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**A CRITICAL ACCOUNT OF IDEOLOGY IN CONSUMER CULTURE:**  
*The Commodification of a Social Movement*

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

University of Edinburgh  
*University of Edinburgh Business School*

**2016**



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## DECLARATION

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own and has been composed by myself. To the best of my knowledge, it does not contain material previously written or published by another person unless clearly indicated. The work herein presented has not been submitted for the purposes of any other degree or professional qualification.

Date: 2 May 2016

Alexandra Serra Rome \_\_\_\_\_



To Frances, Florence, Betty, and Angela

*The strong-willed women in my life who have shaped me to be the person I am today.  
This thesis is dedicated to you.*



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## ABSTRACT

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The study of ideology has long interested sociologists and consumer researchers alike. Much consumption research has approached ideology from various macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis. However, many studies fail to address the dialogical interplay among these three levels of analysis when examining how ideology manifests in, and interacts with, consumer identity projects. Many consumption-based studies examining ideology provide descriptive and normative accounts, affording practices of consumption emancipatory potential. In response, this research adopts a critical marketing perspective in order to draw out the macro and political implications of meso cultural production systems and micro consumption experiences and identity projects. Focusing on the contemporary American feminist movement, and on discourses around sex and sexuality, it explores how hegemonic (patriarchal) and counterhegemonic (feminist) ideologies are communicated in the marketplace, through the media, to understand their role in regard to consumers' lived experiences and interactions with advertisements.

Working within the consumer culture theory tradition, this thesis employed a variant of phenomenological interviewing that explored female emerging adults' sexual narratives and their interpretations of sexualized ads. By generating data on a specific type of experience, inferences were drawn about how young women experience and relate to the contemporary feminist movement. In total, 14 American women, aged 20 to 31, were interviewed twice and also created media collages of what they considered 'sexy'. Implementing a multi-step hermeneutic analysis, the data were analyzed through an iterative process, moving back and forth between the idiographic cases and theory. Through multiple iterations, micro, meso, and macro level inferences were made.

This study suggests that young women foster diverse and temporary identifications with feminism in the pursuit of two, often overlapping, goals: ontological security and status. This results in a micro process of ‘ideological shifting’, which has depoliticizing effects, insofar as (anti-) feminist brands and identities were readily appropriated and discarded depending on specific contexts and situations. Thus, contrary to much work in the consumer culture theory tradition, which presents consumption as having transgressive and liberating effects, this study finds that while the young women had the power to dialogically interact with marketized (meso level) ideologies that constitute the marketplace, they failed to intercept the macro level processes of marketization and commodification and consequently did not challenge the hegemonic (patriarchal) ideology at large.

In adopting a critical perspective, this study offers valuable insight into the relationship between ideology and consumer behavior. Ideology is shown to be disseminated via hegemonic processes of commodification and marketization. Because these processes occur at a macro level, counterhegemonic ideologies are hegemonized and subsequently depoliticized before even reaching the consumer on a micro level. By examining ideology across all three levels, this study finds that consumer agency is largely relegated to the realm of the marketplace, where consumers’ dialogical interactions and consumption practices do not challenge the macro ideologies or oppression at large, but merely alter their marketplace expressions.

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## LAY SUMMARY

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The purpose of this thesis is to critically and holistically explore the role that ideology plays in consumer culture theory. In particular, it examines three levels of analysis: ideology (at a macro level), the marketplace (at a meso level), and consumer's identity projects and their interpretations of advertisements (both at a micro level). Conceptually, this thesis looks at how young women relate to the contemporary feminist movement and how market co-optation impacts the propensity for social change.

Qualitative interviews were used to collect empirical data about women's experiences and their interpretations of advertisements. Insofar as issues about sex and sexuality have long served as a major tenet of the feminist movement, qualitative interviews were used to gain insight into fourteen informant's sexual narratives and their interpretations of sexual content in ads. This allowed the researcher to capture the women's first-hand experiences in relation to the feminist movement, without directly asking them to theorize about this.

Using a Marxist-influenced theoretical framework, this study argues that consumer agency and social change is relegated to the marketplace. In this way, while consumers and social movement activists have the power to alter what is offered in the marketplace and influence symbols of feminism (and patriarchy), this does not translate to the broader oppressive ideologies. As a result, the feminist movement has become depoliticized, functioning as a hegemonic cultural production system in a marketplace that contributes to an overarching oppressive society. This study contributes to the discipline of consumer culture theory, as well as scholarship on new social movements and gender studies. In conclusion, it urges other researchers to identify political strategies that might exist outside the marketplace and consumption in order to facilitate social change on a more macro level.



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

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This research explores the role that ideology plays in the realm of consumption and social movements by addressing the dialogical interplay that occurs across three levels of analysis: the macro, meso, and micro. In particular, it adopts a critical marketing perspective in order to draw out the macro and political implications associated with the commodification of the contemporary feminist movement in the United States. Such macro inferences were made by exploring consumers' interactions with meso cultural production systems (the marketplace/media) and micro consumption experiences. However, as is the case with many doctoral projects, this thesis underwent a series of transformations and alterations prior to adopting its specific focus and drawing its corresponding conclusions. Thus, before delving into the basic requirements of a PhD thesis, I recount here my own inspiration for this study, in addition to the process of transformation that, in hindsight, was absolutely necessary to the development of this study, as well of myself as a researcher.

#### **1.1 Origins and Evolution of the Study**

The title of my original PhD proposal, written some three years ago, was along the lines of: "Developing a Consumer Response Model for Male-Nudity Appeals in Advertising: Contrasting Conscious and Unconscious Attitudes". Early on during my PhD studies, inspired by many of the students working within the marketing discipline at the University of Edinburgh, I made a shift from conducting quantitative empirical research to working within the consumer culture theory discipline, characterized primarily by qualitative and interpretive research. Another crucial shift occurred during my first year: I had recently gotten out of a romantic relationship, which radically transformed my position and confidence as a researcher studying sex. As a female researcher in a heterosexual

relationship, I felt confident in my fortitude to study such a taboo topic – it interested me and I felt free to be audacious and uninhibited in my academic endeavors because I was ‘spoken for’. Yet this all changed when my relationship ended. Suddenly, I found myself embarrassed, even slightly ashamed for undertaking this research. I realized that I did not view sex or sex research in the same way and, in turn, this inspired me. I began thinking about the research I had undertaken during my Master’s program, which compared women’s perceptions of sexual content in advertising, namely female nudity, in the United Kingdom and in the Netherlands. While I had considered geographic (cross-cultural), along with some other standardized demographic differences (such as age and education), I had failed to take into account other crucial factors, like women’s relationship statuses, sexual histories, and future ambitions. It was at this point when I realized the role that consumers’ sexual and romantic narratives could play on how they viewed the world, and could certainly impact how they viewed sexual content in advertisements. This was the second major path my research assumed over the next year, exploring how women’s sexual narratives related to their interpretations of sexual content in advertising.

During the Spring semester of 2013, I studied at the University of Arkansas, where I began to make my way around the intricacies of critical theory. It was at this point when I began generating data and conducting interviews. Over the course of five months, I interviewed women who opened their lives to me and shared some of their rawest, most tragic, and beautiful stories. At times, I felt as if they placed me in a position of power, as a counselor or therapist who could offer them some sort of salient advice. Sometimes I felt as if I relied on their stories to guide me in my own romantic, sexual, and interpersonal struggles. Most of the time, I felt like we were simply two friends sharing a meal together.

Early on in the data generation process, it became evident that the women I was interviewing were making both explicit and implicit linkages among their sexual narratives, advertising interpretations, and the contemporary feminist social movement. I began making adjustments to my conceptual framework, recognizing the role that macro

systemic ideologies seemed to play in their lives, both consciously and non-consciously. Still, at this point in my study, feminism, and conversely, patriarchy were regarded as disinterested societal discourse. In fact, it was not until I returned back to Edinburgh and began an in-depth analysis of the data that this study took a more critical turn. In January 2016, I moved to Germany. Surrounded by the legacies of the great critical theorists, including Karl Marx himself, this thesis eventually came into fruition as a political and critical study about how a traditional institution, such as a social movement, becomes commodified, marketized, and subsequently, depoliticized. It is fundamentally critical in its aim, undeniably pessimistic in its accounts, but optimistic for the future of consumer and political research.

Doctoral theses are often presented in a logical and linear fashion, concealing the many transformations and alterations that they inevitably undergo. I shared this story because, although I too have aimed to provide a clear and comprehensive research project, the transformations that my research and I, as a researcher, have experienced were crucial to the development of this project and the conclusions it draws. The multiple iterations that this thesis has undergone, which take into account multiple theories and ideas, as well as the voices of my informants, have worked to shape and radically transform this PhD into what it is today. The remainder of this chapter briefly introduces the main research gaps, describes the positioning, and outlines the structure of this thesis.

### **1.2 Research Gap and Positioning**

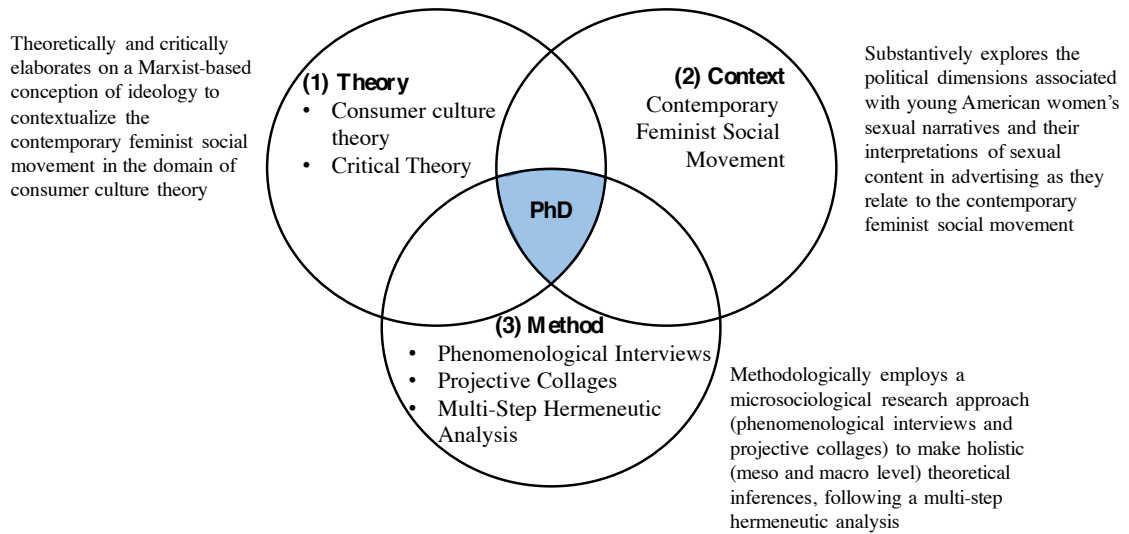
This study contributes to the consumer culture theory (CCT) discipline by offering a critical and holistic examination of the role that ideology plays in consumers' identity projects, by examining how consumers' dialogically engage with a social movement that has become embedded within media culture. The extant research that has considered the link between ideology and consumption (e.g. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Izberk-Bilgin 2012; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Thompson and Üstüner 2015) has been overwhelmingly normative in its accounts,

celebrating the progressive and political role that consumption plays in shifting or altering ideological systems (Douglas 1996; Douglas and Isherwood 1996; Featherstone 1991; Hall 1980; Hebdige 1979; Peñaloza and Price 1993; Miller 1995, 1997). Less research has considered the alternative perspective, which stresses the inescapability and perils of the marketplace. Further, research that does adopt such a view typically falls outside of the mainstream CCT domain, implied in arguments posed most often by the Frankfurt School (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972/1997) and within the realm of post-political (Badiou 1998/2001, 2005, 2006; Dean 2014; Rancière 1999, 2010; Žižek 1999). Scant contemporary consumption research has deviated from a normative focus on the liberatory dimensions of consumption, with some notable exceptions (Dobscha 1998; Murray 2002; Østergaard, Hermansen, and Fitchett 2015; Rumbo 2002).

Furthermore, although ideology can be explored on a macro (e.g. grand ideological systems), meso (e.g. cultural production systems), and/or micro level(s) (e.g. consumer identity projects, consumption practices, media interpretations), most studies within the CCT discipline examining ideology tend to focus on linking one or two of the levels of analysis at once (e.g. Izberk-Bilgin 2012; Murray 2002; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Zhao and Belk 2008): Few consider all three levels holistically, with some exceptions (e.g. Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010). Hence, this study contributes to the ongoing discussions about the role of ideology in consumer research by offering a *critical* and *multi-level* perspective, following the adoption of a microsociological approach (Swartz and Zolberg 2004) that focuses on how emerging adult women dialogically engage with the contemporary feminist social movement on a macro, meso, and micro level.

More substantively, this research contributes to a dearth of research exploring women's lived experiences of sexuality, particularly as it pertains to consumption (Dahl 2008; Gould 1991; Schroeder 1998), as well as a lack of scholarship considering reader-response approaches to sex-in-advertising (Reichert 2002). In this way, this thesis is

interdisciplinary and also contributes to the realm of gender and political studies. The positioning of this thesis is illustrated below, in Figure 1.1.



**Figure 1.1:** Positioning of Thesis

Theoretically, this research operates within the domain of CCT and critical theory to elaborate on a Marxist-based conception of ideology that is substantiated by the works of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and Pierre Bourdieu. In this way, it adopts a materialistic conception of ideology that maintains that the beliefs of a society emerge out of the material structure of a society that is nonetheless socially constructed (Eagleton 1991/2007). This deviates slightly from the majority of extant consumer research that equates ideology to discourse in a sociological sense, which tends to strip ideology of its epistemological implications (Hirschman 1988, 1990, 1993; McRobbie 1994; Press et al. 2014).

Contextually, this project focuses on the contemporary feminist social movement to explore how an ideological system, constituted by hegemonic (patriarchal) and counter-hegemonic (feminist) ideologies, is communicated by the media. In particular, this research is interested in how a counter-hegemonic ideology, i.e. feminism, becomes

embedded in a new social movement(s), which are increasingly dependent on the media and the marketplace to communicate their aims. Notably, few studies within the CCT discipline have examined the marketization of traditional institutions (Barlett et al. 2002; Massey 1997; McAlexander et al. 2014; Thompson 2004a), and even fewer have considered the marketization or commercialization of social movements explicitly<sup>1</sup>, with some exceptions (Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Varman and Belk 2009).

Methodologically, a microsociological research approach was employed using a variant of phenomenological interviewing and projective collages, in order to make micro, meso, and macro level inferences with regard to the commodification of the contemporary feminist movement. Following the calls made by Askegaard and Linnet (2011) and Borgerson and Schroeder (2002), this research goes beyond consumers' phenomenological accounts of lived experiences to consider the macro social contexts and structures as well as the meso cultural production systems that act as the intermediary point between consumers' micro experiences and the macro structures (Arnould and Thompson 2005). In order to achieve this, a multi-step hermeneutic analysis was implemented, which, to the best of my knowledge, has not been attempted by other CCT scholars.

### 1.3 Thesis Structure

Thus far, this chapter has introduced the motivation behind this study, outlining the trajectory it has followed over the past three years. It also briefly summarized the main research gaps and positioning of this thesis. These points are expanded on in Chapter 2, which introduces the orienting conceptual framework developed to guide this research. Chapter 2 also explicates the ideological context, presenting a broad overview of the American feminist movement. Chapters 3 through 5 constitute the literature review of this

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<sup>1</sup> As will be made clear in Chapter 4, CCT research tends to focus on the marketization of subcultures (e.g. Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Goulding and Saren 2007; Hebdige 1979; Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander 2006; Schouten and McAlexander 1995), and while similar to social movements, subcultures tend to lack the explicit political dimension inherent in social movements.

thesis. Beginning with an overview of the macro theoretical considerations, Chapter 3 presents the theoretical background that guided the macro theoretical interjections made in this study. Chapter 4 considers the meso level of analysis, discussing the role of new social movements and the different views with regard to social movement co-optation. Chapter 5 looks more explicitly at the nature of identity and particularly how identity relates to social movements. It also considers extant literature on sexual narratives within consumer research and consumers' interpretations of sexual content in ads. Following an extensive literature review, Chapter 6 outlines the employed methodology. Beginning with a contextualized orienting conceptual framework and presentation of the research questions, this chapter details the philosophical underpinnings and methodological procedures adopted in this study. Chapters 7 and 8 present the main findings of this research, moving from an emic to an etic analysis. Chapter 9 moves up a further level of abstraction, offering a theoretical discussion that considers the commodification, marketization, and depoliticization of the contemporary feminist social movement. It then concludes this thesis by summarizing the main contributions and offers potential avenues for future research.





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## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

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This dissertation, aligning itself with the traditions of consumer culture theory (CCT), aims to “systematically link individual (or idiographic) meanings to different levels of cultural processes and structure and then to situate these relationships within historical and marketplace contexts” (Arnould and Thompson 2005: 875). To this end, it examines the holistic relations between macro, meso, and micro level phenomena. One of the main criticisms of the postmodern project that has warranted much attention, primarily within the realm of consumption studies, has been its adherence to individualist identity-projects, whilst ignoring grander narratives, context, and ideology (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Borgerson and Schroeder 2002). Consequently, this thesis aims to understand how ideology is communicated via cultural production systems, and how these relate to consumers’ identity projects and their interpretations of media.

The first goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of how consumption research has approached issues of ideology to offer an orienting conceptual framework that guides the structure and analysis of this research. The second aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of the ideological context: the contemporary feminist movement in the United States. While this primarily includes the third- and fourth-wave feminism, previous waves are outlined in order to provide context and illustrate the trajectory of the movement.

#### **2.1 Conceptual Orientation**

The macro-micro dialogic refers to two traditions or scales of analysis (Desjeux 2008), which are often linked as a way to explain macro level phenomenon (Alexander et al.

1987; Raub, Buskens, and Assen 2011). This dichotomy is grounded in a historical philosophical and political tradition, sometimes referred to as the ‘romantic’ notions of structure and agency, both of which are illusive and vary depending on the contexts of which they are employed. ‘Agency’ typically refers to the physical or cognitive abilities, skills, or capabilities, which enable actors to do something, reflecting one’s autonomy or ‘free will’ (Arnould 2007: 97). ‘Structure’ tends to reflect a sort of Parsonian functionalism and can generally be described in terms of a pattern, cultural system, or metonymic device, which organizes or socializes some aspect of social existence (Sewell Jr. 1992). Research adopting a macro/structuralist approach is perhaps best represented by Karl Marx’s late works, which offer one of the most influential theories adopting a macro perspective in sociology. In contrast, micro/agentive perspectives reflect a Hegelian philosophy, emphasizing the phenomenology of human experience (Alexander et al. 1987). Increasingly, however, it is uncommon for research to adopt either a purely macro or purely micro approach; most research acknowledges that the two inevitably exist in relation to each other. For example, Pierre Bourdieu is widely acclaimed for his attempts to synthesize the macro and micro using a microsociological approach that seeks to understand how ideology (material structures and human experience) operates empirically in everyday life.

Within CCT, emphasis tends to be placed on micro level studies that explore consumers’ gay (Kates 2004), biker (Schouten and McAlexander 1995), activist (Kozinets and Handelman 2004) cosmopolitan (Thompson and Tambyah 1999), and gendered (Hein and O’Donohoe 2014; Holt and Thompson 2004a; Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander 2006) identity projects to understand how these relate to consumption. Macro level studies, focusing on socioeconomic structures, cultural patterns, systems, institutions, and/or ideologies are less common in contemporary consumer research (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Borgerson and Schroeder 2002). This may be, in part, attributed to the difficulties associated with gaining an empirical understanding of macro level phenomena, given that they are largely abstracted and do not readily lend themselves to empirical research

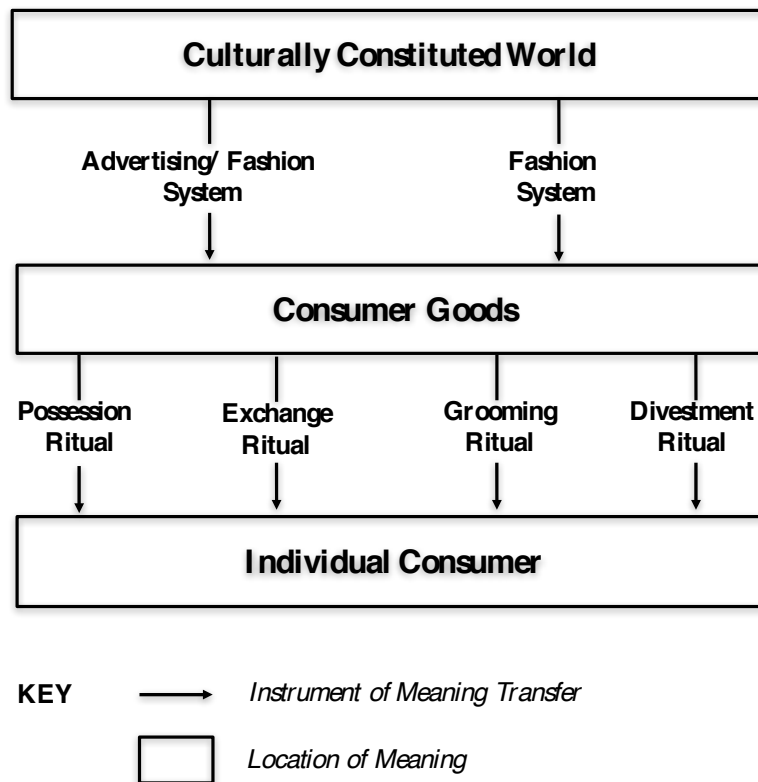
methods (Desjeux 2008). In order to deconstruct macro phenomena, research must consider their influence on micro individual practices as a frame of reference, and/or build upon current conceptions of objective structures via rich description of individual phenomenon; subsequently, researchers may then attempt to reflexively distance macro phenomena from its micro focus. In the realm of CCT, previous research has highlighted how consumers manage, alter, and reinforce ethnic (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004), religious (Izberk-Bilgin 2012; Sandikci and Ger 2010) gendered (Thompson and Üstüner 2015) natured (Canniford and Shankar 2013), and nationalist (Varman and Belk 2009) ideologies, for example.

Additionally, research has expanded the macro-micro dichotomy to theorize a middle or meso level that explains the *interactions* between micro-macro or structure-agency. Arnould and Thompson (2005: 874) characterize the macro level as those global economic and cultural forces, which exert their influence on micro individuated identity projects; this occurs through “particular cultural production systems via the marketplace, such as marketing communications or the fashion industry... [that] systematically predispose consumers toward certain kinds of identity projects”, which make up the meso level. This meso level serves as the middle point between the emic (consumer identity projects) and the etic (socio-historical forces and structures that underlie those projects) (Geertz 1983).

Accordingly, three distinct levels of research have been identified that account for the movement of meaning in consumer research:

- Macro level: Grand ideological systems, narratives, or structures involving global economic, cultural, and/or societal forces (e.g. religion, culture, politics).
- Meso level: Cultural production systems that transfer meanings associated with a culturally constituted world (macro) to individual consumers (micro) (e.g. marketing communications, fashion, brands, markets).
- Micro level: Individual identity projects, consumer narratives, and consumption experiences (e.g. phenomenological experiences).

Grant McCracken was one of the first to conceptually link all three levels of analysis in his (1986) Movement of Meaning model (see Figure 2.1), which illustrates how meanings associated with a culturally constituted world (macro) are embedded into marketized systems (meso), that are eventually communicated to the consumer (micro) through various rituals, following a hierarchal or top-down approach.



**Figure 2.1:** Movement of Meaning Model  
*Source: McCracken (1986: 72)*

However, much contemporary consumption research challenges this hierarchal model, arguing that the nature of consumption is much more interactive and dialogical than what McCracken (1986) suggests. These claims have been substantiated based on studies examining the interplay between macro, meso, and micro levels, which are considered below.

### **2.1.1 Macro and Meso**

Elizabeth Hirschman is well known for making connections between macro and meso levels of analysis. In 1988, she discussed how the ideology of consumption (i.e. secular versus sacred) are encoded within and communicated through two popular television series. In 1990, she identified the dominant themes of an affluent ideology within cultural texts, such as magazines, autobiographies, and novels. In the book, *Heroes, Monsters and Messiahs: Movies and Television Shows as the Mythology of American Culture* (2000), Hirschman explicated how the role portrayals of males, females, and machines in movies and television constitute the mythology of American culture. More recently, she unpacked the workings of rugged individualism as a rhetorical device in magazine advertisements and editorial content that is primarily grounded in an ideology of white male dominance (2003: 21), highlighting the deep cultural connections between gender and race. Other research, such as Schroeder and Borgerson's (1998) study, visually analyzes ads to identify the underlying political and ethical implications of gendered images. Zhao and Belk (2008) show how advertising in China appropriates an anti-consumerist political ideology to promote consumption, facilitating social transformation and cultural evolution towards a more consumption-oriented society. Notably, this study moves away from McCracken's (1986) hierarchal model by inferring how ads and rhetoric can influence society more generally, thus qualifying a dialogical approach.

### **2.1.2 Meso and Micro**

Other research has examined relations between meso and micro levels of analysis. Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007), for instance, show how a countervailing market system functions as an ideology that informs farming and food consumption practices. While implicitly drawing from a macro level ideology (i.e. anti-capitalist rhetoric promoted by the organic food movement), its scope is limited to meso (countervailing market-system) and micro (farming and food consumption practices) considerations. Dolbec and Fischer (2015) employ institutional theory to investigate how the fashion market is inadvertently influenced by interactions of interconnected consumers. Rose and

Wood (2005) explicate how consumers locate and coproduce authenticity by viewing reality television. And Mick and Buhl (1992) develop a meaning-based model of advertising, which emphasizes the links between three brother's interpretations of ads and their 'life themes' and 'life projects'. While this stream of research acknowledges that consumers are actively engaged in culturally constituted identity projects, it largely neglects what Askegaard and Linnet (2011) identify as the 'context of the context', or the underlying ideological and mythological forces that facilitate and legitimate identity projects. "The task of contextualization", according to these authors, "is to explain consumers' choices by referring both to the structuring force of such large-scale contexts, and the meaningful projects that arise in everyday sociality. ... using theoretical tools that make us able to comprehend the structuring effect of culture and ideology" (398).

Other research in this stream acknowledges a macro level, but does not explicitly theorize this. For example, Thompson and Haytko (1997) begin to theorize about the ideological implications of consumers' style projects. The authors conceptualize consumers' use of fashion discourse as a 'lived hegemony', which challenges McCracken's (1986) hierarchal model, demonstrating how the marketplace offers a range of countervailing interpretive standpoints from which consumers can generate localized and personalized fashion narratives that often resist dominant fashion norms in the (meso level) marketplace. Ideology, in this sense, is conceived as an omnipresent macro structure, i.e. the "socioeconomic conditions of an advanced capitalist society" that the authors argue "seldom became a focal aspect of their fashion-based interpretations" (36). In this way, the activities of the cultural markets and intermediaries are afforded precedence. While Thompson and Haytko (1997), Rose and Wood (2005), and Mick and Buhl (1992) tend to emphasize consumer agency, Murray (2002), in his critical re-inquiry of Thompson and Haytko's (1997) study, warns us of the perils of underestimating the macro ideology, namely the political and oppressive aspects that inform consumption. Here, Murray (2002) conceptualizes consumers' interpretation of fashion discourses through the dialogical interplay between agency (sign experimentation) and structure (sign

domination), demonstrating how acts of agency (i.e. ‘emancipated spaces’) can become co-opted by the market as “just another packaged, historical identity” (439). Thus, while occasionally acknowledging the underlying ideological forces that inform consumption, this stream of research does not theorize at a macro level; focusing instead on how (micro) consumer interactions shape/ are shaped by the (meso) marketplace.

### **2.1.3 Macro and Micro**

Increasing research has begun to consider the relationships between macro and micro level phenomena, which either explicitly or implicitly take into account the meso level. For example, Visconti et al. (2010) identify four ideologies emerging from the interactions between residents and street artists that underpin the consumption of a collective good, namely public space. Canniford and Shankar (2013) investigate the nature/culture dualism, showing how consumers use purification practices as a way to preserve the romantic ideology of nature. Kozinets (2008) demonstrates how an (technology) ideological field is not static or divided, as it is so often conceptualized (i.e. technophobes/technophiles), but is dynamic and paradoxical, fueled by the intersubjective and internal contradictions in consumer narratives. And Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler (2010) explicate the process by which different, even competing ideologies can take on similar narrative structures that are shaped by consumers’ brand commitments. In stressing the dialogical workings of ideology, these studies evidence how ideology is constituted from the bottom-up in addition to McCracken’s (1986) assertion that it flows top-down. However, these studies are situated primarily at the emic level, emphasizing consumers’ agentic interactions as opposed to structuring ideological systems and institutions, per se. In these studies, ideology represents a particular world-view, but is stripped of any epistemological connotations.

Other research examines how ideology informs consumption practices, adhering more closely to McCracken’s (1986) Movement of Meaning model, which suggests consumer behavior is structured by economic, social, and cultural forces. Crockett and Wallendorf



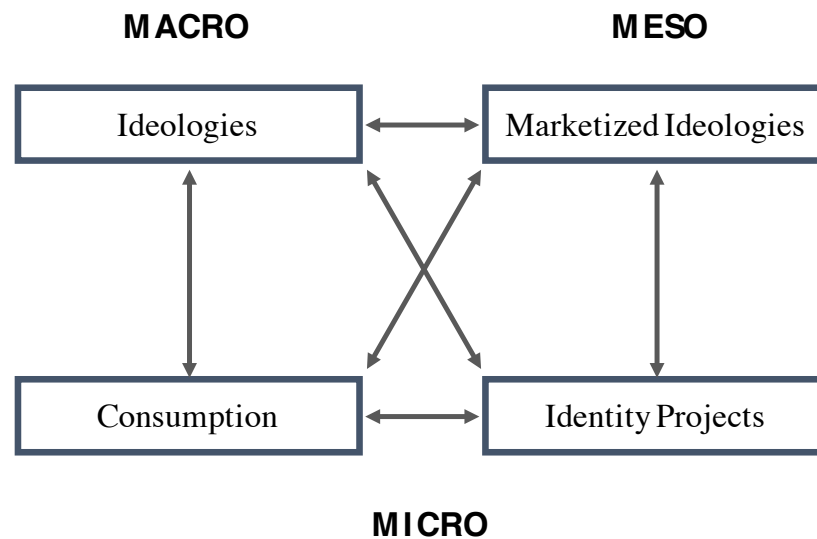
(2004), for instance, examine how consumption is inscribed within black normative political ideology and communicated via retailers with differing socioeconomic status. Their study demonstrates how consumption is always political, regardless of “whether it is clearly elucidated or consciously unavailable” (525), bringing to the fore some of the epistemological – or masking – aspects of ideology. Sandikci and Ger (2010) and Izberk-Bilgin (2012) both seek to understand how a religious ideology (Islamism) shapes consumption and anti-consumption practices. Bernthal, Crockett, and Rose (2005) and Henry (2010) illustrate how broad political ideologies (i.e. individual autonomy, social equality, consumer sovereignty, and corporate dominance) and social discourses (i.e. entitlement and frugality) influence how consumers manage their personal finances and credit card practices. Tumbat and Belk (2011) show how the commercialization of an extraordinary consumption experience (i.e. climbing Mount Everest) can advance an individuated performance ideology, rather than a romanticized or communal one that is often associated with sacred, natural, liminal, and extraordinary experiences. Varman and Belk (2009) demonstrate the workings of a nationalist ideology and how it is reflexively appropriated, materialized, and deployed by activists in a contemporary anti-consumption movement. And Kozinets and Handelman (2004) focus on how activists involved in consumer movements attempt to undermine a consumerist ideology. Kozinets and Handelman illustrate how an anti-consumerist ideology is communicated by activists in a new social movement, but also highlight the role that religious and evangelical ideologies play in the formation of American activists’ collective identities.

