debates. Chen (2013) points out that neoliberalism has been reflected in popular culture by a celebration of consumption and individual gratification, ultimately embodied by the 'empowered, assertive, pleasure-seeking woman of sexual and financial agency' (p.441). With this, the focus apparently shifts from women being objects of male desire, to women as owners of their own bodies, assertively seeking their own pleasure and leading a cosmopolitan, empowered, and self-sufficient lifestyle. This new femininity also sees a shift in the debates around female bodies and sexuality; bodies and images that were once required to be virginal, pure and submissive are now required to be

knowledgeable and sexually 'up for it'. However, Harvey and Gill (2013) note that within this shift, women are still required to maintain the boundaries of sexual monogamy. That is, they are required to embody both a performative, sexual being who makes the choice to be so for her own pleasure, but who is also 'sensitive to the male needs and fears' (p.64). The authors further propose that this contradiction of femininity 'entangles the gains of feminism with the neoliberal incitement to constant self-improvement through hyper-consumption' (p.64).

It is a complex place to be, and women appear to have to tread a fine line between the Madonna and the whore; to be sexually aware of herself, whilst remaining within the parameters of this new femininity to avoid being a slut. Cwynar-Horta (2016) argues that women in this position who contend they are exercising individual choice are actually 'utilising the feminist ideal of female freedom to justify their non-feminist choices and silence disapproval from others' (p.53). On the other hand, our dismissal of those who exercise what they feel is their own empowerment in sexual subjectivity serves to further perpetuate a divide amongst women and relegate their decision to being part of a larger patriarchal manipulation. Harvey and Gill (2013) point out that our analysis of said sexual subjectification must not deny the power of agency and pleasure that can come with neoliberal sexual liberation, though remaining mindful that said choice and empowerment exists within tightly politicised boundaries is also paramount (p.64). To remain within the binary arguments of neo-liberal sexual empowerment as being either a puppet of patriarchal manipulation or uncomplicated emancipation is overly simplistic. Instead, as Harvey and Gill point out, we must continue to critically explore these constraints and freedom in order to work towards generating new and inclusive positive sexual representations of women.

1.10. Relevance to Counselling Psychology

This area of research deserves continued investigation and is important in the field of Counselling Psychology. BPS guidelines (2005, p. 7) state that:

'Counselling psychologists will consider at all times their responsibilities to the wider world. They will be attentive to life experiences, modes of inquiry and areas of knowledge beyond the immediate environs of counselling psychology and seek to draw on this knowledge to aid communication or understanding within and outside of their work.'

As a counselling psychologist, there is a responsibility I must consider in terms of my research and, in addition, the ethical value applicable to my chosen profession. On a

social level, it is important to understand our identity. How we are portrayed as a gender; how we portray ourselves; how we view and understand ourselves. As SNSs have evolved, so too has the capacity for self-expression. Indeed, the time of late adolescence/early adulthood is characterised as a period of emerging expression; a time in which we delve deeply into the questions of identity that arose during our teen years (Arnett, 2000). This deserves continued investigation. Previous findings tell us that exposure to objectifying material increases self-objectification, and this can have implications for well-being (Moradi & Huang, 2008). Such implications (e.g. dissatisfaction with one's body) are key predictors for eating problems (Smolak & Thompson, 2009; Perloff, 2014), depression (Peat & Muehlenkamp, 2011) and self-esteem (Wilcox & Laird, 2000).

Moreover, I identify as feminist. As such, I am mindful of the fact that feminist counselling psychology emphasises the way in which forms of social oppression – including sexism and the objectification of women – can contribute to mental health problems (Brown, 1994; Goodman et al., 2004). I remain conscious of the involvement researchers have in the development of feminist theories and feel due responsibility to contribute to our understanding of the representation of women's bodies in a complex, sometimes hostile, sometimes celebratory, environment. Moreover, the theoretical framework has contributed to our understanding of women's bodies, and the hope is that research in this field will ultimately bring about improved life experiences for women (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2011).

1.11. Rationale for the Current Study

Although research into SNSs and body image has increased over the last few years, there still remain widespread gaps in the literature that need to be addressed, in order to work towards a richer, more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon.

Given that the development of the Internet and subsequently, social media, is still a relatively recent phenomenon, research is still in its infancy. There are a variety of methodological concerns which pave the way for future research. Predominantly, research has investigated the role of Facebook specifically, rather than considering other social networking sites that are more image focused in content, such as Instagram and Snapchat, or indeed, asking participants which sites they use the most to view and post images. Recent research demonstrates that the most popular sites are those which involve posting and viewing photos and videos, with Instagram and Snapchat being the most popular – over Facebook – amongst university-aged women (Knight-McCord et al.,

2016). Therefore, there is a need for less restrictive research which does not limit its focus to specific social networking sites but allows participants to give an account of their online photo sharing, according to their site preference.

Recent research has also fallen short in terms of accurately replicating the authentic conditions in which users access social media and the subsequent role this might have in body image. Though the existing literature goes some way to creating conditions in which to test whether or not images do have an impact on participants, quantitative approaches have thus far been unable to measure participants' real use of SNSs, rather recreating them in experimental conditions or relying on self-report measures, which are open to inaccuracies. Moreover, research predominantly focuses on either looking at, or (less often) sharing photos, rather than thinking about the two in tandem. Given the interactive nature of SNSs and the variety of uses for the sites in terms of photo sharing, studies that have space enough to account for the range of uses are warranted.

As research stands, there is a general underlying assumption that there is something negative or unhelpful to be found in terms of the role of SNSs in body image. Studies are universally geared towards measuring the constructs that make up body image theory (drive for thinness; appearance comparison; self-objectification; body dissatisfaction, to name but a few). These are all valid and important, with sufficient evidence to demonstrate that those who experience higher levels of said constructs are more at risk from a variety of detrimental consequences to their well-being (Moradi & Huang, 2008). This research is also – to an extent – theoretically informed by OT, which assumes negative effects for the women who experience objectification. Nonetheless, research generally fails to consider or account for the 'other side of the coin' in terms of SNSs and body image, in that the space might facilitate accounts which display a more diverse array of bodies than we are used to seeing in mainstream media, or an arena in which women might reclaim their bodies and be agents of their own sexuality. This is important to explore, in that the prevalence of social media shows no signs of slowing down. Producing research which allows for space to explore how SNSs might be of benefit to its users in terms of body image is surely worthwhile.

The question of being sexually objectified is not explored in the recent literature in relation to SNSs and body image. Explorations of the experience in sub-cultures demonstrates that the effect on women can be complex and, at times, contradictory. This is echoed in the current ongoing debates in online space occupied by popular culture opinion pieces and feminist debate (see Sykes, n.d.; Ratajkowski, 2016). Given that girls and young women are increasingly using online space to help formulate an

identity, research which acknowledges this debate and gives its participants a space to explore the question of objectification would lend further weight to our collective understanding of women's body image.

Finally, there is a distinct lack of qualitative data in the current field of research. The existing body of quantitative data is absolutely vital in providing evidence on a large scale for how SNSs might be detrimental to the well-being of girls and women. Nonetheless, methodologically speaking, the approaches can be reductive as participants are not afforded the space to explore their own experiences in their own words. Gill (2017) points out this gap, in that there are a range of correlational studies which – somewhat narrowly – focus on problems of body image which are already well documented. Qualitative research would complement the existing findings by not only giving participants a voice, but also by exploring a range of areas via in-depth interviews which might not have been addressed in quantitative approaches.

A qualitative study is required to close some of the gaps in the existing literature, in order to move our understanding forward of the role SNSs might have in body image. Crucially, new research must afford young women the space to have their voices heard in the context of their experience, so that we might further understand what is required to understand the potential consequences of SNSs and educate its users about the potential benefits and drawbacks they might experience.

2. Chapter Two: Methodology

2.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter provides a thorough account of the process of the research. The aims of the research will be detailed, followed by an explanation for using a qualitative approach and of my own epistemological positioning. The chosen methodology will then be discussed in relation to why it was chosen over other approaches, followed by an overview of the recruitment strategy, ethical issues and interview process. An in-depth account of the step- by-step process of analysis will follow, and the chapter will close with a reflexive discussion in relation to this process.

2.2. Research Aims

The main aim of the research was to understand how young women experience photo sharing on SNSs, and the role that this might play in body image. This was explored by interviewing a range of participants about their experience of online photo sharing and how they constructed their understanding of body image in relation to this. The data were analysed using a qualitative approach, carrying out TA on participant interviews.

Primarily, it was hoped that the findings from the analysis would add further weight to the existing body of literature surrounding SNSs and women's body image, as well as giving further insight into the nuances of the online world; a space in which women are both objectified *and* potentially afforded the space to reclaim their image and voice.

2.3. A Qualitative Perspective

Positivist, quantitative approaches have long dominated psychology (McGrath & Johnson, 2003) and it is only since the 1990s that qualitative approaches have achieved legitimacy in the UK (Harper & Thompson 2012). Willig (2008, p. 8) notes that qualitative approaches have moved from the margins to the mainstream in UK psychology.

Qualitative approaches enable an understanding of experience (Harper & Thompson 2012). As this research seeks to gain a better understanding of women's subjective experience and I hold the belief that individual experiences are likely to be varied, a qualitative approach, which allows space and diversity, is appropriate. It is an approach that is concerned with meaning, and is interested in how people make sense of the

world and how they experience events (Willig, 2013).

As identified in the previous chapter, the majority of current research on this topic is taken from a positivist perspective. To counterbalance this, the current research will aim to gain a broader insight into participants' subjective understanding through a qualitative approach, seeking a heuristic perspective that may be absent in the existing body of literature. Existing research is often heavily dominated by a focus on pathology, theoretical constructs or participant dysfunction, making an assumption that SNSs generate negative experiences that are likely to have an effect on mental health. This approach has furthered our understanding of this entirely new phenomenon. However, by instead taking a qualitative approach, this research hopes to open up any presumptions about online photo sharing and instead to give the floor to the participants and the way in which they construct their experience, of whatever nature that might be.

2.4. Philosophical Underpinnings

Guba (1990) noted that as our philosophical paradigm informs our perspective of the world, it must therefore inform our research. As such, it is necessary for a researcher to clearly establish their own epistemological positioning, as it determines not only our own assumptions about the world, but how we understand how knowledge is gained.

2.4.1. Epistemological positioning

Understood as the theory of knowledge, an epistemological position determines how we come to know things or believe them to be true or real (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliot, 2002, p. 10). As qualitative research rejects the positivist, essentialist position of an absolute, empirical truth, identifying our epistemological position in relation to knowledge is entirely necessary. The researcher does not 'give voice' to an established truth and as such it is important to identify the researcher's perspective on the knowledge they seek from research (Fine, 2002).

Susie Orbach (1993) argues that, from an early age, women learn to view their bodies as socially constructed commodities, resulting in their disjuncture from them (p. 17). Feminist commentaries on the topic of objectification tend to adopt a social constructionist account of the female body, whereby it is a vessel to be looked at and evaluated (Tiggemann & Kuring, 2004). This study aims to get an understanding of the participants' experiential world in

which I believe that women's bodies have – historically – been socially constructed vessels and commodities (whether or not this is now changing is to be explored through the course of this research). Gergen (1973) argues that all knowledge is culturally specific and that our enquiries in research must think beyond the individual; that is, to look at the social and political realms to understand what might be happening in the present psychology. Furthermore, Berger and Luckman (cited in Speed, 1991) note that our reality is socially constructed and agreed upon by a shared meaning; the language we use. In this, our understanding or belief system about the world is essentially a social invention; we construct stories with language about our experience to make meaning, which in turn organises further experience (Speed, 1991).

I hold a feminist, social constructionist epistemological view of the world, in which there is a rejection that an objective reality exists and that, instead, our realities are multiple and are constructed through the societies in which we reside. I am interested in the ways in which participants construct their understanding of the world through available discourses, rather than seeking an objective, empirical truth (Burr, 2015, p.5).

Coming from this epistemological standpoint, I will view the account of participants' experience as a production; the position being that each participant is constructing their experience through the available discursive resources (Willig, 2013). Rather than focusing on participants' quality of experience (a phenomenological approach) or the true nature of events (a realist approach), placing the research under a constructionist methodology means that I will be looking at the construction of knowledge itself, through language (Willig, 2013). There are a variety of social constructionist positionings that might be adopted; this research will be moderate (that is, less individualistic) in approach, in that it will not focus on the individual or localised psychologies of participants, but instead will seek to theorise the sociocultural context which thus allows individuals to account for their experience (Willig, 2013; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research will not seek to gain a definitive knowledge, but the process by which knowledge is constructed by participants. Ultimately, the position is that all of our experiences are mediated through language, rather than there being an essentialist, universal truth. The research will thus seek to view how the participants have constructed their experience of posting photos of themselves online, study the construction of beauty ideals and look at how the impact of this is constructed and shared through discourse.

2.5. Thematic Analysis

TA has only recently been recognised as a method in its own right in psychology (Joffe, 2012). Its key characteristic is that of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Despite its popular use, it has only recently gained the 'brand recognition' enjoyed by methodologies such as grounded theory and interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Critics of TA argue that it is not a method in its own right; instead it underpins other approaches. For instance, grounded theory and interpretative phenomenological analysis both rely heavily on line-by-line coding of the data to identify meaning units (Willig, 2013). Similarly, narrative analysis requires the researcher to group together themes which capture key patterns in the data. However, this is a key construct of TA (Willig, 2013). Though the recognition of TA is only recent and critics argue that it simply provides various tools with which to conduct other approaches, it is nonetheless key to remember that, unlike other approaches, TA is a method (note, not 'methodology') that is flexible, which can be an advantage (should the analysis be executed well). It is not wedded to any pre-existing theory or framework; it can be applied across a range of epistemological perspectives in a way that suits the philosophical standpoint of the researcher.

Braun and Clarke (2006) point out that TA fits well with a constructionist epistemology, as its flexible approach sits well with the constructionist assumption that 'events, realities, meanings and experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society' (p. 9). Essentially, a constructionist perspective proposes that we have jointly constructed understandings of reality, and these understandings are shared through the language we use. To provide context, this research is interested in how the themes of beauty and body ideals play out across the data set; how these shared ideals are constructed through language and what impact these constructs have on mental health. As such, using TA is compatible with the epistemological underpinnings of the research (that is, a constructionist paradigm) through its analysis of language which is assumed to be socially produced (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.5.1. Critique of thematic analysis

Generally speaking, TA is seen as a relatively straightforward approach to qualitative analysis. As Braun and Clarke (2013) point out, it does not require the same technical skill as some other approaches, such as discourse analysis. However, this by no

means suggests that it is an easy approach without pitfalls; indeed, the seeming simplicity and freedom of the method can contribute to weaknesses in the level of analysis.

As noted, TA is a flexible method. It can be applied across a range of epistemologies, from essentialist to constructionist. However, with such flexibility and given TA is not explicitly bound with epistemological underpinnings, there is the opportunity for research to go awry and be unfocused. Willig (2013) notes that as there is no pre-existing theoretical basis for TA, the researcher needs to do a significant amount of conceptual work before the research can even begin. In this instance, this meant two things. Primarily, ensuring that I had a sound understanding of my epistemological positioning (in terms of feminist and constructionist commentaries around women's bodies), as well as my own positioning with regards to this. Secondly, it was necessary to have clearly formulated both the design and aim of my research, so that the various choices that need to be made when utilising TA as a method (as will be discussed in *2.5.3. considerations prior to collecting the data*) were appropriate. The researcher needs to be explicit about what are doing and ensure that what they do in practice matches up with this (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Similarly, it is necessary for the researcher to explicitly locate the themes in relation to the question, rather than a 'shopping list' of themes which do not represent anything in particular (Willig, 2013).

For instance, this research needs to remain focused on themes that *relate* to the question in some respect; that is, participants' constructed experiences of photo sharing and the impact that this has on body image. However, it is also important to note that themes should not be a simple regurgitation of the question but should go deeper than this. It is expected that conducted semi-structured interviews on an emotive and personal topic will elicit a variety of rich data, much of which may not relate specifically to the research question. To remain congruent with theoretical TA and to keep the research focused, it will be necessary to be mindful of this throughout the analytical process. As the method is broad, this allows for a wide range of comments to be made about the data. As such, it can be challenging to decide which aspects of the data to focus on and research can suffer, resulting in a lower quality of work (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.5.2. Considering alternative approaches

Given the nature of this research, the clear epistemological assumptions and the theory

underpinning the research, considering an alternative method/methodology is not straightforward. However, in the early stages of research, grounded theory was considered as an alternative. Sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that researchers needed a method which would allow them to move from data to theory so that new theories could emerge. Rather than rely on pre-existing theories, ideas or analytical constructs, grounded theory would allow for new theories to emerge that are very much grounded in the data, in the context of their development (Willig, 2013). In this respect, there would have been a justification for using grounded theory. Having identified a gap in the literature in terms of research on young women and photo sharing in the context of qualitative analysis, I realised that there is no specific theory underpinning this aspect of the research.

Epistemologically speaking, grounded theory comes in different versions. Traditionally, it is bound to a more positivist perspective (Willig, 2013). However, Charmaz (2006) offered a 'modernised' approach to grounded theory, remaining true to the inductive creativity of the methodology, but resonating with the popularity of social constructionism in current research (Breckenridge et al., 2012). Essentially, the version argues that categories and theories do not emerge from the data, but are constructed by the researcher through an interaction with the data (Willig, 2013). Meaning does not lie dormant in the data, and Charmaz is critical of traditional grounded theorists who purport to 'discover' themes. This approach requires the researcher to be extremely active, co-constructing a shared reality with the participant (Breckenridge et al., 2012). However, this approach was decided against in that I feel unable to divorce the theoretical framework of OT from the research. On a personal, micro level, Fredrickson and Roberts' 1997 theory rings true to my experiences, even in conjunction with social media and photo sharing platforms, which arrived long after the theory was produced.

There was also some consideration given to using Discourse Analysis as an approach. Given that this is an approach that is also interested in the language we use, it would fit well within a constructionist paradigm. However, many forms of discourse analysis typically involve a micro-analysis of language and a technical knowledge of language construction is generally required ("Questions about TA," n.d.). Spencer, Ritchie and O'Connor (2003) point out that generally, TA takes the meanings from data at some level of face value; that is, an in-depth deconstruction of language is not routine. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, focuses more explicitly on the constructs of language, the rhetoric devices in the interactive performances (Spencer et al., 2003). Whilst the analysis of this study is certainly interested in the language used – indeed, the importance of language is inherent to a constructionist paradigm – it also seeks to

work at a level across the data set, understanding how participants' construct their experiences in several levels, rather than solely a micro-analysis of language.

A macro-level discourse analysis which does situate participant talk in relation to wider social discourses, such as Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA), would also be inappropriate as I wanted to understand participants' construction of their lived experiences of online photo sharing within the context of the wider culture. As FDA – as with all forms of DA – are concerned with 'taking language of their focus of interest' (Burr, 2015, p.163) rather than considering participant experience, this approach would also be in appropriate. Considering participants' experience also ties in to my epistemological and ontological standpoint, in that it is more consistent with a feminist, constructionist approach whereby participants' language is viewed as a way of structuring their experience (Burr, 2015, p.54). Ultimately, it was decided that Thematic Analysis would be the most appropriate approach.

2.5.3. Considerations prior to collecting the data

Braun and Clarke (2006) make it clear that various choices must be made explicitly *prior* to analysis. Inductive or deductive approaches, for instance, inform the way in which we bring prior knowledge or theoretical underpinnings to our analysis. An inductive approach to analysis is heavily data driven; that is, the researcher does not bring any theoretical frame to the data when analysing, instead letting the data speak for itself. Any themes that emerge are not wedded to a pre-existed theory; rather they are firmly grounded in the data (Willig, 2013). In contrast to this, a deductive, or 'theoretical' approach is very much theory driven; that is, themes are mapped onto pre-existing theoretical knowledge and research findings.

Joffe (2012) points out that there is little point undertaking research if the researcher is not inclined to let the data – at least in part – speak for itself, rather than being entirely moulded by existing work. Instead, a more sophisticated approach to coding is a dual deductive/inductive approach, in which the researcher attends to the data and holds in mind pre-conceived theories in relation to the themes, whilst letting new ideas emerge independently. This is the position to be taken in this research. I am a woman and I have spent time working in ED facilities. I read extensively around the topic of body image and engage in feminist debate around empowerment and our bodies (particularly with reference to social media). More specifically, I have a particular interest in the way in which women's bodies are routinely constructed and objectified by society, and how

this can lead to objectifying ourselves (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Ultimately, it is unlikely that I could divorce my knowledge from the data during the analytic process, and whilst the theoretical influence will be acknowledged, I will also allow for space for new ideas to emerge (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

There are also the different levels upon which we analyse the data to be considered. On a semantic level, data is analysed on its surface meaning, at face value. As such, the researcher does not actively search for anything *beyond* what the participant has said, and after the organisation of the data into themes to reflect this, it is interpreted according to its broader meanings, and with relevance to the existing body of research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Alternatively, data is analysed at a latent level; that is, the underlying assumptions and conceptualisations are identified as informing the semantic content of the date (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytic process here involves more interpretative work than at a semantic level, as the research is working to look beyond the surface, theorising along the way. A constructionist approach is typically more compatible with the latter paradigm; that is, going beyond a descriptive interpretation of the data and instead producing a response to the data that is theorised. As such, the data in this study was analysed beyond a descriptive analysis of the semantics, seeking to identify features of participants' interviews that give the semantics structure and meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.6. Researcher Reflexivity

Years of positivist, empirical research has taught us that the researcher's role must be detached, omnipotent and entirely impartial, so as not to threaten objectivity (England, 1994). However, qualitative research is personal. As the world is filled with complexity, nuance and diversity, the role of the qualitative researcher is to engage with this and to try and help make sense of voices that might be otherwise marginalised. England (1994) remarks that the world is an 'intersubjective creation… We cannot put our common-sense knowledge of social structures to one side' (p. 243). Indeed, we cannot. As such, there is not only a need to identify the researcher's philosophical underpinnings, but their personal ones as well.

My experience of the world has been part of the research process from day one; from picking an area of interest and formulating a question to engaging in personal and emotive interviews and subsequently immersing myself in the data. Indeed, the interview process itself is very much a collaboration between researcher and participant (Smith, 1997). It stands to reason that I must ask questions of myself in the process,

and be transparent about my role in this study as a response. I have personal experience of many of the topics that might have arisen in the interviews, I was concerned that said experience might interfere with the data and become an exercise is navel-gazing, rather than an exercise in analytic scrutiny (England, 1994). I was also concerned that familiarity and interest in the topic in question might disrupt the process of interviews and the co-construction of meaning, instead becoming overly friendly in discussion, debate or the sharing of experiences. To counteract this, a reflective diary of the process was kept, so as to allow a space for personal reflection away from the interviews.

2.6.1. Researcher's position

Willig (2013) notes that we must reflect upon the ways in which our own values and experiences might shape our involvement with the research. I would identify myself as a 29- year-old straight, white, middle-class, cis-female. I am a trainee counselling psychologist who has a particular interest in EDs, having worked in this speciality through training and subsequently having secured a role in a specialist EDs unit within the NHS as a qualified psychologist.

However, reflexivity in qualitative research calls for going beyond listing personal and objective characteristics, which mimic the process of identifying extraneous variables in experimental research. As such, it is important to go beyond doing so in order to consider the way in which my identity and position impacts the research process (Lazard & McAvoy, 2017, p.8). In a thesis in which one of the central focuses is on participants' use of SNSs and posting selfies, my own experience will invariably come to play a role in how I influence the research process.