This stream of research tends to adopt a more holistic approach to the study of ideology, taking into account the ‘context of the context’ as suggested by Askegaard and Linnet (2011), and thus helps guide the orienting conceptual framework of this study. However, by and large, these studies tend to offer normative accounts of how consumption practices create, reproduce, and/or resist ideologies. This is somewhat ironic given their focus on ideology and its pejorative indications (Eagleton 1991/2007). Even those studies with a critical contextual focus do not necessarily comply with the tenets of critical social

research (Harvey 1990). Rather, these studies tend to be “concerned with a description of what ‘appears’, often failing to pursue critical questioning and investigation of what ‘appears’ and why” (Borgerson and Schroeder 2002: 573). Additionally, as Sandikci and Ger (2010: 16) point out, “research tends to focus more on understanding how a subcultural group resists and negotiates mainstreaming rather than how co-optation actually happens”. In response, this study adopts a critical marketing perspective, which facilitates scholastic reflection on the cultural consequences of contemporary marketing strategies. Thus, rather than theorize strictly at a micro level of consumption or at a meso level of the marketplace, the present study considers the (macro) political implications associated with the intertwining of these three levels and how it impacts society as a whole.

#### 2.1.4 The Orienting Conceptual Framework

Based on these three streams presented above, Figure 2.2 below presents the orienting conceptual framework, which guides the analysis and structure of this research.



**Figure 2.2:** Orienting Conceptual Framework

This model modifies McCracken's (1986) hierarchical Movement of Meaning model to account for the dialogical linkages<sup>2</sup> that have been identified between the three levels. In the context of this research, the macro level is conceptualized as '*ideologies*', encompassing hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideologies. The meso level of analysis consists of '*marketized ideologies*', which are intended to reflect ideology as it is communicated in the marketplace. Finally, the micro level entails two components: '*identity projects*' and '*consumption*'. This orienting framework is further contextualized in Chapter 6, following an in-depth review of the relevant literature.

In order to set the stage for the current study, the next section introduces the ideological context of this thesis. Here, ideology includes both the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideology, which are contextualized in this study as patriarchy and feminism, respectively. Patriarchy is an illusive concept, which generally refers to male domination and women's oppression, but its exact meaning varies according to different feminist movements and organizations (Millett 1969/2016). Thus, hegemony, in this instance, is best understood in terms of its counter-hegemony, feminism. Accordingly, the following section provides an overview of the American feminist social movement. While offering a historical account of the women's movement, this study focuses primarily on contemporary feminism (i.e. third- and fourth-wave feminism).

## 2.2 The Ideological Context

If patriarchy generally reflects the oppression of women, then feminism represents a counter-ideology in pursuit of defining, establishing, and defending political, economical, personal and social equality for women (Millett 1969/2016). Like patriarchy, feminism is an illusive and transitory label that encompasses a number of disparate meanings. Further, feminism is historically and culturally bound, meaning it is both geographically specific and time dependent. The concept of feminism is generally understood to be a Western ideology, although notably, it has made its way to other parts of the world, including India,

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<sup>2</sup> The dialogical linkages are represented by the two-way arrows in Figure 2.2.

Africa, the Middle East, and in East and Southeast Asia<sup>3</sup> (Baxandall and Gordon 2002). Because the trajectory of historical events that comprise the feminist movement (also known as the women's movement) varies from country to country, the present research focuses solely on the movement in the United States. Importantly, however, many scholars have written about the effects of globalization and 'Americanization' of mass media, akin to a process of cultural imperialism, which entails the transmission of American culture via institutions, mass media, and culture industries (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Negrine and Papathanassopoulos 1996; Schwarzkopf 2011). This, in addition to the recent emergence of online social movements, or 'e-movements' (Earl and Schussman 2003) might contribute to a global homogenization of feminism, whereby geographic boundaries are less and less pertinent to social movements.

Sidney Tarrow (1994) characterized social movements in terms of 'cycles' or 'waves', which appear to fit with the women's movement. It is commonly divided into three waves, although some scholars recognize a fourth-wave that incorporates online communities and activities (Munro 2013; Solomon 2009; Sredl et al. 2014). While there are some discrepancies regarding the historical presentisms, the overriding consensus incorporates the following divisions:

- First-wave feminism: (1840 – 1920): Organized around women's suffrage.
- Second-wave feminism: (1960 – early 1980s): Focused on women's liberation sexually, reproductively, domestically, and in the workplace.
- Third-wave Feminism: (late 1980s – present): Celebration of intersectional differences and reflective of a neoliberal sensibility, where notions of individuality, agency, and choice prevail.
- Fourth-wave Feminism: (2008 – present): Not yet a historically recognized wave, but is largely associated with online feminism.

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<sup>3</sup> Notably, feminism in many of these countries (i.e. global feminism) has been 'imported' from Western societies via efforts from the UN and various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), but its origins are primarily Western (Baxandall and Gordon 2002).

### **2.2.1 First-Wave Feminism**

Many scholars agree that first-wave feminism in the U.S. began in 1848 at the first full-scale women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York and ended in 1920, when women won the right to vote (Delegard 2002). Thus, it is often associated with the suffragist movement. However, according to Ryan (1992), the roots of the feminist movement date back to the early 1800s with women's participation in the church and activism in moral reform causes, such as in relation to prostitution and prisons. The church played a vital role in encouraging activism, particularly since the Quaker or evangelist religion (to which many of the early activists adhered) revitalized the "doctrine of perfectionism in which there was an 'acceptance of an obligation to perfect oneself and one's community'" (Griffith 1984: 20). In addition to their shared religious background, the early activists were typically university educated; the first college (Oberlin College) opened its doors to women in 1833 and many others followed suit, particularly during and after the Civil War (Ryan 1992). The first female activists tended to be financially privileged, yet differed from elite women who embodied conservative and traditional mores. For example, women from elite families did not attend university for fear that it might make them unsuitable for marriage (Gordon 2002).

In the 1830s women became increasingly involved in the temperance movement and later in the abolition movement, an alliance that became integral to the establishment of the women's movement. However, following the passing of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments in 1868 and 1870 respectively, that granted citizenship rights, equal protection of laws, and voting rights to black men and former slaves, women became fully aware of their exclusion from the political system, which is when they turned their focus to obtaining equal status via the right to vote. An array of tactics was exploited by various organizations to achieve this end. For example, the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) worked with the Democratic party, while the National Woman's Party (NWP) used subversive tactics, such as picketing, which were viewed as 'unpatriotic' given America's participation in World War I at the time. In response, many

of the protesters were arrested, followed by hunger strikes, force feedings, and an avid refusal to pay fines. By the end of 1919, 30 states passed presidential suffrage for female citizens and on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1920, the right for women to vote was established in the constitution under the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment (Delegard 2002; Ryan 1992).

Following this victory, however, enthusiasm about the women's movement quickly dissipated and it was not until the late 1960s that it re-emerged into what is commonly referred to as second-wave feminism. Characterized by events such as the American civil rights movement and the Sexual Revolution in the 1970s, the (second-wave) women's movement became recognized as the second largest social movement in the history of the U.S. (Baxandall and Gordon 2002). Whereas first-wave feminism focused primarily on women's participation (in the political system), second-wave feminism emphasized women's liberation, seeking gains in the workplace, reproductive rights, and legal and social equality (Kerber et al. 2015; Kinser 2004; Ryan 1992).

### **2.2.2 Second-Wave Feminism**

Second-wave feminism developed into two separate streams that can be classified as 'reform' (moderate women's rights) and 'revolutionary' (radical women's liberation)<sup>4</sup>. The first evidenced a clear continuity with first-wave feminism, particularly the NAWSA. In 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW) was established, which was primarily focused on gaining equal rights for women in relation to employment and gaining control over their reproductive lives. By working closely with the government, namely the Democratic Party, activists in the reform stream used their professional and political influence to elect feminist candidates and implement policies that favored a feminist agenda (Baxandall and Gordon 2002). The second branch of the movement was

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<sup>4</sup> Some scholars (Freeman 1979; Ryan 1992) have noted the problems associated with this dichotomy, inasmuch as both streams are considered radical departures from what was the current state of affairs for women at that time. Freeman (1979) further suggests that while the strategies and tactics differed, the ideology was fairly consistent between the two streams.

radical in the sense that it fought for structural change and against political co-optation and institutionalization. The women's liberation movement sought to politicize the personal through grassroots organizing, agitprop (i.e. propaganda in the form of pamphlets, leaflets, posting stickers onto sexist ads, and etc.), and consciousness raising efforts, whereby women related their personal struggles and experiences to wider discourses of structural gender oppression (Baxandall and Gordon 2002).

By the 1970s, feminists began organizing around single issues, which worked to pragmatize, but also further fragment the movement. One of these issues – which remains current even today – was known as the 'Feminist Sex Wars', where feminists were polarized into two sides: the sex-negative (anti-porn) and the sex-positive feminist group. The sex-negative feminists condemned the porn industry, prostitution, and women's sexual liberation in general (Dworkin 1987/2008; MacKinnon 1989), while the pro-sex feminists promoted sexual liberation, viewing sex as an avenue of pleasure and freedom for women (Gerhard 2001; Segal 1994). And although many acknowledge that this dichotomy is unhelpful to the collaborative movement, much contemporary culture and academic scholarship continues to reinforce it (Gill 2011).

In sum, the second-wave movement made significant advances, particularly in relation to women's employment, sexual issues, reproductive rights, and the establishment of women as an interested political group. For example, abortion was legalized in 1973, women were granted access to more effective birth control methods, and the passing of Title IX (in 1972) prohibited discrimination based on gender in educational institutions or activities receiving financial aid assistance (with the exception of the military) (Sowards and Renegar 2004). By now, feminism was taken seriously, which provoked a strong backlash and the rise of many counter movements, particularly from conservative right-wing groups and religious fundamentalists (Baxandall and Gordon 2002; Ryan 1992). By the mid-1970s, the political climate grew increasingly more hostile towards feminist issues. Feminist organizations became fragmented, grassroots movements fizzled out, and a new

generation of women, who are often presumed to take for granted many of the advances made of their feminist foremothers, rendered the feminist movement increasingly futile (Kinser 2004).

### **2.2.3 Third-Wave Feminism**

Despite some controversy regarding the historical presentisms, scholars generally agree upon a break from second-wave feminism beginning in the late 1980s to the early 1990s (Heywood and Drake 1997; Kinser 2004). There exist multiple views about what constitutes the third-wave movement. Many scholars view third-wave feminism as a distinct generational sensibility (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Kinser 2004; Purvis 2004). Some view it as a continuation of prior movements, deliberately employing the adjective ‘third’ as a way to imply that feminism is still moving and relevant (Siegel 1997; Walker 1995). Others view it as a shift in discourse or ideology that examines oppression more broadly (Hogeland 2001; Mack-Canty and Wright 2004). Mann and Huffman (2005) adopt an alternative view, arguing that third-wave feminism has developed *against* as opposed to merely *after* second-wave feminism. From this perspective, the younger generations attempt to distance themselves from second-wave feminism, which is perceived as constricting and austere.

One of the most distinguishing features of this epoch relates to the professionalization, institutionalization, and intellectualization of feminism, which occurred following the legal and political changes implemented by second-wave feminists. In relation to the workplace, not only were there laws put in place against sexual harassment and workplace discrimination, but today, many companies now have to abide by state sanctioned business practices, such as gender quotas (Squires 2007). Additionally, many feminist organizations that once relied on volunteers, such as rape crisis centers, were forced to seek government funding, thus transforming them into professional social service agencies (Messer-Davidow 2002). And most notably, the feminist movement has become intellectualized in the context of the college classroom, evidenced by flourishing women’s



studies courses and programs over the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Messer-Davidow 2002). In fact, many academic accounts suggest that the classroom has replaced the consciousness-raising group of the late 1960s, early 1970s (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Siegel 1997; Sowards and Renegar 2004).

The marketplace similarly took notice of the feminist movement, leading to a “reconciliation of feminism and consumption, a reconciliation that links empowerment to sexual expressiveness and purchasing power” (Maclaran 2012: 466). Accordingly, third-wave feminism has been described as a celebration of the marketplace, where everything from pole dancing to plastic surgery and high heel shoes can be seen as empowering for women (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Scott 2005). Others have critiqued this symbiotic relationship (between feminism and the market), arguing that this market inclusion leads to an erasure of a feminist politics (Gill 2008a; McRobbie 2007, 2009). These scholars argue that society has come to inhabit a ‘postfeminist’ era or culture, which generally refers to the ‘past-ness’ or redundancy of the feminist movement (Tasker and Negra 2007)<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, patriarchy is believed to have shifted from state domination to the commercial realm, where the self-regulating subject of neoliberalism comes to bear the burden of her own oppression, indicating a distinct shift from objectification to subjectification (Gill 2003, 2008a). Thus, the third-wave is also accredited with fostering a neoliberal individualistic ideology that has been considered a response against the dogmatic and domineering agenda of second-wave feminism (Klein 1997; Mann and Huffman 2005; Walker 1995). From a historical point of view, the first- and second-wave movements managed to establish many collective rights for women. In turn, third-wave feminism shifted its attention to the subjectivities and individual experiences of women, ultimately leading to a ‘politics of difference’ that involves the recognition and celebration of distinctive and heterogeneous cultures and characteristics among women (Young 1986, 1990). This has resulted in a ‘free-to-be-me’ (Mann and Huffman 2005: 77) feminist

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<sup>5</sup> Postfeminism has also been used to describe a feminist movement that has moved beyond second- and third-wave feminism to address issues that supersede gender oppression. In general, however, many scholars reject this label given its pejorative implications (Brunsdon and Spigel 1997/2008).

ideology that has generated multiple and fragmented types or ‘brands’ of feminism, including youth feminism (Mack-Canty 2004), power feminism (Wolf 1991, 1993), do-it-yourself (DIY) feminism (Bail 1996; Karp and Stoller 1999), postcolonial feminism (Mohanty 1988; Narayan 1997), transnational feminism (Grewal and Kaplan 1994), ecofeminism (Soper 1992), cyberfeminism (Hawthorne and Klein 1999), and countless others.

At the same time, increasing attention has been placed on issues of multiculturalism and technology-driven efforts to outsource a type of global, yet post-colonial feminism, which adopts a heterogeneous approach to liberation, seeking freedom and equality for women on a global scale (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 1988; Narayan 1997). Intersectionality involves the intertwining of feminism and race (Heywood and Drake 1997; Kinser 2004), that was in part, a response to the influx of non-European immigration to the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s (Mann and Huffman 2005). While U.S. law professor, Kimberlé Crenshaw was the first to ‘coin’ the term intersectionality, Patricia Hill Collins popularized it as a way to account for “overlapping levels of domination that stem from the societal configuration of race, class, and gender relations” (Andersen and Collins 1994:3). Collin’s notion of intersectionality extended her original concept, ‘black feminist thought’ (Collins 1990) to account for multiple and diverse experiences of domination and subjectivities that include, but are not limited to, race, class, culture, nationality, ethnicity, ability, sex, and gender differences (Sandoval 2000). This, in part, led to the fragmentation of the feminist movement, as previously marginalized groups of different races, ethnicities, sexualities, and classes began speaking out against hegemonic or ‘white feminism’, fighting for recognition in their own right (Mann and Huffman 2005; Sandoval 1991, 2000).

### **2.2.4 Fourth-Wave Feminism**

Recent research has begun to postulate a fourth-wave feminist movement, colloquially known as, ‘hashtag feminism’, which incorporates online communities (Baumgardner

2011; Dixon 2014; Munro 2013; Solomon 2009; Sredl et al. 2014). Baumgardner (2011) estimates that this movement originated sometime in 2008. Contrary to the earlier movements that were largely distinguished based on the shifts in the socio-political context, fourth-wave feminism stands out by way of its primary mode of communication, where technology and social media play a critical role (Solomon 2009; Sredl et al. 2014). Online communities prove particularly effective for reaching vulnerable groups, affording those suffering from disease, abuse, or prejudice, a voice (Herring et al. 2002). Thus, this shift is not unique to the women's movement, but is evidenced across a multitude of contexts and sites of activism, the most prominent being in the 'Arab Spring' uprisings in 2010 and 2011 (Khondker 2011). Indeed, many writers throughout the last decade have indicated the importance of the internet in shaping activism, politics, and society more broadly (Castells 1996, 2009; Khondker 2011; McCaughey and Ayers 2003/2013). However, as Castells (2012) stresses, these new communication strategies did not 'give birth' to insurgencies, but rather facilitate a particular type of activism in response to socio-political conditions.

With regard to the feminist movement in particular, Munro (2013: 23) asserts that the internet has facilitated a "'call-out' culture, where sexism or misogyny can be 'called out' and challenged". Incidents, such as the firing of Nobel prize winner Tim Hunt from the University of London for making 'sexist' comments demonstrate just how powerful online 'activism' can be. Notably, this also introduces a whole slew of issues with regard to the ethics of public shaming, which can have widespread, lasting, and severely damaging effects targeted persons' reputations (Detel 2013). Further, online communities render themselves susceptible to the effects of trolling, where antagonistic users lure members into pointless, time consuming, and often hostile conversations that disrupt the ongoing discussions in the forum (Herring et al. 2002).

Whether or not cyberactivism (McCaughey and Ayers 2003/2013) constitutes a new wave of feminism is contested (Munro 2013), but then so too is the use of the wave metaphor itself, inasmuch as it tends to reify certain time periods that privileges certain types of

feminism (i.e. white, middle-class feminism) without accounting for marginalized groups, small-scale collective action, and overlapping events/tactics (Guy-Sheftall 1995; Springer 2014). Further, the effectiveness of cyberactivism has been questioned, some contending that it may lead to a form of ‘slacktivism’, where online campaigns may garner much public support, but do not translate into real life impacts (Christensen 2011). In a similar vein, Dean (2010, 2014) has argued that online activism can have significant depoliticizing effects, indicating that a shift has occurred from the primacy of a message’s use-value (i.e. content) to the primacy of its exchange-value (i.e. capacity to be circulated and/or forwarded). In short, Dean argues that online utterances have become so profuse that they are valued more for their contribution and ability to attract attention than their content, thus diverting political action. Of course, others have recognized the positives associated with online platforms, which arguably foster safe virtual spaces that can unite victims of inequality (Dixon 2014).

### **2.3 Summary**

In an attempt to orient the reader, this chapter outlined the relevant research so as to locate and situate the contributions of this thesis. Following a review of the previous ideology/consumption research in CCT, an oriented conceptual framework was presented, which guides the analysis and structure of this research. Given the lack of research that adopts a holistic and critical approach to the study of ideology across all three levels (macro, meso, and micro), this research addresses these multiple linkages in order to offer a comprehensive and critical account of ideology in consumer culture.

In relation to the ideological context, this study looks explicitly at the contemporary feminist movement, which includes both third- and fourth-wave feminism. However, the first- and second-wave movements are nonetheless implicated, given that they constitute the backdrop from which the current movement(s) has emerged. The following three chapters, which constitute the literature review of this thesis, follow the macro, meso, and micro divisions presented earlier in this chapter.



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## CHAPTER THREE

### MACRO: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND IDEOLOGY

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In this chapter, I first offer an overview of ideology, followed by an operational definition of ideology in the context of this thesis. I then proceed to discuss the main theorists (following a Marxist lineage) who have been used to inform my understanding of cultural ideologies and how they have been enacted in consumption and feminist studies. Starting with an explication of the Marxist tradition of ideology, I move on to talk about the neo-Marxist, Antonio Gramsci; both play an important role for theorizing ideology at a macro level. Subsequently, I discuss the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, who offers a microsociological framework to study micro level interactions that reflect interpersonal situations at a macro level (Swartz and Zolberg 2004). My aim is not to alter or expand upon the presented theories, per se, but rather to operationalize them in terms of the content of this research. Thus, this chapter highlights the relevant theories and propositions, particularly as they have been applied, or may be applied to consumer and feminist research.

#### 3.1 Defining Ideology

As mentioned in Chapter 2, ‘ideology’ constitutes the macro level of analysis in the context of this research. In etymological terms, ‘ideology’ simply refers to the study of ideas, though notably, through a process of inversion, it often refers to an idea (a phenomenon) itself, rather than the systematic knowledge or scientific study of that idea and how it came to be (Eagleton 1991/2007). Today, the term ‘ideology’ is quite opaque and generates various (and often contradictory) definitions, applications, and perspectives. Terry Eagleton offers one of the most comprehensive compositions of ideology in his widely acclaimed (1991/2007) book, *Ideology: An Introduction*. Eagleton presents a multiplicity of ideological distinctions and identifies 16 different definitions of

the concept. His most basic distinction is one between epistemological and sociological views; this he claims “is an important bone of contention in the theory of ideology, and reflects a dissonance between two of the mainstream traditions we find inscribed within the term” (2-3). Epistemological views are associated with the Marxist tradition of ideology, concerned with the perpetuation of a dominant or hegemonic ideology, often presented as false consciousness. Sociological views, on the other hand, do not concern themselves with epistemological questions, but rather with the worldview of a particular group and the function of ideas within social life; these tend to be conceptualized as poststructural or post-Marxist theories of ideology. Following the postmodern turn of the 1950s-1960s (Firat and Venkatesh 1993), the majority of consumption research has adopted a sociological view of ideology (Hirschman 1988, 1990, 1993; McRobbie 1994; Press et al. 2014), as a way to present a certain worldview of a group or class.

Less research has adopted an epistemological perspective of ideology, where ideology is equated to that of ‘false consciousness’ and refers to ideas or distortions that help to legitimate a dominant power. Under this conceptualization, there is an objective reality that is obscured or masked by ideology. However, as Eagleton (1991/2007: 28) notes, ideology might sometimes falsify, distort, and mystify, although this is “less because of something inherent in ideological language than because of something inherent in the social structure to which language belongs”. Following suit, this research adopts a weak, yet epistemological definition of ideology, which “*retains an emphasis on false or deceptive beliefs but regards such beliefs as arising not from the interests of a dominant class but from the material structure of society as a whole*” (Eagleton 1991/2007: 30 [emphasis added]). In other words, ideology is believed to uphold a hegemonic or dominant power, which arises more or less arbitrarily from society rather than from a ruling group or class. Further, following the definition of ideology proposed by Varman and Belk (2009) and Marx’s (1859/1904) materialist conception of society, ideology relates to a certain material reality, which might be socially constructed, but is, for all

intents and purposes, historically objective. Varman and Belk (2009) claim that such an interpretation brings the socioeconomic (or sociocultural) context to the fore.

Consequently, for the purposes of this research, I argue that ideology is masking and occasionally pejorative. It upholds a hegemonic power that is derived from a historical materialist reality, thus linking the epistemological and sociological views of the concept. The remainder of this chapter outlines the theoretical underpinnings of ideology for this research, which tend to follow a Marxist lineage. However, as will become evident, these theories are applied analytically (piece-meal) rather than substantively, with respect to their explicit propositions about gender and feminism<sup>6</sup>.

### **3.2 The Marxist Tradition of Ideology**

Perhaps contrary to popular belief, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels did not coin the term ‘ideology’. Its origins stem from 19<sup>th</sup> century France with Antoine Destutt de Tracy, a French Enlightenment, (renounced) aristocrat and philosopher who sought to create an empirically verifiable branch of study concerned with the science and criticism of ideas (Kennedy 1979). In its original conception, ideology was very much in line with the empiricist and positivist movement in France that aimed to dispel the idea of a metaphysical, along with errors, prejudice and superstitions that today are recognized as social and personal biases (Durkheim 1895/1982). Thus, while the origins of ideology are often overlooked, superseded by Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’ conceptualization, it “has the most intimate relation to revolutionary class struggle, and figures from the outset as a theoretical weapon of class warfare” (Eagleton 1991/2007: 69), since its inception. Following Tracy, Marx and Engels transformed the concept of ideology as it was once conceived as ‘the scientific study of ideas’ to the abstract, autonomist, oppressive and

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<sup>6</sup> In other words, adopting a Marxist view of ideology is not to suggest that this thesis adopts a Marxist view of feminism, etc. This thesis integrates a number of theories derived from multiple theorists and thus the theories are applied in a piece-meal analytical fashion.



later, economically focused notion of power, institutions, and consciousness (Eagleton 1991/2007).

Marxist theory is difficult to characterize, not least because of the widespread debate regarding what exactly counts as Marxism and the multiple interpretations and inevitable misinterpretations of those writings (Jaggar 1983). Considerable controversy has arisen over the continuity between Marx's early and late work. Some scholars, namely structuralist Marxists following Louis Althusser, believe that there was a sharp philosophical or epistemological break between the two, whereas others view it less as a break than a difference of emphasis of content (Jaggar 1983). In Marx's early conception of ideology (1846/1970), he used the metaphor of a camera obscura to argue that ideology inverted the real world, wherein *imagined* commodities (i.e. money) controlled human social relations. In his later work (1867/2013), ideology was repurposed as a critique of the economic capitalist system. Thus, if before, Marx and Engels argued that ideology facilitated distorted *perceptions* of human beings, in his later work, he argued that it actually does distort humans, in the form of a real (versus perceived) inversion of social reality. This occurs through 'commodity fetishism', where exchange relations (of commodities) dominate and obscure social relations and underlie ideology.

Although Marx's project was to overcome the struggles of a class society, many of Marx's theories and concepts have been applied to numerous social and political contexts, such as race (Bannerji 2005; Miles 1993; Roediger 1992; Szymanski 1981, 1983), ecology (Salleh 1997; Burkett 2006), inequality and politics (Robinson and Kelley 1979), even queer theory (Floyd 2009; Wolf 2009). However, due to its rigid focus on class, it has often been applied in a fragmented and piecemeal fashion (e.g. neo-Marxist) rather at face value (e.g. orthodox or classical Marxist) (Therborn 2008). In the words of Argentine political theorist, Ernesto Laclau (1991: 85), many drawing on Marxist theory "haven't rejected Marxism. Something different has occurred. It is Marxism that has broken up and I believe I am holding on to its best fragments".

Of particular interest, for this research, is how Marx's critique of capitalism lends itself to a critique of patriarchy. While many feminist and gender scholars have been hostile to Marxism, given its alleged reductionisms and perpetuation of a gender-blind or male-dominated society (Hartmann 1979), some argue for the interdependency of capitalism and patriarchy (e.g. Marcuse 2006), while others have looked beyond the semantics of Marxism to focus on social stratification more generally (e.g. Gimenez 2001). Jaggard (1984) establishes a foundation for viewing feminism as a political theory and proposes an interpretation of Marxist feminism, the one she claims "has been the most widely accepted interpretation of Marxist feminism for a hundred years, at least until the emergence of the contemporary women's liberation movement led to a sudden flurry of attempts to reinterpret Marx on women" (52). She gives credit to Marx's collaborator, Frederick Engels, who supplied the mainstay text used by Marxist feminists, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884/2010), which offered a systematic inquiry into women's oppression. She notes some of the inherent contradictions in the theory, where, on the one hand, he adopts a historical materialist approach, claiming that women's oppression and subordination is a result of the capitalist society, but elsewhere argues for the sexual division of labor, in other words, that the division of labor is biologically determined "based on a purely physiological foundation" (1867/2013: 245). "The distinguishing feature", Jaggard argues, "of the Marxist analysis is the casual link that it seeks to establish between women's oppression and class society" (1984:70). Under Marxism, feminism is relegated to that of the bourgeoisie, or ruling class ideology. From this perspective, feminism merely distracts from the real issue of class division, by placing gender issues at the forefront. Thus, bourgeoisie women are more likely to be feminists and are more likely to feel oppressed than working-class women, who contribute to the production society and thus are said to be and feel more equal to their working-class male counterparts.

Other research adopts a more liberal interpretation of Marxism. For example, Marx's concept of 'commodity fetishism' has been transposed to signify 'commodity feminism'

(Dworkin and Wachs 2009; Goldman 1992; Goldman, Heath, and Smith 1991), where feminist discourses have been reduced to the logic of commodity relations in a process of ideological reproduction via the mass media and advertisements, for example. In this way, feminist goals such as empowerment, independence, and liberation are emptied of their political significance and sold to women as consumption choices for which they can construct a lifestyle and an identity. Given the excessive fragmentation of the contemporary feminist movement, the range of discourses sold as ‘feminist’ are practically endless (see Chapter 4).

Finally, the concept of ‘false consciousness’ is an issue that a number of feminist theorists have expanded upon. In its original conception, false consciousness referred to the systematic distortion of the dominant social relations in the consciousness of the intellectuals and capitalists (i.e. the bourgeoisie) (Eyerman 1981). In other words, the producers of ideology were thought to be deluded by their own beliefs. While Gramsci extended this concept to all social groups and classes, it was not, in its original conception, a problem of the working class, since they were “excluded from established political practices and from high culture and thus suffered no illusions about its existence” (ibid 44). While often attributed to Marx, it was again Frederick Engels who coined the term ‘false consciousness’, following Marx’s death in 1883 (Eagleton 1991/2007). This is not, however, to suggest that Marx himself would disagree with the notion of false consciousness, for, as Žižek (1989) reports, “the most elementary definition of ideology is probably the well-known phrase from Marx’s *Capital*: ‘sie wissen das nicht, aber sie tun es’ - ‘they do not know it, but they are doing it’” (28). Notably, this understanding of false consciousness implies an inherent contradiction given that if false consciousness is attributed to the rhetoric of the bourgeoisie, it renders Marxism itself susceptible to being labeled as an ideology, as was noted first by Marxist Eduard Bernstein and later acknowledged by Vladimir Lenin (Eagleton 1991/2007).

Further, as the notion of false consciousness was extended to other classes, groups, and contexts, so were the approaches offered to remedy it. In particular, ‘consciousness raising’ has been a mainstay tool adopted by feminist activists, which gained considerable popularity during the 1970s (Sowards and Renegar 2004). Catherine MacKinnon (1989) was one of the first to articulate consciousness raising as a strategy or method for change (i.e. the method for women’s liberation), using Marxist theory as her point of departure. Consciousness raising purports to make visible unnoticed or naturalized aspects of women’s oppression. It involves both a critical reflexive and pre-reflexive component, insofar as women are able to be critical precisely because they are socialized within a society, which oppresses them, not in spite of that society (Chambers 2005). “Feminist epistemology asserts that the social process of being a woman is on some level the same process as that by which woman’s consciousness becomes aware of itself as such and of its world” (MacKinnon 1989: 98). Traditionally, consciousness raising was conducted in small groups, uniting women through shared experiences and inciting opportunities of *collective* group resistance and activism (Kamen 1991; Sarachild 1970). Today, feminist consciousness raising commonly occurs under educational or institutional settings. However, this has led to a rhetorical problem for feminists. The varied consciousness raising efforts evidenced in pop-culture and on network communication platforms has led to a largely depoliticized rhetoric, but one that is more accessible and individualistic (Dean 2005; Foss and Griffin 1995; Sowards and Renegar 2004). This has given way to what has been deemed ‘therapeutic feminism’ (Rosen 2000), where consciousness raising is no longer a means to an end, but an end in and of itself. Notably, this is not only a problem realized by the feminist movement; varied consciousness raising efforts have been employed across a number of social movements by other activist groups, political parties, and consumers alike (Izberk-Bilgin 2012; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Ozanne and Saatcioglu 2008; Varman and Belk 2009).

While early Marx attributed false consciousness to human perception of reality, later Marx suggested that it was, in fact, intrinsic to – and no longer separable from reality, thus

rendering consciousness raising an unattainable feat (Eagleton 1991/2007). Further, the trajectory from early Marx to late Marx, in some ways, parallels the evolution from modern to postmodern theory and first-wave to contemporary feminism: where at once it was possible to identify a central source of power (e.g. patriarchal gender oppression from the state), power is now conceivably decentralized and inherent in every day social relations (i.e. countless instances of oppression) (Foucault 1991).

Marx and Engels along with those early Frankfurt school theorists are often credited with establishing the foundation of ideology from a critical theory perspective (Eagleton 1991/2007). Such a perspective was primarily concerned with how the “maintenance and promulgation of the dominant group’s [the bourgeoisie’s] ideology are used to sustain and legitimate the power of the dominant group over perceptions of social reality and to legitimate, as well, this group’s control of social relations and institutions” (Hirschman 1993: 537). Hirschman (1993) notes in her critique of the Marxist and feminist uptakes of ideology in consumer research that two concepts closely related to the concept of a dominant ideology are: Engel’s notion of *false consciousness*, as was previously discussed, and *cultural hegemony*, a concept offered by one of the most regarded neo-Marxist theorists of the twentieth century, Antonio Gramsci.

### **3.3 The Gramscian Tradition of Ideology**

Antonio Gramsci is credited with loosening the stranglehold of orthodox Marxism. He is perhaps best known for his theory of cultural hegemony, which has been applied widely across a number of ideological and consumption-based studies, particularly those theorizing about normativity and actions of resistance with regard to sexuality (Kates 2002, 2004), race (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004), the medicalization of pregnancy (Thompson 2005), and the mass media industry (Gottdiener 1985; Hirschman 1988), for example. While Gramsci does not offer a precise definition of cultural hegemony, it can be broadly characterized as

the ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production<sup>7</sup> (Gramsci 1971: 12).

His is a theory of social ascendancy, characterized by rhetoric and embedded in societal institutions; it does not speak of a sovereign power based on force (Connell 1987).

Following Marx, Gramsci grants priority to the economic sphere, where the dominant group is often tied to the bourgeoisie class and the subordinate group is understood as the proletariat, who work, at times unconsciously, to legitimize the dominant group’s power. However, the notion of cultural hegemony has expanded upon Marxism insofar as Gramsci recognizes other mechanisms of power, apart from economic ones, which are present in the civil state and evidenced through social relations (i.e. public and private, political and cultural). These mechanisms contribute to the hegemony of a group, however, these are constantly in flux and thus, the formation of counter-hegemonies (those attempting to dismantle the current hegemonic power) is possible. In this way, multiple classes and groups have the potential to develop their own world view(s) (i.e. ideologies), constituting what Gramsci terms ‘intellectual and moral blocs’ (i.e. social formations). These have the potential to shape history, i.e. to become ‘historical blocs’ (Adamson 1980). While a historical bloc cannot exist without a hegemonic class, not all blocs are necessarily hegemonic; “a new bloc is formed when a subordinate class (e.g., the workers) establishes its hegemony over other subordinate groups (e.g., small farmers, marginals)” (Gill 1993: 57).

Like Marx, most contemporary applications of Gramsci’s theories (Connell 1987, 1995; Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Hirschman 1993) are analytical rather than substantive

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<sup>7</sup> Gramsci offers two definitions of hegemony. The first, relates to the consensus afforded to a political system within the civil society. The second entails a revolutionary component, wherein (an alternative) hegemony can overcome the ‘economic- corporative’ (Adamson 1980: 170-171). The second definition is discussed in this thesis in the context of counter-hegemonies.

(i.e. applied in other contexts than was originally intended by Gramsci). Furthermore, while it is often overlooked, Gramsci's work on counter-hegemonies is central to the notion of 'othering', which has a long-standing presence among ontological and feminist-based texts (Borgerson and Schroeder 2002; Davis 1981; De Beauvoir 1949/2010; Gordon 1995; Hooks 1984/2000; Sandikci and Ger 2010), and to the notion of stigma (Goffman 1963; Patterson and Larsen 2015; Sandikci and Ger 2013; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013).

Gramsci contributes to our understanding of ideology in a number of significant ways, two of which are particularly relevant to this project. First, as with Lukács and others in the early Frankfurt School, he distinguishes between ideology and false consciousness. For Gramsci, false consciousness is not specific to a particular economic class (i.e. all classes were subject to its effects). To this end, Gramsci explicates two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory one): The first is implicit in people's ongoing *activities* and *relations* that contribute to the practical transformation of the real world; the second corresponds to false consciousness and is historically provided and uncritically *absorbed*, which works to underlie and legitimize the dominant group and may subsequently signify a complicity with a group's own victimization (Gramsci 1971: 326-327). As Lears (1985) suggests in his analysis of Gramsci's conception of cultural hegemony, "the maintenance of hegemony does not require active commitment by subordinates to the legitimacy of the elite rule" (569). This echoes Michel Foucault's notion of biopower (disciplinary power), which is upheld by discursive practices and language that demonstrate the process by which power is exercised in reality and experienced as normal, as opposed to more traditional understanding of sovereign power (Foucault 1991). Gramsci, along with Foucault, asserts that hegemonic power asserts itself in multiple systems, including institutions, organizations, popular culture, and the mass media.

In this way, power is maintained via consent and legitimation – it is directive not dominating; it does not rely on coercion or manipulation, although it may resort to such

measures in times of crisis (Gramsci 1971). It is with regard to this point that Gramsci's theory of hegemony is sometimes erroneously applied as a model of 'social control' (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). For example, Stuart Ewen (1976/2008) invokes Gramsci to characterize American advertisers as manipulators of mass culture who are seething to invoke social 'anxiety' as a way to create societal 'norms' and the corresponding wants and needs that ultimately drive consumption. These scholars (e.g. Ewen 1976/2008; Herman and Chomsky 1988/2002; Rachlin 1988) that condemn mass media as the primary industrial manipulator of consciousness, often fail to recognize the dialogical underpinnings of Gramsci's work, by characterizing ideology as a dominating top-down form of social control, which is only a partial or incomplete analysis.

Second, because false consciousness, following Gramsci, is afforded to all economic classes, this introduces the notion of non-hegemonic groups or classes, colloquially known as counter-hegemonies<sup>8</sup>, although Gramsci (1971) referred to them as 'subordinate', 'subaltern', or 'instrumental'. The potential for counter-hegemonies has yielded two contemporary perspectives<sup>9</sup>. On the one hand, counter-hegemonies have the potential to incite political change, overcoming the dominant power (Adamson 1980) and/or historical bloc they were born into (Lipsitz 1988). Gramsci believed that the role of the revolutionary party or the 'organic intellectuals' (i.e. members of the working-class) was to re-educate or raise class consciousness in order to expose the ruling hegemony's forms of oppression. On the other hand, because counter-hegemonies operate within the dominant hegemony, they may unwittingly maintain it, which reflects Althusser's (1970) theory of ideology in *'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses'*, where he argues that citizens are expected to endure ideological subjection in order to sustain the dominant social order. Alternatively, counter-hegemonies may correspond to what Genovese (1974)

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<sup>8</sup> Gramsci never explicitly used the term, 'counter-hegemony', but introduced the notion of a hegemonic alternative, present in both the civil society and the state that was originally intended to constitute a movement towards socialism (Boggs 1984).

<sup>9</sup> Ideology, from a Gramscian perspective includes explanations that legitimate oppression, but that also incites revolutionary consciousness and activity (Eyerman 1981); thus his is a more extensive conceptualization of ideology than was initially theorized by Marx.



calls ‘prepolitical protests’, which challenge particular practices rather than the dominant power itself, combining accommodation and resistance in such a way that ultimately preserves the hegemonic power. Such arguments are common among post-political scholars, who argue that social movements have become co-opted and thus depoliticized by the capitalist system (Dean 2014; Rancière 1999, 2010; Žižek 1999). Furthermore, while the ‘openness’ of a hegemonic culture is necessary for the conceptualization and formation of counter-hegemonies, the more diversified a historical bloc, the more internal divisions and contradictions, the more susceptible it is to domination (Lears 1985)<sup>10</sup>.

One of the most well known applications of Gramsci’s theory is offered by R.W. Connell (1987) in her conceptualization of ‘hegemonic masculinity’<sup>11</sup>. Adopting a macro oriented perspective to explore gender relations, Connell (1987) claims that ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is at the root of the patriarchal society and gender inequality. Hegemonic masculinity does not correspond to the ‘male sex role’ nor is it considered normal, statistically speaking. Rather, hegemonic masculinity is normative (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005), in the sense that it serves as an accumulation of symbols, which construct and legitimize the masculine archetype or the “ideology of heroic masculinity” (Holt and Thompson 2004). Connell (1987: 185) further claims that hegemonic masculinity is constructed in opposition to women and subordinated masculinities; hegemonic masculinity implies “the maintenance of practices that institutionalize men’s dominance over women”. In this way, a counter hegemonic femininity is rendered an unattainable feat, inasmuch as the construction of femininities (of which there are many) polarizes around ‘compliance with’ or ‘resistance to’ the male hegemony. Importantly, this is not to deny the existence of a feminine archetype, what Connell terms, ‘emphasized femininity’, rather this conceptualization demonstrates how its formation and legitimization is not based on dominance. In order to speculate about a hegemonic

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<sup>10</sup> The opposite of an ‘open’ hegemonic culture is a ‘closed’ one, where subordinate groups lack the language to even conceive of any such counter-hegemonies (Lears 1985).

<sup>11</sup> Notably, Connell offers an abstracted application of Gramsci’s theory, given that Gramsci theorized about economic classes and Connell extends this to gender relations.

femininity, in Connell's view, one would need to examine the gender relations (of *both* men and women) in matriarchal society, wherein "women's power is equal or superior to men's and in which the culture centers around values and life events described as 'feminine'" (Eller 2000: 13), which has largely been debunked as a myth or a utopian invention (Bamberger 1974; Eller 1993, 2000)<sup>12</sup>.

However, despite Connell's (1987) claims that the notion of 'hegemonic femininity' is inappropriate, extant research has theorized about this in order to emphasize and draw out additional axes of domination among women. Mimi Schippers (2007), drawing from Judith Butler, offers a compelling conceptualization of hegemonic femininity by focusing on the relationship between idealized and symbolic features of masculinity and femininity, which legitimize, materialize, and ultimately uphold men's dominance over women:

*Hegemonic masculinity is the qualities defined as manly that establish and legitimate a hierarchal and complementary relationship to femininity and that, by doing so, guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Given the centrality of the relationship between masculinity and femininity in the new definition, we now have conceptual space for hegemonic femininity. Hegemonic femininity consists of the characteristics defined as womanly that establish and legitimate a hierarchal and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity and that, by doing so guarantee the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Schippers 2007: 97 [emphasis in original]).*

Thus, hegemonic femininity is possible because male dominance is dependent on complementary and inferior qualities of femininity. From this perspective, subordinate qualities of masculinity do not exist, rather it is hegemonic femininity embodied or enacted by men, which is stigmatized.

While Schippers (2007) manages to keep Connell's notions of 'hegemonic masculinity' and 'emphasized femininity' relatively in tact, other empirical research has equated

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<sup>12</sup> Notably, an extensive amount of (namely feminist) research argues that there exists numerous interpretations as to what constitutes a matriarchal society (e.g. Sanday 2000; Marler 2006; Gneezy, Leonard, and List 2008).

‘hegemonic femininity’ with ‘dominant forms’ or ‘hierarchies’ of femininity (e.g. Finley 2010; Morris 2007; Pyke and Johnson 2003). Such conceptions typically position subordinated femininities against white, heteronormative, and imperialist enactments of femininity (hegemonic femininity) to highlight intersectional oppressions among women. Similar arguments have been made in relation to the critique of hegemonic feminism (i.e. imperialistic ‘white women’s feminism’), which has given rise to postcolonial feminist movements, aiming to combat the Westernization of feminism (McEwan 2001; Spivak 1985a, 1985b). While these studies shed light on the power relations *among women*, they providing little insight on the overarching patriarchal society (of which the dominant forms of femininity are constructed within). Further, while productive in their own right, these studies also tend misinterpret Connell’s (1987, 1995) original conception of hegemonic masculinity, which is to be understood at a macro level (i.e. the patriarchal society), upheld through a plurality of men’s and women’s (Schippers 2007) various practices. Of course, this rigid stance that gender hegemony is always defined in terms of men’s domination (over women and also those who do not identify as men or women) greatly undermines Gramsci’s explication of hegemony, even on an abstract level, insofar as these conceptualizations do not allow for the possibility of a revolution in structure, namely the patriarchal structure.

Beth Hirschman (1993) also invokes Gramsci, in her critique of ideology in consumer research, to discuss complementary ideologies and oppositional ideologies as a way to further delineate the role of counter-hegemonies: complementary ideologies are said to coexist with and even supplement the dominant ideology, while oppositional ideologies directly oppose the dominant ideology. She further argues that in American society, feminism has been positioned as both a complementary and oppositional ideology to the dominant ideology of patriarchy. Holter (1997), however, problematizes the notion of patriarchy as a gendered ideology, articulating the difference between ‘patriarchy’ as structure of society built on the subordination of women (i.e. the cultural context) and ‘gender’, which relates to formations of identity projects or performances (i.e. ideologies).

Demetriou (2001) distinguishes between these concepts by referring to the ‘external hegemony’ to describe the dominant system (i.e. patriarchy/cultural context) and the ‘internal hegemonies’ to discuss the ascendancy of one ideology over others within a system (i.e. the dominant ideologies/gender formations). Demetriou demonstrates how these two concepts, while not equivalent, are nonetheless co-constitutive and are organized in relation to one another (Connell and Mitterschmidt 2005). This reciprocity between gender enactments on a micro scale and the patriarchal society on a macro scale sheds light on the workings of ideology on a more holistic level (Connell and Mitterschmidt 2005). However, the specific interplay between them remains under theorized, which the current study aims to address.

In sum, Gramsci makes a number of important contributions to the Marxist tradition of ideology. First, he expands upon the mechanisms of power to include cultural, political, and economic institutions that are upheld, exercised, and maintained by various historical blocs. Second, he extends the notion of false consciousness to include groups that expand Marx’s conceptualization, wherein false consciousness was solely afforded to the bourgeoisie class. And third, in doing so, he theorizes the potential for multiple (counter-hegemonic) ideologies, which have, in subsequent applications, been afforded to a number of social groups that extend beyond economic classes. This perspective, given its emphasis on cultural consensus and the resulting power dimensions, is particularly helpful in theorizing how ideology is communicated and upheld via meso level cultural production systems, e.g. social movements and mass media.

### **3.4 The Bourdieusian Conception of Ideology**

Gramsci, along with those in the (1930s) Frankfurt School helped to relieve ideology from some of its economic and epistemological constraints to argue for a more empirically oriented, general, and humanistic (personal-cultural) understanding of ideology, more akin to the study of sociology (e.g. Fromm 1957, 1970; Horkheimer 1972/2002). However, while the Marxist and Gramscian traditions of ideology have undoubtedly

informed this study, theirs offers a largely macro perspective, one which is focused explicitly on the capitalist mode of production, which renders an empirical study, such as this one, infeasible. In addressing these limitations, Bourdieu offers a microsociological framework (Swartz and Zolberg 2004) from which to examine the empirical, i.e. human experiences and social processes as they occur in everyday life. In so doing, he posits a new way to overcome some of the shortcomings of a dualistic structure-agency and/or macro-micro dialectic. Notably, Bourdieu does not explicitly refer to ‘ideology’, however his theory is deemed applicable given his attempts to mediate between (eliminate or flatten) the macro-micro dichotomy (Schouten, Martin, and DuFault 2015).

### **3.4.1 Theoretical Background**

Whereas Marx, Engels, and subsequent Marxist theorists are often accused of relegating ideology to the metaphysical, abstract, or a grand theoretical realm, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu reinvigorates its utilitarian or systematic function by focusing on the empirical or ‘microstructures’ of ideology as a way to understand social phenomena (Eagleton 1991/2007; Jenkins 1992/2002) and break down the subject/object – or structure/agency dichotomy. Bourdieu adopts a pragmatic stance in relation to other philosophers, declining to align himself with any particular writer or school (Bourdieu 1989), yet he characterizes his work in terms of ‘constructivist structuralism’ or ‘structuralist constructivism’. His structuralism, however, does not echo that of Lévi-Strauss’ where structures exist only in the realm of the symbolic. Rather, Bourdieu claims that an objective structure (i.e. one outside the realm of consciousness and the will of agents) exists in both the symbolic and social world itself (Bourdieu 1989: 14).

Pierre Bourdieu offers one of the most widely implemented theories of sociological ideology, particularly with regards to consumer research focusing primarily on classed (Allen 2002; Holt 1997, 1998; Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013), marginalized, (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Ourahmoune and Özçağlar-Toulouse 2012; Scaraboto and Fischer 2013; Thompson and Üstüner 2015; Üstüner and Holt 2010) and/or subcultural

consumption practices and identity projects (Arsel and Thompson 2011; McAlexander et al. 2014). One of the primary reasons Bourdieu has proved applicable to the consumer culture realm has to do with the microsociological or sociological miniaturism approach (Fine and Fields 2008; Swartz and Zolberg 2004) he applies to the study of ideology that assumes “social life is composed of micro level interactions that are reflected as an aggregation of interpersonal situations at the macro level” (Saatcioglu and Ozanne 2013: 708).

Thus, a primary aim of Bourdieu’s projects is to synthesize structure and agency. However, this has led to accusations that his theory is one of structural functionalism (Elster 1989). Bourdieu is known for being an empiricist, but is also accused of subscribing to a substantialist epistemology, which holds that while the objective world is made up of material relations, these are not accessible through human observation (Jenkins 1992/2002). In this way, a material reality can be studied, but ‘truth’ can never be fully consciously produced or identified. Furthermore, in claiming, “[w]e can always say that individuals make choices, as long as we do not forget that they do not choose the principles of these choices” (Wacquant 1989: 45), Bourdieu prioritizes the objective over the subjective, aligning himself with Marx’s theory of historical materialism (Jenkins (1992/2002), whereby “[m]en make their own history... but under circumstances existing already, given and transmuted from the past” (Marx 1852/2003: 15). Thus, although Bourdieu did not consider himself a Marxist, he was very much influenced by Marx’s thinking, many contending he embodies elements of a Marxist and phenomenological tradition (Adkins 2004; Fowler 2000). However, and this is a crucial point, although Bourdieu adamantly defends socialism, he diverges from Marxism and neo-Marxism, insofar as his theory functions within (rather than attempts to overthrow) a capitalist society, following poststructuralists (Firat and Venkatesh 1995) and third-way theorists (Therborn 2008).

### 3.4.2 Ideology through Bourdieu's Toolbox

Prior to examining some of Bourdieu's key concepts as they pertain to consumption and feminist studies, it is worth introducing Bourdieu's conception of ideology<sup>13</sup>. Bourdieu advocates what Eagleton (1991/2007) calls a 'practical ideology', emphasizing *how* ideology functions in day-to-day society. Bourdieu's notion of the habitus guides his study of the social human being; it is also most often equated to ideology, even though he did not use that term explicitly. 'Habitus', for Bourdieu represents "[a] system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment *as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems" (1977: 95 [emphasis in original]). It is the harmonious middle point, where structure meets agency. Habitus is thus conceptualized as the embodiment of collective, homogeneous phenomena, which includes an accumulation of historical practices and past experiences, practiced under 'objective' structures and conditions of which, in a dialogical fashion, are mediated through the habitus (Bourdieu 1990b, 1977). Thus, Bourdieu is overtly concerned with 'practice', and because practices are visible and observable, this supports his adherence to empirical research. Bourdieu explains practice as a "feel for the game" (1990b: 61), which suggests that individuals are not afforded rationality or full consciousness, but act in accordance with their cumulative, inculcated, learned, and (largely) presuppositional conditioned sense of being (i.e. their habitus). Thus while interested in the practices and occurrences of daily life, he recognizes that social life is more than merely the aggregate of individual behavior (Jenkins 1992/2002); it also includes an unconscious element.

Habitus is a product of primary socialization, i.e. family upbringing, formative peer groups, and formal educational experiences. Bourdieu claims that the habitus is inherently

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<sup>13</sup> This is, by no means, intended to be a complete summary of Bourdieu's concepts and theories, but is rather a brief articulation of the key ideas that are central to the context of this study.

classed, since different classes differ in terms of their primary socialization (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). Human beings are socialized, through early learning, into certain classed dispositions, which then become embodied and are perpetually reinforced, resulting in a deterministic mode of being. Thus, perhaps understandably, Bourdieu's conception of habitus has been criticized for being overly deterministic, mechanistic, and structural, given his emphasis on objective structures and early learning (Alexander 1995; Jenkins 1992/2002; Sewell 1992).

Notably, Bourdieu's conception of social class differs from Marx's and Gramsci's economic classes. Drawing from Weber, Bourdieu focuses on issues outside of the economic realm that work to structure society, both in terms of class and space. A Bourdieusian '*social class*' is based on a multiplicity of factors (e.g. social and cultural), beyond economics (Wacquant 1989). Similarly, Bourdieu uses the concept of a '*field*' to indicate social spaces or social arenas where actors compete for specific resources or '*capital*', including economic (money, property, assets), cultural (knowledge, education credentials), and social (networks of influence or support based on rank or group membership) capital in order to acquire status, or symbolic capital (prestige, honor) (Bourdieu 1986/2011). Fields are both the producers and products of the habitus and are structured internally via power relations and the struggle for capital (Jenkins 1992/2002), namely symbolic capital.

Capital may exist in a materialized/objectified state (e.g. cultural goods), an embodied state, represented by long-lasting mind/body dispositions, and in an institutionalized state, a form of objectification that functions rather autonomously from its bearer and other forms of capital (e.g. in the case of cultural capital this might be an academic diploma issued by an institution) (Bourdieu 1986/2011). All forms of capital may be subsumed under symbolic capital par excellence, when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate (Bourdieu 1986/2011). With symbolic capital comes symbolic power, the power to fashion and organize the world, "consecrate or reveal things that are already



there ... the power to make groups, to manipulate the objective structure of society” (Bourdieu 1989: 23). Social life, according to Bourdieu, is characterized as an endless struggle or competition for capital, i.e. the driving force inscribed in objective or subjective structures (Bourdieu 1986/2011). In other words, life is a constant struggle to lead a *symbolically* significant life (and death). Dreyfus and Rabinow (1993: 40) summarize Bourdieu’s conception of the social world as “a competition, not just for life and security as in Hobbes, but for advantage, and not just material advantage as in Marx, but more general symbolic advantage”.

Thus, habitus is typically equated to ideology, as the cumulative inculcated or learned and conditioned sense of being, largely formed as a consequence of one’s family background that involves the internalization of an arbitrary and dominant culture (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). The pejorative notions of ideology are evident in Bourdieu’s claims that the habitus forms the basis ‘*symbolic violence*’, which is understood as the imposition of oppressing societal systems/structures upon groups or classes, in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In this way, the habitus causes individuals to subjugate themselves by way of ‘*misrecognition*’ (or false consciousness): “the process whereby power relations are perceived not for what they objectively are but in a form which renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder” (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977: xiii). Power is subtly reproduced and upheld unknowingly by subordinate groups. The linkages between Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) earlier conceptions of a contradictory consciousness and spontaneous consent are evident. Furthermore, this also echoes (as it did with Gramsci) Foucault’s (1976) notion of ‘biopower’. However, while Gramsci theorizes about the revolutionary potential of the subaltern counter-hegemonies, Bourdieu argues that such an endless perpetuation of complementary and oppositional ideologies results in ‘*social reproduction*’ (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), rendering a revolution implausible if not impossible. Through social reproduction, the dominant classes reinforce, reproduce, and legitimize existing power relations (that always favor the ruling class’s interests or ideology) via symbolic violence, i.e. through the habitus of

the subordinate class(s), whereby cultural arbitrariness is transformed into universal forms of meaning (i.e. common sense). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) maintain that cultural institutions, namely the educational system, work to mask and legitimize the arbitrariness of the unequal distribution of powers and privileges. This process (known as '*doxa*'), whereby ideology becomes naturalized in society, explains how ideology is rendered unidentifiable insofar as it is so intrinsically related to the social world that nobody can image an alternative (Eagleton 1991/2007). Thus, Bourdieu argues, as does late Marx, that social justice/change is a relatively implausible feat.

The following two subsections focus on operationalizing these discussed "thinking tools" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 160) in the context of consumer research and feminist research.

### **3.4.2.1 Operationalizing Bourdieu in Consumer Research**

A primary theme in Bourdieu's work is his overt focus on culture. Jenkins (1992/2002: 130) claims "Bourdieu's sociology of culture, is therefore, a sociology of cultural consumption, the uses to which culture is put, and the manner in which cultural categories are defined and defended". In this way, his conceptualization of taste as an indicator of embodied cultural capital becomes relevant. Bourdieu argues adamantly against the Kantian approach to aesthetics, which contend that high cultural objects embody an intrinsic quality, rendering aesthetic judgment 'disinterested'. Instead he proposes that taste is socially constructed and necessitates cultural capital in order to look beyond a 'naïve gaze' to an informed understanding of haute culture, which is defined via the competition between social groups (Bourdieu 2000). "Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make" Bourdieu (1984: 6). Following suit, consumer researchers have frequently employed Bourdieu's theory of taste in order to understand how cultural capital informs consumption practices and contributes to the stratification and reproduction of social class positions (Allen 2002; Henry 2005; Holt 1997, 1998; Üstüner and Holt 2010).

McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips (2013) suggest that two meanings of taste have been operationalized by previous research: ‘distinction-between’ and ‘distinction-over’. Taste as distinction-between structures members participating in a local status hierarchy or subculture, securing group membership and an ‘authentic’ identity. This notion of taste comprises much CCT research examining how individuals manage or advance capital in specific fields (i.e. field-specific capital) (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Kates 2002; Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander 2006; McAlexander et al. 2014; McQuarrie, Miller, and Phillips 2013; Muñiz and Schau 2005; Thornton 1996). Taste as distinction-over, on the other hand, operates at the societal (macro) level and has to do with establishing dominance or status above others; it “elevates select individuals over the mass” (139), securing societal prominence. For example, taste as distinction-over might refer to men who embody the traits of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ that allows them to assert their dominance over women and subordinate men.

Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) present a matrix of four structural relationships that can arise between consumers’ class-based socialization (HCCs versus LCCs) and social fields positioned in either a high or low status hierarchy. Üstüner and Thompson (2012) take this one step further, demonstrating how status games (i.e. the pursuit of symbolic capital) are not only diversified across sociocultural fields, but are positioned in a broader (macro level) socioeconomic hierarchy, highlighting the implications of intersectional and interrelated fields. Such interdependent status games lead to controversy with regard to the legitimacy of particular forms of cultural, economic, or social capital. Üstüner and Thompson further conclude that when emic perspectives are analyzed in relation to their contextualizing sociological conditions “what initially appears to be a straightforward signal of social status can reveal underlying power relationships between socioeconomic factions” (812), which may suggest a discrepancy between taste preferences or taste regimes (Arsel and Bean 2013) and the overarching ideology. Their approach informs the

current study, which considers how taste preferences and capital operate at the micro, meso, and macro levels.

In ‘*Distinction*’ (1984), Bourdieu offers a three-tiered model (or zones) of cultural tastes that are largely based on one’s habituated predispositions (habitus):

- Legitimate taste: Taste for legitimate genres in legitimate domains (e.g. high art, haute couture, and politics); high-brow positions typically adopted by the petite bourgeoisie (i.e. those richest in educational capital).
- Middle-brow taste: Taste for middle-brow cultural domains – those more accessible products of legitimate culture (e.g. light opera) – and middle-brow aesthetics within those domains. Typically operationalized by the middle class, who express tendencies towards legitimate works that have become popularized and the petite bourgeoisie, who favor cultural objects which they see as lying just outside the traditional aesthetic (i.e. original or authentic artifacts).
- Popular taste: Most frequently expressed among the proletariat, wherein legitimate domains and objects are systematically reduced to ordinary circumstances of life and discarded of their artistic aesthetic.

While these were originally tailored to 1960 French society, they have been reproduced in consumer research, typically in the form of a taste scale (Holt 1998; Lamont 1992), with high cultural capital consumers (HCCs) on one end and low cultural capital consumers (LCCs) on the other. Furthermore, Bourdieu distinguishes between the the proletariats’ *taste of necessity* and the bourgeoisies’ *tastes of luxury or freedom* (1984: 177), the later of which reflects “a preference for cultural objects and practices that are removed from mundane material functions” (Gartman 1991: 424). Douglas Holt (1997, 1998) was one of the first to apply this conceptualization to examine generalized consumption in the U.S. and in doing so, argued that the theory should be revised to consider *consumption practices* rather than consumption objects. He identified that it is not necessarily the products, but rather the strategies that define classed-based

consumption. For example, strategies ensuring individuation and variation are highly valued in HCC consumption practices in comparison to LCC consumption. Other research has followed suit, examining HCC versus LCC consumption practices (e.g. Allen 2002; Berger and Ward 2010; Bernthal, Crockett and Rose 2005; Henry 2005; Schulz 2006; Üstüner and Holt 2007, 2010; Üstüner and Thompson 2012). Arsel and Bean (2013) extend Holt's original work on the strategies of consumption to inquire about the 'doing' or 'practice of taste' by examining how normative 'taste regimes' that are perpetuated via the marketplace institutions (i.e. cultural media) are practiced, reproduced, and maintained. The current study adopts a similar approach to understand how patriarchal and feminist ideologies are disseminated and received via the media. And although Bourdieu more readily acknowledges the topic of gender relations, particularly in comparison to both Marx and Gramsci, his theories have been widely debated in terms of their applicability to feminist research. This is explored in the next section.