I am a decade or so older than my participants and whilst in many ways this age gap may seem negligible, my experience of growing up with SNSs will invariably be different given the speed with which technology has developed and SNSs have become unavoidable – culturally, politically, and personally. I created a Facebook account when I was 18, and my undergraduate university years are well-documented with photos of this journey. However, at no point were selfies a part of this; instead, the uploaded photos were typically multiple group shots; un-curated and un-filtered. In my mid-twenties, I created an Instagram account as my use of Facebook waned. Though a more visual site, I have never posted a selfie, or a photo of just myself, on Instagram (or, indeed, on Facebook). I am, in many ways, a relatively private person and the notion of posting a photo of myself is one that I have never felt I wanted to do. At times, perhaps I have held been judgemental of others for overt and public

displays on social media, my own internalised misogyny playing out against women who express themselves in a certain way. At other times, I have seen women as empowered and liberated in posting photos of themselves. Nonetheless, my own lack of drive to post my own selfies has driven an interest in why others do so – particularly women – and I have actively taken the role of the viewer on SNSs. Though my use of these sites has waned in recent months and years as I find myself less drawn to online visual content, instead making a concerted effort to connect with the world around me, I remain active in trying to understand women's constructions of online identity. In relation to this research, my own experience, lack thereof, (and the nuances to this) of selfie posting invariably plays a part in the way in which I co-construct meaning from participants' input.

Invariably, I also have personal encounters of unwanted objectification that might vary from, or corroborate, those of my participants entirely – if, indeed, this is something they have experienced. As a feminist who has sought to read, engage with and identify with some, but not all, of the post-feminist arguments around representation of the self online, I might construct my understanding in ways which are different to those of the participants in this research. Whilst I believe that the reclaiming of our bodies and the move toward empowerment and choice does not signal the undoing of feminist gains – indeed, the (apparent) choice women have to be 'who they want to be' surely signals progress and further steps toward equality – I am curious as to whether the choices women make in terms of their sexuality are *always* theirs, when so often they still play into heteronormative norms. Gill (2009) suggests that this active self-sexualisation makes a promise of freedom and assertiveness, yet is actually a process in which the objectification of our bodies is occurring in a new, pernicious form. I sit somewhere in the middle, and would suggest that legitimate empowerment through embracing our bodies is a valuable act, but one that must come from women and society at large embracing all bodies, of all shapes, sizes, ethnicities, abilities, sexualities and gender identities – as well as the ones that we are steadfastly told that we should desire.

Finally, having a personal and professional understanding of complex relationships with both food and body image means that I have a somewhat personal relationship with this research. As a teenager who experienced difficulties with food and as an adult who has, to varying extents, always been conscious of how my body does and doesn't fit into what I have believed it 'should' look like, I remain fascinated about the lens through which we see ourselves as women. However, whilst I am unable to divorce the core of my own experience from my involvement in this study, I must also be aware of my role and be conscious in checking my assumptions – as well as the privileges I hold as a slim, white, cis, straight woman. In being aware of these processes, my aim is to ensure

that I do not become too self-absorbed in the research process, which would pose a risk to the voice of the participants (Finlay, 2011).

2.7. Summary

A qualitative TA located within a feminist/constructionist epistemology was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for the study in the quest to gain further understanding of how young women construct their experience of online photo sharing and body image. Underpinned (but not wholly influenced) by OT, I will acknowledge and consider existing theory in relation to the findings, whilst ensuring that any assumptions will be acknowledged and reflected upon, so as to allow space for new ideas to be generated.

3. Chapter Three: Overview of the Research Design and Method of Analysis

3.1. Chapter Overview

The following chapter gives an overview of the research formulation, design and method of analysis. This includes a discussion of the decisions taken following the conceptualisation of the study, such as participant criteria, ethical issues and the experience of setbacks along the way. Next, a step-by-step account of the method of analysis is outlined, in order to demonstrate the process followed in terms of analysis and the formulation of themes in the following chapter. Finally, issues of reliability and validity are addressed in the final sections of the chapter.

3.2. Research Design

3.2.1. Participant requirements

Objectification Theory (OT) (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) and literature on the topic of body image predominantly focuses on girls and women, and I have a particular interest in women's body image. As such, this study is exclusively focused on young women, though it is acknowledged later in the study that there is scope for similar research into male body image. Due to the recent phenomena of 'selfies' and of portraying oneself online through photos, a younger sample was considered to be more appropriate and research participants were aged between 18 and 20 years. The decision to have participants in this age bracket was made for several reasons. Firstly, social media and online photo sharing is a relatively new phenomenon that has evolved rapidly, developing new complexities and nuances all the time. By choosing a younger sample of women, it was hoped that participants would be able to share their current experience, as well as being able to give retrospective accounts of using photo sharing applications during adolescence and how this might have changed over time. Moreover, body image concerns for adolescents and young women can have grave consequences, both on an individual level and at a social level in terms of treatment success and costs. Whilst participants are not below the age of 18 for ethical reasons, it is hoped that a younger sample would contribute to our understanding of the origins of problems in this area. Finally, I felt that to in order to fully investigate the complexities surrounding online photo sharing, body image, and questions of female empowerment, utilising a slightly older sample (that is, instead of an adolescent sample) would mean that participants might have more fully formed ideas and understanding around the debates around online

photo sharing and any potential consequences. There was no specific upper age limit applied to the recruitment process, though by advertising for participants in various universities it was understood that participants were likely to be in their late teens and early twenties and it was felt that recruiting a pool of participants who were in early adulthood would mean that they were able to think broadly about the topic in question, whilst still being able to think about their journey on social media over time.

Finally, it was specified on the recruitment advert that those taking part should not have a history of mental health problems. Participants were asked to read the participant information sheet thoroughly and raise any concerns if they did not feel they were eligible for the study. It was hoped that the absence of any difficulties in this respect would reduce the risk of any psychological distress. Participants were also provided with details of support agencies and counselling services, in case they felt the need for support following the process. However, there was some deliberation over this: it is unlikely that many young women completely escape disordered eating or body-related shame, and to pathologise this by suggesting professional support agencies may have contributed to participants' distress, in suggesting that any difficulties were 'abnormal.' Despite this, it was decided that the potential benefits of providing support agencies to participants was more ethical than not doing so, in that participant well-being was one of the primary concerns throughout the research process and that the interviews conducted had the capacity to be sensitive in nature. As such, it was felt that there was an inherent responsibility around conducting said interviews and therefore ensuring that participants had access to any appropriate support networks, should they need to access them, was appropriate.

3.2.2. Advertising and recruitment

Following the study being granted approval by the ethical board of City, University of London, the recruitment process began. This was done in several ways. Firstly, a recruitment poster (see appendix 7.1.) was sent to undergraduate Social Sciences departments at several London universities. I requested that the recruitment poster be circulated amongst students, who were encouraged to make contact if they were interested in taking part. I also posted the recruitment poster on Facebook, asking my contacts to share the details in the hope that people meeting the appropriate criteria would see the advert and make contact. Finally, I contacted family and friends with the recruitment poster to see if anyone in my wider circle might know of people who would be suitable candidates and who might be interested.

The research poster detailed: gender and age requirements of participants; the name of the study; a short sentence on the nature of the research; what would be required from participants should they choose to take part; that participants would be offered an Amazon voucher as a token of my gratitude for taking part; and my contact details. There was some debate as to whether or not to offer participants a voucher. Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 72) note that it is even a contentious issue between themselves; on the one hand, taking part in the research should be enough value on its own. On the other, participants do give up their time to talk to the researcher about what may be personal and emotive topics. In the end, it was decided that a £10 Amazon voucher would be offered to participants, as this amount was deemed to be small enough to ensure participants were not taking part solely for monetary gain, but large enough to demonstrate my own gratitude.

In all instances, prospective participants were asked to make first contact with me to express an interest in the study, so that they did not feel obliged or coerced into taking part. In total, 13 prospective participants made contact, expressing an interest in taking part in the research. Of these, one decided that they did not want to take part upon hearing what the study entailed. Two more arranged and rearranged their interviews several times. One of these participants ceased contact after cancelling an interview; another did not turn up and did not respond to a follow-up email. In total, ten participants were fully recruited. However, one interview was subsequently lost after the recording equipment failed in the interview.

This was only noticed after the interview had taken place and the debrief completed. As such, it was not appropriate to re-interview the participant for the second time, as she would have insight into the research and have already answered the questions once over, which might have made her answers less authentic. In total, nine participants completed the interview process and have subsequently been included in this study (see Section 3.3.8. for sampling demographics).

After contact had been established, participants were sent the participant information sheet (appendix 7.2.) and the consent form (appendix 7.3.) prior to the interview taking place, so that participants had an idea of the topic around which the interview would focus. However, participants were not given the interview questions before meeting, so as not to lose any spontaneity. It was hoped that not having access to the interview questions beforehand would minimise the risk of rehearsed answers and allow each interview to develop organically. Participants were asked to read the information sheet thoroughly before agreeing to take part, as it had further information on the study and requirements for taking part. Further information was provided into how the participants' confidentiality

and anonymity would be protected and guaranteed, as well as information on withdrawing from the study should they wish to do so. At this stage, participants were offered a preliminary phone call with me if they had any questions or concerns with regard to the interviews before taking part. All participants declined this phone call, expressing that they understood what was required of them and that they were happy to take part.

3.2.3. Ethical considerations

Prior to the research commencing, full ethical approval was obtained from the University's ethics committee. I have aimed to comply with BPS ethical guidelines (BPS, 2014) throughout the research process to ensure sound and ethical conduct. The complete details of the ethical process are considered in the subsequent sections.

3.2.4. Participant consent and withdrawal process

To ensure that participants actively consented to taking part in the research, full written consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interview process commencing. I aimed to be as transparent as possible throughout the process, so that there was no risk of deception. In order to ensure that participants were aware of what they were taking part in before their consent was obtained, the nature of the research was explained to them, as well as what participation would entail, without going into too much detail so as to potentially influence responses. It was also explained that participants would have the right to withdraw up to one month after the interview had taken place without needing to provide an explanation and without fear of any ramifications.

3.2.5. Participant confidentiality

Confidentiality was, and remains, guaranteed to participants by the anonymisation of their identities and details, for the duration of this study and beyond. Participants were all asked at the signing of their consent forms if there was a particular pseudonym that they would like to be referred to for the remainder of the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). If they chose not to take this up, participants were assigned a name at random. The original consent forms were kept separately from any recordings or transcripts, so as to avoid the potential for participant identities being matched to any data. All face-to-face interviews were recorded on an LESHP Digital Voice Recorder, and those that took place over Skype were recorded with Apowersoft Screen Recorder

– which recorded the image and audio on the screen at the time of the Skype call.
Participants consented to being recorded in this way.

Once the interviews were completed, they were immediately transferred onto a
MacBook Air laptop computer, which was password protected. The audio recordings,
video recordings and transcriptions were held in separate encrypted, password-
protected files. As paper copies of the transcriptions were printed for the analysis
process, these were kept in a locked cabinet, secured with a padlock which required a
code, at my own home.

3.2.6. Interview setting

Interviews were scheduled at a time and date that was mutually convenient to the
participant and researcher. Participants who lived in London attended the interviews at
the Northampton Square campus of City, University of London. Private rooms were
booked to ensure absolute privacy, and a sign was put on the door asking people not to
enter, as an interview was taking place. Several participants were unable to attend
interviews in London, and lived in various locations all over the country. Several
participants were at full-time boarding school, and the logistics of arranging interviews
when they were unable to leave campus, or have unsanctioned visitors, were
complicated. As such, it was deemed more cost and time effective to conduct the
remaining interviews over Skype at a time and place which ensured participant privacy.

3.2.7. Semi-structured interview schedule

A semi-structured interview schedule was formulated, with several broad topic areas
listed to prompt conversation and discussion around social media and women's body
image (see appendix 7.4.). Open questions were utilised in order to avoid closed
responses (i.e. 'yes' and 'no' answers). However, questions were also designed not to
be too open, so that some level of focus in the interviewed was ensured, whilst giving
participants the space and freedom to respond authentically (Braun & Clarke, 2013).
Under each broad question,

several prompts, or sub-questions, were composed, which could be used should the
participant feel unable to answer the initial questions.

3.2.8. Sample

A total of nine female participants were recruited, interviewed and included in the

analysis for this research. Braun and Clarke (2013) recommend collecting demographic information; below is a table representative of this. Not only is this ethical, but it tells us something about the sample. Whilst the differences in participants are not considered variables as in quantitative research, it is important to acknowledge the various differences and similarities of the participants; to record the various cultural spaces of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 80). It is worth acknowledging that there was some consideration given to including other details about participants (for instance, sexuality). Nonetheless, it was felt that, given the relatively brief nature of the contact with participants, asking such questions might have been deemed too personal and any relevance to the study might not have been clear. Instead, several participants referred openly to their heritage or religion, so it was deemed more appropriate to record this aspect of participant detail, rather than to ask more personal questions.

Table 1   *Sample Characteristics*

Pseudonym	Age	Occupation	Recruitment Source	Heritage	Religion
Sahana	18	Student	University advertising	Indian	Not known
Ilya	19	Student	University advertising	Arab/Italian	None
Anya	18	Student	Word of mouth	British	Muslim
Anna	20	Student	Word of mouth	British	None
Laura	18	Student	Snowball	British	None
Naazima	18	Student	University advertising	Nigerian/British	None
Stephanie	18	Student	Word of mouth	British	None
Alice	20	Student	Word of mouth	British	None
Camilla	18	Student	Snowball	British	None

3.2.9. Pilot interview

A pilot interview was scheduled. it afforded an opportunity to iron out any technical creases; to make sure the audio equipment worked well and was simple to use, so as not to disrupt ensuing interviews. Secondly, as I had not conducted any interviews of this nature before, it was deemed important to get a sense of several things. I wanted to get a sense of how the questions used worked in the context of an interview; whether or not they were appropriate; whether they were open enough to encourage free-flowing conversation, whilst not being so vague as to leave the interview unstructured and lacking the relevant focus. I also wanted to get a sense of what it was like to be in the interview seat – rather than the therapist's seat. It was deemed important to 'have a go' at an interview whilst wearing a hat that was less familiar, so that any slip-ups could be acknowledged and amended for subsequent interviews. There was some concern that employing an empathic, curious stance in the interview to build a rapport with the participant would lead to the interview resembling more of a therapy session in the case of any difficult emotions expressed by the participant, rather than an interview, which is not advised (Moyle, 2002).

Conducting the pilot interview was an extremely helpful process. Whilst the questions used were deemed to be appropriate to use for the subsequent interviews, I was forced to consider that my interest and passion for the topic could lead to being too animated with the participant, thus risking interrupting them or disrupting the dynamic. Whilst I maintain that a friendly, warm approach encouraged rapport with participants, being too friendly and involved in the interview might have distracted from participants' input. These were valuable lessons to learn, and whilst the content of the interview actually translated well to other interviews across the data set and was deemed to be of value and ultimately included in the analysis, I remained mindful in subsequent interviews of not becoming too involved.

3.2.10. Participant well-being

Following the interviews, participants were fully debriefed both verbally and with a debrief sheet (appendix 7.5.), which was handed to them or sent via email. Any queries or concerns that arose were answered as fully as possible. I also remained aware that this is an emotive subject and that ethical dilemmas might have arisen throughout the research process. As such, every attempt was made to remain ethically attuned throughout (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Participants were offered the names of relevant support networks should they feel troubled by anything that had arisen in the interviews,

and were encouraged to seek support if needed.

Some of the participants were known personally to me. Whilst Braun and Clarke (2013) deem it 'perfectly acceptable' to interview someone who is a personal acquaintance (p. 97), it was nevertheless reiterated that all data would be kept confidential, that identifying features from interviews would be excluded in the final study and that participants did not have to discuss anything they felt uncomfortable sharing. Despite this, one participant known to me disclosed that she had sporadically engaged in purging behaviours (that she referred to as 'buliming'), which had been a coping strategy for when she had found things particularly difficult.

An ethical dilemma arose over whether or not this participants' data should be included in the analysis or discussion. The participant did not have a formal diagnosis of, nor did she identify as having, a mental health problem. However, she also described experiences consistent with ED symptoms, which potentially made her vulnerable to distress, as well as to her data being affected by her experiences. I reflected at length on how best to proceed, and I took the issue to a meeting with my supervisor to gain a second perspective. Remaining mindful of the power dynamic in this situation was extremely important; the participant was aware of the importance of the study and may have felt a sense of needing to 'provide' for the value of the interview. That said, there was also a case for arguing that the participant felt relaxed enough in the company of someone that she knew to share a difficult experience, which may – in itself – have acted as a therapeutic experience. DiCicco- Bloom and Crabtree (2006) express the importance of being mindful of this, and being prepared to provide psychological support to participants if necessary.

The participant was signposted to various sources of information about EDs and encouraged to seek professional support if the problem was ongoing, as well as talking to those in her support system. Following the interview, it was expressed that the participant had shared the details of the conversation with a family member and that she had been able to seek emotional support following her disclosure. As such, there was a case to be made for the interview setting actually providing a space that was more beneficial than harmful to the participant, in that it facilitated the start of her acknowledging her difficulties. In turn, it is suggested that the process was a catalyst for future protective measures being put in place for the participant, now that her support network was aware of what happened.

The data was included for two key reasons. Firstly, the participant – at 18 years old,

and considered an adult – was aware of the requirements for taking part in the study and consented to be included. Indeed, following her interview she maintained that she was happy for her data to be used, despite the personal disclosure. The participant expressed that the process had been both cathartic and interesting, yet to eliminate her from the study at this stage would effectively have labelled and diagnosed her with mental health difficulties (despite her not identifying in this way). Indeed, it is generally accepted that the majority of women at some point experience unhappiness with their body, and might go to various lengths to manage this. In support of normative discontent, a term which describes the pervasive and normalised unhappiness amongst women with their bodies (Rodin, Silberstein, & Streigel-Moore, 1984) – Tantleff-Dunn, Barnes and Larose's 2011 study found that the majority of their 472 participants believed that half of both men and women experience levels of body dissatisfaction and/or eating disturbance, with 10% of women reporting weekly episodes of binge eating, and 3% of women misusing laxatives (Tantleff- Dunn, Barnes, & Larose, 2011). This brings up complicated questions over the process of diagnosis in EDs, and to label this participant as having a diagnosable ED or mental health problem without the appropriate information being gathered in the appropriate environment, would be unfounded and unethical. To side-line the participant's voice and adopt an expert, 'researcher knows best' approach is invariably in direct contradiction to the very ethos of qualitative research (and indeed, a constructionist paradigm), which is a collaborative process in which interviewer and participant co-create meaning (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Secondly, the extracts of data from the interview which are used in the ensuing analysis are *not* the parts that correspond with her disclosure. Because her disclosure was isolated to this interview and did not resonate with other interviews, it did not translate into a theme. However, the segments of the interview which are used in the analysis and subsequent discussion *do* resonate with extracts of other interviews. In this, the inference is that when discussing the role of social media in body image, the words used to construct her experience were not heavily distorted or influenced by the earlier disclosure.

3.3. Data Analysis

I elected to use Braun and Clarke's 2006 approach to TA. It must also be noted that throughout the process of analysis, my own assumptions and context – as outlined in section 2.6. – played a role in this process (Willig, 2008).

The process of analysis is outlined in the following sections.

3.3.1. Stage One: data immersion

The first step in analysing the data was to transcribe the interviews. The decision was made early that I would do this myself, rather than outsourcing this aspect of the process. Riessman (1993) argues that it is a productive way to start familiarising yourself with the data, whilst Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) propose that transcribing in itself is an interpretive act, where meanings are created. A narrative arch began to form and when it came to repeated re-reading of the text, it seemed as though the data had already started to be absorbed and processed. Moreover, this limited any ethical issues of breaking confidentiality.

Repeated readings of the text ensued, in order to become fully immersed in the data. In response to the readings, various annotations were noted on the pages, a sample of which is provided in appendix 7.6.

3.3.2. Stage two: initial coding

Phase two of the analysis entails producing initial codes from the data; essentially, this is organising data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). It was decided early on to code the data manually, as it was felt that this would enable me to become more familiar with both the data and the process of identifying themes. I also remained mindful when coding of the theory underpinning my work, keeping in mind the larger concepts of OT. However, it was also considered important not to let interpretation interfere too much with this stage of the process, which is described as 'the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way, regarding the phenomenon' (Boyatzis, 1988, p. 63).

I remained aware that Braun and Clarke (2006) encourage as many initial codes as possible. In order to keep track of the codes and organise them in a way that would be meaningful, a note of each code was kept (for instance, 'attention seeking') with a reference to each participant who discussed something relating to this code and the line number of the quotation from the interview transcript (sample in appendix 7.7.) It was not possible for these codes to be arranged with just one reading, so to continue with the process of data immersion and extracting patterns, interviews were read and re-read many times with each code in mind, linking each one with the appropriate data extracts to ensure all data had been coded. Many of the codes were longer than a short phrase, and data

was coded inclusively so as not to lose any context of the data in question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Many different extracts also fit into multiple codes, as various extracts were rich with multiple layers of meaning.

3.3.3. Stage three: searching for themes

Herein began the stage that was found to be most time-consuming and challenging. It was important to remember that the process of coding and analysing data is inherently subjective, and to keep in mind the importance of including all the necessary text around a relevant quotation, so that the meaning is not lost through underreporting (Bryman, 2001). The most helpful exercise at this stage was found to be making the process as visual as possible. Rather than arranging extracts of data together in clusters on a computer screen, copies of the clusters from stage two were printed and cut out. Two large white boards were purchased, which allowed for the clusters to subsequently be grouped together and rearranged as required (appendix 7.8.). Clusters were then arranged methodically into initial codes or themes as a first step with 'bottom up' thinking, rather than being made to fit into pre-conceived, overarching themes (appendix 7.9.).

Having arranged initial themes into more meaningful groups, the next step was to identify themes in relation to these groups on a broader scale. This took some time, and at various points some themes were merged into one as they were stronger this way. After various arrangements and rearrangements, merging of codes and disregarding of some extracts, an initial mind map was produced (appendix 7.10.). To note: no extracts were permanently disregarded at this stage, but saved for the next stage. This map was loosely split into sections made up of sub-themes. It also is worth noting that various groups of main themes were created and disregarded; either merged together or put to one side, away from the main mind map.

3.3.4. Stage four: reviewing the themes

At this point in the analysis, reviewing and refining themes is necessary. The first stage of this involved a review of the themes that had emerged. Throughout this process, I referred back to the original data extracts to ensure that there was consistency amongst what was being said, and that the relevant quotations supported the theme in question. As this process evolved, mind maps were created and refined along the way until a second 'thematic map' was established (appendix 7.11.) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I also remained mindful of Patton's dual criteria for judging categories: internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. Essentially, did the data make sense as a stand-alone theme whilst also cohering meaningfully? (Patton, 2002). This process involved reading and re- reading the collated extracts to ensure they formed a pattern, and then considering whether the theme itself was problematic in a broader reading of the text: did all the extracts work for both their sub-themes and themes as a whole, or did they need to be reworked? Data extracts were read and re-read, both as an independent theme and in collaboration with other themes. Over the course of revisiting the data bit by bit, there was eventually a shift, or breaking down and refining of the themes, to produce a final thematic map (8.12). It was felt at this stage that there was a consistency of data within and between themes; a narrative arch was apparent. This is in line with the recommendation that themes offer an accurate representation of the data set as a whole (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It was felt that at this stage, saturation of themes had been reached and the analytic process was complete.

3.3.5. Stage five: defining and naming themes

The aim at this point in the analysis was to define and refine the themes that would be presented for Stage 6: Producing the Report. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe this as capturing the essence of what each theme is about. It is pointed out that a theme should not have to work too hard, be too complex or too diverse: essentially, simplicity and coherence are key. This is done by giving a concise account of each theme, which captures the essence of what it is about and why it is interesting. In order to ensure a good standard of analysis, I made sure that the criteria of Braun and Clarke's 15-point checklist were met (appendix 7.13.).

3.4.   Validation Strategies

The keeping of a journal encouraged reflexivity and the acknowledgement of values (Ortlipp, 2008). This suggestion was followed, and was especially important throughout the analysis, where my own beliefs and assumptions came heavily into play.