#### **3.4.2.2 Operationalizing Bourdieu in Feminist Research**

Bourdieu's theories about gender are often conceived in terms of binary oppositions and sexual difference. In general, two streams of research have been identified. First, there are those scholars who work closely with Bourdieu's theories to develop them further within the realm of feminism (e.g. Beate Kraus, Bridget Fowler, and Lois McNay). Second, and more common, a number of feminist scholars (e.g. Beverley Skeggs, Leslie McCall, Lisa Adkins, and Terry Lovell) criticize Bourdieu's overtly deterministic theories of gender and apply his theoretical concepts more broadly to the study of feminism in an abstract or piecemeal fashion, much like those previously discussed applications of Marx and Gramsci. These two streams are discussed below.

#### ***Substantive Feminist Applications of Bourdieu***

In '*Outline of a Theory of Practice*' (1977), and in the '*Logic of Practice*' (1990b), Bourdieu explores the division of labor between the sexes based on his view that binary oppositions are the most elementary forces of social order and in the symbolic world. The division of labor between the sexes is evident in embodied dispositions (i.e. the gendered

habitus), which reproduce individual and collective gendered experiences and practices. Social identity, for Bourdieu, is derived from sexual identity, or more specifically, from the experience of the parental bodies; this conflation of sex, sexuality, and gender has led to accusations of ‘oversocialization’ or determinism. Bourdieu claims that in a capitalist society – which is structured via classes and dependent on binaries – gender, in terms of ‘maleness’ and ‘femaleness’ operates as a “political mythology”, or an ideology that governs all bodily experiences (1990b: 78).

Despite acknowledging a ‘gendered habitus’, that is an internalization of the division of labor between genders (male and female) that reproduces power relations and social status hierarchies (Bourdieu 1997/2000, 1998/2001), in *Distinction* (1984), gender (as well as ethnicity, age, and geographical origin) is relegated to a secondary status in terms of organizing one’s social position, taking a back seat to the ‘fundamental’ organizing factors (i.e. occupation, education, and father’s occupation and education). Thus, in Bourdieu’s original conception, capital is gender neutral and becomes gendered only through the ‘reconversion process’ by dispositions associated with gender (McCall 1992: 842). In this way, capital is presumed to *become* gendered through practices that are associated with either male or female (masculine or feminine). However, as McCall (1992) points out, this conceptualization is somewhat paradoxical given the primacy Bourdieu affords to gender binaries as one of the most elementary forces of social order.

Furthermore, according to Bourdieu, women are not capital-accruing subjects, but rather “capital-bearing *objects*, whose value accrues to the primary groups to which they belong, rather than as capital-accumulating *subjects* in social space” (Lovell 2000: 20 [emphasis in original]). Women, in this sense, do not hold and cannot acquire cultural or economic capital in their own right, but play an integral role in converting capital (via their display of cultural taste) for men and their families. These conversion strategies manifest in numerous ways, but are always defined by the volume and composition of capital, as well as the instruments of reproduction (i.e. education system, the labor market) at their

disposal, which themselves ultimately depend on the power relations between classes ((Bourdieu 1984). Thus, gender operates as a mediating distribution mechanism *within* a social group, already pre-defined by the volume and composition of capital.

Nowhere is Bourdieu's rendition of gender and feminism more clear than in his essay entitled, '*La Domination Masculine (Masculine Domination)*' (1990a) that was later revised and published as a book in 1998 (translated into English in 2001). Adopting a historical materialist perspective, Bourdieu considers how sexism functions in daily life using two extreme cases of traditional gender relations: his early ethnographic work in Algeria among the Kabyles, where he claimed gender functions as the primary division of social life and Virginia Woolf's (1927/1992) novel, '*To The Lighthouse*', which exemplified gendered divisions in a bourgeoisie British family at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Central to Bourdieu's conception of masculine domination is the notion of 'symbolic violence', which constitutes and reproduces domination via face-to-face interactions<sup>14</sup>. Bourdieu claims that through symbolic violence, women are perpetually socially produced (and reproduced) as objects and men as subjects. Central to this theory is the notion of 'complicity' (namely the complicity of the female habitus), which parallels Gramsci's (1971) understanding of spontaneous consent (i.e. subordinate groups working unconsciously to legitimize the dominant group) and Foucault's notion of biopower (i.e. power exerts itself internally, through the body, creating individuals who govern themselves through 'technologies of the self') (Foucault 1976). Bourdieu (1998/2001: 41-42 [emphasis in original]) argues:

[T]he foundation of symbolic violence lies not in mystified consciousness that only need to be enlightened but in dispositions attuned to the structure of domination of which they are the product... [A] relation of domination that functions only through the complicity of dispositions depends profoundly, for its *perpetuation or transformation*, on the perpetuation or transformation of the structures of which those dispositions are the product (and in particular on the structure of a market in symbolic goods whose fundamental law is that women are treated there as objects which circulate upwards).

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<sup>14</sup> Bourdieu often uses the terms 'symbolic violence' and 'symbolic domination' synonymously in the broader sense (extending beyond face-to-face interactions).

Bourdieu's digression ("women treated there as objects which circulate upwards") likens women to what may be identified as a sort of Veblen good (i.e. women as capital bearing objects), which, according to Bourdieu increase men's (or their families') symbolic capital. In other words, women, function as commodities in men's conspicuous consumption, which Thorstein Veblen (1899/2007) identified as a mode of status seeking, and this occurs via women's 'complicity'. Ourahmoune and Özçağlar-Toulouse (2012) demonstrate the workings of this phenomenon in their study of exogamous weddings and fashion amongst the Kabyle community in Algeria. They find that evolving fashions fail to deconstruct existing power dimensions, but work to reinforce masculine domination: "Kabyle women do not contest the internalized social order; they willingly follow Kabyle men, who instrumentalize them to display new marks of social success and responsibility" (16).

Furthermore, while Bourdieu often speaks of women's value as it pertains to men and/or their families, in '*Masculine Domination*' (1998/2001), he disavows any genuine change that has occurred as a result of women entering the labor market<sup>15</sup>. And to be sure, their objectivity is also perpetuated based on their role in the labor market, where, for example, a high paid female CEO functions not only as a valuable asset to a certain company (in terms of satisfying quotas, for example), but becomes a desired commodity, an aspirational status symbol, sold to young girls, women, and their families, via products, such as career-oriented Barbie dolls, some of which have smaller chest sizes (Gogoi 2006) and experiences, including 'Take Your Daughter to Work Day' and watching roller derby (Thompson and Üstüner 2015).

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<sup>15</sup> Fowler (2003: 474) outlines the three explanations that Bourdieu offers in accounting for masculine domination in the labor market, these are: (1) women express a concern for appearances and hostess activities in the public sphere that are often relegated to the private sphere; (2) job performances are often implicitly sexualized, bestowing more power to male employees; and (3) women are less engaged with their professional lives since they also (often) retain domestic duties.



Bourdieu regards any notion of change or progress in a capitalist society, particularly in relation to feminism, as largely superficial; a mere refashioning of gender relations among the dominant classes. Through the process of symbolic violence, the objective structures of a patriarchal society are preserved, which serves as the basis of social reproduction. In this way, Bourdieu's sociology is pessimistic about the possibilities of social transformation, facing charges of 'political paralysis', particularly as it relates to the feminist movement (Fowler 2003; Lovell 2000). Notably, Bourdieu does not deny his repudiation of the feminist movement – as it has been executed – and has, on many occasions, expressed his thoughts on the futility of such political action. For example, in '*Distinction*' (1984: 107) he suggests that "groups mobilized on the basis of a secondary criterion (such as sex or age) are likely to be bound together less permanently and less deeply than those mobilized on the basis of the fundamental determinants of their condition". And more recently, in his 'Preface to the English Edition' of '*Masculine Domination*' (1998/2001: viii), he warns that "a resistance that is reduced to individual acts or the endlessly recommenced discursive 'happenings' that are recommended by some feminist theoreticians... probably expect too much for the meager and uncertain results they obtain". From this perspective, efforts such as consciousness raising (MacKinnon 1989; Sowards and Renegar 2004), individual acts of gender resignification (Butler 1994), and/or intellectual crusades against the gender order are rendered ineffectual (Fowler 2003; Kraus 2006). Bourdieu also recognizes how sectional interests of a dominant group can often overshadow a social movement's broader agenda. This, as it relates to feminism, is explicitly discussed by his doctoral student, Sandrine Garcia (1994, 1999), who criticizes the French feminist movement for advancing and institutionalizing a dominant group's interests (i.e. those women with cultural and social capital), paralleling those current critiques made against the propagation of white feminism (Sandoval 1991; 2000).

However, despite Bourdieu's skepticism with regard to the effectiveness of the feminist movement, in his later work (1998/2001), he does hint at the possibility of a different type

of social movement, whereby forms of collective action might employ weapons “especially symbolic ones, capable of shaking the political and legal institutions which play a part in perpetuating their subordination” (ibid: ix). To this end, he places the male homosexual at the forefront of the feminist movement, claiming that this demographic is uniquely aligned with feminists. However, this has subjected Bourdieu to criticism for not taking seriously the history of gay liberation and its alliance with and differences from the feminist movement, thus his solution for change is tenuous at best.

Nonetheless, some feminist scholars (Krais 2006; Fowler 2003; McNay 1999, 2004) have taken Bourdieu’s theory of masculine domination as their point of departure, highlighting those “margin[s] of freedom for political action aimed at reopening the space of possibilities” (Bourdieu 1997/2000: 234, in Fowler 2003: 486). McNay (1999, 2004), for example, illuminates Bourdieu’s conception of embodiment and the habitus to conceptualize gender identity in terms of an embodied lived existence that is largely unreceptive to reflexive transformation, but nevertheless responds to changing and disparate fields. In a similar vein, Krais (2006) discusses how social change is possible via *collective* (versus individual) reflexivity, which can result in an alteration of social conditions under which individuals may renounce their doxic attitude towards masculine domination. Attending to Bourdieu’s assertion that both society and the habitus are fluid and flexible, Krais argues that collective social practice (i.e. social movements) can open a space for resistance and change. Finally, Fowler (2003) identifies the vulnerabilities and contradictions in Bourdieu’s work to suggest a *critical* application of this theories to feminist research. In so doing, she emphasizes the need to reinstitute class in feminist theory, as does Beverly Skeggs (1997). Ultimately, these scholars attempt to keep Bourdieu’s overriding project in tact, critiquing the underlying material structures and deeper structural relations embedded in society, while discarding (‘get-rich-quick’) acts of individuated resistance (McNay 2004; Butler 1994) that postmodern feminists readily advocate.

Thus gender, for Bourdieu, is theorized as a ‘naturalized’, yet secondary precondition of the habitus, of which practice, structural relations, and societal positions are all contingent (McCall 1992). Correspondingly, his over-socialized and universalized understanding of gender order that relies largely on a typology of (biological) sex differences serves as one of the main criticisms of his work. Furthermore, Bourdieu’s relegation of the feminist movement to the realm of the impossible, or at the very least, implausible, has limited his application to feminist research. In particular his notion of the enduring habitus proves problematic for feminist postmodernists, insofar as they typically perceive identity as a process of becoming and understand gender in terms of performativity<sup>16</sup> (Butler 1990, 1993). This opposition (between Bourdieu and postmodern feminists), however, has lent itself to fruitful academic excavations, leading many researchers to compare (Fowler 2003; Lovell 2000; McNay 2004) and synthesize the two perspectives (Harju and Huovinen 2015; Thompson and Üstüner 2015), as will be further discussed in the more common, analytical applications of Bourdieusian theory to feminist research.

### ***Abstracted Feminist Applications of Bourdieu***

Given the above mentioned criticisms, the majority of feminist scholarship applies Bourdieu’s theories in an abstract and piecemeal fashion in two primary ways. First, as was eluded to previously, some research applies Bourdieu’s theories using a postmodern framework, thus allowing for a more dynamic conception of the gendered habitus. McCall (1992), for example, challenges Bourdieu’s original notion of the gendered habitus by highlighting its *consciousness*, suggesting that it is more than an internalized reproduction of the doxa (i.e. the patriarchal society and gendered binaries as natural and given). She argues that there exist multiple gendered dispositions, practices, and embodiments that can resist what is presumed by Bourdieu to be ‘common sense’. This corresponds with Thompson and Üstüner’s (2015: 34-35) research that surmises the gendered habitus

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<sup>16</sup> Butler makes a theoretical distinction between gender performance and gender performativity, whereby the former presumes a subject, and the latter denies the very notion of the subject (Butler 1994). Her adherence to the latter demonstrates her resolute rejection of a core identity.

invokes contradictory gender discourses, leading to a “more ideologically diversified system of dispositions” than Bourdieu originally theorized.

Other research has argued for a more dynamic conceptualization of the habitus, more generally, that would allow the habitus to change and morph throughout one’s life trajectory. Notably, Bourdieu’s own conception of the habitus is not inexorable and fully determined, but is, again, realized as “feel for the game” (1990b: 61). In fact, in Bourdieu’s later work (2004), he identified in himself a ‘habitus clivé’, or a ‘divided habitus’, which is said to occur when one’s conditions of existence change so dramatically that a specific type of socialization occurs, which essentially de-socializes previously held dispositions (i.e. aspirations and skills are inconsistent and/or conflicting). In reflecting upon his own upward mobility (from a rural working-class upbringing to his social ascent through the French school system), he considered himself an exception to the rule and thus rarely engaged with this concept in his empirical work (Bennett 2007).

Within the realm of consumer research, McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips (2013), who conducted a study of women’s fashion blogs, find that the exercise of ‘doing’ taste can lead to a higher social position and thus the habitus may not be quite as inborn as Bourdieu originally theorized. Üstüner and Holt (2010) examined nuanced status consumption strategies of women in a less industrialized country (LIC) within a single class, inhabiting similar ethnic, life-stage, and religious backgrounds. They find that those living in LICs rely less on the habitus with respect to capital accumulation, affording more attention to the strategic pursuits of tastes that emulate a Western lifestyle. And, while it is outside the realm of gender and feminist studies, Saatcioglu and Ozanne (2013) extend Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus and look at how moral dispositions shape consumption practices, advancing the idea of a moral habitus.

The second, and more common, feminist application of Bourdieu’s analytic framework considers the notion of class and how this might be reinstated into a feminist agenda

(Fowler 2003; Lovell 2000; Saaticioglu and Ozanne 2013; Skeggs 1997, 2004a; Üstüner and Holt 2007, 2010; Üstüner and Thompson 2012). As was previously discussed, Bourdieu relegates gender, as well as race, ethnicity, age, and geographical origin, to a secondary status in comparison to social class, as is defined by occupation and education. However, McCall (1992) offers an alternative, less literal reading of Bourdieu's notion of 'secondary', wherein gender is considered a hidden (or ideological) construct that functions as a fundamental principle of division by appearing to be natural and universal. In this way, gender is even more powerful than Bourdieu's primary institutions of division because it operates as *embodied* cultural capital. Bourdieu's (1986/2011: 85) notion of embodiment, where "external wealth is converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus", is the most hidden and universal (ideological) form of capital. This reading substantiates feminists' claims that capital may be gendered after all (Lovell 2000; McCall 1992; Skeggs 1997, 2004a). For example, gender performance, as argued by Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013), Harju and Huovinen (2015), and Thompson and Üstüner (2015), is a form of embodied cultural capital that functions either as an asset or a liability in different fields. Notably, gender does not constitute its own autonomous field but rather, like social class, moderates and penetrates all social fields (Adkins 2004; Fowler 2004; Kraus 2006; McNay 2004; Moi 1991).

Toril Moi (1991) views femininity as negative cultural capital insofar as it inhibits women's quests for accumulating legitimate cultural capital, namely an education; in Moi's analysis, women with families from good economic standings and high social capital were married and thus accumulated capital for their husbands and families, rather than for themselves. Beverley Skeggs (1997), on the other hand, finds that femininity functions as a type of valuable cultural capital. In her ethnography, examining marginalized (i.e. working-class) women, she finds that the working-class women are reflexively aware of their marginalized positions in society. Engaging in a series of identity investments (attempting to acquiring feminine capital), these women attempt to legitimize their feminine status and symbolic value on their own terms. Skeggs notes that

the working-class women in her study could never truly inhabit the category of femininity, insofar as it historically developed in opposition to working-class and black femininities. While Skeggs notes that this is a tragic engulfment of capitalism (Steedman 1999), Thompson and Üstüner (2015) present a more optimistic view and argue that while conventional gender norms persist through routine, orthodox contexts of the everyday (e.g. domestic and economic fields), women can productively challenge and destabilize ideological gender norms without the threat of being marginalized in unorthodox fields, such as roller derby. They argue that gendered-class barriers can be destabilized via gender resignifications in a bounded marketplace setting, but do not theorize beyond that specific-field to determine the macro societal implications. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) also look at gender performances, but from the perspective of men (a dominant gender group), particularly stay-at-home fathers, who actively invest in a subordinate and stigmatized form of cultural capital in an attempt to legitimize their collective identity. While they establish that these men challenge the dominant cultural norms, like Thompson and Üstüner (2015), they focus exclusively on individual and collective identity projects and do not theorize beyond identity to speculate about the broader societal implications.

Finally, Catherine Hakim (2010) attempts to turn Bourdieu's notion of women as capital-bearing objects on its head by proposing the notion of erotic capital, which relates to one's sexual attractiveness, as a fourth type of capital, giving women an advantage over men. Hakim suggests that sociologists have perpetuated a patriarchal bias by not recognizing (mainly women's) erotic capital. She bases her analysis on sexual economics theory that claims (from an evolutionary psychology point of view) women are the sellers and men the buyers of sex (Baumeister, Catanese and Vohs 2001; Baumeister and Vohs 2004), which has been the subject of much criticism, particularly by those advocating against postfeminist beauty practices (Jeffreys 2005; Wolf 1991).

In sum, these studies modify Bourdieu's original theories for one of two reasons. The first is to reintroduce the notion of class into feminist theory, to demonstrate how class operates within gender to create intersection oppressions. Other applications, however are more optimistic: theorizing the notion of a dynamic habitus, thus inviting the possibility of social mobility and advocating the destabilization of gender binaries through a series of gender resignifications. This latter application corresponds more closely to those applications of Bourdieu in CCT, where there is a clear inclination towards work that assumes the implications of social reproduction can be bypassed in order to theorize individuated acts of resistance (Holt 1997).

### 3.5 Summary

In the 2007 'Introduction' of his book *Ideology: An Introduction*, Terry Eagleton suggests that ideology "is always most effective when invisible" (xvii). That is to say, ideology works best when it is perceived as natural and universal. This corresponds with the definition of ideology adopted for this research, which suggests that *ideology maintains a hegemonic power that arises from the material structure of society*, via various instances of spontaneous consent and legitimation. While this conception is largely influenced by both Marx and Gramsci, Bourdieu's concepts are useful in examining how ideology is upheld empirically. Mediating between the macro-micro dialectic, Bourdieu demonstrates how domination and legitimation occur in everyday life, explicating how an individual's horizon of possibilities is delimited and/or furthered by a socio-historical context. The following chapter moves to the meso level of analysis in delineating how these macro (hegemonic and counter-hegemonic) ideologies are communicated through cultural production systems. Inasmuch as this study is concerned with the marketization of the feminist social movement, particular attention is paid to how a counter-hegemonic ideology is communicated by way of social movements, the marketplace, and the media.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

### MESO: MARKETIZED IDEOLOGY

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The meso unit of analysis constitutes the interception point between the macro and the micro, facilitating the communication of ideology to individuals. Increasingly, consumer culture studies are beginning to consider the interplay between macro and micro phenomenon and while a meso level is always at least implicitly considered, e.g. retailers (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004), brands (Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010), nature (Tumbat and Belk 2011), fashion (Izberk-Bilgin 2012), and technology (Kozinets 2008), more attention is warranted with respect to how ideology is communicated via these cultural production systems, or how “co-optation happens” (Sandikci and Ger 2010: 16). Additionally, as McAlexander et al. (2014) point out, traditional institutions have become increasingly subject to the forces of the market and processes of marketization, including religion (McAlexander et al. 2014), medicine (Thompson 2004a), education (Barlett et al. 2002), and government services (Massey 1997). This suggests that these once formal institutions have become subject to the forces of the market, whereby ideology and consumption are no longer separable notions, but are rather co-constitutive of one another. While McAlexander et al. (2014) explore how this influences consumers’ individual identity projects, the question remains as to what this means for the autonomy and agency of the traditional institutions themselves and society at large. Indeed, this is one of the issues the current research seeks to address in exploring the marketization of the contemporary feminist social movement.

Further, with some recent exceptions (e.g. Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Varman and Belk 2009) social movements have been largely overlooked among this stream of consumption studies, despite the fact they undoubtedly involve various levels of marketization and co-optation. Social movements are unique from the previously



mentioned institutions (e.g. religion, medicine, education, the family, and government services) in the sense that they attempt to disseminate *oppositional* ideologies or *counter-hegemonies* in order to incite social change. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to delineate how a social movement becomes marketized and what this might mean for the social movement at large. Beginning with a definition of a social movement, the subsequent sections overview the multiple forms social movement co-optation can take, including political institutional, formal, and market co-optation. This chapter concludes by discussing the marketization of the contemporary feminist movement.

## 4.1 Social Movement Theory

Sociologists have developed a number of different theories related to social movements over the years, which have developed largely in par with the social movements themselves. In general, social movements can be understood as byproducts of modernity (Buechler 2000), defined by collective action and organized efforts that seek to alter<sup>17</sup> some elements of the status quo (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Snow, Soule and Kriesi 2004; Tarrow 1994). Social movement theory has been characterized in many ways. For example, Garner and Tenuto (1997) identify three paradigm shifts of social movement theory that reflect the respective socio- and politico-cultural contexts. However, this classification is simplistic in the sense that distinctions are merely temporal. Buechler (2000) builds on their work to differentiate between ‘classical collective behavior theory’ (i.e. general collective action including panics, crazes, and fads) and ‘recent social movement theory’, (i.e. social movements as a distinct form of collective behavior). Other distinctions have been made between theories which analyze old social movements, associated with a Marxist proletarian revolution and new social movements that emphasize a diverse array of collective action that is not necessarily political, but is always (sometimes solely) cultural (Buechler 1995; Kauffman 1990/2001; Melucci 1996; Touraine 1985). In a similar vein, distinctions have been made depending on the relative

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<sup>17</sup> Note that in this context ‘alter’ can refer to both change and reinforcement of the status quo.

goals of social movements, as either strategic and political or identitarian and cultural (Benford and Snow 2000; Cohen 1985; Touraine 1981).

Taking the previous research into consideration, this research distinguishes between three paradigms of social movement theory, broadly characterized as: (1) classical theories, (2) political theories, and (3) new social movement (NSM) theories (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996). These are summarized below:

- Classical theories: In the 1950s-1960s, social movement theory was dominated by the social psychology of collective behavior; there was a negative orientation toward social movements, insofar as they were viewed as a form of disruptive behavior caused by supposed irrational actors (McAdam 1982). While these theories tended towards a micro oriented (individuated) focus, some of them adopted a structural-functionalist approach, which necessitated a more macro oriented (structural) approach (Parsons 1951; Smelser 1962). These approaches are largely considered outdated and do not comprise much contemporary empirical work on social movements.
- Political theories: Social movement theory that arose in the 1970s – 1980s began to adopt a more positive outlook of social movements with an evidenced political orientation, whereby rational actors were presumed to pursue strategic political goals. This paradigm comprises most of the work on social movements, particularly in the U.S. Focusing explicitly on the organizational activities of social movements, which are believed to mediate between social structures and individual agency, these analyses typically occur at the meso level (Diani and McAdam 2003). Approaches within this camp include resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977), the political process theory (McAdam 1982; Tarrow 1983; Tilly 1978), and cultural framing processes (Snow and Benford 1988; Snow et al. 1986)<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Resource mobilization theory focuses on the strategies (i.e. incentives, cost-reducing mechanisms, structures, and benefits) required to mobilize collective behavior. Political process theory (also recognized as political opportunity structure) emphasizes the dimensions of the political environment that make

- New Social Movement theories: Towards the 1980s, around the same time as the resource mobilization theory was gaining momentum in the U.S., NSM theories (Cohen 1985; Melucci 1980; Touraine 1985) gained traction in continental Europe<sup>19</sup>. These are particularly helpful in understanding identitarian-based movements, as they emphasize culture, ideology, the social context, and multiple sources of identity (e.g. ethnicity, gender, and sexuality). This paradigm suggests that social movement activists fight for legitimacy within the civil society rather than solely for their rights or extensions of citizenship from the state (Buechler 1995; Scott 1990). NSM theory examines microstructures as a way to gauge macro phenomenon.

Social movement theory readily lends itself to the holistic study of the structure-agency and macro-micro dialectic, insofar as “movements are microcosms of individual action embedded in larger, sociohistoric contexts” (Buechler 2000: 39). Consequently, social movements are believed to operate as meso level cultural production systems that link macro ideologies to micro individual actors (Diani and McAdam 2003). Given the focus that the contemporary feminist movement affords to cultural and identitarian issues, this research builds its base using NSM theory. While space limitations prohibit a detailed discussion of each theoretical camp, suffice it to say that this theory and these movements did not arise in isolation, but as a result of the historicity of social movement theories and the social movements themselves.

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collective action possible or not. Cultural framing processes focus primarily on the social movement organizations to understand how they frame grievances in order to encourage collective action; they also consider external framing activities, undertaken by the media, for example (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Tarrow (1988) indicates that NSM theories became popular in Western Europe during the 1970s. And while NSM theory emerged in a European context, it is now a commonly adopted approach across both Western Europe and the United States (Buechler 1995).

#### 4.1.2 New Social Movements

NSM theory developed directly in response to the shortcomings of classical Marxism and economic reductionism (Epstein 1990; Laclau and Mouffe 1985/2014; Pichardo 1997). Gaining considerable prominence in Western Europe during the 1980s, NSMs are often described as those that emerged in the late 1960s, following the student protests in Europe and the student and anti-war movements in the U.S. (Pichardo 1997)<sup>20</sup>. Notably, there is a considerable amount of variation in the perspectives offered by NSM theorists, including Manuel Castells, Alain Touraine, Alberto Melucci, and Jürgen Habermas. Nonetheless, there are at least two cornerstone features of new social movements, which have achieved a general consensus (Buechler 1995).

The first has to do with the acknowledgement of a macro “societal totality that provides the context for the emergence of collective action” (Buechler 1995). This societal totality has been described as postindustrial, programmed (Touraine 1981), information (Melucci 1996), network (Castells 1997) advanced capitalist (Habermas 1975), and advanced capitalist industrial (Offe 1985). Offe (1985) describes this social totality in three ways, claiming that economic and political rationality is (1) ‘broadened’ both temporally and spatially to all members of society, transcending previous class-specific bounds, which suggests that the effects of domination and social control are (2) ‘deepened’ and (3) ‘irreversible’, impacting all realms of civil society, as well as the political and economic institutions that are now also at the mercy of these effects. NSMs are believed to have arose largely in response to this macro environment, although this is clearly a tautology, since it is indeterminable whether NSMs are the cause or consequence of this macro totality (Cohen 1985; Touraine 1981). Williams (2004: 92) further describes NSMs as “generally macro in orientation... [retaining] the traditional Marxian concern with articulating the ways in which social infrastructures produce and are reflected by culture

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<sup>20</sup> Whether or not a movement is classified as a new social movement is somewhat subjective. For example, while many NSM theorists consider second-wave and contemporary feminist movements to be new social movements, others adamantly reject the label, inasmuch as it may inhibit their influence in theories of economic production (Fraser 1989).

and action”. This leads to the second distinguishing feature of NSMs, that is, the emphasis placed on self-reflexivity with regard to individuals’ recognition of the pervasive modern forms of power, inherent within established political institutions. Thus, these movements do not readily lend themselves to ‘traditional’ forms of political organization, although they often work alongside them. Rather, they are characterized as relatively non-hierarchical, decentralized, unconventional, informal, and somewhat precarious. This is similarly reflected in their demands and tactics that tend to adopt frameworks that leave “ample room for a wide variety of legitimations and beliefs among the protesters” (Offe 1985: 830). In particular, NSMs are concerned with a plurality of issues regarding the quality of life, interpersonal relations, culture, and sexuality, for example. Additionally, they advocate ‘modern’ values, such as individualism, self-realization, humanism, autonomy, democratization, and identity (Offe 1985). While acknowledging the complexities and debates central to NSMs, Buechler (1995) summarizes four major characteristics that typify these – although notably there exists some disagreement among NSM theorists with regard to these themes; these are discussed below.

### ***New versus Old***

The first is the meaning of ‘newness’ in new social movements. Some argue that NSMs are ‘new’ in the sense that they displace ‘old’ social movements, characterized by economic and class-based distinctions, stemming from Marxist theory. This perspective suggests that NSMs transcend the old social movements of proletarian revolution to consider other ideational, cultural, and/or identitarian (i.e. gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc.) issues as the origins of collective action. However, many NSM theorists (Bernstein 1997; Brandt 1990; Tarrow 1991) argue that the ‘new’ in NSMs simply implies that these movements have entered into a new cycle of protest or historical stage of collective action. Snow and McAdam (2000) discuss three ideal-typical stages of ‘active’, ‘successful’, and ‘non-revolutionary’<sup>21</sup> social movements, which relate to the ‘emergence’ stage, the ‘institutionalization’ stage, and the ‘general diffusion’ stage, respectively. They suggest

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<sup>21</sup> This research acknowledges that there are some general discrepancies as to what constitutes these terms (i.e. active, successful, and non-revolutionary), but adopts the labels offered by McAdam and Snow (2000).

that the third stage typifies NSMs. Social movements in this stage entail a specific type of identity work, known as ‘identity seeking’, which is initiated by the potential participant who is seeking to align his or her identity with that of a groups’ (i.e. social movement). Further, from this perspective, it is plausible that NSMs are those ‘old’ social movements that are nearing the end of their cycle (or ‘wave’) of protest (Tarrow 1991, 1994). Adding to this point, Cohen (1983) notes that NSMs are products of earlier movements, but are unique in the sense that the members of earlier movements sought to de-differentiate themselves from society, whereas members of NSMs tend to defend structural differences.