Cresswell and Poth (2018) proposed that the act of verification – that is, being transparent about the strategies or techniques used – is key in ensuring the validation of the research process. Though they propose nine different validation strategies in which verification can be achieved, they recommend that a minimum of two such ways be followed in order to ensure the quality of the research. It is not specified how or which two should be chosen, though in this instance there were a variety of reasons for choosing the two

approaches selected. For instance, seeking participant feedback in terms of the findings and interpretations is suggested. This was not deemed possible, due to the level of commitment that would be required from participants who were all at important stages of study and exams. Moreover, Cresswell & Poth suggest getting a third party to conduct an audit of the study, to assess accuracy. This was also deemed impossible, given that procuring further feedback outside of an allocated research supervisor for an as yet unsubmitted work might well have been in breach of university policy. The writers also acknowledge that this is a less popular choice, as it would incur significant cost to a researcher. In this instance, it was deemed too expensive an option to pursue. As such, two of the nine options were selected on account of their accessibility and cost-effectiveness. These were: 1) relevant themes were reviewed with fellow trainees in a research group that met weekly; and 2) the various initial themes were submitted to the research supervisor to discuss preliminary findings and consider the process of analysis in relation to my own biases and assumptions.

3.5. Summary

As discussed, various challenges were encountered throughout the process of recruitment and data collection. I worked hard to ensure that these challenges were met with thought, reference to the literature, and transparency throughout to ensure an honest and open piece of research. The subsequent method of analysis was found to be a substantial task. However, it was one in which I was able to employ a level of creativity and originality in approach, whilst remaining faithful to the framework that was subscribed to, in order to ensure the richest possible analysis of the data.

4. Chapter Four: Analysis and Results

4.1.   Chapter Overview

The aim of this research is to understand how young women construct their experience of photo sharing online and its role in body image. The following chapter outlines the findings of this study in relation to the research question. Following the approach outlined in the previous chapter, all data was transcribed, coded and assembled into themes and sub- themes. The table below presents the themes and sub-themes generated through this process. Codes that had been found in the initial stage of analysis were clustered and re- clustered, to create three main themes with nine sub-themes. This chapter provides an in- depth analysis of the data, using quotations from the data to support the presented theme.

Table II Master and Sub-themes of the Interviews

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Objectifying Other Women	1a. Contrasting Aesthetic Ideals
	1b. Impossible Standards
	1c. Negative Comparisons
	1d. Managing Pressure
1. Creating the Online Self	2a. Why Post?
	2b. Constructing Photos
	2c. Change Over Time
2. The Question of Feminism	3a. 'Too…'
	3b. Express Yourself

4.2. Objectifying Other Women

Of all the themes, the objectification of other women is the most salient throughout the interview process. Reflecting this salience, the theme comprises four sub-themes, presenting the range of understandings of the participants in relation to objectifying others online.

The first sub-theme – 'Contrasting Aesthetic Ideals' – encapsulates the range of ideals that participants understand to be dominant in today's online, image-focused culture.

These ideals are discussed, reflecting the rich, varied and complex imperative of how women 'should' look. The second sub-theme – 'Impossible Standards' – describes the standards that are set online for girls and women. Often contradictory, participants discuss the various characteristics of women online that are perpetually out of reach. In continuation on this, the third sub-theme – 'Negative Comparisons' – features accounts of the participants who described routinely comparing themselves to online images of women – both to women who may reach impossible standards of attractiveness, and to peers in their own social circles.

'Managing Pressure' is the final sub-theme, providing a balance to the interviews of some participants who discussed making frequent comparisons of themselves to online images. In contrast, the participants who report spending less time online comparing themselves to images of other women also discuss higher levels of body confidence and acceptance of how they look. As such, they talk about being able to resist online pressure in conforming to how others look.

4.2.1. Contrasting aesthetic ideals

An inconsistency is apparent in what participants believe to be an aesthetic ideal. However, taking a step back from the data allowed it to become clear that there is a commonality. All participants construct an aesthetic ideal through their online activity: pretty, toned, skinny and curvy are the key 'looks' the participants formulate – even if they do not subscribe to the aesthetic themselves. Indeed, a quick literature search demonstrates that there is something of a range in the set of body ideals that are depicted online, from skinny/thin (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016) to fit and toned (Tiggemann & Zaccardo, 2015; Holland & Tiggemann 2017), to the recent increase in curvaceous-but-thin ideals being represented online (Overstreet, Quinn, & Agocha, 2010).

This is a powerful narrative and captures the variety of how all participants understand not only the way they believe women 'should' look, but the fact that there exists a notion of 'should' in the first place. Nonetheless, whilst there is something of a range of looks that are depicted online, the fact remains that this range is narrow and the images of women in question would arguably still 'fit' into the box of being conventionally attractive. There remains a distinct lack of any genuine range or diversity of women, and those that are shown online are generally white, able bodied, blemish-free and have no real fat. The diversity that exists is still only amongst a certain type of woman who, in general, is unlikely to represent many of the women looking at her.

Whilst there is extensive commentary on the focus on women's bodies, it is of particular interest to see how several participants repeatedly formulate 'prettiness' as the dominant desirable characteristic of attractiveness: Rather than using 'beautiful' 'striking' or 'attractive', which might evoke an image of strength and womanhood, the construction of prettiness is surely one that is the epitome of girlhood; small, sweet, passive – and young.

P10 Anya *Yeh. I think she's really pretty so I always send pictures to my friends, like 'wow!'*

The importance of prettiness to Anya is clear. To her, these women are so desirable that she shares the images with her friends. Iliya also constructs prettiness as being a vital attribute for women, even more so than intelligence:

P29 Iliya *If they judge celebrities, they're gonna judge me as well, and I'm not as pretty as them… They don't even consider intelligence for instance, you have to be pretty and that's it… You can't say she's intelligent and that be enough.*

Prettiness is the primary way in which this participant hopes to be seen in the images she posts on social media. To not receive the desired response – comments or likes on a photograph – is regarded as demonstrating her perceived lack of prettiness in the eyes of others. Steph concurs with this in her statement that a lack of response from others signifies a lack of prettiness.

P54 Steph: *Um, I don't know… if no one said anything I'd think oh, they don't think I'm pretty, or something like that. If I didn't get as many likes as someone that did on a similar selfie, I'd think I'm not as pretty.*

Later, this participant describes how a person's level of prettiness can determine whether or not someone looks up to them:

P63 Steph *And, um, you're just trying to make yourself look as good as this other person, with all those followers and all those likes and people look up to you because you're so pretty and… and, like, you want people to think you're so pretty, you've got a really good body, and like you want to be the prettiest, you want to be the best, you want to be good enough, you want to be, you know, what everyone aspires to be like.*

Though Steph makes a reference to having a good body being important, she also explains how the primary ideal is understood in terms of prettiness, qualifying a person

to be 'good enough' and to be followed by others.

Laura describes her understanding of prettiness in more detail. Whilst other participants use the word repeatedly, there is no further description of what it constitutes. Laura, however, specifically references the face of the girl, or woman, in the image:

P62 Laura I can be like, wow she looks really pretty. Like, obviously you're gonna have a bit of an issue if she looks amazing. Like, wow, she looks really pretty. Like, say, good lips or good eyebrows, or she's done her eyes amazingly, then I'll be like, oh, I'm kinda jealous. I wish I had that!

For Alice, there has been a shift in her focus in terms of the aesthetic ideal:

P42 Alice I think, at that age, I wanted to look pretty. Like I don't think I got involved with the body thing until a bit later on. Um, but yeah. It definitely was trying to look pretty, I think.

She associates the need to look pretty with when she was younger, but that her attention has now changed. Instead, her focus has shifted to being more aware of the bodies she sees online, and how impactful this has been on her evaluation of her own body:

P16 Alice I think, 'cause, obviously I wanted to look, like, toned and skinny, um, and like, um, they've always got a tan which probably helps!
P22 Alice I think that, like, when I started trying to restrict, like my eating and things, a lot of it was, like, looking at what these people were doing. Um, especially like, the healthy eating blogs and the fitness blogs.

Alice's focus develops into something far more body conscious; so much so, that she describes restricting her food to try and match the bodies of people she is looking at online. Interestingly, Alice is the only participant who described becoming fixated with online displays of 'healthy' approaches to eating and excessive gym use. Other participants describe how thinness alone is a key part of how they construct being attractive:

P9 Iliya Because if you see, like, Victoria's Secret. Victoria's Secret images, I'll be like, oh my gosh they are so skinny, I should be as skinny as them…

P28 Iliya …*They all were saying – she's a fashion blogger – Eugenia something – and she's really skinny. She's not anorexic, but people saying you should not follow her because she's so skinny. But, I think it's more, her body type… she is nice.*
P54 Iliya *The thigh gap. I think it's that if you have it, you're more skinny and that's what's nice. Whereas if your thighs are touching…*

Iliya repeatedly details people that she follows online, seemingly in awe of their skinniness. Isolating a particular part of the body – the thighs – she muses over how desirable it is to have a gap in this place. By her own admission, she finds a very skinny body type (that other people criticise) attractive.

Awareness of skinny being fashionable is reflected throughout the data set:

I33 Interviewer *You mentioned earlier about – that there's a certain image that you feel that girls think they 'should' have – what image do you think that is?*
P33 Camilla *Um, very thin, um, blonde straight hair, I don't know, I've got a kind of… image in my mind.*

To add to this, the type of look that Anya constructs as the most desirable – indeed, most 'normal' – is one that is blonde and thin. The pressure of this creates an environment where she feels she must restrict her intake of food, in order to achieve this look:

P107 Anya *Like, nowadays, normal is like – long, straight hair, long hair to there, that's what people go towards and everybody's growing their hair, trying to get longer hair, to be more like, what everybody's looking like. Yeah. And sometimes you would think, ok, I'll only, like, eat this much, or something, or I'll only eat one meal today and then it will be fine.*

This is echoed by Sahana who, though she does not have first-hand experience of restricting food herself, is aware of friends who limit their food intake in order to try and match the thin ideal.

P18 Sahana *I know a few people, um, so there are two different types of people I know. There are, I have quite a few friends who seem to think that, um, who, kind of stop themselves from eating.*

In conjunction with this, Naazima describes how, although she encounters a variety of

bodies represented online, slim bodies are still the primary focus:

P32 Naazima No, they're still quite skinny… They do advocate like, a range of body sizes, but, like, the main campaign and their main models are still like, quite slim and not curvy.

This mention of a range of body sizes is important, as several of the participants mentioned a shift in body ideal, when talking about thinness. Anna refers to the skinny, tanned look as referenced by previous participants, but her understanding is that this ideal has shifted:

P13 Anna That there used to be this whole, like, ooo, skinny and, um, and brown and that look… I would say almost, it's like, swung the other way. So, being really skinny is like, now, really like, what are you doing?

As well as a move away from skinniness, eight of the participants specifically describe a move towards a more curvaceous body ideal. Though Laura equates skinniness with perfection, she also references the role of Kim Kardashian in moving away from this ideal, and the inherent positivity of the shift:

P22 Laura Yeah, that's probably what's so much of the attraction to it. Like you're used to seeing really skinny models, like perfect. And then she's just as confident, and she's so curvy. You don't have to be all, you know, twig skinny and stuff to be beautiful, like her.

Alice also discusses the change, describing the Kardashians as 'unique looking' with curves that are seen as a positive thing. In fact, she says, 'if you've got this, it can actually be a good thing.'

Naazima's appraisal of this body shape is more complicated. She believes this look to be attractive: 'it's the mainstream right now is having, like, quite a curvy body. Like a big butt, and quite large boobs, and then like a slim waist and being relatively slim… it's more flattering.' Later, however, she discusses how this look is 'unhealthy' as people have to lose weight and do 'a lot of exercise, squats and stuff' to look like that. Finally, Sahana resists entirely the idea that a curvaceous ideal is somehow a good thing:

P16 Sahana I think the one thing that, I think this is the idea that an hour glass shape is the best shape, er, that people would want. But I don't agree with that, I think as long as a

woman is fit, um, if she can handle her own body and take care of it, I think that's fine.

In summary, every participant discusses a variety of aesthetic ideals, ever evolving and experienced in different ways. To several of the participants, prettiness is seen as key – over and above something like intelligence and very much in line with OT, where a physical attribute is valued over and above personal qualities (Harris & Fiske, 2009). Indeed, the appraisal of prettiness plays into the infantilisation of women, wherein society systematically equates femininity with vulnerability and childhood (Jhally, as cited in Huot, 2013). Whilst this is a dominant construct of attractiveness in interviews, so too is the fact that the variety of ideals is narrow in range; whether an ideal be thin – which participants reflected on as influencing food intake – or curvaceous or toned, each 'look' does not deviate drastically from appearances that are approved by a heteronormative – that is, straight and patriarchal – society. Finally, the common thread that runs through all of these narratives is that all participants constructed a shared understanding of there being an aesthetic ideal – whatever that might be – and nearly all participants discuss viewing women's bodies online in respect of this.

4.2.2. Impossible standards

As well as a variety of aesthetic ideals, participants also describe how these ideals often feel out of reach, or simply impossible. In this respect, participants' descriptions of women are often contradictory to one another. For instance, Camilla describes the women she has seen online as being 'not muscular, but kind of, muscular'. Steph's description of Kim Kardashian echoes this:

P76 Steph *I don't even know how she has her body. It's like, really curvy, but really thin as well. And it's really weird, but it looks natural in a way.*

Other participants also reflect on the impossibility of the bodies they see online. Alice, who describes getting particularly caught up in the images that she was viewing, describes how in her attempts to attain the body she was seeing online, nothing worked:

P22 Alice *I play hockey three times a week. And suddenly there was this craze of people that looked like this. And I definitely wasn't gonna look like that. And it's like, 'what are you doing wrong?' kind of thing. 'Cause I eat quite healthily and was doing sport and I still didn't look like this.*

Though exercising regularly, Alice later observes how real-life things – such as doing

exams, or having a job – make achieving such a body impossible. On the other hand, Anya understands the women she views online to be – quite literally – 'not real'. The curvy ideal requires 'silicone' and 'plastic surgery' to obtain the 'enhanced features' she described viewing. Indeed, Naazima agrees, citing the editing of photos as partly responsible for the curves of women:

P26 Naazima Um, maybe not necessarily healthy, because those proportions are hard to achieve. Um, like, having quite a big contrast between your waist and your hips. For some people, like your fat just doesn't deposit that way! So, it's kind of unrealistic. And also, it's still photoshopped to make it look bigger, like the ratio even bigger.

Iliya discusses similar observations, pointing out that 'Beyoncé did Photoshop – I think it was her thigh gap?'. However, as well as Photoshop, Iliya feels conflicted by the different demands of social media:

P28 Iliya And I think that social media would hope to put the idea of the perfect body, we have to combine everything. So, you have to be skinny, but not too skinny. You have to have hips, but not too much. You have to have a Kylie Jenner body, but not too much. And it all needs to be natural. You have to be pretty, as much as them.

The list of things she felt women 'have' to be is long and contradictory. She describes a need for women to be 'perfect', alongside conceding that 'there is no actual possibility for us to look amazing'.

Finally, Anya laments the complexity of aspiring to a body that isn't real:

P112 Anya You know, that sort of thing – I'm talking about how it's so distorted and how it's not real, but I still look at it and I'm still like, oh my gosh, I need to be like that. You know?
And I know, I know it's not – and I think my friends, like, I think everybody's a bit like that and they see, they know it's not real – that it's kind of just like… but I still wanna be like that! I wanna be like something that's not real.

To summarise, participants identified a universal lack of reality with the photos they viewed online. Whether this be through Photoshop, unrealistic gym and diet regimes, or plastic surgery, the women that the participants viewed online were generally acknowledged to be unrealistic for the everyday woman. Many of the participants still express feelings of wanting to emulate these images, or negatively compared

themselves to these images, despite knowing that they were not real. Upon interviewing these participants and feeling the impossibility of standards propagated online, it was interesting for me to consider just what these contradictions might achieve. Indeed, Wolf (1990) remarks that though women have breached the power structure, the levels of EDs and cosmetic surgery have also risen, whilst consumer spending has increased significantly. She blames this on the 'beauty myth', in which a backlash against feminism uses images of female beauty as a political weapon, in order to checkmate the inheritance of second-wave feminist gains, and exert social control over women (Wolf, 1990, pp. 11-12). Indeed, one might argue that the contradictory and impossible standards routinely promoted leave women in a position of failure and out of pocket, chasing an ideal that does not exist.

4.2.3. Negative comparisons

Negative comparisons to images viewed online are rife amongst participants. Five participants describe how, at one point or another, they have viewed themselves negatively in relation to the women they see online, both in terms of their bodies and their general appearance. Indeed, all participants who discuss viewing images of other women online do so through the medium of Instagram. Primarily a site for posting and sharing images, research suggests that Instagram may be more detrimental to the appearance-related concerns of young women than other sites, which typically contain a range of content (Fardouly, Willburger, & Vartanian, 2017). For instance, Anya describes that the ongoing exposure to images of women she perceives to be beautiful is difficult:

P19 Anya And after a while, that's all I would see. And I found that really depressing. Because, it's like, it's too much. Sometimes when you just see a certain type… so then like, it's just, it's all up to who you choose to follow, it gets in your head loads.

Steph echoes this sentiment and explains how, despite recognising that the images she sees online are not real, she cannot help but compare herself negatively:

P67 Steph Ok. Um, this girl that I was talking about in the year above, who has a really good body, and she gets loads of likes on her Instagram. And she did put a picture of herself in a bikini and, um, tried to make it seem really natural and I remember, um, her caption was like 'national best bikini day' or something like that, but really, it was so put on… But then, I guess because I now think of it as it was really put on, I'm still a little bit like even though it's put on, she looks really nice and so I'm a little bit jealous, even if it

is fake, and um, maybe you're just not, you're still not making it look as good, or you're not as pretty, even when you're being fake.

Though she is able to recognise that the photo in question is 'fake', and 'put on', Steph still places herself in a position of inferiority in comparison, demonstrating the power that these photos can hold. For Laura, a girl whom she might see as a 'threat' would have an impact on her and leave her feeling jealous.

P62 Laura If there's a girl that you think is a bit of a threat, or you know, you've always been jealous of her, then I think I'd personally be affected by that. And be like, oh, I wish I looked like that sometimes.

Iliya reiterates this sense of jealousy, as she discusses how she became jealous of her friends who post photos of themselves, more so than with celebrity. For her, not matching up to a friend was an even harder experience:

P86 Iliya She's, she's the same age as me, the same background, the same social stability, stuff like that, and why she is pretty than me, and I'm not so pretty? What experience changes that? What should I do to be like that?

Not only do peer comparisons cause Iliya to question her looks, she also notes how the images she posts of herself online simply don't match up:

P34 Iliya Let's say, I'm out with my friends and they say, 'have you seen that girl, she's in the discover page on Instagram, she's so pretty.' Whereas if you go back to your own page and don't see you have any photos like that, am I as equal as them? Am I less equal? I don't know. I compare myself a lot to them. And, oh I should be like them, but never do something about it, I think it's laziness.

Despite citing her laziness, Iliya also repeatedly refers to episodes of wanting to restrict her intake of food throughout her interview, as a result of seeing skinny women on SNSs:

P16 Iliya And I also watch, like, Victoria Secret parades and whenever I see them at the end, I'll be like 'wow, I think I can't eat for a week'. They're really skinny, they are like the ideal body type, and I should, like I should be like that. Whereas um, when I see the pictures online, or like, Instagram, I'll also be like 'ok, I might go on a diet'.

Feeling the need to restrict her food intake is repeatedly referenced through Iliya's interview, as it is by two other participants. It is echoed by Alice in particular, who also referenced the Victoria's Secret models she would see online, and that the constant comparison she would make online 'just wasn't helpful'. She goes on to explain that other types of accounts – in particular, healthy eating, fitness ones – had an effect on her eating habits:

P22 Alice Yeah. I think that, like, when I started trying to restrict, like my eating and things, a lot of it was, like, looking at what these people were doing. Um, especially, like, the healthy eating blogs and the fitness blogs. Um, 'cause, I've done sports since I was like, seven, and I still do it, like I play hockey three times a week. And suddenly there was this craze of people that looked like this. And I definitely wasn't gonna look like that. And it's like, what are you doing wrong, kind of thing. 'Cause I eat quite healthily and was doing sport and I still didn't look like this. I think these people were saying that they did, so…

Over half the young women interviewed had, at some point, compared themselves negatively in terms of their looks, to an image they viewed online. Be it comparing themselves to peers or celebrities, to their bodies or just how they 'look' in general, there was a universal sense that they had a negative experience of this. Social comparison theory (Myers & Crowther, 2009) proposes that we have a natural tendency to compare ourselves with others – that is, comparison is very much part of our human nature in order to seek reassurance or understand our differences – and it would seem that SNSs provide the perfect space from which to compare oneself in this way. Moreover, all participants describe a specific type of social comparison, that is, comparing themselves upwardly (that is, to someone perceived to have superior attributes to themselves) rather than downwardly (a comparison to someone perceived to have inferior attributes) (Festinger, 1954). The constant ability to access images of other women online appears to facilitate not only the comparison process for these participants, but the effects thereafter. Indeed, those participants who describe comparison to others in more detail also reflect on their resulting low mood, poor self-worth and desire to restrict food intake. This is corroborated by existing empirical literature, which has found online social comparison to have a negative impact on women's well-being (Chua & Chang; 2016; Fardouly et al., 2015b).

It is worth noting that Social Comparison Theory is individualistic, in that it is based on a premise of the comparison of one individual to another, and thus might seem at odds with research which is based on the premise of socially constructed identities. However, within

the context of this research and the methodological approach underpinned by a constructionist standpoint, the concept is still relevant. The young women compare themselves to others who they deem to be more visually desirable to themselves, and this desirability, whilst represented by an individual, is determined by social constructions of attractiveness.

4.2.4. Managing pressure

Several of the participants discuss the way they manage online pressure. These are predominantly participants who express feeling more confident in themselves during interviews, and present themselves as less seriously affected by seeing photos of women online that others might struggle with. Indeed, the majority of participants in this category do not feature in either category featuring negative comparisons, nor impossible standards. It is well established in literature that the problematic use of social networking (for instance, repeatedly looking at one's own profile and the profile of others) is related to body image concerns (Santarossa & Woodruff, 2017). It seems that the participants who feature more heavily in this sub-theme are the ones who describe using social media to view images of women's bodies less than others, as well as reporting less of a negative personal experience of photo sharing online.

For Laura, her existing body confidence plays a key role in meaning she is able to feel good about herself:

P73 Laura Um, I don't really know. I've always been told since I was younger, well, I've never really had a problem with my body 'cause I've never been, like, a large girl or anything. And um, and I've always, like I've always had a high metabolism. So, I've never, like, worried about it.

By her own admission, Laura has never been a 'large' girl – thereby this seemed to exclude her from having to worry too much about her physique and tapping into social discourse about the desirability of being thin – and the shame of being overweight. For her, a body which corresponds with a social ideal appears to act as a protective measure against having to worry about her body.

Anna, who also discusses confidence in her own body, explains how she is less affected by online pressure. She explains that her motivation to eat well is because it makes her feel better in herself – rather than doing so to manage how she looks.

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P52 Anna Um, I probably eat quite, like, I generally don't have to put a lot of effort into my body to be the way I want it to be, which is quite nice! Um, but um, I would say that I'm a little bit um, conscious of just eating more healthily. But more because of how I feel in myself when I eat more healthily. It makes me feel more awake and less, like, gross.

As with Laura and Anna, other participants – who typically talk less about being affected by online pressures and were not featured in the two previous sub-categories – were more able to distance themselves from any negative influence of online spaces. Camilla, despite sometimes wanting to look a different way, describes being able to maintain a level of acceptance, whilst surrounding herself with people who are similarly able to manage:

P29 Camilla If everything's fine in general, I don't mind and I just deal with it. And if I'm with people who aren't, who either, you can kind of tell don't care, then I'd be I'd be fine, but sometimes it's not that big a deal, and sometimes it's kind of like 'mmm, I wish I looked a different way'. But there's nothing you can do about it, really.

Sahana is also accepting of her body, resolute that online photos would not change how she feels about herself:

P13 Sahana Um, I don't think that what I read or look at in terms of social media would change how I feel about my own body, or women's bodies in general. Physically if we have a different physicality to people, I don't think that someone else should ever change what you feel about yourself.

P16 Sahana I think the one thing that, I think this is the idea that an hourglass shape is the best shape, er, that people would want. But I don't agree with that, I think as long as a woman is fit, um, if she can handle her own body and take care of it, I think that's fine.

Sahana acknowledges that women's bodies are different and that for her, to be healthy is key in being happy with her shape.

Finally, Naazima described similar body confidence, which means she is able to post photos as she pleases, without being concerned about how she might look:

P89 Naazima Erm, I don't know. Not really. I don't really put much emphasis on it. So, I don't know. Maybe because I'm not really that insecure, erm… I don't know, I don't really know how to explain it. But I'm not really hesitant to put up like, a full-mirror selfie,

or anything like that, 'cause of, like, how I look or whatever.

There are a variety of reasons *why* participants described that they were able to manage online pressures, from having desirable physical features (that is, to be slim) acting as a protective factor, to having other interests and being more interested in friends and physical health. Nonetheless, all of these participants construct their appearances as either less important or something that they did not let worry them, which translates into managing any perceived pressures from SNSs. Whilst these participants formulate different ways of managing SNSs, there is a commonality in that they all reported spending less time and energy looking at photos of others online.

There are various commonalities and differences in understanding that run through this theme. Nonetheless, the first three sub-themes are dominated by participants who, in one way or another, describe objectifying women that they look at online. Many of the participants appear used to viewing other women online according to societal standards of beauty, long socialised in an objectifying culture (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). In the act of objectifying the women they look at, participants invariably describe falling short in comparison, despite often being aware that the images they look at are not real. Participants who describe a particular preoccupation with the looks of others are invariably the ones who describe experiencing the ill-effects of ritualistically looking at others. Despite this, a handful of the participants do formulate how they manage SNSs, in that their health, friends, body confidence or self-assurance mean that their confidence acts as a protective measure.

Of course, the other side of objectifying others is the role this plays in constructing the self. A key construct of OT is the outward gaze turned inwards. Given that the dual function of SNSs is to view *and* post photos, the following theme reflects participants' experience of creating their own online identity.

4.3. Creating the Online Self

The way participants describe posting their own photos is just as varied and complex as the way they describe viewing the photos of others. This theme explores the creation of the online self. It is split into three sub-themes. The first explores participants' reasons for posting photos of themselves. Consistent with the literature on motives for posting, which suggests that the response to a selfie can increase self-esteem, many participants explained that the validation they received from others in the form of likes and comments was a positive experience (Pounders, Kowalczyk, & Stowers, 2016).

Countering this, however, participants also reflect on the inherent anxiety that accompanies posting a photo, and often subsequently deleting it, should it not get enough likes or the desired response.

The second sub-theme explores how participants construct photos of themselves. Again, there is variety in how participants approached this, but a consistency in that they are all aware of how they appear in photos, wanting the photos they post to be consistent with a certain 'look'.

The third sub-theme explores the development in posting photos online. Several participants referenced their posting habits when they were younger, which were less concerned with a consistent image or look, and more spontaneous or fun. For these participants, posting a selfie developed to become more serious, or more consciously created. Participants also describe being more aware of their audience now, contributing to the understanding that photos are in some way engineered according to those looking at them.

4.3.1. Why post?

Participants discuss a variety of reasons for posting. For Laura, one of the main reasons is simple: to gain as many likes as possible, which she describes as a competition.

P28 Laura Um, and obviously, people, like, when it comes to Instagram, like, putting up photos, you tend to try and get as many likes as you can! So, it's like a competition.

Laura also describes holding others in mind when posting photos; in a sense, the photos are for them:

P41 Laura I put up stuff because I think people will like it. I'd like to think no one would turn around and actually be brutally honest with me and say how I actually look. But yeah, I get good comments saying, 'oh you look good' and stuff, and it actually makes me feel really good about myself! So…

Here, Laura touches upon an interesting sentiment, in that she doesn't think people are honest in their responses on Facebook. Instead, there seems to be an accepted discourse; a culture of paying one another compliments which can enhance feelings of self-esteem.

Stephanie echoes this, explaining that her confidence is boosted when people remark that she looks nice in a photo. Later, she too describes a similar approach to posting

selfies, hopeful that she will get as many likes as possible:

P44 Stephanie I think everyone tries to look their best and get many likes, or people to like them, or as many followers as well. I think followers are equal to likes, because then if you have more followers, it shows that people are interested in your life more. And it could be from the way that your image is portrayed on Instagram – it is, because people want to follow your images, and see that. And so, therefore, obviously you look better than the person with less likes.

It is apparent that for Stephanie, there is a high level of peer validation from posting photos and receiving a response, in that it signifies an interest in her life, as well as elevating her above others.
 Too nervous to post pictures of her body, Iliya also experiences likes from others as a demonstration of her worthiness:

P60 Iliya And, those likes. I'm worried that nobody's gonna give me the likes! The likes are really important. Like, I was talking with my brother and he'll be 'why do you even care about likes on Instagram?' but I think that, I think they're giving me more… appreciation?

Interestingly, this participant explains that a photo being liked by a girl, rather than a guy, is more important:

P79 Iliya And, a girl that I never met, she commented online, she was like 'oh my gosh, eyebrows on fleek. Eyebrows, clothes.' It was like, 'oh my gosh, I see what she wrote!' and I was so happy. Whereas if a guy compliments me, it's a bit creepy.

For Iliya, there is no suggestion that the photo is intended to be viewed by a male counterpart; indeed, her focus and attention on her eyebrows and clothes suggest a more female-centric audience. McRobbie (2015) articulates that female competition has been repackaged, and brought back to life in the form of women competing against one another within the confines of normative femininity. Indeed, a compliment from another woman is a construction of validation.

Naazima appears more conflicted in her understanding of why she posts. Initially saying that she isn't sure if she is aware of likes, she also acknowledges that her efforts in photos are rewarded with others' likes.

I44 Interviewer There's quite a lot of – it sounds like, it's good getting lots of likes and

following. Is that something you're aware of?

P44 Naazima *Um, yeah. I don't know. Well, I think some people don't really pay attention to likes. I've noticed a few of my recent profile pictures have had a lot of likes compared to my old ones. 'Cause I've like, thought them out better. And it's like, that effort has paid off in a way, 'cause people have enjoyed that image.*

For her, there is still an element of photos being for other people. Photos are described as being thought out, with time and effort going into them.

Hand in hand with posting pictures for a response, comes the anxiety of waiting. Anya describes testing the waters with photos of herself – seeing 'how it does' for a while, before deleting it 'if it doesn't do very well'. Later, she tries to see herself through others' eyes, as an explanation of why she might not have received much response:

P75 Anya *Yeah, but then you're kind of like, you're thinking about it and thinking 'oh my gosh, what if people are looking at it and they're like "she looks really weird"' or something like that… then I just delete it.*

Stephanie also describes deleting photos that haven't achieved the response she would hope for:

P71 Stephanie *Like, I think, when, um, I've said in the past with pictures that if they don't get enough likes then I'd delete it, I think that is a little bit true. And I think I probably would do that.*

Finally, Anna also explains that her photos are designed, in some way, for others. Despite this, her photos appear to be less about approval-seeking for her looks, but rather to engage others in conversation:

P43 Anna *Um, I would want people to, 'cause if I was posting a selfie it would be for costume makeup or something like that. And I'd want people to look at it and think I'd done a good job on it, because I do enjoy doing things like that. Um, I'd hope that people would like it and comment on it and say 'oh, that, like, that makeup looks really cool, how did you do it' or something like that.*

Other participants are less clear on their reasons for posting selfies, though they did comment on what they feel are others' reasons for posting – more of which is discussed in the third section of this analysis. In summary, the participants who describe posting

photos of themselves more regularly report that much of the process was to invoke a response from others. Indeed, McRobbie (2015) suggests that Facebook (and this can presumably be translated to Instagram, Snapchat, etc.) is a new version of the 1970s Miss World Beauty Pageant; a place in which women can re-traditionalise gender roles and be looked at (Berger, cited in McRobbie, 2015). Whether for approval or to stimulate discussion, photos generally are intended to have a purpose: for other people to view and respond to in an act of eliciting validation and approval.

4.3.2. Constructing photos

Every participant interviewed describes constructing their photos in one way or another, before posting them online. Despite many of the participants viewing images of women's bodies, relatively few of the participants talk about posting their own body shots online, instead posting pictures of just their faces, pictures with friends, pictures at fashionable venues, and holiday pictures. Participants describe a range of photos posted and in accordance with a certain aesthetic for each picture, often emulating others' photos in a copycat fashion. Whether this is created through certain conditions for posting, looking a certain way in pictures, wearing makeup or editing photos, the common thread running through the interviews is the need for either themselves, or the general look of the photos, to be a certain way.

Several participants remark on the copycat nature of creating their own photos to be posted. Boyd (2007, p. 10) notes that 'by looking at others' profiles, teens get a sense of what types of presentations are socially appropriate; others' profiles provide critical cues about what to present on their own profile'. Essentially, social media creates a reference point from which teenage girls and young women are able to create their own online identity. Indeed, Camilla remarks on the copycat culture of photos, commenting on how other girls aim to look uniform in their photos:

P12 Camilla Yeah, I think more, if you have, kind of, a group of girls and one of them's posting their selfie, and the others really like how she looks or likes something particular in the photo, they'll try and be like that.

Alice concurs, citing celebrity photos as the main source of inspiration for many girls' photos:

P76 Alice I think, like, people are trying to be like everyone else. Like, they're all trying to, like, get a certain picture. I think, like, 'cause, like, it's celebrities that have loads of likes and things, like it's kind of seen as like, the good thing to do.

Anya also describes being very aware of the celebrity influence on how people post, and the effect it has on her:

P115 Anya Yeah, it's just kind of like, trying to fit in, I think, as well. Because everybody's trying to look like a celebrity… and now it seems like everybody's posting pictures of themselves, looking like celebrities. So, it's like, ok, so everybody looks like this now, so I ought to look like this now as well. You know, that sort of thing.

This is echoed in both Stephanie, Anna and Iliya's interviews, who all discuss being aware of how others look online and feeling a need to emulate this in their own posts, either with how they construct their photos (through angles and makeup) or via their fashion sense and general image.

As well as the copycat culture of social media, participants also discuss how they construct their look more generally, before posting pictures of themselves. Camilla, despite posting relatively few photos of herself, still checks the photo to confirm it is suitable:

P64 Camilla I'll check I look ok, and then if I do I'll post it. But the number of times I've posted is probably a lot less than most people. But yeah, I'll always check I think – I think I look ok.
I65 Interviewer Is there anything specific you look for?

P65 Camilla No… just generally that I like them. There are probably things in my mind I look for, but I don't think I think about that, I just do it subconsciously…

Anya echoes this sentiment, not looking for anything specific in her photos other than generally approving of them:

P71 Anya Like if we have a picture of ourselves we'll, like, zoom in and look and it. And be like 'ok, ok, now I can post it'. Even though when people look through it, they don't go like that.
I72 Interviewer So, what might you be looking for when you zoom in?

P72 Anya I don't know, just anything. Like if there's anything that looks like, wrong, with me, then I'll be like 'no'.

Though neither participant has anything specific in mind in terms of how she looks, nor

is there any reference to how others might observe them – both are still aware of their appearance in photos, suggesting that there exists a level of self-objectification in the posting of photos, in that participants are viewing themselves through the gaze of another.

For Iliya, the process is more complicated; choosing the 'perfect' selfie, she says, 'takes time'. Describing the processes, there are a range of things she does to ensure she appears how she wants to:

P69 Iliya Um, different poses, let's say… er. Let's say my lips. I'd be like 'oh my lips look so weird' or my face, oh I look such a baby face. Let's put more highlighter or –
Interviewer Ok –

P70 Iliya Makeup to make me more skinner. Or, um, I don't know. I should, like, change angle. I know that Kim Kardashian does that, the angle thing. She doesn't care! It doesn't matter if you're pretty or not, it's the angle [laughter].

Iliya describes avoiding photos of her body, which she 'hates'. Instead, she prefers to take selfies and focus on her face, utilising makeup, angles and different poses to achieve the desired look, in the style of Kim Kardashian.

Alice describes rarely posting photos of herself anymore, after making changes to how she uses social media. Nonetheless, she recalls in detail how, uncomfortable with posting body photos, she would instead post pictures of her face, using varying approaches to create her look. In particular, Alice also notes that she uses strategies to look slimmer, such as angles and sucking in her cheeks:

P39 Alice And, you sit there for hours, trying to find the right angle.

P41 Alice Um, I definitely sort of, tried to pout but like, suck my cheeks in, get my cheekbones um, like, I've always worn makeup, I think I wore a lot more then. Um, so like, ones had quite a lot of makeup on, like, um, like, usually had my hair in the picture, I think.

For this participant, it is apparent that a thin ideal is being emulated, with the use of photo manipulation as one of the means by which to achieve it. Other participants describe the importance of makeup in a selfie, where the face is the primary focus. Laura points out that she wouldn't ever take a selfie if she didn't have makeup on, whilst Stephanie describes how these photos often gain the most likes:

P47 Stephanie If you take a selfie and you've got loads of makeup on, and then you put a really nothing to do with the picture caption, like, I honestly have no idea. But people are obviously just like 'oh, I look really nice with loads of makeup on' and stuff like that – they'll get a lot of likes.

For Anna, the approach is different. Whilst she posts photos of herself with makeup as a focus, in this instance it is for the artistry of the makeup, which is clearly costume:

P44 Anna Yeah, so it would be specific. It would definitely be specific makeup that I'd done for a party, or something that was, that was, out of the ordinary. So, like, if I, like a costume character or something, and part of that, like I've gone to a party as the Cheshire cat, or medusa, and I've done quite a lot of makeup for that, scales and a big smile or something.

Anna's construction of a look is entirely different from that of other participants. For her, the importance was her image in general:

P40 Anna Um, to actually have, like, whatever I'm wearing or the style. And then I'll have a lot of other things going on and a picture as well maybe. Um, and yeah, I would want to look good in photos that are online. But more in a way, not in a way of I look like I've made an effort that day, and I've, like, not necessarily with makeup on or wearing my best clothes. But just generally like to not look awkward or unhappy, to always look happy and like I'm having fun and stuff.

With photos of herself, she also describes looking as though she doesn't care being a key part of the image being constructed. Indeed, Gill (2007), comments on the lesson that girls and young women are taught in constructing their feminine identity, in that appearing carefree and effortless is paramount. Key to Anna's look is just this – a conscious construction of an image and particular style, specifically designed to look easy, effortless and desirable to others. This is a recurrent theme throughout her interview.

Naazima also repeatedly explains that whilst she doesn't really like social media, she takes more time and care over photos for Instagram:

P50 Naazima Yeah. Um, I don't know. Like, on Facebook I'm more willing to just be relaxed and do like, a really funny face. And like, just do, 'cause it's just my friends and

they know how weird I am. But then on Instagram, I'll make it really pretty and like nice, and edit it really well.

She highlights the difference between social media sites; Instagram, the platform more heavily focused on the visual, requires more care, time and thought to ensure a photo looks how she wants it, whereas she can be more relaxed on Facebook. To note, few participants explicitly cite the difference between sites, as Naazima does, yet all discuss Instagram as the dominant site they use, indicating the significance of this site, designed for visual validation.

Finally, two of the participants do discuss how they construct body shots for social media photos. Whilst Iliya describes going to lengths to avoid these photos, Stephanie describes one recent photo of her in a bikini, where she cropped out her stomach as she had 'a massive food baby'. However, for her, this body shot was a one off. Laura agrees, saying she would not post a photo on a day where her stomach doesn't feel flat as she wants to look her 'absolute best'. Despite this, both participants talk more about posting photos which are general reflections of their lives (for instance, holidays) or selfies where their faces were the main focus.

In summary, participants describe a range of approaches to creating pictures of themselves for their social media accounts. None of the participants focus heavily on body shots – though when they did, looking slim enough was important – and the majority of selfies were of their faces. Gill (2017) remarks how young women's visual literacies pay particular attention to the face, in which minute flaws are itemised, or easily erased with apps that are designed to rub out perceived imperfections. Alternatively, participants are hyper-aware of how they looked to others; a form of self-objectification in which the body isn't necessarily key but the 'look' projected to others certainly is.

4.3.3. Change over time

Finally, seven of the participants discuss the changing function of posting on social media over time; there is a general consensus that pictures now are more serious, or more curated. Camilla remarks how there used to be far less celebrity influence than there is now, and that people would 'just take selfies', but they wouldn't post them in the same way. Anna agrees that there has been a shift, commenting on how photos now lack authenticity:

P3 Anna *'Cause, I'd say that sort of thing would have started, like, taking selfies and stuff to see an authentic life of what the celebrities are doing when they're not in the media and stuff. But it's kind of just turned into another way of looking at them and they all seem to just use it as another way of, like, publicity for themselves and career.*

For Anna, her photos have become less spontaneous, more thought out in terms of what other people want to see:

P60 Anna *Yeah, and it's curated definitely. And also concerned with what other people want to look at. Like, when I was younger it was more 'I'm interested in 9,000 pictures of me and my cat' so that's what I'm going to put!'[laughter] I wouldn't really think about what it was like for other people.*

Anya echoes this sentiment, reflecting on how she used to post a lot when she was younger:

P36 Anya *Yeah, I used to post a lot! And some of the stuff, it was just really weird. But, I thought I was being really cool… it definitely wasn't!*

Similarly, Stephanie explains there has been a change in the photos people post, which are now more serious, more important:

P48 Stephanie *And, when I first got selfies, or like, heard about selfies, like I said, I think it was just quite fun. But then it just got, it got so big that even the 'right' selfie became trying to show off.*

For Laura, the experience has also shifted:

P31 Laura *Um, well it was like, a teen thing. You know, when you had cameras and you'd be with your friends, so probably when I was a teenager, with my friends, or something. But when they started getting serious, [laughter], I don't know – maybe 3 or 4 years ago, maybe?*

Finally, Iliya describes the same understanding of how things have changed, in that younger teenagers – 13 or 14 years old, are 'ahead of the game' in comparison to the photos that she used to post at that age.

Overall, there is agreement amongst participants that there has been a change in the way people post on social media. What was once more fun, or authentic, appears to

have shifted to something more serious, more curated, and more with an audience in mind. Participants' descriptions of finding the 'right' sort of selfie is reminiscent of Warfield's 2014 study, in which she comments that 'when young women choose the right lighting, pose and posture, they are choosing from those that have become embossed as the acceptable visual grammar of the female form in North American visual culture'. So too do these participants seek to create a selfie that fits in with a certain visual aesthetic. Interestingly, participants in the current study agree that these photos subsequently lack the authenticity that the ones they posted at the start of their time on SNSs held, whilst Warfield's participants describe seeking the right photo in which multiple conditions are met for what the participants 'proclaims to be the "authentic" self'. The participants in the current study suggest quite the opposite to the findings of Warfield's study; that is, the photos that are just 'right' lack the carefree attitude of photos from their adolescence, and which attitude denotes authenticity.

This is an interesting sub-theme and had not been considered prior to the research taking place. Could it be that as participants have got older, their relationship with SNSs has shifted and developed? Another possibility to consider is that SNSs have changed and developed over their short life span. In particular, the developing culture of SNSs as a tool for marketing and advertising, the rise in celebrity culture on SNSs and the increasing visual literacy amongst young women suggest that the culture of SNSs has changed. Elias and Gill (2017) note that the proliferation of apps and filters to perfect photographs intended for SNSs bring about not a male gaze but a surgeon's, where our imperfections are highlighted and corrected, and that the stakes for online photos are higher than ever.

This theme encapsulates participants' construction of their online self; their reasons for doing so in the first place, the way in which they 'create' themselves and how this has developed over time. Of note, none of the participants describe posting regular shots of their bodies, and several describe actively avoiding doing so, rather posting photos of their faces and with friends. This ultimately poses the question as to how and why participants construct their understanding of the type of photos that they avoid posting.

4.4 The Question of Feminism

The question of whether posting revealing photos is an act of defiance and feminist empowerment, or self-publicising attention seeking, plays out across the data. Though participants generally fall into one of two camps, some of them are, at times, caught between the two. Herein, these participants denounce revealing photos, whilst

acknowledging the individual's choice in the same breath. This dilemma characterises the debate about women who are either empowered or slutty (Petersen, 2017). At one end of the spectrum, participants seem to have internalised judgement of women who reveal all; a rhetoric which lingers over the women who display their bodies and are called too slutty for doing so. The other end is representative is post-feminist discourse, which is characterised by body ownership, choice, empowerment, and the sexualisation of culture (Gill, 2007). Whilst participants inhabit this contradiction in the language they use, some are apparently unwilling to completely condemn other women by caveating what they say with reference to a woman's choice. It seems that post-feminist sensibilities have suffused popular culture (Gill, 2007) and some participants are conscious not to go against the status quo. Nonetheless, it is of interest that just three explicitly reference the term 'feminism' whilst doing so.

This theme is split into two sub-themes. The first represents those participants who demonstrate that they are inherently 'anti' body shots, whether they be posted by a celebrity or a peer. I had wondered in this part of the interviews whether participants would associate such photos with some form of self-objectification, consistent with ideals of the patriarchy. However, the general consensus amongst these participants is that actually, sexy-selfies are 'too' something; too revealing, too attention-seeking, too much. Indeed, participants placed more blame on the individual women who post these pictures, rather than the culture that encourages them to do so. Nonetheless, there are moments in which participants pay lip- service to current feminist rhetoric, in conjunction with contributing to a narrative which shames woman for displaying their sexuality.

The second sub-theme encapsulates an alternative perspective to online spaces predominantly promoting unattainable levels of perfection. Several participants express an awareness that social media also provides a platform for a movement which encourages women to be natural and embrace themselves as they are, regardless of whether or not they fit into a specific category of looks and body shape. Though not explicitly labelled as such, one might argue that these sorts of selfies are inherently anti-selfie, protesting against the 'mainstream' values of the selfie and an attempt to legitimise stigmas around a certain type of female body (Barbala, 2017).

4.4.1. 'Too…'

A common theme running through interviews is the view that revealing body shots posted on social media by other women, both friends and celebrities (specifically, ones that celebrate women's sexuality or ones posted featuring women with an 'ideal' body), are 'too' something: too much, too self-centred or too outrageous. A direct parallel arises with

Petersen's 2017 book, comprising ten essays which focus on the dominant women of popular culture (Madonna, Lena Dunham, Nicki Minaj and several more) who are routinely criticised for being 'too' something (in this instance, too old; too naked; too slutty). Indeed, all of the subjects of Petersen's essays are 'too much' (p.xii). Results from this analysis appear to corroborate the suggestion that there remains an ongoing policing of women who speak and act loudly, contradicting traditional femininity.

Sahana describes finding revealing body shots of women too much, explaining that she would rather look at something else:

P24 Sahana But a few, one or two of those people, are too obsessed with themselves. And that's sometimes a little bit, like, I just don't think – it's not something that shouldn't be, it's just, you come across like 17 or 18, but ok can I move onto something else, please.

For her, posting body shots is unnecessary, as she does not need the attention they garner:

P27 Sahana I've never done that, and hopefully I never would. Because, um, I think I have enough attention – if I need someone, I can just text them. But, um, I think that whole process of taking so much effort, just for one picture, it's too much for me.

Anya and Stephanie also refer to revealing selfies as 'too much'. For Anya, the experience of seeing these photos is an unhappy one:

P19 Anya And, after a while, that's all I would see. And I found that really depressing. Because, it's like, it's too much. Sometimes when you just see a certain type…

I find her comment on the lack of variety in female bodies represented online particularly interesting; a reflection of the bodies she sees online which are still compliant with the demands of a heteronormative gaze. She comments on the effect on the girls viewing these photos, and indeed, makes a rare comment on the male gaze, and the pressure on women because of it:

P83 Anya …girls especially will think 'ok, how will I meet this standard of what all these boys are looking at and finding attractive? How am I gonna be like that when I don't have the money to have plastic surgery?' Or, I wouldn't even get plastic surgery for that, you know?

Other evocative words are used throughout the interviews to describe revealing photos. Alice and Stephanie use 'outrageous' and 'ridiculous', whilst Anna describes the photos as 'too far', citing women's empowerment as good 'to a certain point'.