The feminist movement has also oscillated between celebrating and suppressing differences depending on the macro political conditions in society (Bernstein 1997). During the first-wave movement, women attempted to establish their sameness to men in order to gain formal policy reforms and the right to participate in the political system. The second-wave feminist movement was characterized by liberal feminist groups, i.e. older professional women reflecting the ethos of the first-wave, but also by radical feminist groups, dominated by college women who stressed their differences to men (Freeman 1973; Sandoval 2000). Those activists, who emphasized sameness, challenged the dominant culture’s perception of the minority via uncontroversial (e.g. educational) means, while the radical feminists, who advocated difference, challenged the hegemonic culture through oppositional tactics (e.g. protests) in order to validate their identity (Bernstein 1997: 538). And to reinforce Cohen (1983), contemporary feminism fosters an almost universal politics of difference, not only from men, but from other intersectional groups as well. Thus, while Buechler (1995) surmises that there exists much continuity between the purported ‘old’ and ‘new’ social movements, NSM scholars generally agree that a markedly different macro context characterizes NSMs (i.e. advanced capitalism, etc.), which undoubtedly impacts the conflicts and grievances around which these movements organize, as well as the corresponding strategies, goals, and aims of movements and the theoretical paradigm for which to study them (Habermas 1981, 1987).

### ***Classed or Classless***

The second characteristic of new social movements has to do with the issue of class and whether or not there exists a class-base in these types of movements and if so, how it might differ from the former movements' class-base (i.e. proletariat) as theorized by Marx. Some have argued that participants of NSMs are no longer defined by a class-based structure, that identity orientations, such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, citizenship, and/or ideological affiliations are central to NSM mobilization (Arato and Cohen 1984; Dalton, Kuechler, and Burklin 1990; Steinmetz 1994). However, the majority agree that NSMs retain some semblance of a class-based structure, particularly because NSM theory developed in response to the shortcomings of Marxism (Epstein 1990; Laclau and Mouffe 1985/2014; Pichardo 1997; Williams 2004). Much of this work extends Bourdieu's (1984, 1986/2011) notion of social class that includes other forms of capital aside from just economic. This new class-base is said to be comprised of the 'new middle classes' (Eder 1993; Kriesi 1989; Offe 1985). Empirically, however, it has been difficult to define the new middle classes (Brint 1984; Pichardo 1997). From a demographic standpoint, they are often described as having a high educational status, relative economic security (particularly during their formative years), and tend to work in social service industries, e.g. teachers, social workers, psychologists, etc. (Eder 1993; Offe 1985). Further, they are believed to embody notions of individualism (Gans 1988) and a shared desire to experience the '*good life*' (advocating neoliberalism and emphasizing self-aggrandizing, autonomous, and competitive notions) and '*consensual social relations*' (where people interact and communicate as equals and free persons) (Eder 1993). Offe (1985) further suggests that in addition to the new middle classes, NSM members also consist of the 'old' middle classes (i.e. blue-collar workers), as well as 'peripheral' or 'decommodified' groups, i.e. students, housewives, retired people, and unemployed youths who have ample time and flexible schedules to devote to political activities.

German macro-sociologist, Klaus Eder attempts to bring together culture, social class, and social movements, particularly in the modern era. He describes the new middle classes' structural base as historically originating from that of the petite bourgeoisie habitus:

the social-structural position of the new middle classes makes its members perfect consumers, who have to fight for status on the diverse markets. Individualization is positively forced upon the petit bourgeois by his [sic] social position . . . it [the petit bourgeois consciousness] can be interpreted as a mixture of bourgeois universalism and plebeian particularism (Eder 1985: 876).

This results in an intermediate position, where the new middle classes are defined by their absence of a class existence; they are neither dominated nor dominating and this consequently leads to what Eder (1993) later identifies as the problem of identity – the need to legitimize one's own status. Eder readily oscillates between emphasizing historical structural bases, i.e. equating the new middle classes with the traditional petit bourgeois habitus and his contention that classes are not bound by their objective condition of existence, but rather by their collective practices that define an 'identitarian' mode of existence (i.e. classes do not determine collective action, but can hinder or expedite it). Offe (1985: 833) agrees with this later perspective, arguing that new middle class politics "is typically a politics *of a class* but not *on behalf of a class*" [emphasis in original]. Further, these two perspectives may be combined, as they are by Giddens (1971), who argues that a defining characteristic of these classes is that they are 'class-aware', but not 'class-conscious'. In other words, those making up the new middle class share a set of structural characteristics (i.e. petit bourgeois habitus) that may predispose them to engage in political action, but may differ with regard to individual interests, concerns, and demands.

### ***Reactive or Progressive***

The third consideration, according to Buechler (1995), has to do with whether or not new social movements are reactive (i.e. hegemonic or defensive) or progressive (i.e. democratic), which speaks to their potential with regard to societal transformation. Generally speaking, reactive social movements seek to defend a particular way of life by resisting societal changes (Cohen 1983). These tend to take the form of counter-



movements (e.g. anti-statist, anti-market, anti-modernization, the Ku Klux Klan, conservative women's groups, and anti-feminist movements). Progressive social movements, alternatively, seek to make changes within a society by creating new associational and democratic reforms (Cohen 1983). Notably, the majority of relevant scholarship on this issue is quite critical, arguing that NSMs are largely reactive to the modernization and institutionalization of contemporary macro society (Buechler 2000). Critical theorist Jürgen Habermas is central to this debate, contending that NSMs are largely defensive reactions to the 'colonization of the lifeworld', that is, reactive against economic and political intrusion in everyday life (1981, 1987). In fact, according to Habermas (1981), the feminist movement is the only social movement that may be deemed 'offensive' or progressive in terms of inciting emancipatory social change, although notably he was not referring to the contemporary feminist movement. Colonization, according to Habermas, occurs through two related processes of 'juridification' and 'commodification'. Whereas juridification refers to increasing state intervention into the lifeworld (i.e. the welfare state permeating other forms of civil society and private life), commodification refers to the extension and intensification of the market into areas of everyday life. Mouffe (1984) expands on this notion of commodification, suggesting that the commodification of social life, bureaucratization (increasing intervention of the state), and 'cultural massification' (the destruction of collective identities as a result of the prevalence of the mass media) creates new antagonisms that NSMs attempt to resist.

Goldstone (2003: 2), among others (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993), offers a more progressive view, asserting that social movements do not directly challenge the political system, but rather "constitute an essential element of normal politics in modern societies, and that there is only a fuzzy and permeable boundary between institutionalized and noninstitutionalized politics". This widespread institutionalization of social movements constitutes what Meyer and Tarrow (1998) identify as 'movement societies', wherein social movements and political parties overlap to *mutually* shape politics and the broader

society (Goldstone 2003). Indeed, such a conceptualization invites the possibility to assess NSMs liberatory potential in new ways that bypass the reactive versus progressive debate, since NSMs are said to function within as opposed to separate from society. However, this brings to the fore one of the longstanding critiques of NSMs: that because they function within advanced capitalism, they consequently progress its exploitative features, thus indicating the end of anti-systemic movements (Dean 2014).

### ***Cultural or Political***

This consequently leads into the last presumption of NSMs, which takes into account one of its most distinctive features – identity, and considers whether or not such an overt focus on identity issues lends itself to political, rather than just cultural reforms. Extant research has questioned the transformative potential of NSMs, classifying them into either cultural or political movements (Buechler 1995; Eder 1982). While political movements “challenge modern state domination”, thus resonating more profoundly with the previous social movements, cultural movements “oppose present social life”, often in the form of countercultural movements, as previously mentioned, and through various identity reenactments (Eder 1982: 5). Buechler (1995: 451) attempts to neutralize the distinction by offering an operationalized definition of ‘political’ movements, which “are at least in part focused on influencing or altering state power, and such movements must thereby have some explicit strategy aimed at transforming power relations”. Alternatively, other scholars have distinguished between ‘*strategy-oriented*’ movements that are typified as instrumental and political, and ‘*identity-oriented*’ movements, characterized as expressive and cultural (Touraine 1981). At some level, of course, all movements implicitly or explicitly adopt both political and cultural stances and are not restricted to such rigid binaries (Buechler 1995). However many scholars argue that given their cultural and identitarian focus, NSMs are apolitical, or at the very least pre-political<sup>22</sup> forms of collective action, which presuppose largely ambivalent societal effects (Kauffman 1990/2001; Touraine 1985).

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<sup>22</sup> Pre-political in this context indicates that the culture and consciousness of marginalized or oppressed groups and individuals must change before political change can occur (Kauffman 1990/2001).

NSMs are often considered to be synonymous with identitarian movements (Touraine 1981) and are understood to practice identity politics. The term ‘identity politics’ is most closely associated with the second wave feminist movement, following Betty Friedan’s (1963) bestseller, *The Feminine Mystique* that posited gender relations via social roles, norms, and expectations as a form of oppression. Following suit, the title of Carol Hanisch’s essay, *The Personal is Political* (1970) became a popular and widely used tenet at the time (and still is to this day), which came to represent the overt politicization of one’s personal life. Thus, identity politics has been defined in conjunction with status-based social movements (Bernstein 2005) that are organized around specific identities (i.e. gendered, racial, sexual, etc.) rather than political ideologies and/or issues (Hekman 2000). Identity, in this case, is central to the mobilization, goals, and strategies of social movements (Kauffman 1990/2001).

Kauffman (1990/2001) outlines the history of identity politics, demonstrating its transformative potential in revealing systematic patterns of domination, particularly for the Black Power and second wave feminist movements in the 1950s and 1960s. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, however, identity politics proliferated, resulting in significant depoliticizing effects. Kauffman (1990/2001: 30) argues, “[w]hen everything is seen as political, it becomes virtually impossible to formulate effective political strategies,” indicating the problems associated with theorizing an omnipresence of power, resonating with Foucault’s (1972/1977) notion of ‘dispositif’. Further, according to Fraser (1997) an overt focus on identity politics does a disservice to feminist, anti-racist, and LGBT movements, since they address individuated particularisms without attending to universal justices (see also Fraser 1997, 1998; Fraser and Honneth 2003).

Additional criticisms have to do with the notion of identity itself and the fact that it often adopts a positivistic essentialist and ontological form. From this perspective, one’s politics are rooted in ‘*what one is*’ or ‘*what one identifies as*’ (e.g. a woman, a feminist, a lesbian,

or some combination of these subjectivities), rather than ‘*what one identifies with*’ via a dynamic process of relation and identification (Fuss 1995; Thompson 2004b). The former perspective thus runs the risk of advocating an identity as an ontological end in itself, rather than employing it as a means or a resource within the broader political spectrum (McNay 2010). This consequently leads to a bipartisan model of social justice politics: one that emphasizes goals of achieving an identitarian status (‘*recognition*’) versus one that seeks egalitarian redistribution of economic and cultural resources (‘*redistribution*’) (Fraser 1998; Fraser and Honneth 2003). A similar dichotomy is also recognized by Jasper (1997), who distinguishes between ‘*citizen movements*’, wherein members seek inclusion in societal institutions and ‘*post-citizen movements*’, whose members already enjoy most or all of the normal rights of citizens. While a goal of redistribution is associated with a political class politics, illustrated most effectively by the labor movement, recognition is common in new social movements, but is often derided as an apolitical identity politics – one that reduces politics to issues of identity. Furthermore, such an overt focus on identity recognition leads to accusations of identity reification – where differences are masked and identity becomes a fixed vehicle through which state power is wielded rather than limited or challenged (Bernstein 2005; Hekman 2000). The reification of identity also makes it susceptible to what Brown and Halley (2002) denote as ‘suffer mongering’, whereby “subaltern identities are fetishistically constructed around the compulsion to repeat and relive the primal injury of oppression or exclusion” (McNay 2010: 513). In other words, the ideology of oppression precedes experience that can lead to a ceaseless spiral of self-subjugation. This in turn represents an extreme, albeit subtle mode of co-optation, where identity becomes integrated into a system, which ultimately progresses rather than fights the oppression/system that it aims to challenge (Hekman 2000).

In response, postmodernists have drawn extensively from Foucault’s theory of power, sexuality, and identity to argue that both power and identity are not centralized, but rather decentralized and inherent within power-structured relations. Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 1997), most notably, argues against a modernist subject, theorizing a politics of

performativity (i.e. gender performances constitute gender, but do not reflect a gendered subject) as a way to resist the pitfalls of identity politics. Hekman (2000) argues that Butler's theory embodies an abstract and untenable concept of resistance. Drawing on object relations theory, Hekman suggest that there exists a core self that is not essential, but rather relational, akin to Bourdieu's concept of the habitus that is more aligned with the process of identification (*with*) (Fuss 1995; Thompson 2004b). From this standpoint, she argues that an overt focus on identity is problematic for two reasons. First, illustrating a resistance to 'others' reveals that the universal citizen/subject is *not* othered. And second, if the relational subject is constituted by his or her sociocultural conditions, identities of identity politics cannot locate liberation in a system that is structured by those same sociocultural conditions; in other words, it is paradoxical to seek liberation from a system that precludes it in the first place. Accordingly, Hekman recommends a politics *beyond* identity, stipulating that political institutions cease to award benefits on the basis of identity and that activists move away from an (reified) identity politics toward one of identification. While it makes sense that activists would mobilize on the basis of their identified interests and ideologies rooted in their (relational) core selves, they are not susceptible to a fixed identity. Other research has similarly argued for an erasure of identity within the political realm (Brown 1995b; Zerilli 2005), contributing to the post-identity stream. Post-identity arguments are derived from the broader theoretical stream of post-politics, also known as 'post-democracy' and the 'post-political consensus' that speaks to the contemporary processes of depoliticization, whereby major issues of political and economic transformation in capitalist societies are deemed incomprehensible to the majority of the population (Badiou 1998/2001, 2005, 2006; Rancière 1999, 2010; Žižek 1999). This reflects back to the aforementioned criticism of NSMs, that they work within rather than against the capitalist system. Jodi Dean (2014: 266-267) summarizes this point:

[T]he real political problem today is that *the Left* accepts capitalism . . . When democracy appears as both the condition of politics and the solution to the political condition, capitalism cannot appear as the violence it is. Rather than assuming the underlying class conflict, one assumes a field generally fair and equal enough for

deliberation and voting to make sense, the basic assumption of post-politics [emphasis in original].

Badiou (1998/2001, 2005, 2006) contends the macro social totality (i.e. capitalism and the associated power structures) produce ideology, serving the interests of those in power and creating apolitical subjects. This is similarly reflected in Bourdieu's claims, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.4), whereby society is dominated by ideological apparatuses, emphasizing actors' dearth of agency. However, while Bourdieu's theory is undeniably pessimistic, rendering social movements futile via the notion of social reproduction, Badiou asserts that there exist moments, or '*events*', where social change is possible. These events (i.e. alternative sociohistoric conditions) create ruptures in the existing knowledge structure of a society ('*ideology*'), producing what Badiou refers to as the '*truth*'. Truth is what contests and elucidates structures of power, yet "the exact nature of the ethics and action resulting from the experience of truth is always locally and personally specific" (Earley 2014: 81). According to Earley (2014), Badiou succeeds in fashioning a new ontology, linking phenomenology and the subjective experience of ideology (Earley 2014). Thus while many post-politics and post-identity arguments are rooted in a romantic attachment to an abstract radical politics, (Cooper 2004; McNay 2010; Rancière 1999), other scholars within the post-political realm are more optimistic, following Badiou's lead. McNay (2010), for example, contends that a complete erasure of identity from the political realm may be 'theoretically precipitate'. She argues it may be pragmatically necessary to engage with experience and identity in order to move past a politics of recognition. Similarly, feminist standpoint theory, while largely disregarded in the social movement literature, draws on Marx's historical materialism theory to offer an identity politics, where personal subjectivity and felt oppression contribute to the development of a standpoint, from which collective action is premised (Harding 2004; Naples 2003).

Other NSM theorists argue that NSMs are not political in the conventional sense, but offer cultural benefits that supersede those of strictly political movements (Cerulo 1997;

Melucci 1989). From this point of view, NSMs are less concerned with *achieving* freedom or political emancipation, but are rather focused on the continual struggle towards liberation, seeking recognition and status with regard to identity and lifestyle (Bernstein 2005). This, according to Melucci (1989), is the strength of NSMs: challenging existing social relations predominant in the cultural realm, while avoiding political co-optation. Young (1990) deviates from the recognition versus redistribution dichotomy, arguing that the goal of NSMs is to seek participation in everyday social life. Further, subsequent research has argued that the integration of identity into the political sphere has led to a more robust theorization of how politicization functions even across nonpolitical terrains, directly engaging the self, subjective experience, and daily life as sites of political contestation (Kauffman 1990/2001: 23). Polletta and Jasper (2001), for example, highlight how collective identities can have significant and lasting implications on the institutional and political domain. And Nancy Fraser (1997, 1998; Fraser and Honneth 2003) argues for the integration of both redistributive policies and politics of recognition in a single comprehensive framework to overcome social injustice. Using gender as an illustrative example, Fraser demonstrates how gender inequality is rooted partly in economic arrangements and partly in society's culture, neither of which can be completely subsumed by the other. She proposes a bivalent conception of justice that connects both distribution and recognition by the notion of 'parity of participation', wherein "justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers" (Fraser and Honneth 2003: 36). These social arrangements require both adequate material resources (distribution) and institutional conditions ensuring equal opportunity for achieving social esteem (recognition). This trend also resonates with Bernstein's (1997) notion of 'identity deployment', which involves strategically deploying tactics that celebrate or suppress differences depending on the political conditions to incite institutional, cultural, and political change.

Furthermore, several studies within the consumer culture theory tradition, many of which were referred to in the previous chapters (e.g. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013;

Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Holt 2002; King and Pearce 2010; Kozinets and Handelman 2004; Thompson and Üstüner 2015; Varman and Belk 2009) illustrate how the goals of recognition and redistribution are dialectically linked “most particularly when consumers’ identity work is directed toward transforming marketplace structures in ways that serve their collective interests” (Thompson 2014: iii). In contrast, other research has argued that identity-oriented movements, particularly those focused on status and recognition, can lead to the commodification of protest (Chasin 2000; Kauffman 1990/2001; Lehr 1999), perpetuating identity-based consumption that undermines their transformative possibilities. Collins (1998) approaches this issue from a slightly different angle, arguing that identity politics have become co-opted via the notion of diversity itself, where the reified identity (i.e. the black woman) becomes “a commodity exchanged in the marketplace of ideas” (54), without altering structural power (Bernstein 2005). This type of marketplace co-optation is commonplace among today’s neoliberal NSMs and is explored in the next section, with regard to the feminist movement.

## **4.2 The Marketization of the Feminist Social Movement**

The concept of co-optation is often attributed to Philip Selznick’s (1949) seminal case study that explores how the Tennessee Valley Authority’s (TVA) co-opted a grassroots ideology to push its electric power generation agenda forward by collaborating with land-grant colleges and the U.S. Farm Service Bureau. This allowed TVA to market itself and win local support as a regional organization, rather than as an appendage of the federal government. However, it also led to a series of unintended consequences, given that the external stakeholders dictated much of the policy and decision making in TVA. Accordingly, Selznick (1949: 219) argues that co-optation involves “the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence”, but warns that it “reflects a state of tension between formal authority and social power.” Hence, while the notion of co-optation – at least in the realm of consumption research – is generally assimilated with the market forces of corporatization and commercialization (Hebdige



1979; Maclaran 2012; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007), it is, in fact, much more encompassing and includes processes of institutionalization (Andrew 2010; Staggenborg 1988), incorporation (Hebdige 1979), and professionalization (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977).

The process of co-optation is generally viewed as problematic for two reasons. The first implies that co-optation leads to a significance power imbalance, which typically favors the larger and more powerful institution(s) or corporation(s) that appropriate or acquire the 'subordinate' group, culture, company, or party. The second necessarily involves the presence of threat, whereby the co-opted group may lose its impact and future gains, given that it is forced to comply with the ethos of the institution that co-opted it (Coy and Hedeem 2005). In general, the extant research on co-optation can be divided into two streams, which highlight either the positive (Andrew 2010; Banaszak 2009; Goldstone 2003; Markoff 1996/2015; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; Valenzuela 1989) or negative (Piven and Cloward 1971; Pereira et al. 1993; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Coy and Hedeem 2005; Gamson 1990) effects, but rarely both. Additionally, co-optation can be understood in terms of type, that is, political co-optation, general formalization, or commercial co-optation, as are outlined in the preceding subsections.

#### **4.2.1 Political Co-Optation**

Much of the research that focuses on political co-optation refers to the process of institutionalization. Institutionalization in this context refers to when a social movement becomes integrated into the rules, policies, and practices of the state, becoming a recognized actor in the institutionalized political system (Katzenstein 1998: 198; Tilly 1978). In particular, an extensive body of work has explored the effects of social movements and/or special interests of social movements becoming co-opted by the state (see Goldstone 2003). Many studies have reported the downsides of political co-optation, with regard to effects of demobilization (Piven and Cloward 1971), a lack of radical political protest (Pereira et al. 1993), and a reformulation of radical goals, inasmuch as

oppositional parties are pushed towards the moderate political center (Coy and Hedeem 2005; Gamson 1990; Meyer and Tarrow 1998). Other research has indicated the importance of this dependency (i.e. between of social movements and political parties) in shaping the political context and achieving democratization (Goldstone 2003; Markoff 1996/2015; Valenzuela 1989).

With respect to the women's movement, Costain and Costain (1987) and Freeman (1987) discuss how this type of political co-optation occurred in the 1980s, when the women's movement became co-opted by political parties, rendering its policies and initiatives subject to elections. Costain and Costain (1987) contend that during the 'formative period' of the (ostensibly, second-wave) women's movement, between 1966 and 1972, social movement tactics did not involve political parties, inasmuch as "the protesters saw parties as integral parts of an oppressive patriarchal system" (197). This is not to suggest that there did not exist any 'insider' (i.e. working through political elites) strategies; in fact, this tactical duality of insider versus outsider (i.e. protests) has been present since the first-wave women's suffrage movement, rather the social movement organizations (SMOs) tended to adopt non-partisan, non-sectarian positions. However, by the mid-1970s, the Vietnam War ended and political protests began fading from the political landscape in the U.S. Additionally, despite the fact that women had won the right to vote, there was still a prominent gender gap between male and female voters, which required significant resources if it was to be changed, such as financial support and media attention (Costain and Costain 1987). This led to an alignment between the National Organization of Women (NOW) and the Democratic Party in the 1980s. Since then, feminism has become partisan in nature and remains closely aligned with the Democratic party, while the countermovement, antifeminism, is generally associated with the Republican party or the New Right (Freeman 1987). The political institutionalization of the women's movement has received mixed support. On the one hand, it has been viewed as beneficial in terms of helping the women's movement gaining legitimacy in electoral politics. On the other hand, this co-optation presents difficulties in terms of engendering bi-partisan support,

which is traditionally required for successful interest groups and social movements (Costain and Costain 1987).

Clemens (1993), among others (Banaszak 1998; Goldstone 2003), present a differentiated analysis, describing how first wave feminism was able to escape political co-optation by inventing novel forms of political organization and by deploying familiar organization forms in unfamiliar ways via unfamiliar groups. This involved rejecting existing forms of political organization and adopting nonpartisan models for political purposes, such as unions, clubs, parliaments, lobby groups, and corporations. By the 1920s, however, the two branches of the first-wave women's movement had formed established organizations, which subsequently became associated with the political parties in the U.S. (Freeman 1987).

#### **4.2.2 Formalization of Social Movements**

In a similar vein, much research has explored what happens when social movements – or rather certain aspects of social movements – become professionalized and formalized. McAdam (1982: 55) discusses how formal movement organizations become susceptible to incessant outside control that effectively reduces their impetus for change:

Having mobilized the resource support needed to create a formal organizational structure, insurgents still face the challenge of sustaining that structure over time. ... supplementary support must be drawn from outside sources. The establishment of external support linkages, however, grants considerable control over movement affairs to the source from which the resources are obtained. ... the establishment of external support linkages threatens to tame the movement by encouraging insurgents to pursue only those goals acceptable to external sponsors. The latter course of action may insure the survival of the movement – or at least of its organizational offshoots – but only at the cost of reducing its effectiveness as a force for social change.

Social movements become professionalized as increased sources of funding become available for activists to make careers as paid leaders (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Staggenborg 1988). On the one hand, the professional institutionalization of a social movement may indicate its successful progression into a more latent and profitable phase

(Andrew 2010). These arguments expand upon Tarrow's (1994) characterization of social movements as waves or cycles, wherein social movements are said to progress towards institutionalization (Lang and Lang 1961; Staggenborg 1988; Turner and Killian 1957), and/or become subject to different strategies (i.e. confrontational, organizational, and electoral) (Costain 1992), or visible and latent phases (Della Porta and Diani 1999/ 2006; Melucci 1996). Staggenborg (1988) finds the professionalization of SMOs can contribute to the longevity of organizations and lead to increased coalitions among other formalized SMOs. On the other hand, it could also indicate a lack of volunteers/members associated with the movement, thus necessitating its transformation into the professional realm (Messer-Davidow 2002; Piven and Cloward 1977). Trumpy (2008) further notes how a move towards professionalization and institutional tactics can render SMOs more susceptible to corporate co-optation.

During the second-wave feminist movement two mainstay social movement organizations were established, namely, the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). By the late 1970s, a number of additional special interest groups had emerged, resulting in self-help groups, rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, and women's studies programs in academia, for example. In response, counter social movement organizations began rising to the fore, such as the Eagle Forum and Concerned Women for America (Chafetz and Dworkin 1987; Chafetz, Dworkin, and Swanson 1986; Ryan 1992).

Other research has examined what happens when an SMO's discourse or ideology is co-opted by another SMO. For example, Burke and Bernstein (2014) argue that the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community co-opted queer discourses to advocate for same-sex marriage. This worked to subvert the queer movement's agenda, which focused on promoting reciprocal beneficiary relationships (RBR) and advocated recognition for alternative family types (i.e. outside of marriage). Katzenstein (1998) also moves beyond the argument that institutionalization is relegated to the state to examine

the nuanced spatial institutionalization of the feminist movement in two unique organizational environments, the Catholic Church and the military. Katzenstein argues that the intra-institutional as well as extra-institutional norms and opportunities influence a movement and affect how it is experienced among institutional members.

By the beginning of the third-wave movement in the late 1980s, feminism had become largely professionalized, institutionalized, and intellectualized, constituting what Meyer and Tarrow (1998) identify as a ‘normal politics’. This transition has signified what has been regarded by Francis Fukuyama (1992/2006) as the end of Western liberal democracy (‘the end of history’).

#### **4.2.3 Corporate Co-Optation**

The Western world has experienced a shift away from a sovereign state towards neoliberal politics, emphasizing “the merits of free markets, free trade, deregulation, and privatization, and the corresponding growth of corporate power, [which] has prompted many SMOs to shift attention from the state to corporate actors in order to bring about desired social change” (Trumpy 2008: 480). Accordingly, this has led to more varied analyses of co-optation that exceed the simplistic and dichotomous view of the authorities (the state) versus the challengers (the social movement activists) (Andrew 2010; Banaszak 2009; Chappell 2002; Van Dyke, Soule, and Taylor 2004).

Kozinets and Handelman (2004: 703) argue that “differentiating between style-based countercultures on the one hand and movements that seek to undermine ... ideology on the other will reveal how ... [movements] are actually different from resistant communities... who seek temporary community and authenticity through acts of consumption”. However, these lines of difference become blurred when taking into account the nature of corporate co-optation, wherein countercultural practices and symbolic forms of socio-cultural resistance become co-opted by corporate interests and sold as ‘alternative’ lifestyle choices; when ideology and consumption are no longer

separable notions, but are rather co-constitutive of one another (McAlexander et al. 2014). Further, Dick Hebdige (1979), who is particularly well-known for his work on subcultures, argues that subcultures are subordinate groups that resist and challenge hegemony, primarily by way of style: “The objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed... at the profoundly superficial level of appearances: that is, at the level of signs” (Hebdige 1979: 17). Accordingly, movements and countercultures have increasingly come to reflect to subcultures and more specifically, subcultures of consumption, which have the ability to shape the marketplace (Goulding and Saren 2007)

A subculture of consumption can be understood as self-selected group on the basis of some shared consumption values, which exhibits a homogeneous ethos of core values, expressions, and practices, as well as an identifiable hierarchal social structure based on authenticity and a shared commitment towards a particular ideology of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). This phenomenon has been (largely uncritically) examined with respect to youth culture (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; McRobbie 2000), gays and lesbians (Kates 2002, 2004; Weston 1993), goths and punks (Fox 1987; Goulding and Saren 2007; Hebdige 1979), Harley Davidson enthusiasts (Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander 2006; Schouten and McAlexander 1995) and mass media centered subcultures, such as *Star Trek* (Kozinets 2001, 2007) and *Sex and the City* (Arthurs 2010) fans. Subsequent calls have been made to account for more contexts and diverse subcultural members (Martin, Schouten, and McAlexander 2006; Thompson 2002). Schouten, Martin, and McAlexander (2007) argue specifically for a theory of subcultural evolution that works to broaden the original monolithic definition offered by Schouten and McAlexander (1995) to include a complex “mosaic of microcultures” (69), stemming from the market itself. Thus, not only do subcultures influence the market, but so too does the market influence a plurality of subcultures.

Not all subcultures of consumption can be conceived as counter-hegemonies with an intent to subvert societal norms for political reasons; indeed, some subcultures are much

more identitarian in nature, corresponding to NSMs which tend to seek recognition, as was discussed in the previous section. However, for those subcultures intent on challenging hegemony, the process of corporate co-optation can have detrimental effects that lead to diffusion via incorporation. According to Hebdige (1979) this occurs in two ways, ideologically and/or commercially by way of the media and the market, respectively. From an ideological standpoint, the media plays an influential role in either damning or trivializing subcultures, framing them as vulgar spectacles (highlighting differences) or as ordinary people (emphasizing sameness). And from a commodification position, a subcultural style becomes translated into widely accessible (mass-produced) commodities that signify the subculture and contribute to a company's bottom line. In both instances, the subculture is given new meaning, which allows for it to be located within what Stuart Hall (1977) refers to as 'the dominant framework of meanings' (Hebdige 1979: 94). Goulding and Saren (2007) expand on Hebdige (1979) to suggest that subcultures become commodified following a three-step process. The first stage is '*rebellion*', which presupposes the emergence and subsequent adoption of a subculture that is perceived to be outside the mainstream; this stage includes Hebdige's (1979: 94) initial two processes of 'commodification' (the conversion of subcultural signs into mass-produced objects) and 'ideological redefinition' (the labeling or redefining of deviant behavior by dominant groups, e.g. the media). The second stage involves '*fragmentation*', wherein a subculture or movement breaks up into smaller groups and a proliferation of products emerge to service each individual segment. The final stage is '*commodification*', whereby the subculture becomes widely accessible and appropriated by the mainstream and becomes reified by way of its symbols and products.