Laura comments on how, though none of her friends post revealing photos, she remains aware of other people doing it:

P10 Laura Um, well personally I don't really have many friends that do that. I mean, you might come across a couple, especially if there is a few round school, when people are so shocked by it 'cause it's just quite unusual. Like, 'oh god, you're revealing quite a lot about yourself' and like, we joke about it, saying 'well it's not much of a surprise' from that person.

There is a real sense of those who post these photos being 'othered'. Moreover, in reference to the Kardashians, Camilla feels their posts are constructed to gain attention or fame:

P1 Camilla But, um, some of the things that she posts are a bit ridiculous, like she's just trying to get attention, and the family's only really famous because of how they look and what they do, there isn't really a talent or anything like that.

The same, she later remarks, is true for her peers, who only post for attention or to become more popular. Anna's understanding of these photos is consistent with Camilla's, despite not having seen the photos in question:

P2 Anna I probably, I would have said that she did that as like, a stunt, more than just – but I haven't really seen them so I don't know what they're like. But, that sounds like, kind of attention seeking, type thing.

The question of whether nude selfies negate feminism is a much-debated topic, not just in academic spaces, but in accessible, popular culture writing. Pamela Rutledge, director of the Media Psychology and Research Centre, was recently quoted in *Elle* magazine, saying that this type of selfie is problematic: whilst empowering for Kim Kardashian ('all the way to the bank'), she argues that such pictures are in fact exploitative of her fan base (Phelan, 2016).

Alice's response to body shots echoes this sentiment, remarking that there is a 'motive' behind the bikini shots her friends post, which is to get more likes on their social media

accounts. Similar remarks are made by Naazima, Stephanie, Laura and Sahana, who all formulate revealing photos as being posted in order to gain attention from others. To note, several participants acknowledge and criticise a woman's choice, almost in the same breath.

P27 Alice Yeah. I saw it, um, and I think like, part of me is all for women doing what they want. Like, if they feel comfortable doing that, then that's fine. But then I, kind of, the other side of me thinks that it gives out the wrong message.

Laura's comments echo this sentiment, as she raises the conflict between a woman's choice and this being taken too far:

P10 Laura Well, yeah, it's a bit like 'oh god, I don't really want to see that much…' but I guess, it's their choice to put that up. So…

So too does Sahana seem caught between a woman's choice to post photos of herself, which are 'nothing bad', and her photos going too far:

P25 Sahana Well, lots of selfies. It's nothing bad, not at all. It's just, it makes you think that they're just, too much into themselves, to be concerned with anything.

Comments from Anya are consistent with this. Whilst she has friends who would construct revealing photos as a form of feminism, she feels more torn:

P6 Anya I mean I've got a couple of friends who would look up to Kim Kardashian and they agree that the whole baring yourself is quite… um, like a form of feminism. They like, take pictures like that, and I'm like 'ok that's fine, but you're not…' you know that sort of picture, you know?

There is a suggestion that posting photos of one's body is ok, but only in certain circumstances. This opens up the dynamics to be navigated by women in terms of how and when to post photo on SNSs. Are women's bodies only 'ok' when they are an object – coy and subservient, rather than placed in the role of the subject?

There is general agreement that the revealing body shots posted online by other women are 'too' much. Several participants contradict themselves, acknowledging the right to choose what to post, but undermining this right with criticism. Again, there appears to be a contradiction here in that many participants who formulate gaining likes as one of the

reasons for posting their own photos are simultaneously critical of women who post body shots for attention. It raises the question, 'what is the right sort of attention?' As noted, Gill (2007) suggests that being seen to be effortless and carefree is key in the construction of femininity and perhaps for these participants, the women who post photos of their body violate the silent rule of not being seen to post for attention, rather doing it subtly, quietly – femininely.

4.4.2. Express yourself

Countering the seemingly pervasive negative experience of viewing women's bodies online, several of the participants also present photo sharing as a feminist move, as part of a movement towards online body positivity and the embracing of yourself as you are.

Naazima's observation of photos and choice are similar. When discussing women that post photos of themselves wearing lingerie online, she recognises no shame in their bodies.
Instead, the confidence to post like this is seen as a positive:

P11 Naazima *And sometimes it can be quite revealing, but I just think that's people showing off what they've got; it's not really, um, yeah. It's not bad.*
Interviewer *How does that make you feel, kind of, about women's bodies in general and about your own body? Is there any link there for you, any correlation?*
P22 Naazima *I don't really view their bodies as being shameful of anything, like negative in any way. So, like, I don't really feel like me, like, wearing, like, the same things is shameful or whatever either.*

In conjunction with this, Iliya highlights how women are shamed by societal expectations of women as mothers, whilst arguing that women should have choice in what they do:

P1 Iliya *Cause, it's her own body, so if she wants to expose it, it's her own, there's nothing wrong with it. Even though some people think that, oh, she has a child, she should not do that. But, that would be sexist. Like, if men post a nude selfie, it's ok. But if a woman does it, it's like oh, she's the mother, she can't do that.*

The juxtaposition of men and women here points to the fact that women can't 'have it all' in current society; in this instance, that they cannot be sexy and bear children. Iliya raises this split, highlighting her understanding that we still live in a patriarchal society in which women are either innocent, child loving and lacking interest in sex, or sexually

experienced and seductive – never both at the same time (Friedman, Weinberg, & Pines, 1998). However, Iliya champions these photos as inherently individualist: an expression of the women themselves, as artistic, as inherently post-feminist:

P7 Iliya Yeah, I use Instagram, I follow most celebrities like Beyoncé, Kylie Jenner, um, Rihanna. If I see a celebrity in the nude, like picture, I see it more as an expression of themselves. Because the ancient Greeks, they had nude pictures. Maybe it's more like that, it's the body of the woman. So, it might be seen as an art.

Indeed, a body positive movement has seen a growing online trend for women to challenge normative ideals of beauty. Growing in momentum since 2012, users have more and more frequently been posting selfies to challenge traditional ideals of feminine beauty, and this has been further advocated by news media outlets (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). Alice, who is vocal throughout her interview about her negative construction of online photo sharing, also reflected on how the representation of a variety of bodies from high-profile characters, such as the Kardashians, can actually be a positive thing for girls and young women:

P86 Alice So, I think, um, like, the majority of models, um, and celebrities have focused on being quite skinny, um, and I think with them having such a high profile, and still like – I think they look great, um, like I think that's really positive. I think they wear clothes that quite, like, enhance their curves. Like, they don't try and hide it. And I think that's good.

Alice's focus on the Kardashians as being positive body role models (in contrast to the usual, skinny look of models and celebrities) offers an alternative perspective to the family's repeated publication of their bodies on social media. For her, having previously expressed her discomfort at routinely seeing women online who represent an unrealistic, skinny body ideal, they represent variety which challenges the status quo.

Anna also describes social media as a space in which to embrace yourself as you are, so much so that this has had a personal impact on her in terms of how she interacts with her own body:

P27 Anna Um, and, but, what's nice is that if I have any imperfections, it's almost like a fashion now to have those imperfections, that it's like 'oh yeah, you should leave those as they are, because, it like, shows that you're just natural', and that's just something that's really good now. Yeah, so it almost encourages those things to just stay how they

are. And even things like, um, shaving legs and stuff, or just generally, shaving a lot of body hair, it's like 'oh no, maybe you shouldn't do that, you should be, it shows that you're a woman and stuff'… and so there is a really strong movement in the other way now, which I think is definitely powered by social media being like 'look how beautiful this woman is, and she's all natural' and that's because that's been so strongly supported, it's kind of like going the other way now.

For Anna, social media has facilitated the championing of women being natural, unfettered by the 'rules' as they may once have been and embracing women's bodies that might previously have been subject to stigmatisation and shame. Indeed, she is more aware of being encouraged to stay natural and to embrace her body as it is. Moreover, she expresses a distinct move away from women seen singularly as sexual objects, but instead seen as natural, beautiful beings:

P21 Anna *So yeah. I'd say that the feminist movement and women wanting to be seen as not as sexual, as agents of their body and normal people – that's encouraged social media because it's become so popular and that's now what people want to see.*
P26 Anna *Um, I'd say it's portrayed in a lot of ways depending on where you're looking for it, but you'll definitely find quite a big variety of how it's portrayed. I'd say it's very highly respected that, usually, like if you have art of the female form, it's like 'uh, this is very beautiful and natural' and it's very, like, it's very much like, that, the, if you were showing off your body it's never really seen as a negative thing, that much.*

Sahana's comments are in line with these, in that she also describes the positive impact of encountering women online who go against the grain in terms of their appearance and body type:

P32 Sahana *So, you know. Somebody who's not that zero-figure person, and they still, um, are pretty confident. You know, feel good about themselves. That's pretty motivating. Um, or somebody who, um, went on that fitness way, and then they've achieved something that's really motivating… I tend to pay attention to those, rather than the negativity.*

For Sahana, paying attention to these pages and witnessing the confidence of women who don't 'fit the mould', rather than focusing on the more one-dimensional pages, is something she feels to be worth her time and attention. In conjunction with this, Stephanie also recognises a shift how women's bodies are being portrayed and celebrated in an online space.

P59 Stephanie *I think in the media now, it's all coming out maybe a bit to 'accept your natural self' and there's that whole thing – it doesn't matter if you're plus sized, or skinny, it doesn't matter your size.*

Finally, Iliya also comments on how she feels if she encounters women online who have posted a picture of their body, even if it doesn't fit a certain ideal. For her, this is a more positive message than seeing photos of a popular but body-focused celebrity:

P11 Iliya *I see them and I scroll them… whereas if a girl, like, not ideal body type, normal, with a bikini on, I'll be like she really looks nice. And I'd like that picture instead of Kylie Jenner's. Because I feel like that's different. You see Kylie everywhere, the ombre hair, the body. Whereas if you see that girl and she looks really pretty, even if she's normal body type but she looks happy, I like that. Maybe if I like it she might feel better and post more. I feel ok, she really looks nice.*

In conclusion, several of the participants balanced the discussion of online representations of women's bodies as hyper-sexual and too much. Instead, they explained how social networking sites provide a foundation from which women can challenge body ideals, own their sexuality, embrace womanhood and own their imperfections.

Throughout the interviews, several participants appear caught between promoting post-feminist values of choice and empowerment and also admonishing women who do make this choice. This tension is in many ways reflective of the current debates amongst feminists, which are not only refined to academic circles but take place on the comment sections of Instagram posts and Twitter statuses; it seems that participants are caught in their own feminist predicament and this is prevalent amongst women. Similarly, many of those who champion women showing their bodies online are doing so in the name of diversity (that is, in terms of body shape and imperfections) rather than of sexuality, suggesting that empowerment in the name of inclusivity is to be championed, but that it is still a contentious topic in terms of sexuality.

This theme represents the split in participants in terms of feminist ideologies and posting body-centric shots online. As the debate as to whether or not SNSs negate feminist values is ongoing, this confusion and divide is embodied by some participants, who hold two different constructions of how they experience this dilemma. Moreover, this theme raises the question of the various feminist arguments in general; do those who disagree

with what is slated as post-feminist empowerment feel unable to critique it? And does the LYB discourse leave space for us to question and critique women's online body representations?

The complexity of this debate is reflected in the back-and-forth positioning of some participants. Nevertheless, it is clear from interviews that the context for this argument is not the only thing that SNSs provide, and is apparent from the interviews that the participants' experience of online photo sharing extends beyond questions of female empowerment.

4.6. Conclusion

Overall, the analysis has highlighted how complex and multifaceted interaction with SNSs can be. Despite this, there exists a range of commonalities amongst participants' construction of their use of SNSs and the impact that this has on body image. From a consensus of an ideal body shape and an interaction with other women's photos in response to this, to the ways in which participants produce their own photos in line with their perception of attractiveness or image of the self they wish to create, all participants are generally consistent in their accounts of SNSs being a production. This throws up broader questions about representations of female sexuality and autonomy as a whole, which can serve to divide women. Finally, it is apparent that SNSs have a range of important uses beyond female body image which can yield benefits for their users, and these uses should not be overlooked at the cost of further marginalising women and casting them as objects to be viewed.

5. Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter reviews the aims of this research project, followed by a summary of the research findings in the context of the research aims. These findings are considered in relation to the literature and theory already reviewed, as well as new literature in light of any new findings. The clinical implications of the study are considered, both in terms of counselling psychology and in the wider context. The methodological approach is reviewed with regard to its strengths and limitations, as well as a critical evaluation of the research.

Suggestions for future research are considered, and my own reflections on the entire research process are presented.

5.2. Research Aims

The first aim of the research was to gain a better understanding of young women's experience of online photo sharing and its role in body image. The second aim was to consider these findings and the ensuing implications in the context of counselling psychology and beyond, in order to better understand the experience of women who are often marginalised and oppressed because of their gender. The final aim of the research was to be able to consider the strengths and limitations of this research and to be able to suggest directions for future research and clinical practice in light of these.

5.3. Summary of the Findings

The following sections review the findings of the analysis and discuss them in relation to existing literature. The aim of the research was not to corroborate existing empirical literature on SNSs and body image through testing constructs of existing theories of body image, rather to complement and extend existing literature through the use of a qualitative methodology. Nevertheless, findings from this study support past positivist research, in that participants discussed a range of negative consequences from the use of photo sharing platforms, such as body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem and low mood. Moreover, participants described experiences consistent with the premise of self-objectification – that is, seeing themselves through the eyes of another in terms of their physical attributes. However, this study also opens up our awareness of the complexities and contradictions in young women's use of images on SNSs, and these are explored in the following sections.

5.3.1. Objectifying other women

OT posits that the act of objectifying women based on their physical appearance, rather than personal attributes, is so pervasive – in particular, through the media – that it creates an environment of perceived pressure for women, which can lead them to internalise said gaze (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This has been found to increase body shame, anxiety, self- esteem, and disordered eating (Moradi & Huang, 2008; Fredrickson et al., 1998; McKinley & Hyde, 1996). As discussed previously (*2.5.3. Considerations prior to collecting the data*), this research took a dual inductive-deductive approach in that I held in mind previous readings of this theory and allowed these to underpin some of my thinking, whilst allowing space for new concepts and ideas to emerge.

A further dimension offered by this research is that women appear to also objectify other women – even when they express their disinterest in appearance or do not follow trends. All participants in this research demonstrated awareness of other women's ideal body type and discussed other women in terms of their physical appearance, rather than their more dynamic attributes as a person. As we live in a society obsessed with women's appearance in particular, it is no surprise that all participants were hyper-aware of how they understood women 'should' look. Indeed, women are the main targets of sociocultural pressure to look a certain way; the source of this pressure is being appraised by a male gaze (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). In this case, it was demonstrated that participants were aware of viewing women on SNSs in relation to these societal standards and being always aware of the 'should' of female appearance, whatever that might be.

Several participants appeared to be in a cycle of objectification (Strelan & Hargreaves, 2005). Awareness of other women's appearance seemed to be based upon what they collectively constructed as an 'ideal' look – that is, what they constructed as the most desirable physical attributes, as determined by society. It was according to this look that participants described other women. These accounts varied throughout the interviews; for some, the ideal look was formulated as slim and blonde; for others, a more curvaceous look was understood to be in vogue. Nevertheless, variety of the 'ideal', remained narrow. None of the bodies discussed in these variations deviated from cultural norms in that they were still slim and able bodied. Whilst on the surface, a move to a more curvaceous ideal might seem to be a good thing (given the significant physical and psychological health problems that can arise from a drive for thinness), I would contend that the curvy ideal is problematic in its own right. Epitomised by Kim

Kardashian, who was referenced by many of the participants as the trendsetter for a curvy body, this physique is still out of reach for many women. Curvaceous yet still slim and without any real fat, her shape embodies both the heavily regulated 'white' body and the hyper-sexualised, exoticised, non-white (implicitly black) body (Sastre, 2014, p. 129). This also highlights another problem with the 'variety' of bodies cited as ideal, in that even the ones which are not white are still not bodies of colour. Kim Kardashian is replete with tension – slim yet curvy, controlled yet exposed, white and black – and whilst she treads a fine line between these tensions, she is invariably 'white' enough to be granted access to the world of privileged whiteness (Sastre, 2014). Moreover, the world's fascination with (and her endless advertising of) her bottom half not only fetishises but also appropriates black bodies, whilst remaining 'white enough' to be mainstream.

Various other constructs of appearance were used during interviews to describe other women. Two-thirds of the participants repeatedly referred to the women – or, 'girls' – they saw online as 'pretty'. This infantilisation taps into the discourse of the fetishisation of women who resemble teenagers or children; small, meek, and obedient. Merskin (2004) points out that the eroticised gaze at women who are child-like is everywhere in the media and fashion industry. The use of the word prettiness invokes an idea of girlhood and vulnerability, consistent with the thin ideal that participants also repeatedly referred to. Brownmiller (1984, p. 13-14) noted that key to femininity is to be small, allowing masculinity and size to rule, and so this child-like appearance of women maintains the status quo of men's patriarchal dominance. Associations of femininity with smallness, and masculinity with largeness, are so entrenched in our subconscious that we feel discomfort when they are challenged (Grogan, 2008).

Not only are the bodies that participants described being aware of deeply limited, they also set an impossible standard. There was acknowledgement amongst participants that the various ideals they were aware of amongst other women on SNSs were also unrealistic because of their use of Photoshop, plastic surgery, or because they embodied contradiction (for instance, curvy yet slim). Participants discussed the impossibility of achieving any of these looks alongside the demands of an everyday life – that is, school, university, jobs and exams – to the extent that it must be asked: at what cost does it come to look like these women we see online? The time spent harnessing an almost impossible body in the gym, the money spent on beauty products and surgery, and the unrealistic diets adhered to must surely detract from women focusing on other areas of their lives. Furthermore, the psychological impact of aspiring to a body that is either reached by extreme, unhealthy means or quite literally does not

exist (due to extensive photo manipulation) must not be underestimated. Indeed, Wolf (1990) suggests that this feeds into a beauty myth which keeps women subservient to a consumerist society, since they are always dissatisfied that they can never achieve a beauty that doesn't exist. Feminists have long held anti- essentialist, constructionist approaches to bodies (King, 2004), understanding them as created rather than simply existing, and see the impossibility of achieving an 'approved' body as a representation of power politics. This ongoing objectification and control over women's bodies draws on Foucauldian ideas, in which the female body is devoid of power and part of a larger discourse of control (Amigot & Pugal, 2009). The way in which participants refer to women's bodies in terms of their creation – in the gym and through photographic manipulation, and subsequent impossibility – feeds this discourse further.

Participants also described comparing themselves negatively both to peers and celebrities, which is consistent with much of the existing literature on social comparison through SNSs (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016; Fardouly et al., 2015b). Social comparison theory proposes that we have a natural tendency to compare ourselves to one another and SNSs provide an ideal environment for comparisons to be made (Perloff, 2014). The very process of looking at others, internalising these standards of beauty and making comparisons in light of this internalisation is a further form of objectification and self-torture, serving only to divide women.

Second-wave feminism called for sisterhood; third-wave approaches highlight that this suppressed the distinctive experiences of women from different socio-ethnic backgrounds or sexualities, calling for us to recognise these (Lyshaug, 2006) and to form a more unified, inclusive alliance. The prevalence of SNSs appears – in this instance – to have facilitated a space in which any recent calls for united feminist values are undermined. Instagram in particular appears to be a space where women may experience being divided, pitting themselves against peers and stars alike, whilst playing into the consumerist belief that our looks define our self-worth and experiencing the punitive effects of objectifying others and ourselves (Wolf, 1990). Not only does this comparison have the capacity to divide women, but the potential for more serious psychological side effects is apparent from this analysis.

Previous literature suggests that upward comparison to others might serve as motivation to make positive changes in one's own life (Collins, 1996), yet only one participant in this study (Laura) cited gaining inspiration from comparing herself to images of other women online. The remaining participants who engaged in online comparisons – and, indeed, Laura herself – expressed that they had experienced negative consequences from doing

do. Several of the participants mentioned their lack of self-worth in relation to viewing images of other women that they perceived to be more attractive than themselves in line with their conception of beauty, and feeling competitive with peers who might be seen as a threat. Others explained that direct comparisons to others had made them restrict their food intake. It is evident that the objectification of other women – looking at them solely in terms of their physical attributes and latterly making comparisons to these women – can have a variety of negative health impacts. These findings echo those of Chua and Chang (2016) who also found that participants who engaged in social comparison became caught up in potential negative health impacts (that is, restricting food), experienced strained friendship, episodes of jealousy and emotional hurt.

An alternative perspective was offered by several participants, who reported managing the pressures of SNSs. As we know from the existing literature, media exposure and the subsequent objectification that might occur can have a negative impact on young women (Slater & Tiggemann, 2015; Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012; Calogero, 2011). As such, understanding what might act as protective factors, or preventative measures, is surely worthwhile. Previous longitudinal research demonstrates that playing sport was predictive of low-self objectification (Slater & Tiggemann, 2012). Women have also been found to have fewer appearance-based concerns when they are able to filter information about appearance through a feminist lens of understanding, which acts as a form of protective measure (Myers & Crowther, 2007).

Whilst participants in this study did not specifically reference either sport or feminist beliefs as a protective measure, their understanding of the importance of friends, health, and alternative interests appeared– to some extent – to keep them from focusing too much on their appearance-based concerns. Furthermore, of particular interest, one participant who did not identify as a 'large' girl (which we might read in this instance as socially undesirable) explained that this had meant she had not suffered with body image issues. Of course, it must be said that many young women who look 'conventionally attractive' – according to western standards – might still experience serious difficulties with body image. Literature demonstrates that girls who are already thin – in combination with perfectionistic standards – are more at risk from developing anorexia (Tyrkam, Waldron, Garber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002). Nonetheless, citing slimness as a protective measure from body image difficulties is telling of the need for a push toward acceptance of all body types and a move away from the shaming of people who do not meet existing standards.

Analysis demonstrated that the objectification of other women occurs both in general

and through the use of SNSs. Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr (2011) hypothesise that women contribute towards the objectification of other women through the way in which they speak to one another or via gender policing, in which comments by women can contribute to the attitude that women are sexual objects. In conjunction with this, Bearman, Korobov and Thorne's 2009 study found that women's internalised sexism manifested in everyday comments and behaviours, serving to perpetuate the construct of women's inferiority. This was through assertions of incompetence, competition, degradation of other women, and women as objects. Researchers found that women frequently construct both themselves *and* other women as objects, comparing them to an external standard of beauty rather than referring to other descriptors, such as their personality or characteristics. This was a frequent occurrence in the current study. Whether participants were referring to standards of beauty that they observed on SNSs, together with the impossibility of achieving this and comparisons to other women, participants routinely constructed other women as objects, rather than encapsulating the broader dynamics of her person.

5.3.2. Creating the online self

Several participants referred to the element of competition in posting photos, or getting as many 'likes' as possible, and keeping the audience in mind when posting. Whilst SNSs are based on the premise of connection and community, McRobbie (2015) remarks that women are currently absorbed in an ethos of 'competitive individualism', and it seems that SNSs foster an environment for this to thrive. Indeed, one of the defining features of the rise of neoliberalism and contemporary power structures is suggested to be that of competition (Foucault, 2008) and in the context of women in a heteronormative society, McRobbie posits that this is encapsulated by an idea of 'the perfect', able to balance a career and domesticity in harmony. Extending this idea specifically to this study, several participants appeared to be caught up in a construction of appearing a certain, flawless way through the photos on their social media. This was referred to as looking their best in photos, or constructing them in a way to try and get the most likes – a competition of perfection. Mehdizadeh (2010) points out that the online self is a production and one that is not accurate to whom we are in everyday, face-to-face encounters. Rather than the pictures being posted acting as an authentic, honest representation of the self, participants instead explained that photos were designed to compete with one another for the most favourable response from others.

The focus on achieving a response in posting corroborates existing literature, which has found posting photos on SNSs to be a form of approval seeking and validation (Chua &

Chang, 2016; Bazarova & Choi, 2014). Conversely, when participants experienced *not* receiving the desired response from their peers online they discussed feeling a level of anxiety which could prompt them to remove photos. Participants assigned significance to photos of themselves that, when not received in a certain way, reduced their self-worth. Acting as both a motivator *and* a potential outcome, the number of likes on a photo can either improve or detrimentally impact self-esteem (Pounders, Kowalczyk & Stowers, 2016). Moreover, for the majority of participants, likes and comments from peers acted as an affirmation of their physical attractiveness, with SNSs acting as a vehicle for achieving this affirmation.

Results from Chua and Chang's 2016 research are consistent with the findings of this study in that photographs posted online act as a means to get peer validation, and they point out that social media transforms girls into exhibitors with the ability to post photos that are refined and edited, bringing them one stage closer to their ideal standard of beauty. In this, participants' photographs are very much a construction, created with an agenda in mind. Whilst participants might vary slightly in these agenda, they all share common ground in that photos were described as constructed, and the audience – usually female – was held in mind. This appears, in its own way, to be a form of self-objectification. Whilst participants generally did not describe isolating parts of their body and looking at them as though through a male gaze, they *did* however look at them through the gaze of another, evaluating their look or appearance and seeking validation because of it.

Participants were also acutely aware of how they looked in the photos they posted. There was variety in how participants wanted to look, but the overall commonality was that there was a specific look or image, that each of them hoped to create. One of the most dominant ways participants looked to create photos was by copying others' photos. Emulating celebrities is nothing new; Pamela Church Gibson notes that there has long been an intense interest and need to emulate both the style and bodies of Hollywood stars (as cited in Barron, 2015[1970]). Celebrity culture is prevalent in western society, and the advent of SNSs means that we have constant access to many celebrities (or wannabe celebrities) who choose to share snapshots of their lives. The rise of reality television shows such as *The Only Way is Essex* and the 'DIY celebrity' where celebrity wannabes can amp up their celebrity through SNSs (Turner, 2016) means that celebrity is now accessible to everyone: the route to celebrity has become more realistic (Barron, 2015 [1970]). The line between 'civilian' and celebrity appears to be blurring. In the context of this research, several participants explicitly referred to the copycat nature of celebrity in terms of SNSs and how 'everyone' wants to look like a

celebrity.

It appears that SNSs can facilitate this desire, in that the creation of a photo through editing, re-taking and manipulating angles plays into the dominant idea that everyone can be, or look like, a celebrity. That celebrity norms inform how photographs are created and posted amongst participants further emphasises that the world of SNSs is a constructed reality, where the changing trend perpetuated by a group can disseminate down and influence those who follow said trends. A culture of trend-following is hardly anything new; celebrity has always held a certain glamour and has long been commonplace in the virtual world. Nonetheless, the current findings implicate a new dynamic, accessibility and level of intensity to these practices (Chua & Chang, 2016).

As well as the copycat process of photo construction, participants were also acutely aware of how they looked in their photos. Whether simply wanting to look 'good' (and having no further specifications than this) or wanting to look 'perfect', there was an overall production involved with the process of posting a selfie. Ideas of perfection in the creation of a photo once again are in line with McRobbie's suggestion that women currently compete for perfection. Whilst McRobbie (2015) writes more specifically of the pursuit of perfection in terms of motherhood and domesticity, the findings from this research suggest that the need for perfectionism extends to young adulthood, in which young women are acutely aware of their public persona and have a need to appear in a certain way.

To note, the construction of an online image was *not* about body shots in any of the interviews undertaken. Whilst some participants expressed that they actively avoided body shots due to feeling too uncomfortable or insecure about showing their bodies in this way, others discussed that photos normally focused specifically on their faces in shots with friends. The look, or aesthetic, that participants described hoping to achieve was – other than in one or two exceptions – generally not one about body image. Photos of the face alone are particularly interesting; in some ways more personal than a shot of the whole body, which is potentially taken in a mirror or from a distance, a close-up of the face feels inherently intimate.

Wendt (2014) suggests that Instagram facilitates an environment in which human fascination with the self is fostered – a modern-day Narcissus, trying to harness a sense of self. Whilst this is speculation and no participant articulated what underpinned their reason for posting selfies of their face, it certainly appears to be both an intensely private moment of the self, shared in a public sphere, and an act of seeking feedback and

reassurance. Photos of the face also tie in with participants' repeated use of the word 'pretty', which is characteristically associated with facial features. Whilst those interviewed were remarkably aware of the body type of other women online, they were far less likely to reveal themselves in the same way. It appeared that participants generally partook in the role of objectifier – that is, looking at other women – and in some ways, of self-objectifier, in that that they looked at themselves through the eyes of another. However, the process of self-subjectification, that is, actively placing oneself in the role of the sexual subject (Gill, 2009), did not seem to occur amongst participants. Indeed, participants expressed relatively strong views about women who choose to post photos of their bodies – addressed later in this chapter – and the majority refrained from posting these photos themselves.

Whilst none of the participants discussed actively posting photos of their whole bodies, several participants did show a specific awareness of what they looked like in photos, in terms of their weight. Some discussed using editing apps to make themselves look skinnier, whilst the use of makeup and highlighters to enhance cheekbones and help them appear thinner was also referenced. In line with OT in this respect, it appears that an internalisation of the thin ideal and latterly self-objectifying in terms of skinniness was part of the taking and sharing of photos for some participants.

Accounts of wanting to look a certain way in relation to weight in photos are important to consider when examining the role of SNSs in body image, and current literature focuses heavily on SNSs in relation to body image concerns, drive for thinness and other constructs relating to potential predictors for disordered eating (Holland & Tiggemann, 2016). We know from the existing literature that the use of SNSs can have negative consequences for young women's body image. However, this research highlights other considerations that are taken into account when taking a photo, including taking shots that will please other people, showing that one has been to certain fashionable locations, and appearing not to care entirely. Participants in this study evidently self-objectify in multiple ways, in that they discussed being aware of how they looked to other people. Whilst this is not specifically in line with Fredrickson and Roberts' original theory, in that participants' awareness extended beyond their body, it appears that SNSs nonetheless create a space for young women to depict, examine and study how they appear to others.

Several participants described a shift toward SNSs becoming more 'serious', and how younger users curate their images heavily. In the early days, SNSs might have been used as an authentic snapshot into the life of a celebrity; indeed, as it began, the power

of twitter in the early days was that it took away power from gossip magazines and paparazzi. Now, however, SNSs are populated with not only celebrities posting edited images to promote a brand, but also influencers – chasing the fame and fortune promised by SNSs through their own self-branding (Khamis, Ang, & Welling, 2017). Even if one is not looking to become a SNSs star in one's own right, there has invariably been a shift in the type of accounts we see online through the involvement of lucrative marketing campaigns and there are grounds to wonder whether participants' shift in constructing their experience of SNSs as more 'serious' is a reflection of the change in the platform overall. It would seem that the proliferation of accounts that are carefully edited, constructed and designed for maximum aesthetic impact are more likely to have a role in how people produce their own photos.

5.3.3. The question of feminism

It is necessary to first put forward a general contextualisation and a location of debates in relation to this question, when thinking about women's bodies and what images of these do in our current cultural climate. As discussed in 1.9., the complexity of women's subjectification – the shift in women from objects of a male gaze to becoming a subject apparently in charge of her body – is not straightforward. Harvey and Gill (2013) propose this new femininity, shaped by both the sexual revolution, neoliberalism and consumerism, is replete with tension. Does this 'sexual entrepreneur' – the women au fait with her own sexuality who is located in SNSs, sex advice columns and advertising billboards – represent real, positive change in depictions of female sexuality, or, is she simply a re-packaged version of the patriarchal gaze, in which 'objectifying gazes are simply wrapped up in a feisty, empowered sounding discourse' (p54)? The body of the woman who represents this shift in discourse is key; she has moved from object to subject, but this shift is complex and provokes an argument about how far women really have come. In the context of this research, situating this conflict in current commentaries on women's bodies is necessary in order to understand where young women locate themselves within this discourse.

Throughout participant interviews, feminism was rarely, if at all, referred to. Indeed, those participants that did refer to the term did so loosely, rather than discussing specific schools of feminist thought. Despite this, the content of participant interviews was at times reflective of conflicts and tension within feminist rhetoric in terms of women's bodies, despite not always being identified as such.

One of the most salient aspects in the analysis was the apparent judgement of women

who choose to show off their bodies on SNSs. There was variety in the specifics of this judgement, but the overall feeling was that they were 'too much'. There appeared to be a level of internalised sexism in respect of this, in that the choice of the referenced women (in terms of showing their bodies online) was either ignored entirely or – when referenced – undermined by a critiquing this choice.

It is interesting to note that, at a time when we are entering a fourth wave of feminism, characterised by the online sharing of young voices, intersectionality and encouragement to call out misogyny and injustice (Retallack, Ringrose, & Lawrence, 2016), several of the young women in this research stood against, not with, women who made a choice to show their bodies. Given that women are increasingly turning to SNSs as a way to bring feminism to the forefront (Munro, 2013), this study suggests that in tandem with this, SNSs are also a space which serves to divide women. It must be acknowledged that second-wave feminism fought not to be portrayed in an objectified manner and is thus why, for many, sexual subjectification is inherently pushing feminist gains backwards (Gill, 2009). Indeed, to push back against women baring their bodies in public and to champion women's rights to be seen as something other than a sexual object is inherently feminist. Nonetheless, there did not seem to be a sense that participants who critiqued women showing their bodies were aligning themselves with feminist discourse. Instead, the language of women being 'too much' suggests that an internalised oppression and shame of women as sexual beings is present in the language of several participants.

Calogero (2011) points out that this internalised oppression ensures women assimilate the restricted gender roles and demands that are thrust upon them. In this instance, it appears that several of the participants pushed back against women being explicitly sexual, autonomous beings. However, in doing so, participants made caveat remarks criticising women with a nod to women's choice, or empowerment. The obligatory nod to feminism by several participants is perhaps a reflection of its current fashionable status, regardless of whether or not participants themselves held different views (which, evidently, some of them did). T-shirts emblazoned with feminist statements have been sold on Etsy and Asos; Chanel's spring/summer 2015 show in Paris was flooded with models waving placards with 'feminist' statements on them. Being a feminist and proclaiming female empowerment is part of the current cultural zeitgeist and neoliberal attitudes that adorn power and praise on women who are sexually agentic. The Internet has facilitated a new space for a 'global community of feminists', who can use the space for discussion and activism (Munro, 2013). Nevertheless, this online social activism has come under fire for being cultural 'slactivisim' – that is, only taking place

online rather than in domains where there is a tangible, real-world impact (Retallack et al., 2016). Participants' cursory nod to feminism suggests that it was not something they felt that they could leave out, given its current on-trend status, regardless of whether post-feminist thinking correlated with their own beliefs.

In conjunction with these contradictions, several participants made further references towards more recent feminist discourses, in which women are encouraged to love their bodies and embrace them however they wish. From SNSs being cited as a place in which women can love their bodies as they are, to embracing imperfections and accepting your natural self, participants touched upon a multitude of the dominant catchphrases of 'fourth- wave', social media-enhanced feminist mantras. In particular, the 'LYB' discourse that has emerged over the last few years was posited as a movement which fights back against the impossible standards set for women in the mainstream media. This has also been utilised in mainstream marketing campaigns, which capitalise on the experience of women who have historically been excluded from these spaces, instead placing them front and centre in a move to appeal to the everyday woman.

Though this discourse is not without its problems, participants constructed their idea of feminine empowerment and body positivity on SNSs to be positive experiences. Gill & Elias (2014) point out that the LYB discourse facilitates a space in which self-photography and SNSs are used to build, rather than undermine, body confidence and interviews from participants in this instance appear to corroborate this notion, with participants referring to the types of photographs in questions as 'positive', 'art', 'beautiful' and 'respected'.

Certainly, to have a broader representation of women online which encourages women to shed the habitual criticism of their bodies is surely a good thing, given that women's bodies have long been a battlefield of self-loathing and lost confidence. Nevertheless, several questions are raised in respect of this. Only one of the participants (Naazima) exclusively supported a woman's right to be sexy. The remaining participants in this category talked more in terms of body diversity. As such, issues of female sexuality were generally not addressed and the suggestion is that the championing of women's bodies was seen as a positive – but only if they are stripped of their sexuality. It seems that in this instance, the LYB discourse is rife with tension, in that women can only show their body without reprimand when the image is not of a sexual nature. As such, the question is posed: is it ever possible for women to be sexual without being a slut? Results from this analysis suggest there is still division in the camp with regard to this.

Finally, questions arise about what is achieved by this body positive movement. Whilst it proclaims to make space for women to embrace their bodies, does it make it more difficult for us to critique representations of women's bodies? Gill and Elias (2014) point out that campaigns that have championed this movement – Dove, Special K and Weight Watchers – might not actually represent a straightforward liberation for women, instead commandeering a new form of power – where women can 'simply' leave behind their self-esteem issues and love themselves. To simply shred any issues with self-esteem and to 'remember' how incredible we are is unlikely to be easy. Indeed, the very campaigns that propose to be on the side of women are not only capitalising on their body shame by professing to offer them solutions (for instance, the 'Special K' diet in which women replace one meal with a bowl of Special K in order to access their body-confident self) but also negate the notion of being body confident, in suggesting that there is an issue in the first place (Gill & Elias, 2014). By placing themselves in the corner of vulnerable women in this way and appealing to their desire to be 'fixed', marketing campaigns are capitalising on the vulnerabilities of women, rather than challenge the system that created these vulnerabilities in the first place.

5.4. Recommendations for Future Research

This study aimed to achieve a better understanding of the ways in which young women construct their experience of SNSs and body image. I was interested in talking to women without a diagnosis of an ED, given that 'normative discontent' (Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984) with body type is pervasive amongst women and can have negative psychological consequences, yet falls under the diagnosis threshold. Nevertheless, this research did raise issues in terms of eating disordered behaviour; specifically, wanting to restrict food intake. It is reasonable to suspect that if young women forming a non-clinical sample of participants experience adverse consequences from SNSs in terms of their body image that they want to restrict food intake, so too might those who are already suffering from EDs. Given the severity of the illness and that a large number of patients do not recover from eating disordered behaviour (remission rates after 10 and 20 years have been found to be 29.6% and 39.3% respectively), further research into managing the maintaining factors of the illness are worthwhile (Fichter, Quadflieg, Crosby, & Koch, 2017).

This study was limited in that it only included female participants. Research demonstrates that men are not immune to the negative consequences of an image-obsessed media, and can also experience body dissatisfaction, lower self-esteem and pressure to look muscular after being exposed to images of other men (Hobza, Walker,

Yakushko, & Peugh, 2007; Ridgeway & Tylka, 2005). Recent figures released by the NHS detailed a 70% rise in male EDs, with rates rising at the same pace as for women (Marsh, 2017). My own anecdotal experience from working with men with EDs has indicated that they can often feel excluded by the existing literature which is usually based around women's experience, and may also experience shame at suffering what is routinely constructed as a 'female illness'. Further research to challenge these stereotypes and gain a better understanding as to what might be contributing to the rise in male EDs is recommended.

Research demonstrates that women who are able to look at objectifying media through a feminist lens are less likely to be negatively impacted by it (Myers & Crowther, 2007). Given that this research indicates that women also play a role in objectifying one another, educating young girls to be more critical of the media they view may also contribute to lessening the cycle of objectification that they might be vulnerable to become engaged in.

Younger users of SNSs might be more susceptible to the dangers of being exposed to unrealistic body ideals in that they are potentially less well equipped to deal with online pressures and challenge images that are unrealistic. Given that we know prevention and early treatment of EDs is key (Treasure & Russell, 2011), research which seeks to further investigate how young girls might be experiencing body image issues is worthwhile. Secondly, all participants in this study were able-bodied, middle-class, cis-females. Future research – particularly in the name of counselling psychology – should seek to be more inclusive in terms of the participant population it focuses on.

Finally, this thesis did not study in depth the question of taking and posting revealing photos. Though participants did partake in taking photos of their faces or more general photos of themselves with friends and on holiday, this aspect of SNSs was not fully explored in terms of getting a sense of women's subjectification (Gill, 2009). In the interest of furthering feminist thinking around objectification, subjectification, questions of empowerment, the male gaze and SNSs, future research may choose to talk more specifically to women who choose to display their bodies online.

5.5. Critical Review: Evaluation of Current Research

Assessing qualitative research is, in many ways, not as straightforward as in quantitative approaches. Yardley (2008) points out that in order for quantitative study to be reliable, there must be the possibility to generate the same results, when the same measures

are given to a different set of participants, by different researchers. Qualitative approaches, however, are complicated by the addition of a researcher, who comes into a study with their subjectivity in tow. Despite this, various approaches to evaluating research have been formulated to try and overcome this difficulty. Yardley (2008) created set of four principles which are theoretically and epistemologically neutral. The flexibility means that these core principles can be interpreted and demonstrated in a variety of ways, as appropriate for the research in question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The following section will evaluate the quality of this study, with a constructionist epistemological stance taken.

5.5.1. Sensitivity to context

The current challenges that face women in terms of the social construction of their bodies were highlighted in the opening chapter, and the ensuing battles that women face over their bodies in disproportionate numbers. Further context was provided in an overview and critique of the existing theory and literature in relation to this, subsequently identifying the gaps for future research. Given the in-depth and potentially personal nature of the interviews, I remained mindful of my position as a cis, straight, able-bodied, slim white woman of middle-class, educated background. I strove to remain aware of this privilege at all times, ensuring that the language used was sensitive and appropriate. By adopting a position of curiosity and empathy in interviews, I hoped to co-construct a climate in which participants felt comfortable and manage any power dynamics that might have arisen. Given my own experience of sexual objectification and SNSs, I remained mindful throughout the interview process of ensuring that these experiences did not contaminate the meaning being constructed by the participants, in particular by being mindful of the language used. Finally, I worked to be sensitive to participants' meanings when analysing data, rather than heavily imposing my own meanings on the data and disregarding alternative constructions of experience and understanding (Yardley, 2008).

5.5.2. Commitment and rigour

There were various approaches used to demonstrate both commitment and rigour. To begin with, a pilot interview was conducted. This provided an opportunity to check that the questions asked were appropriate and achieved the appropriate depth in order to conduct a rich analysis, to get a feel for doing a research interview and to get a better feel for my own role in the interview. In terms of analysis, Yardley calls for depth and breadth, and I was cautious not to exclude salient themes rich with data if they didn't fit

into pre-conceived ideas about the research. I was also cautious to ensure methodological competence and skill, taking sufficient time throughout the analysis to ensure that it was systematic, thorough and coherent. As such, I met with other trainees who had knowledge of TA in research meetings to discuss initial analytic findings, as well as submitting the first stages of analysis to the research supervisor. Yardley also calls for in-depth engagement with the topic on both a personal and professional level. In this instance, I have worked in EDs services and remain fascinated by feminist reading around the topic – both in casual forums such as blogs and SNSs and by attending a feminist book club and engaging with formal publications which concentrate on women's body image in the mass media.

5.5.3. Transparency and coherence

By explicitly citing the ways in which the study was designed, data was collected, analysis was conducted and my own role in the process, I strove to be transparent throughout the research process. As noted in the methodology chapter, Braun and Clarke's (2006) 15-point checklist, designed to help ensure a 'good TA', was adhered to. To demonstrate this, a paper trail of the analysis process was kept – from all the annotated transcripts to photographic evidence of the various whiteboards used to create mind maps and whittle down and collate the initial clusters of data into themes and sub-themes. Finally, I aimed to be reflexive throughout, acknowledging my own privilege and experience that might inform my own constructions of SNSs and body image, as well as keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process in order to monitor my own role in the study.

5.5.4. Impact and importance

Yardley (2000, p. 223) has stated that the impact and importance of research 'can only be assessed in relation to the objectives of the analysis, the application it was intended for, and the community for whom the results were deemed relevant'. This study has contributed useful knowledge into how young women construct the impact of social media on their own body image, as well as provided an insight into the way in which young women formulate beauty and body ideals. The study also provided a perspective on how young women play a role in the objectification of other women, and how this can further perpetuate existing constructions and contradictions around women's identity. Focusing on these findings has meant that the research has been able to contribute to the existing field of literature in terms of EDs and women's body image, putting forth implications to both the clinical world and the wider context, whilst making

recommendations for future research.

5.6. Further Methodological Considerations

Generally, this study meets the criteria set by Yardley (2008), which were intended to establish research quality. Nevertheless, there remain – as with most studies – various methodological limitations that must be addressed in order to fully evaluate this piece of research.

Qualitative research is essentially about meaning, in a way that quantitative research cannot be (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Nevertheless, this does mean that there is a level of uncertainty involved in the process. Given that this study has adopted a constructionist perspective and rejects the idea of an absolute truth or knowledge, this invariably means that I as researcher have played a substantial role in formulating the analysis and subsequent discussion. In relation to this, qualitative research does often come under fire for being unable to safeguard against issues of generalising findings when such small sample sizes are used (Willig, 2008).

There are limitations with the way in which recruitment took place. The process was relatively straight forward, in that emails sent out to various London universities and recruitment posters on SNSs were responded to, as were recruitment adverts that were put on Facebook. Nevertheless, in some ways this sample used was a convenience sample in that all universities contacted were London universities, and only the undergraduate programmes on social sciences courses were emailed, as students on these courses were assumed to be likely to have an interest in this research.

However, participants came from a range of social, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Given that many of the constructions discussed might be considered specific to western understandings of beauty, and several participants had been brought up in a variety of cultures that might express different understandings of women's body image, it would be fair to say that results are not context bound and might not be generalisable to a specific group of people. However, I would contend that this qualitative data is not solely about generalising data as with quantitative research, but rather seeks to gain a better understanding of the depth and rich variety of a multifaceted phenomenon – in this instance, the meaning that young women construct around body image (Willig, 2008). Moreover, whilst Yardley (2008) states that there does need to be some level of homogeneity amongst participants, otherwise studies would have 'no relevance to any other situation' (p. 238), I contend that there was indeed a level of homogeneity.

All participants were in education – either studying for A-Levels or in their first or second year of university. I acknowledge that all participants were educated and likely to pursue further studies, which may have influenced findings given the inherent privilege that comes with pursuing further education. However, given that teenage girls are more likely than ever go on to university (37.1% of young women), I would argue that this is still representative of over a third of young British women (Pells, 2017). Moreover, whilst participants were from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and referenced their cross-cultural upbringing which might also have had an influence on shape concerns, all participants had been living in the UK for at least the majority of their teen years, displaying an understanding of body image and western sociocultural ideals of beauty consistent with participants who had lived in the UK their whole lives. Participants also fell into a very small age bracket (18-20) and had all self-selected to take part in this research, ultimately demonstrating a level of interest about the topic. The commonalities that were held by the participants were reflected in the shared experiences of SNSs and body image recounted throughout the interview process, and utilising TA as the method for analysis meant that both the similarities and the differences across the data set were incorporated into the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Time limitations also had an impact on the study in various ways. Firstly, only one participant was consulted about themes prior to the analysis being completed. This was the participant who had disclosed bulimic behaviour, and it was deemed ethical to consult this participant about the final themes, as well as the reasoning for including her data in the study. However, Williams and Morrow (2009) suggest that in order to maintain the integrity of the data, obtaining validation from participants about themes in relation to the data is necessary. Because of the time constraints faced when writing up the study, this suggestion was not adhered to.

I have experience with leading groups in a clinical context that discuss the role of SNSs in body image. Conducting a focus group was considered, as it was thought that this might provide rich and interesting data, allowing participants to engage in natural interactions with one another and to co-construct meaning and understanding, which is lacking in individual interviews (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). However, the logistics of getting all the participants into the same place, at the same time, were too complex and costly, given the educational commitments of participants and their distance from London. Finally, it was felt that the setting of an individual interview might give each participant the space to explore the subject fully, without feeling pressured by being in a

group scenario with people not known to them.

Despite these limitations, there are also a variety of strengths to this research. One was a flexible, warm and understanding approach to the participants. It was understood that participants had a variety of educational commitments and that scheduling a time to talk might be difficult. I also hold a natural passion and interest for the topic in question. Whilst I am aware that these were very much interviews and not therapy sessions, it was still felt important to remain true to the ethos of counselling psychology's humanistic values by remaining empathic, non-judgemental, and viewing each of the participants with unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 2004). It was hoped that this would reduce any perceived power dynamic, creating a space in which participants felt they could talk freely and openly.