Recently, research has begun to consider the marketization of more traditional institutions, which has instigated more critical evaluations. As mentioned, McAlexander et al. (2014) discuss the marketization of religion, indicating that "ample evidence points to the marketization of many, if not most of society's traditional institutions" (858). Marketization in this context involves "the infusion of market logic" (865) into traditional

institutions, which transforms them into a constellation of marketplace offerings (i.e. products and services) from which consumers can fashion an identity. Accordingly, this leads to a process they identify as the ‘detraditionalization’ of social institutions, where individuals become responsible for constructing his or her own personal identity. “Traditions no longer automatically steer this construction process, but are only possibilities together with other choices from which an individual must choose” (Boeve 2005: 104-105, as cited in McAlexander et al. 2014: 859). The authors deduce that ideology and consumption are mutually reinforcing, rendering traditional institutions and the like, largely indistinguishable from subcultures of consumption. To this end, many consumption studies report on the positive effects that consumption, and by implication marketization, has had in terms of overcoming gender norms (Thompson and Üstüner 2015), Western consumerism (Izberk-Bilgin 2012), fat stigmatizations (Scaraboto and Fischer 2013), stigmatized religious consumption practices (Sandikci and Ger 2010), and racial inequalities (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004). However, McAlexander et al. (2015) paint a slightly different picture, arguing that the marketization of a traditional institution has notable destabilizing effects for those who have made significant investments within that institution, which may ultimately result in the severance of ties and “shattered identity projects” (Üstüner and Holt 2007, as cited in McAlexander et al. 2014: 870).

In considering the corporate co-optation of social movements more explicitly, some research has highlighted the positive effects. For example, Trumpy (2008) analyzed the movement-firm relationship by way of a case study that looked at the partnership between Greenpeace and Coca-Cola. Trumpy demonstrates how, through co-optation, SMOs can acquire more legitimacy, resources, and media attention, which allows SMOs to gain leverage on corporations and thus interject their policy agendas. Similarly, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) show how the organic food movement has benefitted from commercialization by generating a countervailing market (community-supported agriculture) that promotes the countercultural ethos of the movement. While acknowledging that status seeking does play a role in some consumers’ affinity with the



movement, inasmuch as ‘rebellion’ is often ideologically synonymous with elitist contemporary cultural practices, the authors contend that it nonetheless exposes consumers to a countervailing ideology that engenders societally redeeming benefits. They further advise precautions in conceptualizing commercialism as a hegemon, since all countercultures invariably exist within the system of capitalism. In this way, Thompson and Coskuner-Balli (2007) situate the countervailing market system as a ‘local alternative’ in opposition to global polit-brands that are promoted on the basis of their politicized (often leftist) associations that are conceptualized as ‘socially responsible capitalism’ or ‘corporate caretaking’ (Loe 1999; O’Guinn and Muniz 2005). While both are the result of corporate co-optation, polit-brands have been accused of depoliticizing social movements, given that they tend to oversimplify solutions to disembodied social issues, reducing them to a form of tangible consumption that similarly works to reduce consumers’ feelings of guilt over their consumption lifestyles (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007).

These examples notwithstanding, the majority of research focuses on the downsides of co-optation: when a corporation benefits from co-opting an SMO without acquiescing to its demands or furthering its aims (Trumpy 2008). A commonly cited effect associated with the corporate co-optation of social movements is the dilution and weakening of a social movement’s impetus (Clark 2003; Ewen 1988; Jaffee 2012). This has been evidenced by a plethora of corporate purpose-driven or cause-related marketing efforts, wherein institutions and corporations co-opt social movements – or aspects of social movements – with the primary intent of producing revenue, but not necessarily furthering the SMO’s aims. Stole (2008: 34) defines these marketing strategies as corporate window dressing, or “cleverly designed marketing ploy[s] to mask some of the fundamental problems for which the very same marketing forces are directly or indirectly responsible”. These deceptions have been referred to, for instance as ‘greenwashing’ when corporations co-opt the environmentalist or ecology movement (Beder 1997); ‘bluwashing’ to publicize a partnership between a company and the United Nations (UN) (Laufer 2003); ‘fair-washing’ (Jaffee 2012; Renard 2005) or ‘clean washing’ (Raynolds 2009) in relation

to espousing fair-trade as a marketing strategy; and ‘pinkwashing’, when corporations co-opt either the LGBTQ movement<sup>23</sup> (Puar 2011; Schulman 2011) or attempt to demonstrate their adherence to the fight against breast cancer (Lubitow and Davis 2011; Malkan 2007). In particular, the latter use of pinkwashing indicates how corporate co-optation explicitly manifests itself in women’s movements, which has generated mixed opinions, as are explored below.

#### **4.2.3.1 Marketing Contemporary Feminism**

Scott (2005) demonstrates how marketing has been integral to the women’s movement since its very inception, when many first-wave suffragists readily marketed themselves to convey the message of the movement and realize financial rewards. Not only were many suffragists paid to give speeches and appearances, but some also benefitted greatly from their celebrity status, such as Amelia Bloomer for her fashion design (Bloomers) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton who appeared in national advertising campaigns for Fairy Soap. In contrast, second-wave feminists attempted to establish distance from consumerism, often lambasting the mass media and marketplace for furthering a patriarchal agenda (Friedan 1963). In particular, Betty Friedan’s (1963) book, *The Feminine Mystique*, lambasted advertisers for perpetuating gender stereotypes and manipulating female consumers. This led to “an organized all-out assault of the advertising industry” (Craig 1997), including sit-ins, boycotts, and placing stickers on sexist ads indicating their exploitive content, for example. Advertisers soon caught on and by the late 1960s began moving away from stereotypical and objectifying portrayals of women as housewives or sexual objects to incorporate themes of liberation and empowerment into their ad campaigns (Craig 1997; Goldman, Heath and Smith 1991; Maclaran 2012). An ad for Virginia Slims (cigarettes) was among the first to explicitly market the women’s movement, evidenced by the slogan “you’ve come a long way, baby”, with other ad campaigns following suit. Others took a slightly different approach by advertising counter

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<sup>23</sup> This use of the term ‘pinkwashing’ typically refers to a deliberate Israeli strategy, whereby LGBTQ rights are promoted, in order to deflect attention from the ongoing violations of Palestinians’ human rights and to demonstrate their commitment to Western ‘democratic’ ideals.

stereotypes depicting women engaged in traditional male roles (Craig 1997). Importantly, however, this was done in such a way that was non-threatening, appealing, and above all, profitable for companies, thus paradoxically subsuming feminism (a counter-hegemony) into the dominant logic of the market. Additionally, those formalized feminist SMOs (profit and non-for-profit) that arose during the second-wave movement were forced to adapt to the dynamisms of the movement and thus the marketplace, although some were more successful than others and many of these early organizations eventually shut down (Loe 1999; Thomas and Zimmerman 2007). Furthering this trend, third wave feminism has been described as a celebration of the marketplace (Maclaran 2012). Applying the tenets of neoliberalism, the contemporary feminist movement has given rise to what Ewen (1988) describes as the ‘commodity self’, where a person is increasingly defined on the surface by what they have, rather than what they do. Third-wave feminism is thus “characterized by the reconciliation of feminism and consumption, a reconciliation that links empowerment to sexual expressiveness and purchasing power” (Maclaran 2012: 466), suggesting the salient linkages between the feminist social movement, consumption, and media culture.

This has given rise to what is known as postfeminism, that is, a phenomenon or a set of assumptions that acknowledge the ‘past-ness’ of feminism (Gill 2008a, 2007b; McRobbie 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2011; Tasker and Negra 2007). Often equated to that of a neoliberal sensibility, postfeminism emphasizes notions of individuality, the body, self-surveillance, empowerment, choice, and agency (Gill 2008a). In general, postfeminism can be understood in one of two ways. On the one hand, it is considered synonymous with ‘third-wave feminism’, believed to transcend past issues deemed central to the former second-wave feminist movement to include additional intersectional subjectivities (i.e. alternative sexualities, ages, body-types, races, and ethnicities) (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Heywood and Drake 1997; Scott 2005); in this way it is celebrated as being progressive and transgressive. For example, this is evidenced in the ‘love your body’ (LYB) discourses that have emerged over the past decade, which aim to positively affirm

women's self-image and self-esteem by celebrating various portrayals of beauty (Gill and Elias 2014). Dove's campaigns for 'Real Beauty' is one of the best known advertising campaigns drawing on such discourses and has generated many competing responses. On the one hand, such a shift is lauded for its attempt to challenge the status quo around beauty stereotypes, reducing the gap between reality and advertising (Millard 2009). Millard (2009) further argues that these ads, even when viewed in a negative light, spark conversations that empower women to critique the media culture. On the other hand, some have argued that such discourses have engendered a shift from "bodily to psychic regulation" (Gill and Elias 2014: 180), or rather, a combination of both (Murray 2012), whereby:

No longer is it enough to work on and discipline the body, but in today's society the beautiful body must be accompanied by a beautiful mind, with suitably upgraded and modernized postfeminist attitudes to the self. Women must makeover not simply their bodies but now – thanks to LYB discourse – their subjectivity as well, embracing an affirmative confident disposition, no matter how they actually feel (Gill and Elias 2014: 185).

Murray (2012) argues that the employment of such discourses are evidence of cause marketing, which contributes to a sort of paradox, inasmuch as these companies rely on the dissatisfaction of women's bodies in order to sell their products.

This gives way to the second, and more common interpretation of postfeminism: that which reflects a naturalized, arbitrary, and taken-for-granted ideology (Hall 1977), reinforcing Connell's (1987) proposition that hegemonic masculinity (and emphasized femininity) defines the overarching ideology, masquerading as type of 'advanced' feminist society. By invoking feminism, the media perpetuates this postfeminist sensibility, which presupposes that gender equality has been achieved, thus displacing the need for a feminist social movement (Tasker and Negra 2007). This is perpetuated by the fact that this sensibility has emerged among a generation of young women who are not necessarily privy to the struggles of their foremothers, since they were born into an era that affords many of them opportunities, domestically, in the workplace, and in

accordance with women's growing financial independence (Gill 2008b; Scharff 2012; Walker 1995).

In response to this phenomenon, new repertoires of meanings (McRobbie 2004b, 2011) have come to the fore, particularly by way of the media. Goldman (1992) describes how contemporary feminism has become subject to the commodity form in a process akin to Marx's (1867/2013) commodity fetishism, which points to the ways in which social relationships that are central to production are concealed. Riordan (2001: 284) adds that "Marx's theory of the commodity is important because it establishes the idea that *appearance may conceal reality*" [emphasis added]. This gives way to Goldman's (1992: 133) notion of 'commodity feminism', which is intended to signify the co-optation of feminist values into the commodity form "so that it threatens neither patriarchal nor capitalist hegemony". In other words, a 'feminist' commodity works to conceal the patriarchal (and capitalist) reality. This view further demonstrates how the women's movement has come to reflect a subculture of consumption structured around a consumption ideology rather than a political one. Smythe (1977: 4) takes this argument one step further in conceptualizing audiences as commodities of the media:

As collectivities these audiences are commodities. As commodities they are dealt with in markets by producers and buyers (the latter being advertisers). ... Both these markets and the audience commodities traded in are specialized. The audience commodities bear specifications known in the business as 'the demographics'. The specifications for the audience commodities include age, sex, income level, family composition, urban or rural location, ethnic character, ownership of home, automobile, credit card status, social class and, in the case of hobby and fan magazines, a dedication to photography, model electric trains, sports cars, philately, do-it-yourself crafts, foreign travel, kinky sex, etc.

Accordingly, marketers subdivide women into market segments based on the aforementioned demographics to sell commodities vis-à-vis different ideologies of 'feminism' or, rather, 'postfeminism' (Goldman 1992). This has given rise to the fragmentation of the feminist movement – characteristic of most NSMs (Haenfler 2004) – resulting in a number of 'marketized ideologies' or 'brands' that capitalize on issues of

female empowerment and sexuality (Riordan 2001). In effect, these marketized ideologies reflect what Schroeder (2006, 2015) has referred to as the consumption of difference ('consuming difference'), whereby ad campaigns highlight various cultural codes to signify an identity (or subculture) that emphasizes difference, i.e. alternatives to the mainstream. In this way, the feminist social movement has become "characterized by multiple embedded and sometimes conflicting, narrative identities derived from, and manifested in simultaneously and sequentially occurring dialogues" (Humphreys and Brown 2002: 437), driven primarily by way of the media. These identities are explored in the following chapter.

### **4.3 Summary**

By delineating a two-step process, this chapter presents a comprehensive overview as to how macro ideologies are communicated via meso level cultural production systems: first through social movements and second, by way of social movement co-optation. Focusing on a marketized social movement contributes to the CCT literature by responding to Sandikci and Ger's (2010) call that more research should focus on the processes of co-optation and mainstreaming. As this chapter demonstrates, co-optation of the feminist movement is not specific to the contemporary movement, but has been ongoing since its very inception, albeit in many different forms. More recent, is the infiltration of the marketplace, leading to the commercial co-optation or marketization of traditional institutions (like social movements), which consequently become reduced to subcultures of consumption. Adhering to the literature on NSMs, such a transformation evokes concern with regard to the political efficacy of these movements. Yet, this speaks to a broader debate with regard to the political and social effects of co-optation and institutionalization, where on the one hand, institutionalization can be indicative of a movement's success, as it implies the progressive reconstruction of social and institutional structures (Cohen and Arato 1992). These successions can facilitate future activism, which may ultimately contribute to the incremental progression of social movements. On the other hand, many scholars equate institutionalization with the end of a movement,

which implies pejorative notions of routinization, inclusion, and marginalization (Meyer 1993; Meyer and Tarrow 1998).

Similarly, there are mixed views with respect to the marketization of the contemporary feminist movement, where patriarchal and feminist ideologies have simultaneously divided and synthesized to produce fragments or brands of ideology, resulting in a number of 'marketized ideologies'. How consumers might go about negotiating these marketized ideologies in light of their commitments to the feminist social movement is considered in the next chapter.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### MICRO: IDENTITY AND ADVERTISING INTERPRETATIONS

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This chapter is the last of three constituting the literature review of this thesis. The previous two chapters explored the notion of ideology on a macro level and considered how ideology is communicated through a (meso level) co-opted social movement. This chapter focuses on the micro level, seeking to understand the role that ideology plays among individuals. Beginning with a broad overview of identity projects as they have been considered in CCT, it then hones in on how identity has been considered in relation to social movements, particularly, the feminist social movement. Given the empirical focus on sexual narratives and interpretations of sexual content in advertising, the chapter concludes with how sex and sexuality have been approached in CCT, and reviews research on sexual advertising consumption and interpretations.

#### 5.1 Identity Projects

The concept of ‘identity’ is an elusive one at best and varies depending on the discipline and philosophical tradition under which it is employed. Within the realm of consumer culture theory, identity has been primarily explored from a ‘*postmodern*’ perspective, which, according to Firat and Venkatesh (1995:250) is:

concerned with the issues of construction of the modern subject, the distinction between object and symbol, the idea of truth as construction, the notion of spectacularization of life, the creation of the hyperreal, the cultural signification and anesthetization of life, the role of language and communication forms as opposed to cognitive forms, and the primacy of consumption over production, or, more accurately with the effacement of the difference between production and consumption.

Postmodernity is often directed against ‘*modernity*’, which emphasizes a single and objective reality and grants affordance to meta-narratives and structures that determine a



Cartesian subject (Firat and Venkatesh 1995)<sup>24</sup>. While postmodern perspectives advocate a break from modernity, others argue that society has merely entered another phase of modernity and that it is better characterized in terms of ‘late’ or ‘high modernity’ (Giddens 1990). This view suggests that the key features of modernity have become intensified given processes associated with globalization and reflexivity, where traditions and institutions no longer serve as uncontested guides to how individuals should act. In light of this, individuals are believed to engage in a perpetual process of reevaluation and reflexivity that leads to the fragmentation and instability of culture. In a similar vein, Zygmunt Bauman (2000) suggests we are in a state of ‘*liquid modernity*’, where “social structures that ‘limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behavior’ are no longer stable and have a shortened life expectancy; thus ‘they cannot serve as frames of reference for human actions and long-term life strategies’” (Bauman 2007: 1, in Bardhi, Eckhardt, and Arnould 2012: 512). From this perspective, nothing has long-term value; possessions, institutions, identity projects, and social movements are rapidly changed and discarded. Bourdieu’s philosophy also serves as a welcome corrective to postmodern CCT tendencies, given his emphasis on social structures that impact, but do not fully encapsulate individual’s identity projects (Firat and Venkatesh 1995).

Central to this discussion is the concept of the ‘subject’, which in postmodernity is rejected as a modernist narrative: identity is deconstructed and individuals have no ‘core’ identity (Butler 1994; Firat and Venkatesh 1995). Non-postmodernists typically acknowledge some semblance of a ‘core self’ (Giddens 1991; Belk 1988; Hekman 2000), although it is often conceptualized as relational, reflexive, and/or socially constructed

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<sup>24</sup> At this point, it is worth distinguishing between modernism/postmodernism and modernity/postmodernity; while the former typically refer to different historical periods in relation to style, art, and architecture, for example (modernism beginning in the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century and postmodernism in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century), the latter refer to philosophical frameworks that may be viewed as two opposite ends of a continuum that entail diverse ontological and epistemological assumptions (Giddens 1990). Notably, there does not appear to be a general consensus with regard to which terms represent the historical period and which terms symbolize the philosophical frameworks, thus from here on out, the variations of ‘modern/postmodernity’ and ‘postmodern/postmodernity’ are intended to reflect the philosophical tradition.

rather than essential or God-given. These competing viewpoints do not necessarily alter how identity projects are studied and conceptualized, at least within the realm of CCT, which focuses on “coconstitutive, coproductive ways in which consumers, working with marketer-generated materials, forge a coherent if diversified and often fragmented sense of self” (Arnould and Thompson 2005: 871). Often, narrative and storytelling methods are employed as a way to understand the dialogic relations between one’s subjective selfhood and the cultural context that includes marketer-generated materials (i.e. structures, institutions, artifacts, etc.) (Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988; Chen 2012). However, these perspectives do specify distinct instances of ‘emancipation’ or ‘liberation’ efforts.

While those engaging in a postmodern tradition typically advocate micro-emancipatory acts via perpetual deconstructions and reconstructions (e.g. of gender, sexuality, etc.) (Butler 1994; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Murray and Ozanne 1991, 2006), those adopting a more modernist philosophical stance tend to advocate grand emancipatory projects rooted in moral utopianism and leftist politics, which attempt to overthrow meta- or localized narratives (Lyotard 1979/1984), such as capitalism or patriarchy (Cova, Maclaran, and Bradshaw 2013; Hetrick and Lozada 1994). In this way, postmodern perspectives generate more (often individuated) instances of emancipation via people’s daily enactments and interactions (i.e. consumption), whereas modern perspectives place more emphasis on idealistic forms of collective action to overthrow grander institutions, systems, and/or structures. Following the theoretical and critical orientations of this research outlined in Chapter 3, this thesis aligns itself with the latter perspective; it adopts a ‘modernist’ perspective on identity that assumes a core subject, albeit one that is emergent and socially and historically constructed, similar to Bourdieu’s notion of the habitus<sup>25</sup> (Nash 1990; Skeggs 2004b). Since the scholarship on identity in the CCT discipline alone is expansive, the following sections focus explicitly on how identity

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<sup>25</sup> Bourdieu’s theory does not recognize a ‘self’, however, many argue the habitus offers a model of self that incorporates elements of both structure and agency (Skeggs 2004b).

relates to the meso cultural production systems considered in this study, i.e. social movements and the media (advertisements).

### 5.1.1 Identity and Social Movements

With the introduction of new social movement theories, increasing attention has been placed on the sociological and psychological aspects of identity (Stryker, Owens, and White 2000). In the context of social movement theory, much work has examined ‘collective identity’ and ‘social identity’. Collective identity refers to the (often implicitly held) commonalities and shared beliefs about membership, boundaries, and the activities of a broader community, category, practice, and/or institution (Johnston, Laraña, and Gusfield 1994; Polletta and Jasper 2001). Social identity is “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1978: 63). Thus, while related, collective identity is distinguished from social identity, inasmuch as the former is a *collective belief*, stressing the commonalities of a group as a whole (Melucci 1989), whereas the latter is an *individual belief*, emphasizing an individual’s identity in relation to the group, inciting intergroup differentiation (Hogg and Abrams 1990). Accordingly, these two notions require two distinct levels of analysis: the collective (meso) and the individual (micro) (Klandermans and de Weerd 2000).

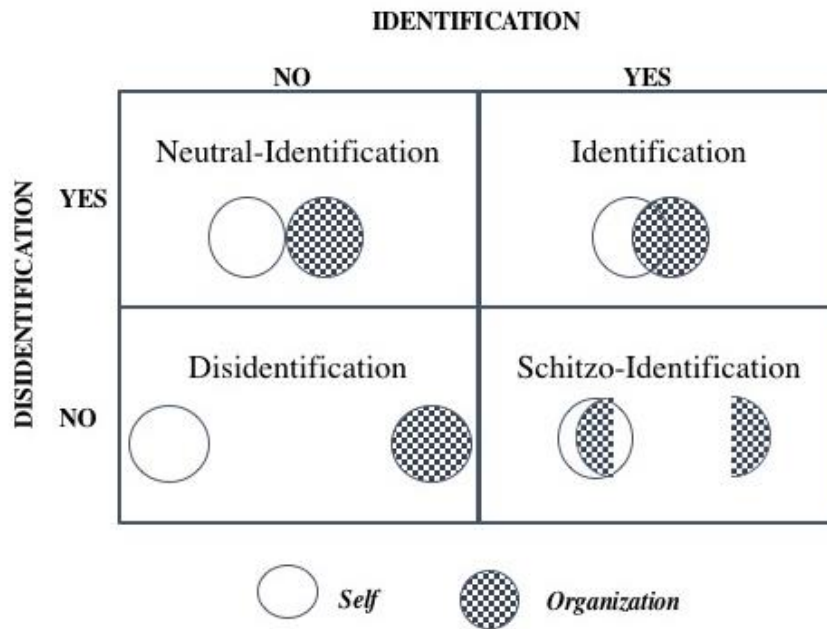
However, as explicated in Chapter 4, NSMs are becoming increasingly individuated, diffused, and fragmented (Haenfler 2004). Thus, while some claim that those individuals identifying with a ‘cause’, as opposed to an explicitly defined group or organization, do not constitute a collective identity (Klandermans and de Weerd 2000), other research has found that an increasing amount of social commitments are based on establishing a collective identity that acts independently of institutions or social movement organizations (Haenfler 2004). Thus, commitments to social movements, like subcultures of consumption, are increasingly expressed via cultural materials and signifiers, such as names, rituals, clothing, consumption practices, symbols, etc. (Polletta and Jasper 2001).

Further, as society moves away from traditional institutions (McAlexander et al. 2014), including social movement organizations, collectivities become much more fragmented and thus difficult to study. Accordingly, this calls for the subjective studies of institutions (Parsons 1990), where aggregate micro analyses of individual and beliefs and identifications may provide insight into the dynamics of an organization or collectivity (Coleman 1990).

Additionally, as NSMs continually push beyond the structures of traditional institutions (Tarrow 1998), conceptualizations of what constitutes a social movement, an organization, and a collectivity need to be broadened and interlinked. This entails a more expansive definition of a social movement that might be understood in terms of Bourdieu's (1986/2011) notion of a field, or what Scaraboto and Fischer (2012:1236) refer to as "organizational fields", which comprise a set of institutions that "refer to the persistent practices, understandings, and rules shared by actors in an organizational field". In the context of this research, this field might be understood as the 'feminist social movement', which is made up of various marketized enactments, taste structures, and brands (i.e. subcultural feminism, girlie feminism, anti-feminism, and etc.). How individuals relate to this dynamic field is addressed in the next subsection.

Taking these conditions into account, the scholarship on 'organizational identification' is helpful, as it extends the work on group identification to examine individuals' cognitive links to an organizations' identity based on their perception of self (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; March and Simon 1958). Research on organizational identification has been largely conceptualized as a *positive* identification that is dependent on the perceived overlap between oneself (personal identity) and an organization (organization's identity). Thus, much research has examined how individuals identify (define their self-concepts) vis-à-vis their connections with an organization, social group, or brand community (Abrams and Hogg 1990; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Muñiz and Schau 2005; Tajfel 1982). However, more recently, scholars have begun

to note the limitations of this narrow positive viewpoint, inasmuch as it fails to take into account the complex processes associated with organizational identification. This is particularly the case in modern society, where individuals, organizations, and organizational fields have become increasingly complex, evolving, and incongruent (Elsbach 1999; Pratt 1998). Accordingly, research has begun to consider expanded models of organizational identification that theorize multiple ways of identifying with organizations (Kreiner and Ashforth 2004). Elsbach (1999) was one of the first to conceptualize a new taxonomy of identification, which has been confirmed by subsequent empirical work (Ashforth et al. 2007; Ashforth et al. 2013; DiSanza and Bullis 1999; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001; Kreiner and Ashforth 2004; Pratt 2000). This taxonomy is reproduced in Figure 5.1 below:



**Figure 5.1:** Expanded Model of Organizational Identification  
*Adapted from: Elsbach (1999: 177) and Kreiner and Ashforth (2004: 6)*

Elsbach (1999) proposes four types of organizational identification. ‘*Organizational identification*’ is understood as one’s perceived connection and overlap with an organization’s identity. Most empirical research has examined this theoretical construct,

either directly (e.g. Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Pratt 1998; Press and Arnould 2011; Rousseau 1998), via brand communities (e.g. McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn 2001; Muñiz and Schau 2005; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007) and/or through subcultures (e.g. Goulding and Saren 2007; Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Kozinets 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). '*Organizational disidentification*' is based on the perceived incongruences between one's identity and an organization. Elsbach and Bhattacharya (2001) present this as an *active* separation of oneself from an organization as a way to affirm one's distinctiveness and to avoid negative (stereotypical) associations. Identification and disidentification are not, however, mere opposites; rather, disidentification embodies a unique psychological state of active disconnecting (Kreiner and Ashforth 2004). To this end, Elsbach (1999) notes that while both self-enhancement and self-verification are motives that may predict identification and disidentification, self-verification is most often linked with disidentification, given the identity threats posed by associating with a negatively perceived organization. '*Organizational schitzo-identification*' refers to the ambiguity, or the simultaneous identification and disidentification one fosters with an organization. It enables individuals to align themselves with positive aspects of an organization, while selectively distancing themselves from the negative dimensions or stereotypes. For example, Kreiner and Ashforth (2004: 4) cite how people of color may identify with a predominately white institution, but may simultaneously feel ethnically excluded or denigrated, thus resulting in a schitzo-identification. '*Organizational neutral-identification*' is based on the notion of apathy, or the intentional absence of both identification and disidentification with an organization. Neutral-identification is distinct from '*organizational non-identification*', which refers to those who do not care or may not know about an organization. Notably this category of non-identification is not readily studied in original (Elsbach 1999) nor updated typologies (Kreiner and Ashforth 2004) of organizational identification and is thus not considered in this research.

Much empirical research concerning organizational identity has focused on structurally defined, singular institutions, such as the National Rifle Association (NRA) (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001), the Amway Corporation (Pratt 2000), the U.S. Forest Service (DiSanza and Bullis 1999), and a community supported agricultural program (Press and Arnould 2011). While these studies analyze the various identification strategies that individuals may adopt, they have yet to theorize how identification occurs across a diverse and dynamic organizational field. Further, while some studies have expanded their context to examine identifications across multiple institutions (i.e. workplaces) within an organizational field or market (Ashforth et al. 2007; Kreiner and Ashforth 2004), they remain focused on organizations and institutions, as opposed to loosely defined collectivities that characterize NSMs, for example. A broader conceptualization of 'identification' and 'organizations' is considered below, focusing on identifications with the contemporary feminist movement.

### **5.1.2 Identity and the Feminist Social Movement**

In conceptualizing the contemporary feminist movement as a NSM, one of the assumptions that must be taken into account is the societal totality, where the market has come to be viewed as 'inescapable' (Baudrillard 1981a; Jameson 1991; Schor 2007), rendered as either a site of liberation, the dominant perspective among CCT scholars (Arnould 2007; Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Thompson and Üstüner 2015), or one of capitalistic oppression, most closely associated with post-political theorists, such as Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Rancière, Alain Badiou, and Jodi Dean.

Taking both streams into account and applying them to the context of feminism, the market may act as a site of liberation, selling symbols of feminism, and/or as one of patriarchal oppression, which has given rise to the postfeminist critiques. In any event, to participate in the marketplace is to necessarily adopt a position (i.e. identification) in relation to feminism, even if that position is an ambivalent or apathetic one. Elsbach's (1999) four-fold typology is useful in conceptualizing the different ways that individuals

relate their self-narratives to the multiple narratives embedded within the contemporary feminist movement. Further, Humphreys and Brown (2002) argue that there exist “analytical advantages in locating identity in individuals’ (and collectivities’) self narratives” (422), recognizing that “narrative emplotment is an authorial device” (426). The following subsections thus apply Elsbach’s (1999) typology of organizational identity to consider how young women might relate to the broader feminist movement.

#### **5.1.2.1 Identification**

Much research has explored the motivations for individuals joining a social movement(s); these include social capital (Diani 1997), loyalty (Gamson 1991), preexisting solidarities (Oberschall 1973), the framing efforts of an organization (Jasper 1998; Snow et al. 2014), and/or self-interested reputational concerns (Chong 1991; Snow and McAdam 2000). With reference to the latter, “activism for many people is a way to construct a desirable self”, since “[a]ctivists may identify primarily with a movement organization, affinity group, style of protest, or degree of moderation or radicalism” (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 290-293). Thus, an activist identity might center around one’s dedication to a particular cause, an organization, a group of people, and/or distinct taste preferences and practices (Jasper 1997).

As mentioned in Chapter 3, Hirschman (1993) differentiated between oppositional and complementary ideologies in accounting for how feminism has emerged in response to the dominant ideology of patriarchy in American society. While complementary ideologies are said to co-exist, and perhaps even reinforce the hegemonic ideology, oppositional ideologies directly challenge it and often embrace political and lifestyle tactics and tendencies associated with anarchism (Portwood-Stacer 2013). Portwood-Stacer (2013) argues that an anarchist lifestyle/identity must be understood in relation to earlier radical and utopian movements, namely those countercultural movements of the 1960s, characterized by a left-wing politics that emphasized anti-materialism, contestation (i.e. sexual promiscuity and recreational drug use), and grassroots activism (i.e. communal



activities, be-ins, sit-ins, riots, demonstrations, and underground movements). With regard to feminism, Ferguson (1984) and Roth (2000: 302-303) point out that “some feminists argue that feminism and bureaucratic structures are mutually exclusive. According to this view, ‘nonhierarchical’ grassroots organizations represent the only organizational form that is comparable with feminist principles”. Thus, while social movements and the nature of activism have substantially changed with the rise of a new societal totality, characteristic of NSMs, (Offe 1985), many activists, including feminists, continue to reproduce what they believe to be a more ‘authentic’ style of activism (or activist identity), drawing on countercultural aesthetics. One of the most well-known grassroots feminist movement of the third-wave is the Riot Grrrl movement, which is said to have ended in the late 1990s, but still remains influential.

Beginning in the 1990s, Riot Grrrl feminism started as a particular subset of do-it-yourself (DIY) feminism, defined by its grassroots organization and affiliations with punk culture (Bail 1996; Karp and Stoller 1999). Like the countercultural movements of the 1960s, Riot Grrrl feminism challenged the mainstream mass media, emphasizing collectivity, grassroots activism, and local production (Garrison 2000) in an attempt to re-define social structures related to gender and sexuality (Riordan 2001). Adopting a punk DIY ethos and grassroots tactics, women were encouraged to be active participants and producers in the cultural and political milieu. This resulted in the introduction of gynocentric (female-created) commodities (i.e. music and art) in a marketplace that, up until this point, was largely dominated by men. Further, Riot Grrrls promoted subversive styles of beauty through performances of ‘ugliness’ (Eileraas 1997) and exploited their sexualities, not for the male gaze, but to empower women to take pleasure in their bodies and celebrate their sexualities (Gottlieb and Wald 1994). However, as the movement caught on, Riot Grrrls faced a dilemma in communicating their message and remaining ‘underground’. Conscious of the threats of corporate co-optation and misrepresentation (primarily by the media), Riot Grrrls instituted a ‘media’ or ‘press block’ in 1992, whereby members of the movement refused to speak with the mainstream media and did not allow documentation

of their activities (Strong 2011). Yet, these efforts were to no avail. As the movement made its way through the three stages of commodification, i.e. rebellion, fragmentation, and commodification, (Goulding and Saren 2007) it became subject to what Arsel and Thompson (2011) refer to as a ‘marketplace myth’, wherein a subcultural style becomes popularized, trivialized, and even occasionally stigmatized (Patterson and Larsen 2015). According to Arsel and Thompson (2011), members of a subculture under siege tend to engage in a variety of demythologizing practices in order to protect their identity investments. And in the case of Riot Grrrl feminism, this occasionally resulted in an explicit rejection of the label (‘Riot Grrrl feminist’) (Garrison 2000), which proved somewhat contradictory given that Riot Grrrl feminists actively celebrated feminism, women, and gynocentric culture through music, zines<sup>26</sup>, style, and art (Schilt 2003). By the late 1990s, the Riot Grrrl movement had effectively faded out as a unified movement (Dunn and Farnsworth 2012; Schilt 2003), yet emerged as a salient subculture of consumption, sharing many of the same characteristics and stylistic indicators as the punk subculture (Hebdige 1979)

Its position as a counter-hegemonic subculture, wanting to “detach itself from the taken-for-granted landscape of normalized forms” (Hebdige 1979:19), has led some to conclude that Riot Grrrl feminism has evaded commodification (Riordan 2001). Indeed, the movement has been widely acknowledged for carving out a place for women as artists and cultural producers in rock, an industry dominated by men (Gottlieb and Wald 1994); and many laud the impact it has made with respect to female empowerment and self-representation (Dunn and Farnsworth 2012). However, because a complete evasion of the market is impossible, many assert that Riot Grrrl feminism (like punk) has fallen subject to the forces of commodification and marketization. Reified in its (gynocentric) commodity form via art, music, zines, style, and dress code (Goulding and Saren 2007), Riot Grrrl operates as a brand or identification, which communicates a “significant

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<sup>26</sup> Zines are small, homemade, self-published publications that cover topics ranging from poetry, manifestos, reviews, advice, comics, collages, and art, for example (Riordan 2001).

difference” from mainstream culture (Hebdige 1981:102). Riot Grrrl feminism has since branched off into two disparate types. First, like the punk subculture more generally, its aesthetic has come to be materialized in its ‘original’ counter-hegemonic, subversive ‘girl-style revolution’ form (Wald 1998: 592). This can be conceived as ‘countervailing’ feminism, given the radical, anti-patriarchal, and anti-capitalistic ethos of the subculture. Second, and more in line with postfeminist discourse, it has come to reflect what Dunn and Farnsworth (2010: 142) describe as a “superficial appropriation of ‘girl power’”, exemplified, for example, by the Spice Girls (Wald 1998). Accordingly, the Riot Grrrl movement is perceived as a precursor to ‘popularized’ or ‘girlie’ feminism, which tends to dominate both academic discussions and the marketplace in terms of what constitutes commodity feminism and postfeminist media. Thus while an adherence to girlie feminism could be analyzed as a position of feminist ‘identification’ in its own right (and is in the case of one informant in this study), many argue that it conflates feminist and patriarchal values (McRobbie 1994, 2004b), resulting in ‘ambivalent femininities’ (Skeggs 1997) that is more in line with feminist schitzo-identification.

### **5.1.2.2 Schitzo-Identification**

Ambivalence, according to Zygmunt Bauman (1991) is unavoidable. Thus to some extent, it is a necessary feature of all identity projects. However, in the case of organizational identities, schitzo-identification refers to an explicit position that mirrors a ‘brand’ of feminism, where ambiguity is inherent in the brand itself. This brand is colloquially known as ‘popularized’ or ‘girlie’ feminism (Baumgardner and Richards 2000), referred to elsewhere as ‘power femininity’ (Lazar 2006) and choice-feminism (Hirshman 2006). It is often equated to postfeminism, which, as detailed in Chapter 4, has been criticized for conflating feminine and feminist values (Gill 2008a, 2007b; McRobbie 2004, 2007, 2011; Tasker and Negra 2007). Others have celebrated girlie feminism (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Heywood and Drake 1997; Scott 2005), precisely for its ability to incorporate feminine and feminist values and stylistic indicators, which has led to its popularization and mainstream marketability. In fact, some argue that the market itself

has succeeded in creating a new brand of feminism that appeals specifically to a generation of young women attempting to distance themselves from their conservative, austere second-wave mothers (Mann and Huffman 2005) and from the ‘feminist myth’, which depicts feminists as man-hating, bra-burning lesbians (Scharff 2012). These scholars contend that by incorporating feminism into the marketplace, the media initiated a re-signification of feminism as feminine, or alternatively, a re-signification of femininity as feminist, whereby symbols of femininity (e.g. stilettos) can be sold as indicators of liberation (e.g. a freely chosen look) (Baumgardner and Richards 2000; Heywood and Drake 1997; Scott 2005).

Girlie feminism describes a “new woman [as] both feminine and feminist at the same time, merging notions of personal agency with the visual display of sexuality. She inhabits a contradictory postfeminist terrain that unites patriarchal notions of feminine beauty with feminist expressions of female emancipation” (Genz 2010: 106). Girlie feminists exercise their femininity and sexuality in order to demonstrate their independence, autonomy, and legitimacy. In particular, a liberal sexual attitude functions as a discernable indicator of one’s adherence to Girlie feminism. Sexual liberation has operated as a defining facet of the women’s movement since the 1960s. Through media representations, women are made to believe that using their sexuality as a form of empowerment enables them to be autonomous, confident, desirable, desiring, and independent. This produces an ‘up for it’ consciousness, wherein women are expected to consistently perform an active, confident, all-knowing, autoerotic sexuality (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010: 115). Consequently, an ‘up for sex’ attitude is presumed to reflect women’s autonomous sexual needs and desires, which, as Gill (2008b) observes, just happens to coincide with discourses from heterosexual pornography aimed at men.

Although the use of sex as a marketing ploy is not in any way novel, positioning it as an act of feminist activism is. Such messages of sexual empowerment are found in the mainstream media, not least in advertisements (Amy-Chinn 2006; Gill 2008b, 2009a,

2009b; McRobbie 1994), but also in television series and movies, such as in *Sex and the City* (Arthurs 2010; Zayer et al. 2012), *Girls* (Sredl et al. 2014), and *Bridget Jones Diary* (Barker and Gill 2012; McRobbie 2004a). Such discourse has also contributed to the booming sex industry illustrated by the rise of popularity and acceptance of female sex toys, sex toy parties (McCaughey and French 2001; Fahs and Swank 2013; Walther 2008; Walther and Schouten 2016), lingerie (Jantzen, Østergaard, and Vieira 2006), erotic novels (Brown 1995a; Deller and Smith 2013; Dymock 2013), and inspiring the search for a ‘Pink Viagra’ (Hartley 2006).

Even the more mundane personal consumption choices, such as high-heeled shoes, cosmetics, clothing, exercise, and plastic surgery have come to typify feminist goals of independence and an active, confident, autoerotic sexuality (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010; Goldman, Heath, and Smith 1999). Paradoxically, however, values such as virginity, abstinence, and chastity are still heavily promoted by American politicians and in education and religious institutions. This gives way to what Angela McRobbie (2004b: 255-256) describes as a ‘double entanglement’ or the “co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life... with processes of liberalization in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations”. This conflation of patriarchal and feminist values produces what Beverly Skeggs (1997) refers to as ‘ambivalent femininities’.

Unlike Riot Grrrl feminism, Girlie feminism was, at its inception, a subculture of consumption, emphasizing a feminine aesthetic. And, despite its adherence to a counter-hegemonic (feminist) ideology, this is a subculture premised largely on heteronormativity. For example, Rosalind Gill has written extensively about how sexualization is afforded only to those who reinforce heteronormative standards of beauty and appeal to a heterosexual male gaze (2008b, 2009a). Thus, black women are not afforded the same active and empowering sexuality as Caucasian women and are typically portrayed “as objects, signaling sexual promise, soul or authenticity” (Gill 2009a: 150). Lesbianism is

also represented in a way that upholds the heterosexual standards of beauty; media depictions of lesbians, for instance, typically showcase feminine or lipstick lesbians rather than butch lesbians, and they are typically shown in groups of two, thus appealing to the male fantasy that often plays out in porn aimed at straight men. Further, lower-class or marginalized women are often denied this feminist subjectivity for two reasons: not only is lower-class or ‘white-trash’ sexuality repudiated in society (Gill 2009a; McRobbie 2009; Skeggs 1997; Tyler 2008), but because girlie feminism is enacted on the basis that consumption is a means to empowerment, not all women can afford to partake in the required feminine practices (Riordan 2001).

Nonetheless, this is not a monolithic or static subculture, but one that is emerging and open to a wide array of multiple subjectivities, meanings, and authenticities (Schouten, Martin, and McAlexander 2007). This is exemplified by girlie feminism’s emphasis on a neoliberal subjectivity, exploiting notions of independence, individuality, and thus plurality. Recognizing this, the media has been able to capitalize on a plurality of (‘girlie’) identities that seek recognition for alternative sexualities, ages, body-types, races, and ethnicities, resulting in niche brands that appeal to wider audiences (Heath and Potter 2004; Portwood-Stacer 2013). While some argue that the multiplicity of the feminist movement is its fundamental strength, given its ability to accommodate difference (Bulbeck 2000) and avoid reification (Caraway 1992), others view the valorizing of difference within feminism as a political travesty, serving to displace the prospect of collective action (Dean 2007; Young 1990), resulting in ambivalent activism (Skeggs 1997). This has also facilitated another popular response to the contemporary feminist movement – one of disidentification.

### **5.1.2.3 Disidentification**

As was mentioned previously, organizational disidentification implies more than the mere opposite of identification; it entails the active separation of oneself from an organization – or in this context, a collectivity (or brand) – in order to affirm positive distinctiveness

and/or avoid negative stereotypes (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). Thus, disidentifying with the feminist movement, does not necessitate the identification with a counter (anti-feminist) social movement, nor does it imply that one is a misogynist, for example. Rather, it is an attempt to distance oneself from the movement and the perceived negative stereotypes it may imply.

McRobbie (2004a: 2) argues that, in relation to the contemporary feminist movement, negative stereotypes are perpetuated via the postfeminist media, which works to subtly ‘undo’ feminism by “provoking feminist condemnation as a means of generating publicity”. In her study of young women, Scharff (2010, 2012) found that they repudiated feminism as a way to distance themselves from the mythic construction of ‘the feminist’, associated with misandry, lesbianism, unfemininity, and cultural otherness. An alternative view as to why women reject feminism might be that the popularization of feminism and its widespread uptake has rendered it a ‘popular taste’ aesthetic, associated with a lower class, thus losing its indication of cultural distinction (Bourdieu 1984). McRobbie (2004a) also notes that feminism as a movement is both historicized and generationalized, and may thus be perceived as ‘outdated’, leading to a widespread feminist backlash among young women (Faludi 1991; Whelehan 2000). However, this backlash differs from the traditional anti-feminist movements, which tended to advocate a conservative, pro-life, and/or a religious agenda with an emphasis on traditional family values and gender roles (Ryan 1992; Steuter 1992).

In the past, women who joined anti-feminist movements opposed feminism and clung to traditional values and patterns of behavior if they felt their identities (as wives, mothers, and keepers of the home) were threatened (Steuter 1992). Today, this repudiation is less about maintaining the status quo (upholding a patriarchal ideology) and more about actively avoiding stigmatization and/or validating a distinct identity project that goes against the mainstreaming/marketization of feminism, thus, inadvertently upholding the status quo. Other disidentifications with feminism may be based on a general rejection of

collectivities (i.e. traditional social movements), which are believed to conflict with the tenets of neoliberalism that champions individuality and self-responsibility (Scharff 2012). Accordingly, contemporary anti-feminist movements are fragmented and individualized – even more so than traditional NSMs, given their lack of collective goals, aims, identity, etc. For example, the social media campaign, ‘Women Against Feminism’ (womenagainstfeminism.com), has prompted women’s *active* disassociation with feminism, arguing that it promotes misandry and the victimization of women. This campaign encourages women to post pictures (often selfies) holding up posters or postcards stating “I don’t need feminism because . . .”, followed by their reason(s) that correspond either to the rejection of ‘the feminist’ myth (Scharff 2012) and/or the anachronism and redundancy perceived in the movement (Scharff 2010).

Nonetheless, while many women’s attitudes “have consolidated into something closer to repudiation rather than ambivalence” (McRobbie 2004b: 257), others continue to endorse feminist attitudes and ideologies, but strongly reject the ‘feminist’ label, which suggests a disconnect between self-identification and values (Christiansen and Høyer 2015). Skeggs (1997) also found that many of her informants’ experiences and responses could be classified as ‘feminist’, despite their active denial of the label. Feminism has often been contrasted with femininity and the two are often seen as mutually exclusive (Riley and Scharff 2012; Scharff 2010). Hogeland (1994/2000) notes that this is particularly problematic for young women today, given that as traditional institutions have increasingly fallen by the wayside, romantic and sexual relationships are granted precedence in shaping identity projects. Accordingly, young women fear the repercussions of identifying as a feminist and what this might mean for their romantic prospects, particularly given feminism’s abject, unfeminine, and non-normative connotations (Scharff 2010). That being said, feminism has been regarded as a useful explanatory discourse, for interpreting negative experiences and imagining social change (Skeggs 1997). However, this does not appear to be the case for women who claim to have not had negative gendered experiences, rather, these women tend to be more



reluctant to align themselves with victimized women and/or admit to what could be perceived as a ‘weakness’ or vulnerability of their gender: acknowledging the possibility that it could happen to them (Hogeland 1994/2000).

While a position of disidentification is based on the premise of negation, i.e. defining oneself through the social group(s) to which one does not belong, this does not imply that it constitutes a fully formed subculture. For while ‘feminism’ constitutes an identity, its conceived opposite, i.e. ‘femininity’, is typically associated with a characteristic or trait. According to Skeggs (1997), to embody a feminine identity in its purest form would be to assume a position of complete powerlessness. Even the anti-feminist movement discussed previously is not as much a movement as a stand-alone campaign. Consequently, more research, particularly of an empirical nature is warranted on these modern modes of feminist disidentification (McRobbie 2004a; Scharff 2010, 2012).

#### **5.1.2.4 Neutral Identification**

Feminism requires an expansion of the self – an expansion of empathy, interest, intelligence, and responsibility across differences, histories, cultures, ethnicities, sexual identities, othernesses. The differences between women, as Audre Lorde pointed out over and over again, are our most precious resources in thinking and acting toward change (Hogeland 1994/2000: 20-21).

As the above excerpt indicates, to identify, schitzo-identify, or disidentify with feminism implies an exertion of effort, although with regard to schitzo-identification, this effort is exerted in polarity. In contrast, a neutral identification presupposes a withdrawal of effort. Less research has focused on individual’s neutral-identifications to the feminist movement, perhaps because they are easily confused with schitzo- and/or disidentifications, but also because they typically omit an explicit self-identification, rendering it somewhat difficult to study. Further, with some exceptions (Ashforth et al. 2013; Humphreys and Brown 2002) few studies differentiate between schitzo- and neutral-identifications, thus the differences between the two are somewhat abstracted (Kreiner and Ashforth 2004).

As mentioned previously, NSMs imply a social totality, i.e. advanced capitalism, which, as many argue, necessarily includes patriarchy (Holter 1997; Jaggar 1983; Shelton and Agger 1993) and feminism, given the recent uptake of feminist values (McRobbie 2004b). Thus, like the market, one can not operate outside of its effects. Consequently, a neutral-identification with feminism does not imply that one ‘escapes’ the ideology (or its counterpart), nor does it suggest the absence of perceptions and attachment. Rather, it implies a self-perception of impartiality or apathy, believed to be a self-definition in its own right (Ashforth et al. 2013; Elsbach 1999; Kreiner and Ashforth 2004).

A crucial aspect of consideration among those fostering a neutral-identification with the movement may have to do with their lack of reflexivity or, rather, reflexive interest in feminism. However, this is not to suggest a lack of reflexivity in general. Those fostering a neutral-identification with the feminist movement are still engaged in a “reflexive project of the self” (Giddens 1991: 5), but given the “overwhelming range of options” (Binkley 2007: 166) made available to them in consumer society, they may opt to draw on different ideologies and/or institutions in the construction of their identity projects. Thus, while their actions and beliefs may be interpreted from a patriarchal/feminist lens, they do not reflexively adhere to – or acknowledge these ideologies. In this way, an interpretive existential-phenomenological method that aims to *interpret* individuals’ structures of consciousness as they are experienced, rather than theorized or self-defined first-hand (Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989), lends itself nicely to the exploration of individuals’ organizational identifications. This is particularly true in the case of neutral-identifications, given that individuals may struggle with conceptualizing their apathetic affiliations. Consequently, as discussed in the following chapter, informants were not asked directly about their relations to or with the feminist movement, rather conclusions were drawn based on their sexual narratives (i.e. identities and experiences), which have been shown to reflect patriarchal and feminist ideologies (Jackson and Scott 1996; Rosen 2000); these are considered in the following section.

### 5.1.3 Sexual Narratives

Sexuality – in terms of behaviors, identities, socialization, fantasies, and ritual – plays a significant role in the shaping of consumption, consumers, and consumer society more broadly (Gould 1991; Schroeder 1998). Additionally, sex has served as a staple of the feminist movement since the sexual revolution, beginning in the 1960s (Rosen 2000). This, in turn, has led to the marketization of female sexuality, giving rise to what is known as ‘new consumer feminism’ (Rosen 2000) or, more commonly, ‘commodity feminism’ (Goldman 1992; Goldman, Heath, and Smith 1991; Dworkin and Wachs 2009). Accordingly, sex and sexuality influence both consumption and production practices, yet “there is an amazing absence of research on sexuality and sexual practices within consumer research” (Schroeder 1998: 28).

Broadly speaking, sexology research has traditionally been conducted within the disciplines of psychiatry (Freud 1963/1997a, 1963/1997b), medicine (Masters and Johnson 1966, 1970), sociology (Holland et al. 1994; Janus and Janus 1993; Kinsey et al. 1948, 1953; Laumann et al. 1994; Nicolson and Burr 2003) organizational studies (Acker 2006; Burrell 1987; Hearn and Parkin 2001), and public policy (Holland et al. 1991, 1992; Holland, Ramazanoglu, and Scott 1990). Within the realm of consumer research, however, most sex-oriented studies have focused either on the impact of gendered identities on consumer behavior (e.g. Bettany et al. 2010; Costa 2000; Fischer and Arnould 1994; Hogg and Garrow 2003; Zayer et al. 2012) or on consumers’ interpretations of sex in advertising (Beetles and Harris 2005; Elliott and Elliott 2005; Elliott et al. 1995; Elliott and Ritson 1995; Schroeder and Zwick 2004; Sengupta and Dahl 2008). Some have explored the role that sexual identity (i.e. gay, lesbian, queer, bisexuality) plays in relation to consumption (Kates 2002, 2004; Kates and Belk 2001). And fewer have focused on the consumption and use of sex products, such as toys, lingerie, and romance novels (e.g. Brown 1995a; Evans and Riley 2015; Deller and Smith 2013; Dymock 2013; Fahs and Swank 2013; Jantzen, Østergaard, and Vieira 2006; Kent 2005; Walther 2008; Walther and Schouten 2016). Further, while some research has

hinted to the role that sex and romance play in mediating consumption (e.g. Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 1996, 2003; Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Schouten 1991), few studies have examined the notion of sex in its own right (Dahl 2008; Gould 1991; Schroeder 1998). And to the best of my knowledge, no consumption-oriented study has considered individuals' sexual narratives (i.e. stories, experiences, histories).

In his book, *Telling Sexual Stories*, Ken Plummer (1995: 6) defines sexual stories as “the narratives of intimate life, focused especially around the erotic, the gendered, and the relational”. However, he notes how sexual stories do not always focus on the issue of ‘sex’ per se, since a sexual story cannot be sealed off hermeneutically from one’s broader identity project. Further, according to Foucault (1997: 163):

Sexuality is something that we ourselves create – it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it’s a possibility for a creative life.

From a Marxist historical materialist perspective, studying individuals' sexual lives, relationships, and desires can reveal much about the macro social conditions in which they emerge (Plummer 1995). And while many scholars have theorized about the macro shifts and the meso level media representations with respect to sexuality (Attwood 2006, 2009; Bauman 1998; Gill 2009a; MacKinnon 1989; McNair 1996, 2002; Segal 1994), less research has examined this from a micro empirical standpoint.

## **5.2 Interpreting Sexual Advertisements**

Advertising, according to Williamson (1979), who draws on both Marx and Baudrillard, has two functions. The first is to sell things – products or services – conveying a certain use-value. The second is ideological, to create structures of meaning by bestowing commodities with certain exchange- or sign-values. And for Baudrillard (1981b), these sign values, which become attached to commodities, are determined by powerful institutions (e.g. advertising) and have come to represent a (symbolic) market system that

is totalitarian, inescapable, and impenetrable to resistance. In a similar vein, Haug (1986), argues that advertising contributes to a third element in Marx's conceptualization of use- and exchange-value, that is – commodity aesthetics – which he argues merely gives the *appearance* or the *illusion* of use-value.

As will be made clear in the next chapter, this is not an advertising study per se. Rather it considers consumer's interpretations of sexual advertisements as micro consumption experiences that further enrich understandings of their sexual identity projects and relations with the contemporary feminist movement. Given that the majority of sex-oriented consumer research studies have been situated within an advertising context (Gould 1991), consumer's interpretations of sexual advertisements were deemed an appropriate consumption activity, linking together the three levels of analysis (macro, meso, and micro) considered in this study. Such is further affirmed when considering how sex has functioned as a rhetorical tool since the second-wave feminist movement (Maclaran 2015).

Consequently, this section builds on Chapter 4, moving from a discussion about how the feminist movement has become co-opted through (meso) cultural production systems, to consider how these marketization efforts might be received among consumers on a micro level. In this way, this section focuses explicitly on how consumers *interact* with advertisements – in order to better understand the dialogical engagements between the macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis. It does not offer a content analysis on the type of sexual advertisements consumers may interact with, as that falls beyond the scope of this project<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> This is summarized briefly in Chapter 4 (Section 4.2.3.1) and is also expanded on in Chapter 6 (Section 6.3.2.1). However, an extensive overview is not offered, as this research focuses on consumers' interpretations of advertising content as opposed to the ad content itself.

### **5.2.1 Sex in Advertising**

Sexual advertising research has generally been considered in one of three ways. First, much research has explored the effectiveness of sexual content in advertising. Many sex in advertising studies have been conducted quantitatively, using cognitive psychological approaches that address the information processing effects of sexual appeals (Reichert 2002). This research has examined sexual appeals with regard to their affect on attitudes (e.g. Peterson and Kerin 1977; Simpson, Horton, and Brown 1996), brand and product interest (e.g. Dudley 1999; LaTour and Henthorne 1993), purchase intention (e.g. Reidenbach and McCleary 1983), memory/brand recall (e.g. Reichert and Alvaro 2001; Reichert and Fosu 2006), arousal (e.g. LaTour 1990; LaTour, Pitts, and Snook-Luther 1990), and ethical judgments (Mittal and Lassar 2000), for example.

Second, many sex in advertising studies have employed visual, literary, and frequency-based content analyses in order to determine particular themes and their prevalence (Reichert and Carpenter 2004; Reichert and Lambiase 2003; Rohlinger 2002; O'Barr 2011). In a similar vein, some scholars have analyzed sexual advertisements from a theoretically and/or contextually informed perspective (Gill 2008b, 2009a, 2009b; Ostberg 2010; Schroeder and Borgerson 1998; Schroeder and Zwick 2004; Stern 1993), which has contributed to the multiplicity of expert opinions about the sexual (and otherwise) representations of men and women. Others have applied poststructuralist methods, such as discourse analysis to advertising imagery to explore their potential impact in terms of violence towards women (Schroeder and Borgerson 1998) or consumers' relationships to bodily norms and bodily ideals (Hirschman and Thompson 1997; Ostberg 2010). This research has contributed to the rich insight about the dominant discourses presented in the media and the current cultural context, specifically with regard to the mainstreaming of sex in contemporary Western cultures (Attwood 2009). Valuable as these studies have been, however, both streams lack consumer voice and the input of lived experiences.

This leads to the third way in which sexual advertising research has been considered, which focuses on consumers' subjective interpretations and interpellations of sexual advertisements through qualitative and/or other interpretive methods (Beetles and Harris 2005; Eck 2001, 2003; Elliott and Elliott 2005; Elliott et al. 1995; Elliott and Ritson 1995; Schroeder and Zwick 2004). This stream of research is significantly smaller in scope in comparison to the other two, indicating a dearth of research on consumers' interactions with sexual advertisements as they pertain to sociocultural, experimental, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption. The remainder of this section focuses on this third stream of research, reviewing both meaning-based models of advertising and gendered readings of ads in order to review the research base related to consumers' interpretations of sexual ads.

### **5.2.2 Meaning-based models of Advertising**

Grant McCracken (1987) was one of the first to point out the theoretical insufficiencies of the information-based model of advertising, arguing that it decontextualizes consumers by assuming they seek out and subsequently process information in ads in a linear fashion. As mentioned above, much of the previous sex in advertising research has applied this model in an attempt to generalize (and thus decontextualize) information processing effects of sex appeal in ads by manipulating levels of nudity, models, and/or products being advertised in experimental settings (Reichert 2002). McCracken (1987) argued that researchers should develop meaning-based models of advertising, which characterize consumers as meaning-centered individuals engaged "in a cultural context [and] in a cultural project" (121); he saw both the self and context as culturally constituted and mutually reinforcing. One of the primary ways that meaning-based models of advertising feature in consumer research studies is drawn from reader-response theory (Mick and Buhl 1992; Phillips and McQuarrie 2010; Ritson and Elliott 1999; Scott 1994; Stern 1989).

Reader-response theory, or in the context of consumer research, the consumer-response perspective, developed by Iser (1974), Fish (1976, 1980a, 1980b), and Scott (1994), considers readers/consumers as co-creators of meaning. This suggests that no single or ‘correct’ reading exists, as each individual may interpret a text (i.e. advertisement) differently given their experiences, knowledge, motives, etc. (Elliott and Elliott 2005; O’Donohoe 2001). Mick and Buhl (1992) are particularly well-known for their use of reader-response theories in their meaning-based model of advertising, which emphasizes the links between consumers’ advertising responses and their “life themes” and “life projects.” However, a notable limitation of Mick and Buhl’s study is that it only considers one gender (i.e. men), which, as the following subsection will address, can have a significant impact on consumers’ interpretations. Additionally, the authors fail to take into account broader macro forces, in favor of an individualized and decontextualized empirical dataset, which, as noted by Askegaard and Linnet (2011), is a common limitation of many interpretive CCT studies. Askegaard and Linnet additionally call for more research on consumer subcultures or consumer communities, as opposed to CCT’s prevailing unit of focus, the individual. This is not to marginalize or discount research on personal identity projects, but rather stresses the need to study social patterns and practices, which are bound by (macro) social, historical, ideological, and cultural forces and underline consumer identity projects.

Stanley Fish was the first to introduce the notion of interpretive communities in his 1976 article, *‘Interpreting the Variorum’*. Fish broke with literary formalism by eliminating the subject/object dichotomy from texts and their readers. He argues that meaning is derived, not from stability of a text (thus refuting objectivity), but from predisposed interpretive strategies that determine the shape of what is read. In addition, Fish negates the subjectivity and idiosyncrasies of individual readers by arguing for stability in the formation of interpretive communities, or “those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions” (Fish 1980a: 71). However, Fish also indicates that this



stability is always temporary and that interpretive communities change over time; thus, offering just enough stability for interpretive battles to go on, and just enough leeway for them to evolve. In particular, interpretive communities based on gender have long been theorized within the context of consumer culture theory (O'Donohoe 2000; Rosenblatt 1978; Stern 2000; Winship 1981).

### **5.2.3 Gendered Readings of Ads**

Erving Goffman (1979) was one of the first to analyze gendered advertisements, suggesting a series of codes that could be used to identify gendered symbolism. His analysis gave way to what is understood today as submissive, objectified, passive, and powerless imagery of women. Drawing on literary, feminist, and consumer research, Barbara Stern (2000) discusses the gendering of texts, challenging Fish's (1976) claim that texts are non-objective. Androcentric texts, Stern argues, privilege the male perspective, while gynocentric texts are female-centered. Stern contends that advertising is largely androcentric, encouraging women, as well as men, to identify with male values and vantage points. She proposes four models of reading, characteristic of both genders: dominance, submission, interaction, and resistance. Dominance suggests one's refusal to engage with a text, reading the contents of one's own mind as opposed to the text at hand. Submission implies that the reader accepts the text without any critical detachment. Interaction occurs when the reader and the text enter into a dialogue, signifying a balance between dominance and submission. Finally, resistance occurs when a reader refuses to read a text as it was (supposedly) originally intended; this is a strategy commonly adopted by feminists taking a stand against patriarchy. Female readers tend to interact with gynocentric advertising texts, and submit to androcentric texts, although exposure to feminist theory may encourage resistance against androcentric texts (Stern 2000).