Finally, ensuring that there was a pilot interview gave me space to think about any flaws in my approach and manner in the interview room. This was a beneficial process; whilst valuable data was produced from this interview and the interview schedule remained the same for future participants, I also recognised, upon listening back to the tape, that I had too much input in the interview and was too conversational. I subsequently made an effort to be active but not dominant in future interviews, so as not to influence or steer the conversation.

5.7. Clinical Implications

The results of this study demonstrate there are a range of experiences young women might encounter through their use SNSs. As there exist a range of functions on these sites, so too are there a range of potential implications to be considered both in counselling psychology, and in the wider context. These implications are considered below.

5.7.1. Counselling psychology

Counselling psychology is concerned with a subjective experience; there is an ethos of searching for understanding, rather than searching for universal truths (Rafalin, 2010). This study sought to understand how young women construct their experience in relation to SNSs and body image. Core to its values, counselling psychology holds a social justice mission, seeking to give voice to those who might be side-lined or marginalised (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2011). Given that women in the western world still suffer disproportionately from EDs in comparison to men, and that individuals with

EDs have an especially high mortality rate – in particular, those suffering from anorexia nervosa – there is ample remit to further our understanding of contributing and maintaining factors in order to move prevention and treatment forward (Arcelus, Mitchell, Wales, & Nielsen, 2011). Moreover, early diagnosis and treatment of EDs reduces morbidity and cost of treatment (Eisler et al., 2007) and considering the values of counselling psychology, we have a responsibility to utilise the findings of research in order to enforce change (Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr, 2011).

SNSs have developed rapidly and use is extremely prevalent amongst girls and young women, though research specific to SNSs is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, existing literature about traditional media outlets and body image has been extended upon and findings suggest that SNSs can have a detrimental impact on female body image (Chua & Chang, 2016; Fardouley et al., 2015b; Perloff, 2014). It is important to acknowledge that this study was not empirically investigating correlation and causality of specific constructs in relation to theories of body image and SNSs. Nevertheless, accounts from many of the participants are consistent with existing findings from empirical literature in several ways.

The current research supports these findings in that several participants explained that viewing photos of women on SNSs had contributed to feelings of reduced self-esteem and of dissatisfaction with their bodies, and had encouraged them to restrict their intake of food.

Such implications are key predictors for EDs (Smolak & Thompson, 2009), and given that EDs often begin in adolescence and emerging young adulthood, these findings are of particular relevance (Brown et al., 2016).

No conclusions should be drawn from this research in suggesting that SNSs are solely responsible for, or indeed capable of, causing EDs. These are complex psychological conditions, for which the risk factors and causes are much debated. Whilst 'internalisation of the thin ideal' and 'drive for thinness' are both constructs for understanding objectification and body image difficulties, those suffering from EDs repeatedly explain that their illness is not about looking like a model (Striegel-Moore & Bulik, 2007). Though there is no doubt that whilst a culture that values thinness is potentially damaging to the psychology of girls and young women, environmental, biological and genetic risk factors can all contribute to the aetiology of EDs (Striegel-Moore & Bulik, 2007). This research does not seek to make bold proclamations about social media causing EDs. That said, fear of weight gain and a drive for thinness *are* representative of the symptoms and behaviours that may be displayed by those suffering from or developing EDs. Whilst participants involved in this study did not form

a clinical sample, results nonetheless suggest that SNSs can have a profound impact on body image. As these sites promote images of women with unrealistic body types, and the user feedback functions of these platforms further serve to elevate these body types in terms of desirability, they must surely be considered with caution in the hands of those who might be vulnerable to difficulties with food.

Ultimately, awareness about the potential negative consequences of using SNSs to look at images of other women is necessary. Within treatment, an awareness of the role of SNSs in body image is recommended to clinicians, as is facilitating a space in which clients are able to make sense of their own understanding and experience in relation to their difficulties. Social media literacy for practitioners, patients and carers should be considered paramount, in order for the factors that can contribute to, or help maintain, EDs to be addressed. Indeed, the ability to critically evaluate media has been promoted as a method with which to prevent body dissatisfaction and EDs (McLean, Paxton, & Wertheim, 2016).

Alternative perspectives in the context of a clinical setting must also be considered. As well as referring specifically to looking at other women's bodies online, participants also expressed their frequent comparison to others in terms of their faces, evaluated in the context of prettiness. It is necessary to consider what specifically such a comparison to others – outside of body image – might result in. Existing literature on social comparison and SNSs suggests there are a range of potential negative consequences that might be experienced by those who engage in online comparison to 'attractive' profiles. For instance, Appel, Crusius and Gerlach (2015) found that users of SNSs with existing levels of depression were more susceptible to experiencing envy, feelings of inferiority and low self- esteem, when viewing the said attractive profiles (that is, 'conventionally' physically attractive, as well as profiles which displayed strong levels of education, job status, friendships, likes and comments). Similarly, Vogel, Rose, Roberts and Eckles (2014) found that users of SNSs report a higher degree of upward social comparison – that is, comparing themselves to profiles they perceive are better than their own – and consequently experienced lower levels of self-esteem. In the context of this research, there is scope to suggest that upward social comparison happens beyond the realm of body comparison. Evidently, this upward comparison can contribute to a range of negative consequences and is something that clinicians and services should be aware of when working in the context of a range of difficulties, not just those relating to EDs. Given that flexibility, integration and adaptability are key strengths of counselling psychologists and that SNSs are a relatively new phenomenon, taking learning forward from research findings to help inform clinical practice in this area is extremely well

warranted.

5.7.2. Wider context

Not only are there implications from this research in terms of a clinical population, but also for girls and women in a wider context who might be suffering from body image problems, yet remain below the threshold for a formal diagnosis of an eating disorder. Ensuring that there are measures in place to inform and educate about managing difficulties with food and body image before they require treatment must be part of our drive towards tackling the problem. Starting treatment in the UK can be a slow process; there are often restrictions to specialist care, and commissioning panels are tasked with deciding who receives this treatment – which, in some areas, is only afforded to low-weight patients (Brown et al., 2016) and so those who are not quite 'ill-enough' can be left without support. Whilst progress is being made – the NICE guidelines for EDs were updated this year for the first time in 13 years, recommending early referral to specialist services 'immediately' if an eating disorder is suspected (NICE, 2017) – preventative measures are surely necessary in helping to ensure that girls and young women do not get to the stage of being required to wait for treatment. Social media literacy programmes in schools and colleges would be welcome, as with a general awareness amongst parents, teachers, school nurses and other members of the student support system.

Findings from this research also have implications beyond EDs, in that the objectification of women in popular culture and everyday life appears to remain a prevalent issue. Participants demonstrated that through SNSs they were acutely aware of other women's body shapes, the generally accepted body ideals and the accepted constructions of beauty. Being so aware of other women's bodies meant that some participants took these body ideals on board, practicing self-surveillance in terms of their own bodies and judging themselves against prevailing societal standards of beauty (Grogan, 2008). Feminists have long understood women's bodies to be a construction, informed by societal standards. Shifts in feminist thinking have invariably incited new ways of responding to constructions of women's bodies, and recent developments certainly appear to have acted a source of empowerment to some, in reclaiming women's bodies and giving a sense of ownership and autonomy. Nevertheless, whilst the post-feminist championing of this rhetoric is very much part of the current cultural zeitgeist and enabled by SNSs, it was interesting to note that there remained a split in participants' responses to this shift. Though some referenced women's choice and empowerment, others readily adopted a position more consistent with criticism or judgement of women

who choose to display their bodies in an act of sexual subjectification (Gill, 2009). Similarly, though there was a general consensus that there has been a move toward a more general acceptance of women's bodies that don't fit the expected western standard of being exceptionally slim, there still remained a level of body dissatisfaction that was perpetuated by the use of SNSs.

Varying movements have appeared to capitalise on the shift in feminist rhetoric under the guise of championing all women – through an apparent shift in body ideals LYB movements – it appears that there still remain deep divides amongst women, and it is clear that there is no simple answer to the complexities of women's bodies being used as public fodder. Though findings from this study suggest that different women have different experiences of objectification and latterly, self-objectification, it remains that women's bodies are still created as objects to be evaluated in one way or the other; even some of the ones which proclaim to be more inclusive of 'all' women. The advent of SNSs has created a space in which the objectification, celebration, and subjectification of women can all prosper. Whilst there is much to be said for attempts to move beyond the heteronormative objectification of women and into territory of female empowerment and acceptance for all, there remains space for us to do better. The net for 'acceptable' body types is still a small one, and there is a disappointing lack of women at the centre of our conversation who are legitimately diverse, in terms of shape, ethnicity, sexuality and gender identity. The users of SNSs nevertheless have a unique opportunity to change longstanding discourses which perpetuate women as objects of male desire.

5.8. Overall Reflections on the Research Process

Willig (2008) points out that reflecting on the process of research means that one is executing a good methodology. Throughout this process, I have made conscious attempts to be transparent about my position within the research, as well as my position in the wider context of who I am. Braun and Clarke (2013) point out that though some researchers are sceptical of pointing out the researcher's credentials, being transparent and locating your standpoint is vital, as essentially these form part of your identity. My attempts to be transparent have been because in many ways, this research has been personal. I have experience of being objectified, of self-objectifying, of using SNSs and of difficulties with body image. Whilst I understand that these experiences are in no way unique to me, being clear about them meant that I was able to both use them in my analysis and ensure that I was keeping them separate enough from participants' input into the research. For instance, being open to participants who reported positive experiences in terms of SNSs and body image was especially important, even if they

were not consistent with my own construction of how SNSs can work.

On a personal level, this research has been a fascinating process. I am inspired daily by the clients with whom I have worked in eating disorder services and the strong women in my life who have overcome adversity in the form of EDs, body image problems, experiences of objectification and low self-esteem. I strive to gain a better understanding of how society constructs the role of women, particularly in terms of our bodies, and how we can sometimes internalise this construction to the detriment of our well-being. This research has highlighted to me how we can educate ourselves by reading, talking, debating, and protesting in order to push back against constructions which do not work for us. This research has also reminded me to check my privilege, which I can be guilty of forgetting to do. Whether it is through careless use of language on my part, or simply not recognising the privileges I am afforded by society, I am grateful to be able to re-examine my own understanding of such issues.

This research has been both an enormous challenge and a great joy to conduct. I studied literature as part of my undergraduate degree, taking elective creative writing courses on the side to cultivate my love of words and language. I have been guilty of neglecting this love since moving into psychology, and have at times struggled with this shift to a more scientific discipline, despite the fact that I have relished new learning experiences. The process of qualitative research has not been without its challenges. Coming to terms with the philosophical aspect of qualitative methodologies has been entirely new for me, whilst I have felt immense pressure to complete this study in time to start full-time employment, whilst ensuring I do the research justice – both for the participants who so kindly gave me their time, and for me. Despite this, being able to conduct qualitative research, which in many ways is more compatible with the way I work and think, has been an invaluable experience and allowed me to reconnect with my love of constructing meaning from people through putting pen to paper. I hope that my small contribution to this field of research can somehow move forward our thinking on the pervasive issue of women's dissatisfaction with their bodies and the mediums which might perpetuate this.

5.9. Concluding Remarks

This research was designed to add to the growing body of literature which aims to give a better understanding of the role of SNSs in women's body image. It is evident from the results and ensuing discussion that this is a complex topic. There is no one truth, rather different truths for different people. However, results have demonstrated that in the

differences amongst participants, there are also a range of commonalities which can contribute to our understanding of this relatively new phenomenon.

All participants interviewed demonstrated in one way or another that they were part of a cycle of objectifying other women, looking at them with the eyes of a heteronormative society and evaluating them based on their looks. Whilst participants explained a range of constructions of female beauty and the impact of making comparisons to these, there existed a cycle of looking at other women through SNSs. For some participants, there were no negative consequences from seeing other women of perceived beauty online; for others, it led to feelings of decreased self-esteem and wanting to restrict food intake.

As well as looking at photos of other women through SNSs, participants also posted photos of themselves. To note, participants generally avoided revealing photos of their bodies, instead opting to post pictures of just their faces or of their experiences more generally. All participants held in mind an external observer when posting these photos, wondering what they would look like to others. However, this perceived observer was often gender-less or explicitly female, which prompts questions about the role women are currently playing in the cycle of objectification.

Feminist constructions of understanding were also varied and contradictory in participants' interviews, with some thinking more in line with second-wave approaches and pushing back against seeing women as sexual objects and others falling more in line with the recent status quo of championing women's sexuality and expression. In opposition to both these approaches, several of the participants displayed what might be considered internalised sexism, using language that has been used to judge and suppress women for many years. In many ways, this highlights not only the extent of old-fashioned, patriarchal values, but also serves to illustrate that the differences that continue to exist amongst women only work to divide us more than ever.

Finally, there remains ample space for our feminist values to be more inclusive. Capdevila, Ciclitira, Lazard and Marzano (2006) point out that unifying strategies to bind women together in the name of feminist gains can - and have - been undermined by the potential to 'create an excluded, subordinated other' (p.3). The authors point out that assumptions made in early feminist work were exclusionary, addressing the concerns of women who were white, able-bodied, heterosexual and middle class. The advent of social media has fostered a space in which discussion, debate and the ability to evolve is now at our finger tips, even more so than it ever has been. There is no excuse not to engage in conversation with one another, in order to understand and celebrate our

differences, and to push back against a rhetoric that serves to define women as one dimensional, monolithic beings. Though a divide amongst participants was apparent – indeed, sometimes embodied in participants who fell on both sides of the argument - it was also clear that SNSs can serve as a great space for unity, acceptance and freedom of expression; a space in which the marginalised few might become the many. Whilst this study may have appeared overly critical at times of SNSs and their potential negative consequences, it is important to acknowledge the power they might have in terms of tackling gender and bodily norms.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Recruitment Poster

Department of Psychology
City University of London

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN PHOTO SHARING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

We are looking for female volunteers between 18 and 20 years old, to take part in a study on
viewing and sharing photos on social media.

You would be asked to: take part in a semi-structured interview that will last for no longer than 60 minutes.

In appreciation for your time, you will receive a £10 Amazon voucher.

For more information about this study, or to take part, please contact:

Rebecca Dixey: █████████████████████████

Research Supervisor: Meg John Barker █████████████████████

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through the City University of London Psychology Department Research Ethics Committee [PSYETH (P/L) 15/16 72].

If you would like to complain about any aspect of the study, please contact the Secretary to the University's Senate Research Ethics Committee on ████████████ or via email: ████████████████████

7.2. Participant Information Sheet

Title of study An exploratory analysis of young women's experience of photo sharing on social media and its role in body image

We would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

The study is the thesis of my Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology. I would like to ask you about your experience of viewing photos of others and sharing photos of yourself on social media, and about body image in relation to this. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview and debrief session with myself.

Why have I been invited?

12 people are taking part in the study in total. All participants will be female and 18-20 years old, without a history of mental health problems and who use social media platforms to view and share photos.

Do I have to take part?

No. You are not in any way obliged to take part. You also have the right to withdraw at any time during the interview without any cost or ramification to yourself. You are also not obliged to answer any questions you are uncomfortable with, do not understand or find too personal. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide

to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be briefed about the nature of the research, prior to taking part in an interview with myself, which will be audio-recorded

The interview is expected to last for no more than 60 minutes, with a twenty minute debrief at the end

The research is expected to be completed in August 2017. Should the research be passed by the University, it will be available for you to read.

There is no reason for us to meet again following this interview. However, my contact details are provided should you have any queries following the meeting.

The interview will be semi-structured; meaning much of what we talk about will be guided by you with some questions included from me. We will be in a private room where no one will be able to hear what is going on.

A qualitative, thematic approach is being used. This means I am particularly interested in the language used in the interview and how your ideas and beliefs are constructed through this.

Expenses and Payments (if applicable)

Any travel expenses incurred will be covered, within reason (i.e. public transport only)

If you would like to claim for expenses, please provide a receipt on the day of the interview

A £10 Amazon voucher is offered as a reward; this will be made after completion of the interview and debrief

What do I have to do?

You do not need to prepare at all for this interview. All I ask is that you answer as honestly and openly as you can.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I do not foresee any risk of harm to either you or myself throughout this process. However, I will provide relevant details of support agencies if you have any concerns.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that this research will inform the wider community with findings that may be beneficial in the prevention of body image problems amongst females.

What will happen when the research study stops?

All data will be kept completely anonymous and no one other than myself will have access to it. If the research stops, for any reasons, data will be destroyed. Data will also be destroyed at the completion of the project.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

No one other than myself will have access to the data, either before or after anonymising it

The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. After the transcription process is complete, recordings will be destroyed.

Personal information will not be used for any other purposes

The process is confidential. However, if I am concerned of any risk of harm to yourself or others throughout the process, I am obliged to bring this up with the relevant faculty members and my supervisor.

Records will be kept on a password-locked computer. They will be deleted following the completion of the project.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

Whatever happens to the data, anonymity will be maintained. Should the research be written up in academic journals, any other publications, or should any publication of future research which refer to this piece, anonymity of data will still be guaranteed. I am

happy to provide copies of the results if and when the research is passed after completion.

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You are free to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview without any penalty or ramification. You are also able to withdraw your data up to a month after the interview without any penalty or ramification. However, it will not be possible to withdraw after this point.

If you have any problems, concerns or questions about this study, you should ask to speak to a member of the research team. If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally, you can do this through the University complaints procedure. To complain about the study, you need to phone 020 7040 3040. You can then ask to speak to the Secretary to Senate Research Ethics Committee and inform them that the name of the project is: An exploratory analysis of young women's experience of photo sharing and its role in body image.

You could also write to the Secretary at:
Anna Ramberg

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Email: ██████████████████████

City University London holds insurance policies which apply to this study. If you feel you have been harmed or injured by taking part in this study you may be eligible to claim compensation. This does not affect your legal rights to seek compensation. If you are harmed due to someone's negligence, then you may have grounds for legal action.

Who has reviewed the study?

This study has been approved by City University London Research Ethics Committee.

Further information and contact details

For further information, please feel free to contact my research supervisor, who will be happy to answer any inquiries about the research:

Meg-John Barker

█████████████████

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

7.3. Participant Consent Form

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

Title of Study: An exploratory analysis of young women's experience of photo sharing on social media and its role in body image

Ethics approval code: PSYETH (P/L) 15/16 72

Please initial box

1.	I agree to take part in the above City University London research project. I have had the project explained to me, and I have read the participant information sheet, which I may keep for my records. I understand this will involve: Being interviewed by the researcher Allowing the interview to be audiotaped	
2.	This information will be held and processed for the following purpose(s): *To answer the research questions, by exploring and analysing female experience of photo sharing online in relation to body image.* I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that could lead to the identification of any individual will be disclosed in any reports on the project, or to any other party. No identifiable personal data will be published. The identifiable data will not be shared with any other organisation.	
3.	I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can	

	choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw at any stage of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	

4.	I agree to City University London recording and processing this information about me. I understand that this information will be used only for the purpose(s) set out in this statement and my consent is conditional on the University complying with its duties and obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998.	
5.	I agree to take part in the above study.	

Name of Participant   Signature   Date

Name of Researcher   Signature   Date

When completed, 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher file.

Note to researcher: to ensure anonymity, consent forms should NOT include participant numbers and should be stored separately from data

7.4. Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

1. Have you been aware of coverage of selfies on SNSs (e.g. Kim Kardashian's recent naked selfie)

- What are your thoughts on selfies such as this?

- How do famous people's selfies make you feel?

- How do these naked/bikini/revealing/posed/beauty selfies make you feel (about women's bodies and your own body)?

2. Do you have experience of posting your own selfies online, and who is in your mind when you post?

- Retrospectively – when did you first post/become aware?

- What sort of selfies do you post?

- How would you describe your reasons for posting selfies?

- What version of yourself are you trying to portray?

- Is there a particular response you hope for when you post a selfie?

- How do you experience the response to selfies you post online?

- How do your own selfies make you feel about yourself?

- Can you pinpoint a specific selfie/its response?

How do you respond to other people's online selfies?

- Do you respond to them?

- How do other people's selfies make you feel about yourself?

- Can you pinpoint a specific selfie/your response?

- What is your relationship to online content and your own body image?

- How do you feel about selfies in relation to a sense of self and body image?

- How do you feel about your body in relation to this – does online content have an effect?

- If there is an effect – how do you manage it?

7.5. Debrief Sheet

CITY UNIVERSITY
LONDON

An exploratory analysis of young women's experience of photo sharing on social media and its role in body image

DEBRIEF INFORMATION

Thank you for taking part in this study. Now that it's finished we'd like to tell you a bit more about it.

The phenomenon of taking selfies and sharing them online is a fascinating one to me. It has become so quickly engrained within our culture and I am consistently aware of my friends and celebrities posting selfies online, sometimes on a daily basis.

I'm interested in our identity as women. I also have a personal and professional interest in body image: how we see ourselves, how we identify ourselves, and why this might be. As such, I'm particularly interested in the conflicting arguments that surround our objectification and self-objectification; that is, the way men and society see our form, and how we see it.

I'm intrigued by the conflict that there is in response to this, particularly with reference to social media. Is photo sharing a form of self-objectification that may actually be damaging? Or is it empowering to women?

My research hopes to gain a better understanding of online photo sharing and what it means for the young women of today.

I very much hope that you have enjoyed being part of this research experience and have found it to be of interest. However, if you have found any part of it upsetting or distressing, there are several organisations you can contact for further information or support.

Beat
Eating disorder charity that can provide information and support: http://www.b-eat.co.uk
Mind
Mental health charity: http://www.mind.org.uk/
The Samaritans
Confidential emotional support, 24 hours a day: http://www.samaritans.org/

If you feel you would like on-going support, I would also recommend contacting your GP

If you have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at the following:

██████████████████
██████████

Supervisor:

Meg-John Barker

███████████████████

Ethics approval code: PSYETH (P/L) 15/16 72

7.6. Annotated Transcript Sample

commercial aspect of photos.

	side. If she takes a selfies, often it's holding up like a detox tea or something.
06:18	Oh yes, she does that 'flat tummy tea' doesn't she.
06:20 P14	Yeah, something like that. So, but the whole aspect of women's bodies on social media. I do think that now, it's become normal to have like less and less and less, you know? —— *Normality of nakedness.*
06:35	When you say less and less and less...
06:38 P15	As in like, clothing. Less clothes! But, I mean... it's different people. I mean, the mainstream celebrities, they kind of seem to post the same sort of content. Which is always pictures of themselves, at the gym, being healthy, what they've bought... —— *similarities of photos.*
07:01	So it always feels, you mentioned a couple of times that there is commercial aspect to it. But it's also really normal for them to be half naked when they're doing it? Did I hear that right? I wonder how you feel about all these women's bodies on social media?
07:16 P16	Yeah, definitely... Well, I think it matters though who you choose to follow. Because before, with my Instagram – I don't really use twitter – but with my Instagram, I used to follow a lot of different pages and they would have like, the typical Tumblr girl, sort of thing. You know, like really skinny, with the blonde hair, you know, that sort of thing. *used to* *Choice in following* *we can be saturated with images of the same 'look'*
07:40	What did you call them just now? A Tumblr girl? I've not heard that term before! You might have to explain that one to me...
07:42 P17	Yeah! It's um, like... 'cuase on Tumblr, they have different types of like, things. And sometimes they are really funny ones, you'll get people joking and stuff. But then, like, 'cause I don't have a Tumblr, but my friends told me about it. So whenever we go out or something, they will dress a certain way, like 'Tumblr girls!' —— *Ideal.*
08:10	So what would a Tumblr girl look like? You mentioned she would be blonde and skinny.
08:13 P18	Yeah and kind of like, like, got the surf style.
08:20	Ah, I know. So kind of beachy, with a middle parting and wavy messy hair, that kind of waif, tanned, skinny look.
08:29 P19	Yeah! Just like that. And after a while, that's all I would see. And I found that really depressing. Because, it's like, it's too much. Sometimes when you just see a certain type... so then like, it's just, it's all up to who you choose to follow, it gets in your head loads.
08:47	I suppose if you're seeing something online all the time, like a Tumblr girl, and you don't have that aesthetic – I mean, I don't, that's not how I look at all – but... *'told' – ideal*
08:56 P20	That's what you're being told is pretty! All the time. And you're like, oh gosh. I need to like, dye my hair blonde, get a tan... and like I need to go on a diet. You know that? And like, I think it's all about who you choose to follow. But sometimes you can just end up looking at other pages, like, popular ones. And that's kind of like what you go along with, as well.

conscious move away from image related accounts

Images because overwhelming too much.

choice of who you follow

Influence of images.

'pretty'

Choice

If you're not active in choice, 'end up' inevitability of following popular pages.

7.7. Initial Coding

Achievement in having lots of followers Ilya, P106, P109

Autonomy, freedom, empowerment, choice in posting sexy pics
Camilla: P1
Alice, P27
Laura, P10
Anna, P68
Sahana, P2, P12, P67
Anya, P6
Naazima, P9, P10, P18, P19, P21, P22
Ilya, P1, P5, P7, P12, P113

Avoiding attention:
Camilla, P20
Anya, P28

Avoiding/deleting body shots
Alice, P43
Laura, P50
Anya, P76
Ilya, P63, P65, P66, P67, P117

Benefits from staying away from image focussed content
Alice, P24, P60, P62, P63, P96

Body(shape) shaming
Alice, P19, P84
Laura, P73
Anna, P26, P27, P65
Sahana, P16
Naazima, P76
Ilya, P28

Body shot being more uncomfortable
Ilya, P63, P66, P117

Body/appearance for men – they prefer curves
Laura, P70, P72

Boredom/retrospective posting
Laura, P37, P38
Ilya, P76

Boundaries of posting body images
Sahana, P8

Boys caring less about looks than girls
Naazima, P43

Addiction/being hooked on celeb photos
Alice, P64, P68

Addiction/hooked on phone/SM

Anya, P119,P120, P121, P112, P123, P124

Aesthetic ideal:
Camilla, P8
Alice, P15, P16, P22
Anya, P85, P95, P96, P102
Stephanie, P30
Ilya, P102

Ambivalence to SM
Naazima, P47, P60, P62, P63, P72

Anorexia/ED
Ilya, P94
Anya, P108

Anxiety of posting, anxiety of response, posting regret
Anya, P29, P30
Stephanie, P71
Ilya, P60, P66, P67

Attention seeking:
Camilla, P1, P8, P23, P25, P26, P63
Alice, P32, P33, P108
Laura, P3, P8
Anna, P2, P3
Sahana, P25, P27
Naazima, P74
Stephanie, P48

Aspiring to a body that isn't real
Anya, P112

**Attractive/positivity of curves
Naazima, P24
Ilya, P9, P10, P13

Ilya, P51

Brotherhood/sisterhood
Ilya, P37

Bulimia
Stephanie, P15, P16, P17

Celebs as inspirational
Laura, P20
Stephanie, P14

Celebs objectifying themselves/women by posting
Sahana, P2

Celebration of imperfection/authenticity
Anna, P13, P19, P26, P27
Stephanie, P31

Change in social media use over time:
Camilla: P9, P10
Alice, P37, P53, P54, P55, P60, P68, P105
Laura, P31
Anna, P3, P29, P59, P60
Anya, P33, P36, P37
Stephanie, P48, P49
Ilya, P83

Clinical vs non-clinical body appraisal
Ilya, P95

Choice in what we see/ignoring stuff we don't want to see:
Camilla, P1, P2, P7, P52
Alice, P21, P24, P57, P60, P68, P95
Anna, P1, P2, P5, P63
Sahana, P2, P3, P14, P32, P33, P34, P35, P45, P46
Anya, P16, P19, P20
Naazima, P77
Ilya, P4

(No) choice in what we see:
Alice, P95
Camilla, P7, P40, P52, P58, P61(?)
Laura, P14, P16
Anna, P63
Anya, P20, P114
Naazima, P13
Stephanie, P2
Ilya, P33

Clothing – better for skinny body ideal
Ilya – P21 P27

Commenting for friends on their photos
Anya, P62
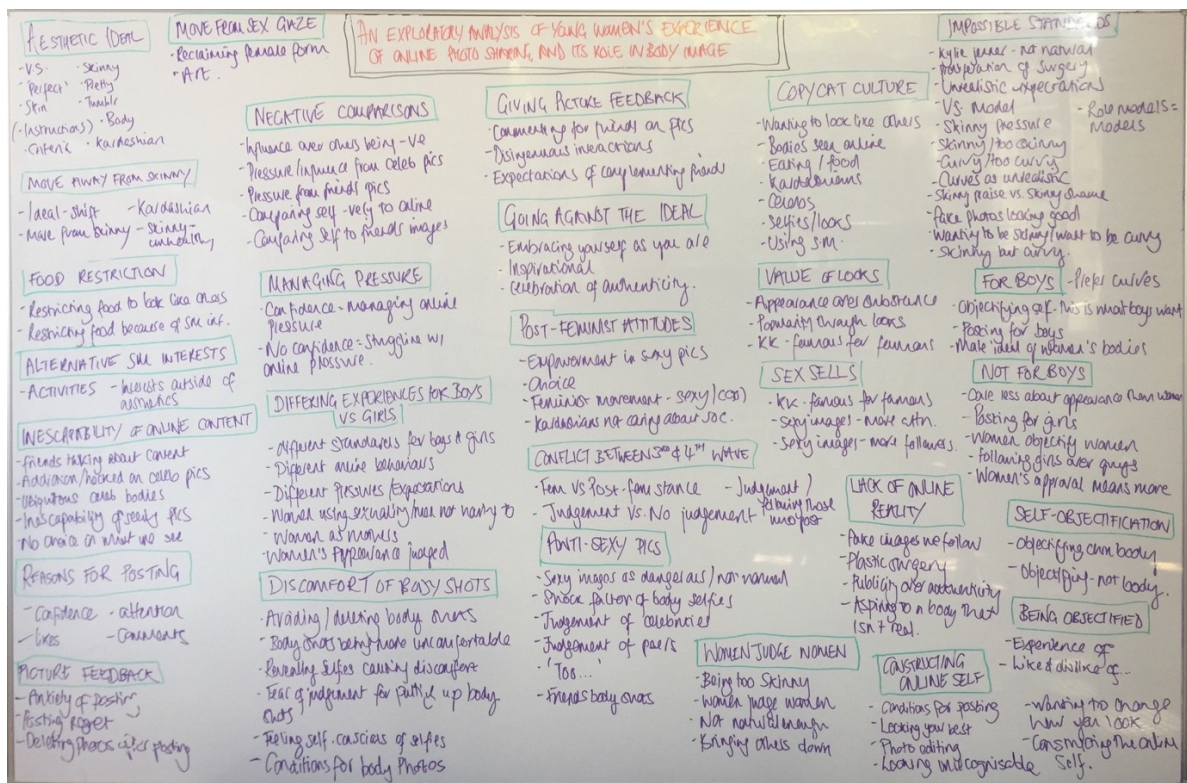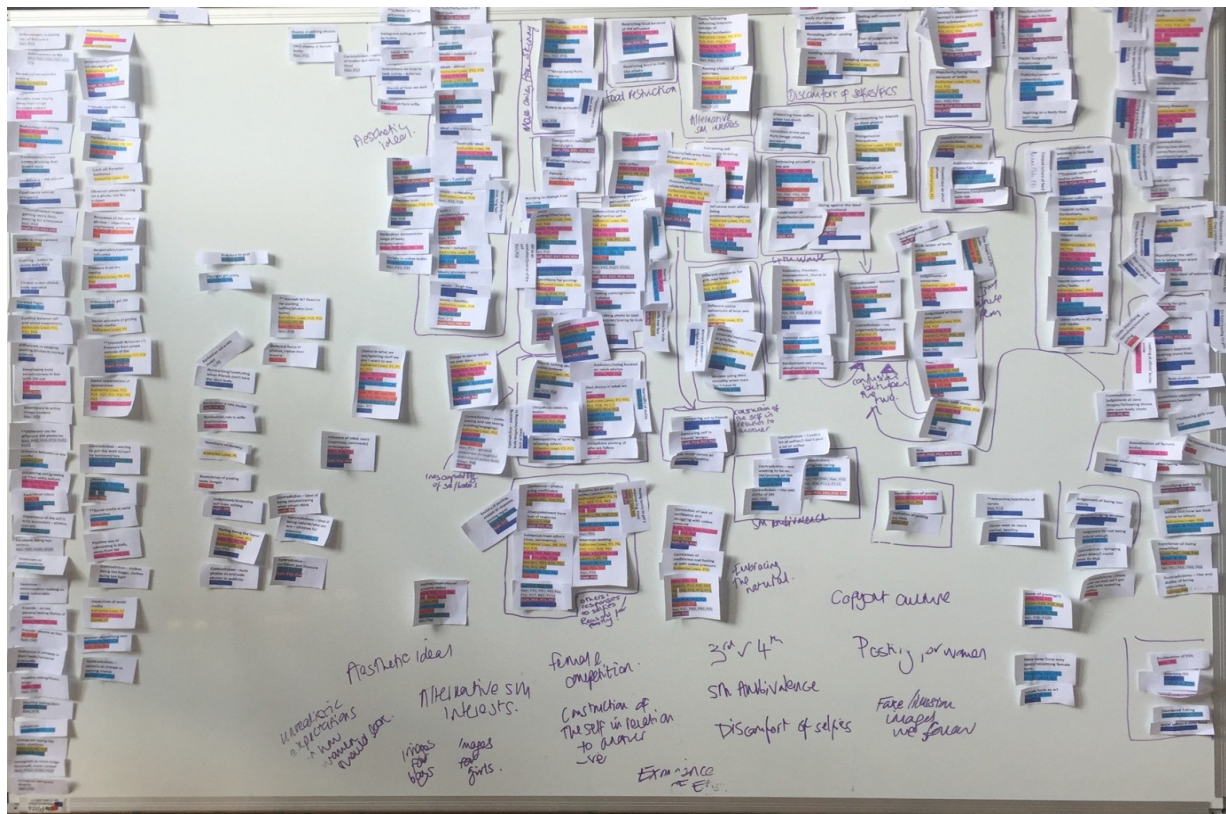
An Exploratory Analysis of Young Women's Experience of Online Photo Sharing, and its Role in Body Image

AESTHETIC IDEAL
- VS • Skinny
- Perfect • Pretty
- Skin • Trouble
- (Instructions) • Body
- Criteria • Kardashian

MOVE FROM SEX GAZE
- Reclaiming female form
- Art

MOVE AWAY FROM SKINNY
- Ideal shift – Kardashian
- Move from skinny – skinny unhealthy

FOOD RESTRICTION
- Restricting food to look like others
- Restricting food because of SM inf.

ALTERNATIVE SM INTERESTS
- Activities – interests outside of aesthetics

INESCAPABILITY OF ONLINE CONTENT
- Friends talking about content
- Addiction/hooked on celeb pics
- Ubiquitous curvy bodies
- Inescapability of sexy pics
- No choice in what we see

REASONS FOR POSTING
- Confidence – attention
- Likes – comments

PICTURE FEEDBACK
- Anxiety of posting
- Posting regret
- Deleting photos after posting

NEGATIVE COMPARISONS
- Influence over others being -ve
- Pressure/influence from celeb pics
- Pressure from friends pics
- Comparing self -vely to online
- Comparing self to friends images

MANAGING PRESSURE
- Confidence – managing online pressure
- No confidence – struggling with online pressure

DIFFERING EXPERIENCES FOR BOYS VS GIRLS
- Different standards for boys & girls
- Different online behaviours
- Different pressures/expectations
- Women using sexuality/men not having to
- Women as models
- Women's appearance judged

DISCOMFORT OF BODY SHOTS
- Avoiding/deleting body ones
- Body ones being more uncomfortable
- Revealing selfies causing discomfort
- Fear of judgement for putting up body shots
- Feeling self conscious of selfies
- Conditions for body photos

GIVING PICTURE FEEDBACK
- Commenting for friends on pics
- Disingenuous interactions
- Expectations of complementing friends

GOING AGAINST THE IDEAL
- Embracing yourself as you are
- Inspirational
- Celebration of authenticity

POST-FEMINIST ATTITUDES
- Empowerment in sexy pics
- Choice
- Feminist movement – sexy (cool)
- Kardashians not caring about soc.

CONFLICT BETWEEN 3RD & 4TH WAVE
- Fem vs Post-fem stance – Judgment
- Judgement vs No judgement (reducing those who post)

ANTI-SEXY PICS
- Sexy images as dangerous/not normal
- Shock factor of body selfies
- Judgement of celebrities
- Judgement of peers
- 'Too...'
- Friends body ones

WOMEN JUDGE WOMEN
- Being too skinny
- Women judge women
- Not natural enough
- Bringing others down

COPYCAT CULTURE
- Wanting to look like others
- Bodies seen online
- Eating / food
- Kardashians
- Celebs
- Selfies/looks
- Using SM.

VALUE OF LOOKS
- Appearance over substance
- Popularity through looks
- KK – famous for famous

SEX SELLS
- KK – famous for famous
- Sexy images – more often
- Sexy images – more followers

LACK OF ONLINE REALITY
- Fake images we follow
- Plastic surgery
- Publicity over authenticity
- Aspiring to a body that isn't real

CONSTRUCTING ONLINE SELF
- Conditions for posting
- Looking your best
- Photo editing
- Looking unrecognisable self
- Wanting to change how you look
- Constructing the online self

IMPOSSIBLE STANDARDS
- Kylie Jenner – not natural
- Popularisation of surgery
- Unrealistic expectations
- VS Model
- Skinny pressure
- Skinny too skinny
- Curvy too curvy
- Curves as unrealistic
- Skinny praise vs skinny shame
- Fake photos looking good
- Wanting to be skinny/want to be curvy
- Skinny but curvy.
- Role models = Models

FOR BOYS – Picks curves
- Objectifying self - this is what boys want
- Posing for boys
- Male ideal of women's bodies

NOT FOR BOYS
- Care less about appearance than women
- Posting for girls
- Women objectify women
- Following girls over guys
- Women's approval means more

SELF-OBJECTIFICATION
- Objectifying own body
- Objectifying - not body.

BEING OBJECTIFIED
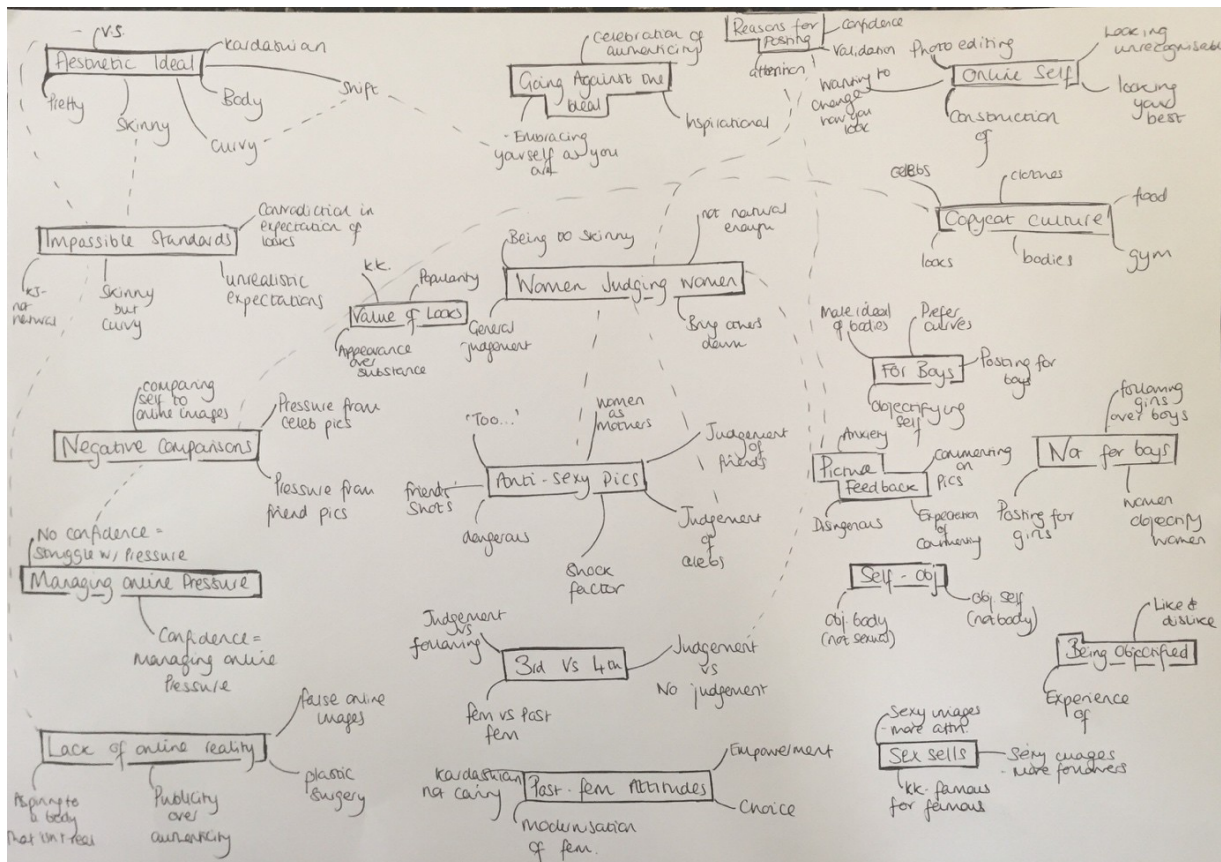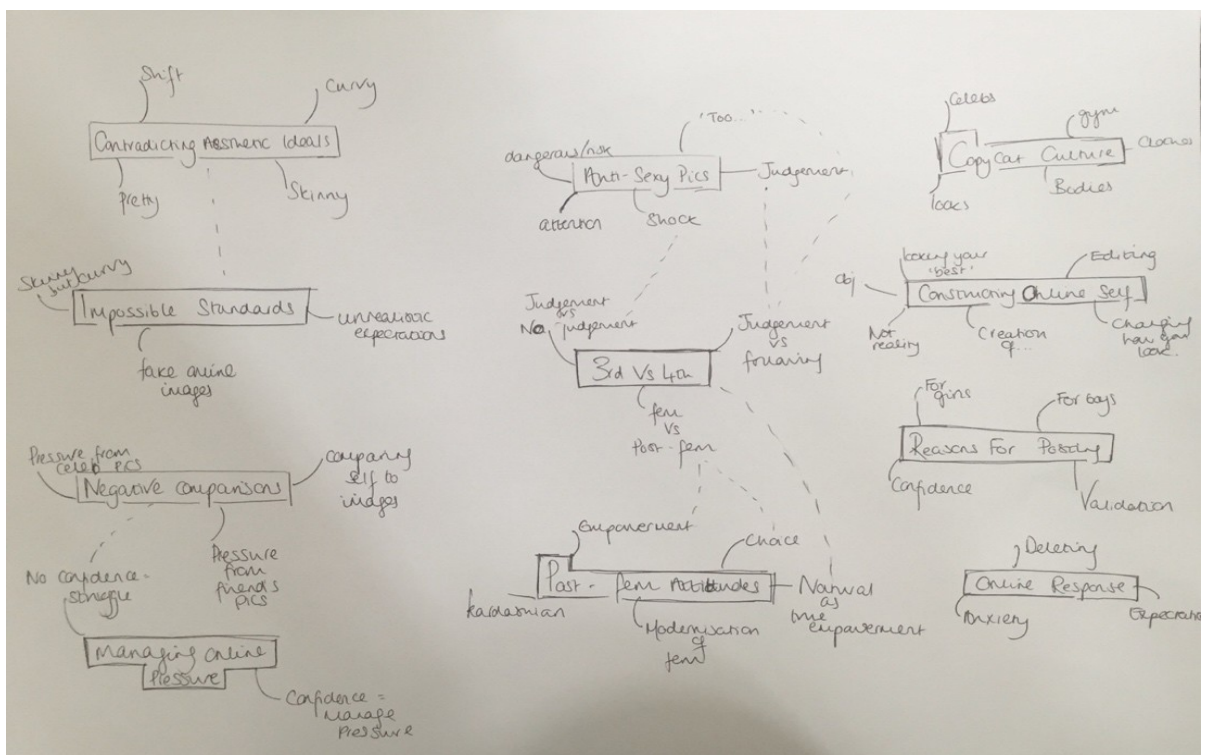- Experience of
- Liked disliked of.

7.10. Initial Mind Map

7.11. Reviewing the Themes

7.12. Final Mind Map

Contrasting Aesthetic Ideals

Impossible Standards

Objectifying Other Women

Negative Comparisons

Managing Pressure

Why post?

Constructing Photos

Creating the Online Self

Change Over Time

'Too…'

Express Yourself

The Question of Feminism
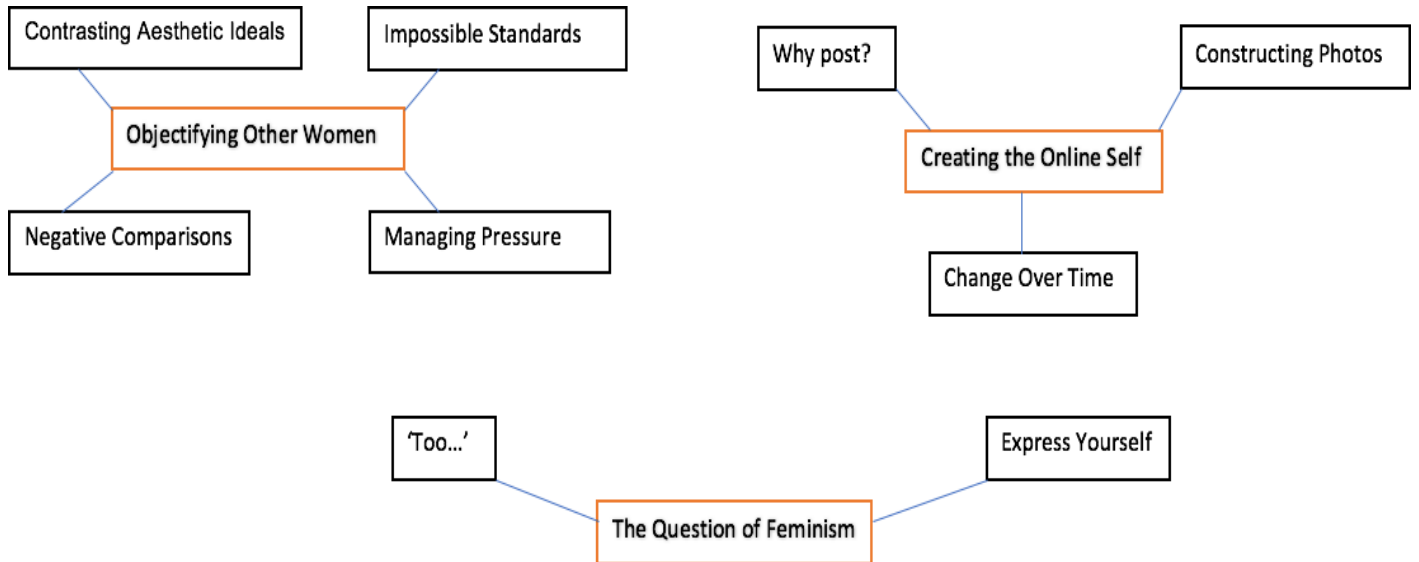
7.13. Checklist for Good Criteria (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analysed - interpreted, made sense of - rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other - the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done - i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as *active* in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

7.14. Signed Consent Form

CITY UNIVERSITY LONDON

DPsych Counselling Psychology

Placement Supervisor's Confirmation

I confirm that _Rebecca Dixey_ (trainee's name) has completed Form CT1, page 1, and obtained the client's signed consent to the recording and use for academic assignments of their therapeutic sessions.

Placement Supervisor's Name: _Piotr Waltos_

Placement Supervisor's Signature: ██████ Date: _28/07/2017_

Complete page 1 and show to the supervisor who is supervising your work with this client. Ask your supervisor to complete page 2 to confirm that you have obtained the client's permission to record the session and to use it for your academic assignments.

To ensure full anonymity of the client, page 2 only must be submitted with your case study / process report, and the client's name must not appear anywhere on the form.

Page 1 must not be submitted, and should be retained with the client's notes within the agency/ placement setting.

CT1 Form