Some parallels may be drawn between Stern's (2000) styles of reading (of androcentric texts) and Elsbach's (1999) organizational identifications (in relation to the feminist movement):

- Dominance: May suggest one's *neutral* engagement with the feminist movement, insofar as readers tend to be detached, thus imposing a predetermined (likely hegemonic) structure on texts.
- Submission: May reflect one's *disidentification* with feminism, given that while engaged, readers become overwhelmed and subsequently overpowered by an androcentric text.
- Interaction: May signify one's *schitzo-identification* with the feminist movement, as readers actively co-contribute to the meaning of a text, fluctuating between critical detachment and empathetic involvement.
- Resistance: May signify one's *identification* with the feminist movement, whereby readers adopt a critical stance against hegemony – reading a text in the opposite way in which it may have been intended<sup>28</sup>.

Further, gender differences appear to become more pronounced when ads include sexual content (Dahl, Sengupta, and Vohs 2009; Elliott et al. 1995; Sengupta and Dahl 2008). For example, Eck (2003) found that although men and women employ similar cultural scripts when viewing the sexualized female model, there is no common script for viewing the sexualized male model. Thus, while women can identify with, or aspire to a sexualized woman, men are not able to do the same with sexualized men. Moreover, women have been shown to express feelings of guilt and apprehension when viewing male nudity (Bordo 1999; Eck 2003), whereas men often report feeling comfortable when viewing nude women (Eck 2003; Sengupta and Dahl 2008). However, the argument that responses to gendered advertising texts are influenced primarily by a consumer's gender is difficult to sustain, particularly as feminist ideas are increasingly circulating in mainstream media (Gill 2012).

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<sup>28</sup> Importantly, while these reading strategies are insightful and do contribute to the analysis of the findings, I do not impose androcentric or gynocentric labels on the ads, so as to grant precedence to consumers' subjective readings of non-objective texts (Fish 1976).

There are two primary issues that should be addressed at this point. The first is relative to interpretive community membership. Certainly, these extend far beyond gender to include class, race, sexuality, and experience (Winship 1981). For example, Holt (1998) identified distinct receptions of cultural texts on the basis of social class, which following Bourdieu, he defined based on one's family upbringing (i.e. father's education and occupation), formal education, and occupational culture (Bourdieu 1984). Those with more cultural capital (HCC) were able to adopt a critical and reflective stance towards popular and mass media. In contrast, however, those with LCC were unable to adopt a similar position and read these texts from what Holt (1998: 9) defined as a "referential perspective", where the texts were interpreted "as more or less realistic depictions of the world that are potentially relevant to their own lives". This finding is important, insofar as it rejects the argument that cultural texts have any impetus of their own (i.e. embedded ideologies) by emphasizing the individualistic, though nonetheless deterministic<sup>29</sup> readings or consumption strategies adopted by people within different social classes. Thus, more research is needed on the reading style(s) consumers adopt in relation to their intersectional differences.

The second issue relates to Fish's (1976) notion of interpretive communities' impermeability. Given recent shifts in discourse and representations in the media, particularly in relation to feminism, gender, and sex, it may be outdated to suggest a dichotomous interpretive community exists in relation to gender alone. Future research should examine communities within genders, to identify a range of sensibilities and interpretive styles. For example, in the context of this research, young women's distinct identifications with the feminist movement (i.e. identification, schitzo-identification, disidentification, neutral-identification) might function as four interpretive communities, whereby members share similar interpretive strategies in their co-creation of media texts. Furthermore, the interpretation of an ad is a social act. Therefore, women should not be

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<sup>29</sup> Many of Bourdieu's critics claimed that his theory was overtly deterministic, given his emphasis on objective structures and early learning (for a more detailed discussion see: Jenkins 1992/ 2002).

viewed as a homogeneous group, but as socially embedded individuals, who co-construct a plurality of meanings depending not only on the text itself, but also their sociocultural background, transformational experiences (Blumer 1969; Mick and Buhl 1992), and their memberships, for example.

### 5.3 Summary

The study of identity has served as a cornerstone of CCT research (Arnould and Thompson 2005). However, recently, scholars have called for these studies to be grounded in the broader (macro) social, historical, ideological, and cultural forces that underline and contextualize consumer identity projects (Askegaard and Linnet; Borgerson and Schroeder 2002). Thus, while much research has adopted a postmodern perspective to the study of identity, this study applies a modernist perspective in order to examine an identity that is emergent – yet socially and historically constructed, akin to Bourdieu’s habitus. In particular, this chapter conceptualized identity in relation to a particular organizational field, i.e. a social movement collectivity. Drawing from the field of organizational studies, this thesis employs Elsbach’s (1999) typology of organizational identity as an orienting device for interpreting the complexities of young women’s various identifications with feminism.

The second part of this chapter considered advertising, which represents a totalizing “magic system” (Williams 1980), whereby structures of meaning are *created* and become *attached* to commodities. This gives rise to Ewen’s (1976/2008) ‘commodity self’, where people come to be defined by the commodities they have (what this symbolizes) rather than by what they do. Thus, to understand one’s relation to macro ideologies is to understand how they are received/interpreted in their advertised and commodified form. These interpretations, however, do not occur in isolation, but are shaped by, and thus reveal, individuals’ broader identity projects and the wider cultural context that they inhabit (O’Donohoe 2001). In this way, advertisements function as ideological instruments and consumers’ readings of ads function as insightful micro consumption

activities, which help link macro, meso, and micro conceptualizations. This chapter, thus, provides a basis for the empirical data generation, which, considers both young women's sexual identity projects and their interpretations of sexual ads as they relate to the contemporary feminist movement.

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## CHAPTER SIX

### METHODOLOGY

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The purpose of this chapter is to explicate and justify the methodological and analytical procedures adopted in this study. However, before delving into the methodological specifics, this chapter first reviews the aims and the rationale for undertaking this particular research. Second, having outlined the theory and scholarship relevant to the macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis, the *contextualized* orientating conceptual framework and the three research questions used to guide this research are introduced. Next, the philosophical underpinnings are discussed, followed by an elaboration of the study's sampling and methodological procedures. Subsequently, an overview of the data analysis is offered and the chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations and ethical considerations.

#### 6.1 Research Aims and Justification

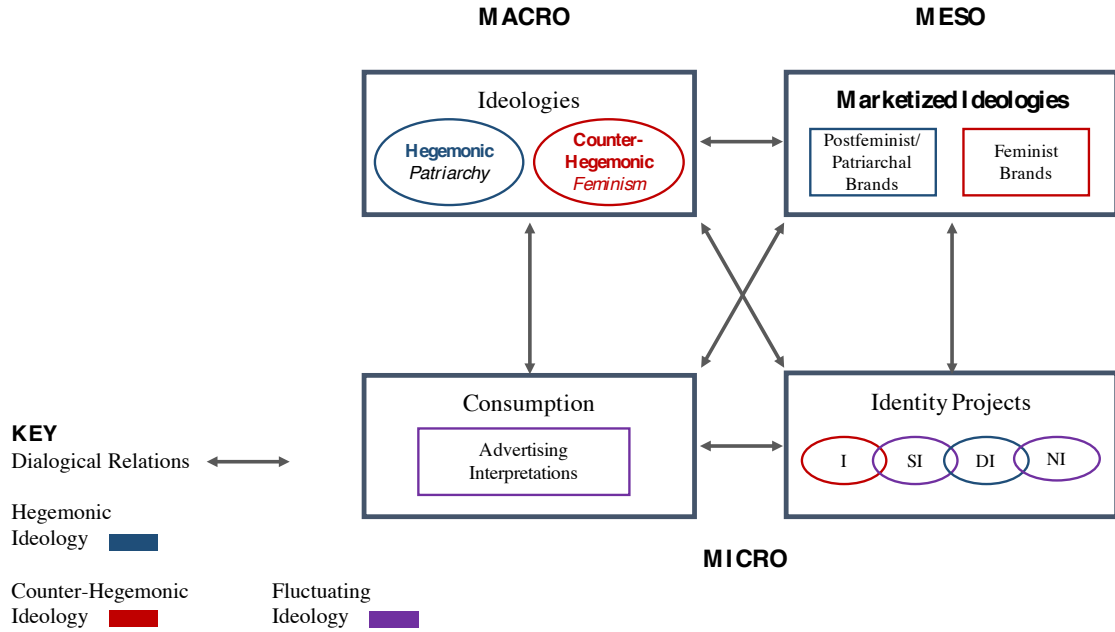
As indicated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.1), this study began with a desire to explore *how* women interpret sexual content in advertising in the context of their own sexual histories, thoughts, fantasies, and ambitions. And although this study evolved and became significantly more political and critical in its aims, the methodology employed and the conclusions it draws are indisputably coupled with its origins. The motivations underpinning this study are threefold. First, as previously discussed (see Chapter 5), the qualitative literature pertaining to sex in advertising remains scarce, with some notable exceptions (e.g. Beetles and Harris 2005; Elliott and Elliott 2005; Schroeder and Zwick 2004). Second, there are limited studies examining how women's experiences shape their advertising interpretations (Mick and Buhl 1992). This is problematic, particularly given the significant conceptual research demonstrating gendered differences with regard to advertising interpretations (O'Donohoe 2000; Stern 2000). Finally, no previous study

appears to have examined the link between women's sexual experiences and how this may influence the ways in which they perceive sexual content in advertising.

These three points served as the primary motivations underpinning this study. An explicit focus on women's sexual narratives not only provided greater insight into how women interpret sexual content in ads, but also (in hindsight) shed light on broader themes of gender, eroticism, relationships, religion, friendship, family, and celebrity culture. In particular, women's sexual narratives were beneficial in *inferring* their lived experiences of feminism and feminist-related issues.

### **6.2.1 Contextualized Orienting Conceptual Framework**

Chapter 2 introduced a generalized orienting conceptual framework for approaching this study, combining macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis. Chapter 3 examined the macro theoretical considerations, distinguishing between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideologies, represented for the purposes of this study by patriarchal and feminist ideologies, respectively. Chapter 4 explicated the meso level of analysis, considering how macro ideologies are communicated via new social movements (NSMs) and illustrating how NSMs become co-opted and marketized through the media. Finally, Chapter 5 contextualized identity projects by drawing on Elsbach's (1999) typology of organizational identification: identification, schitzo-identification, disidentification, and neutral-identification. It also briefly discussed consumers' interactions with and interpretations of advertisements. Synthesizing the literature across these four chapters led to the development of the contextualized orienting conceptual framework presented below, in Figure 6.1.



**Figure 6.1:** Contextualized Orienting Framework

As discussed in Chapter 2, these three levels of analysis are believed to interact dialogically, represented by the double-sided arrows. Hegemonic (indicated by blue circles) and counter-hegemonic (indicated by the red circles) are communicated via marketized ideologies in the form of postfeminist/patriarchal and feminist brands, respectively. Identity projects draw from these, which, in turn, are believed to influence the macro ideologies, at large. These identity projects may ascribe to the counter-hegemony (identification), to the hegemony (disidentification), or draw from both ideologies (schitzo-identification and non-identification, as indicated by the purple circles). Consumption, in the form of advertising interpretations, is also believed to draw from both ideologies (indicated by the purple square).

### 6.2.2 Research Questions

In order to holistically examine the workings of ideology across all three levels of analysis (micro, meso, and macro) and to understand the impact of a marketized traditional and



political institution, namely the feminist social movement, three research questions have been proposed:

**RQ 1:** How do young women's sexual identity projects relate to their interpretations of sexualized advertisements?

**RQ 2:** How are marketized hegemonic (patriarchal) and counter-hegemonic (feminist) ideologies received and interpreted by young women?

**RQ 3:** How do hegemonic (patriarchal) and counter-hegemonic (feminist) ideologies relate to young women's sexual identity projects and their interpretations of sexualized advertisements?

As is evident, the three research questions follow from the contextualized orienting conceptual framework. The first research question looks specifically at how the two micro levels of analysis relate to one another (young women's sexual narratives and their interpretations of sexualized ads). The second research question moves up a level of abstraction to consider first, how patriarchal and feminist macro ideologies are communicated via cultural production systems (i.e. the media) (macro-meso) and second, how these marketized ideologies are linked to young women's micro identity projects and advertising interpretations (meso-micro). The last research question considers the dialogical interplay between how young women might reproduce and/or resist the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideologies of patriarchy and feminism, at large (macro-micro). These research questions helped guide the methodological and analytical procedures adopted for this research. However, before delving into the specifics, the philosophical underpinnings of this research are explained.

## **6.2 Philosophical Underpinnings**

The philosophical underpinnings guiding this research can be understood by way of what Thomas Kuhn (1970) identified as a 'paradigm', that is, a set of shared traditions or

metaphysics (i.e. beliefs, rules, and standards) through which research is conducted. These shared beliefs that define one’s adopted paradigm can be understood through three interconnected philosophical concepts that structure one’s worldview and concept of reality; these are formally understood as ‘*ontology*’ (what can be known about the world and the nature of reality), ‘*epistemology*’ (what is the nature of knowledge), and ‘*methodology*’ (how can knowledge be acquired and investigated) (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Together, these philosophical concepts shape the assumptions that underpin social science research. Before examining the selected paradigm and assumptions, it is worth mentioning that, following the tenets of CCT and the ‘interpretive turn’ in consumer research (Sherry Jr. 1991; Spiggle 1994), this study adopts a qualitative approach. Accordingly, the following discussion focuses primarily on the qualitative traditions and philosophical underpinnings of social science research<sup>30</sup>.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) identify four main paradigms associated with qualitative research, all of which assume distinct philosophical underpinnings. These are summarized in Table 6.1 below, as a way to help facilitate this discussion.

<i>Paradigm</i>	<i>Positivism</i>	<i>Post-positivism</i>	<i>Critical Theory et al.</i>	<i>Constructivism</i>
<b><i>Ontology</i></b>	<b>Realism</b> There exists an external reality independent of individuals’ understanding of it	<b>Critical Realism</b> There exists an external reality independent of individuals’ understanding of it; reality is not fully apprehendable and only knowable via the human mind and socially constructed meanings	<b>Materialism; historical realism</b> There exists an external reality independent of individuals’ understanding of it; only the material or physical world is considered ‘real’ and mental phenomena arises from the material world	<b>Idealism</b> No external reality exists independently of individuals’ understanding of it; there exist multiple realities

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<sup>30</sup> Importantly, this is not to suggest that a research paradigm stipulates whether qualitative or quantitative methods should be used, since both may be applied appropriately (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Objectivity/Positivism</b>	<b>Modified Objectivity/Positivism</b>	<b>Interpretive/Subjective</b>	<b>Interpretive/Subjective</b>
	Findings are value-free and objective; they can be obtained in ways that are unaffected by the researcher	Dualism between the researched and the researcher is abandoned, yet objectivity remains a 'regulatory ideal'; findings are objective, yet subject to falsification	Findings are value-mediated and interaction-dependent; researchers should make their assumptions transparent; emphasis on reflexivity	Findings are value-laden and created through investigation, where the researcher plays an integral role in generating the findings
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Quantitative</b>	<b>Mixed-Methods</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>	<b>Qualitative</b>
	Experimental and manipulative methods; emphasis on quantitative techniques	Modified experimental and manipulative methods; concerned with falsifying rather than verifying hypotheses; emphasis is placed on mixed-methods	Dialogical and dialectical; emphasis on qualitative methods	Hermeneutic and dialogical; emphasis on qualitative methods

**Table 6.1:** Qualitative Research Paradigms  
*Adapted from: Guba and Lincoln (1994: 109)*

Parallels can be made between positivist and post-positivist paradigms in terms of their respective epistemologies and methodologies, which tend to employ quantitative methodologies, that include experiments, surveys, statistics, and simulation models, for example, and advocate for objective and (largely) value-free findings (Bryman and Bell 2003/2007). Alternatively, constructivist and critical theory paradigms, the latter of which also includes neo-Marxist, feminist, materialist, queer theory, and participation inquiry paradigms, tend towards value-mediated or value-laden findings; the associated methods are typically those of an interpretive and qualitative nature, including in-depth interviews, phenomenology, and ethnography, for example (Bryman and Bell 2003/2007). While this research tends towards the latter two paradigms, it is essential to recognize that critical theory and constructivism are not wholly commensurable, particularly when considering their differing ontological stances: critical theory asserts that there exists an external

reality, albeit one that is never fully apprehendable, whereas constructivism argues for the existence of multiple realities (Guba and Lincoln 1994).

Given the Marxist-informed theoretical underpinnings of this research, a critical theory research paradigm is adopted. The corresponding ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions are addressed below.

### **6.2.1 Ontology: Historical Realism**

Questions of ontology are metaphysical and consider whether social reality exists ‘out there’ or is merely a product of one’s mind. Within the realm of marketing, questions of ontology (and epistemology) have been widely considered. Characterized by debates between relativists and positivists, these issues came to the fore (within the marketing discipline) in the early 1980s, beginning with the decade-long Anderson-Hunt interchanges (Kavanagh 1994). Critical theory, however, deviates from these two camps in adopting a ‘critical realist’ position, which stems from Marxism, but is most closely associated with the works of Roy Bhaskar (1975/2008, 1993). Although a full discussion of critical realism is beyond the scope of this project, a critical realist perspective holds that social reality exists ‘out there’, but this is an emergent reality, *interdependent* on the activities and cognition of humans. As discussed by Gorski (2013), such a view involves the following three stipulations:

1. Social reality is distinct from natural reality, the latter of which is considered to be relatively independent of human interaction;
2. Social reality is made up of multiple perspectives and is independent of any particular human mind; and
3. Social reality is ‘independent of’, not ‘exhausted by’ human persons, thus it is also comprised of material social structures and systems that can be independent of human interactions.

Such a view has been credited with delivering an effective schema for theorizing change and is thus appropriate to critical theory, which, while generally assimilated with the Frankfurt school and the works of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, has increasingly made its way into the consumer research tradition (Firat and Tadajewski 2009; Murray 2002; Murray and Ozanne 1991, 2006). Murray and Ozanne (2006: 51) explicate the 'realist' ontological underpinnings associated with critical theory:

[A] critical perspective assumes 'realism', the view that a real world exists 'out there' that can be known by the human mind. In this context, 'mind' is understood as a receptacle for sense-data from which it constructs a picture of the world piece by piece. This assumes a correspondence theory of knowledge where words and concepts genuinely refer to material objects. The purpose of critical theory is to resolve the contradiction between subjects and objects so that people can begin to see the world as it really is.

Expanding on this, Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) stipulate that critical theorists adopt a number of shared ontological assumptions, which can be summarized into two categories. The first has to do with the *specific nature* of the 'real world' that is assumed to be fundamentally mediated by socially and historically constituted power relations. These power relations result in many types and forms of oppression that are most forcefully reproduced when they are considered natural, necessary, and/or inevitable. Thus, the nature of the 'real world' is characterized by incessant conflict, struggle, and oppression (Crotty 1998). Consequently, it is the critical researcher's role to draw out these oppressions and power relations in order to more effectively challenge them. In this way, critical researchers adopt the role of Gramsci's (1971) 'organic intellectual' in interpreting and raising awareness or consciousness of hegemonic forms of oppression ingrained in society.

The second adheres more explicitly to the *construction* of the 'real world' that is made up of historical and changing social, political, economic, ethnic, and gendered structures, systems, and relations. In this way, individuals are born into a pre-constructed world that is simultaneously always being constructed and reconstructed. Importantly, critical theory deviates from constructivism in granting precedence to natural and historical structures

rather than an individual's mental social constructions (Snape and Spencer 2003). However, from an epistemological point of view, this can be problematic, since the historical structures are only accessible through people's mental and linguistic representations.

### **6.2.2 Epistemology: Interpretivism**

Epistemologically, both critical theory and constructivist paradigms employ a *type* of interpretivism, where findings are subjective, interaction-dependent, and not value-neutral. Epistemological differences between the two paradigms arise for two main reasons. First, unlike much traditional interpretive research that is interested in *describing* reality and generally *contributing* to knowledge, critical research is political at its core and aims to *criticize* in order to ignite some *political* or *emancipatory action* (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). In this way, although both research traditions adopt an '*inductive*' research approach (the identification of patterns and associations to form a theory), as opposed to a '*deductive*' approach (the generation of hypotheses and propositions based on a theory, a priori) (Snape and Spencer 2003), critical theory carries '*abductive*' or '*retroduction*' overtones (Strydom 2011). An abductive research approach, generally attributed to pragmatist Charles Pierce, involves an iterative process of identifying a theoretical assumption to explain a set of observations, which might be probable, but is never provable. This is sometimes explained as an 'inference to the best explanation', an 'explanatory hypothesis', a 'causal explanation', or in a more banal fashion, 'guessing' (Gorski 2013; Hintikka 1998).

The second epistemological difference relates to the ontological differences noted in the previous section. While constructivist approaches stress co-created, *value-laden* findings that stem solely from the mental structures (and language) of individuals, critical theory affords primacy to historical social structures, thus advocating *value-mediated* findings (Snape and Spencer 2003; Guba and Lincoln 1994). A critical realist approach agrees that social structures can only ever be understood and/or observed through humans and their

material artifacts. Yet, because reality can be successfully studied at different spatio-temporal scales (macro, meso, and micro levels), this suggests that reality must be, at least partly, organized that way. To gauge these macro level structures, then, is to describe their *workings* and this is achieved by what Bhaskar (1993) refers to as ‘*dialectical critical realism*’, which consists of four moments, expanding on Hegel’s original three; Gorski (2013: 667) summarizes:

In the first moment [‘non-identity’], we grasp the distinctness of structures qua individuals, suspended in time. In the second moment [‘negation’], we grasp them as agents in interaction across time. In the third [‘totality’], we comprehend the relations within and between these agents in systemic terms. In the fourth and final moment [‘praxis’], we reflect on what we have learned and decide how to act on it.

Such a view corresponds to Bourdieu’s microsociological approach that advocates for a synthesis of structure/agency by examining micro level interactions that are believed to cumulatively reflect interpersonal situations at the macro level (Swartz and Zolberg 2004). Bhaskar similarly tries to rid his project of the structure/agency problem, asserting that “[h]uman agents are bio-psycho-social structures with emergent powers of intentionality. Conversely, social structures have agency, an agency that transcends and influences the intentions of the individual agents that co-constitute them” (Gorski 2013: 669). In the realm of consumer research, Askegaard and Linnet (2011) argue the need to theorize beyond consumers’ lived experiences to better account for the underlying ideological and mythical structures, systems, and powers by taking into account Douglas’s (1986) theory of institutional agency. Thus, in granting these macro structures or external contexts agency, individuals’ intentional (and unintentional) actions are understood in their socio-historical contexts, rather than in the generic sense of ‘free will’ (Robb 2010).

Notably, such an undertaking poses particular difficulties in the realm of critical theory, inasmuch as it involves identifying *contradictions* between an emerging empirical reality and people’s experience of it, both of which are expressed in the context of language, which is not free from context or ideological inscription and is central to the formation of

subjectivity (Kincheloe and McLaren 2005). In other words, the problem becomes how critical theorists can hope to identify, let alone reflect and learn from such contradictions, given that the empirical reality and one's experience of that reality are described using the same linguistic system.

In combating these issues, Murray and Ozanne (1991, 2006) advocate a 'postmodern pragmatism' that emphasizes local acts of micro-emancipation, whereby resistance is conceptualized as decentralized and fragmented activities situated primarily in the realm of identity politics. Such an approach, however, has been deemed inconsistent with the critical theory espoused by the Frankfurt School, which advocates a more radically progressive agenda (Hetrick and Lozada 1994). From this latter perspective, critical theory as a standalone theoretical paradigm is regarded as incommensurable with contemporary society, given the inescapability of a social totality (i.e. capitalism, patriarchy). However, some researchers have noted the possibility of a renewal of critical theory by coupling it with postmodern and poststructural approaches as a way to expand on the failures and limitations associated with advanced capitalism (Agger 1991; Hetrick and Lozada 1994; Levin 1991), rather than focus on local points of resistance that often fall victim to the perils associated with identity politics. This leads into the last philosophical assumption underpinning this study: the methodology.

### **6.2.3 Methodology: Existential Phenomenology**

The specific methodology employed in this thesis was selected for two reasons. The first, quite broadly, stems from my ontological and epistemological positions that are rooted in a critical theory tradition, which entails studying 'lived ideologies', facilitated through the generation of micro-sociological data in order to make inferences about oppressive macro structures and systems (Swartz and Zolberg 2004). The second has to do with the conceptual and substantive aims of the study (Laudan 1984). Thus, inasmuch as this is a critical study exploring the *lived experiences* of macro ideologies facilitated through meso



cultural production systems, a variant of existential-phenomenological interviewing was selected as the appropriate interpretive method for this study.

Existential-phenomenology is “a combination of two philosophies, one concerned with a certain perspective on human existence [existentialism] and the other with a certain mode of investigating that difference [phenomenology]” (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997: 4). Phenomenology stems from the writings of Edmund Husserl, but is most closely associated with the work of his contemporary, Martin Heidegger. The key goal for these philosophers involved describing the *essence of experience* as they present themselves to consciousness. It is a philosophy concerned with identifying *a priori* categories or structures that make subjective experiences (i.e. thinking, understanding, and lived experience) possible (Solomon 1972/2001). While Søren Kierkegaard is often regarded as the founder of modern existentialism, existentialism as a movement is most strongly associated with Jean-Paul Sartre, and developed as a critical response to phenomenology. Rejecting essence, rationality, and generalizations, existentialists focus on the world as it is *lived* and *experienced* by unique individuals with emphasis placed on the body and the affective (Dreyfus and Wrathall 2006).

These two philosophical movements began to merge following the writings of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who developed the more contemporary existential-phenomenology philosophy. Today, existential-phenomenology functions as a philosophy and a method that insists the world is to be lived and described rather than explained (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997). It is important, however, to distinguish between existential-phenomenology as a philosophy and as a method. Given the critical ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this study, existential-phenomenology is applied as a practical method, rather than a philosophical stance.

Following the ‘interpretive turn’ in the 1980s (Sherry Jr. 1991), existential phenomenology made its consumer research debut following Thompson, Locander, and

Pollio's (1989) seminal article, which urged researchers to 'put consumer experience back into consumer research'. Accordingly, an existential phenomenological approach enables consumer researchers to describe consumption-related experience as it emerges in some context(s) of social interaction, or as it is 'lived' through formative processes. They do this in pursuit of in-depth understandings of both reflexive and non-reflexive experiences, practices, meanings, and interpretations, which are dependent upon a particular context (Blumer 1969). Existential-phenomenological interviewing seeks to capture first-person descriptions of a specified domain of experience in a circular, free-flowing, first-person dialogue, as opposed to predetermined, linear, and more structured interviewing approaches. Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989) (see also Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997) offer some heuristic guidelines for conducting phenomenological interviews:

1. The interview should inspire a free-flowing and circular conversation, thus the interviewer should have no *a priori* questions concerning the topic. However, the research questions serve as a motivational backdrop for the researcher, helping to keep the dialogue focused on experiences relevant to the study;
2. Questions and probes should evoke detailed descriptive experiences; thus researchers should refrain from asking closed-ended questions intending to confirm or disprove a theoretical hypothesis;
3. The purpose of the interview is to understand informants' lived experiences from which theoretical inferences can be drawn *by the researcher*. Hence 'why' questions that prompt the informant to offer a plausible explanation or theorization of their own experiences should be avoided;
4. Informants should be made to feel comfortable in freely describing their experiences. Because the data arising from the interview are dialogic, informants are considered co-researchers as opposed to research subjects. Particular care should be taken to reduce power imbalances, by adopting a non-directive interview style and treating the informant as the expert of his or her own experiences;

5. Meaning is derived from first-person descriptions and nomothetic interpretations should remain grounded in the idiographic lived experiences of the informants.

These methodological stipulations have withstood the test of time, remaining largely unchallenged in the CCT tradition. However, some recent critiques highlight the limitations of existential-phenomenological interviewing, claiming that it is too individualistic, mentalistic, and unable to account for the postmodern complexities of social action, as well as the cultural, historical, ethical, and political dimensions of marketplace activity (e.g. Holt 2004; Moisander, Peñaloza, and Valtonen 2009; Moisander, Valtonen, and Hirsto 2009). Others offer less fundamental critiques, calling for ways of analyzing or theorizing data that more appropriately take into account socio-economic, ethical, and political contexts (e.g. Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Borgerson and Schroeder 2002).

Thus, following Askegaard and Linnet's (2011) call for a 'context-attentive epistemology', this study employs a variant of existential-phenomenological interviewing in order to study the practices and symbolic exchanges that individuals engage in, as a way to theorize the broader political, historical, and socio-cultural boundaries and institutions mediating both their reflexive and non-reflexive experiences. In so doing, the *analysis* – as opposed to the method (i.e. the existential-phenomenological interview) is adjusted to “retain the detailed description of experience, but also refer to extra-experiential contexts on theoretical and methodological grounds” (Askegaard and Linnet 2011: 394). Accordingly, this study employs a multi-step hermeneutic analysis (as detailed in Section 6.4) to consider interactions across multiple levels or scales of observation (macro, meso, and micro). This allows for the development of theoretical and critical explanations via descriptive data, thus addressing concerns about individualistic analysis associated with existential-phenomenological interviewing.

## **6.3 Methodological Procedures**

The following section discusses the methodological procedures adopted in this study, including the selection of the orienting framework, the adopted sampling procedures and the chosen research design.

### **6.3.1 Bracketing: Selection of the Orienting Framework**

In accordance with existential phenomenology, it is customary to ‘bracket’ an orienting frame-of-reference in order to establish one’s interpretive lens from which to interpret any generated data (O’Shaughnessy 1985; Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997). This process of ‘bracketing’ is typically associated with a phenomenological philosophy, which in its purest definition means to suspend or temporarily cast aside, all experience resulting from linguistic, cultural, and methodological influence that might bias the interpretation (Cooper 1999). Since assuming a perfectly neutral interpretation is unrealistic, a reformed practice of bracketing was proposed that requires the interpreter articulate an orienting frame-of-reference that facilitates the emergence of a phenomenological understanding (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997; Thompson 1997). This initiating frame-of-reference concerns the historical, cultural, and social conditions relevant to the context of interest and can be devised using two non-mutually exclusive sources: a primary analysis of historical data (e.g. texts, magazines, archival records) and/or secondary analysis of the historical and sociological data relevant to the group(s) and phenomenon being studied (Thompson 1997); this study attended to the later.

In selecting one’s orienting frame, Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) suggest one conduct a ‘bracketing interview’ (often in the form of a personal statement) in order to tease out the researcher’s personal motivation, history, and current concerns in relation to a particular phenomenon. While this is presented in Chapter 1, the orienting frame was, in actuality, constructed during the data generation process and stemmed, at least in part, from the data itself. The orienting frame-of-reference was first introduced in Chapter 2

(see Figure 2.2) and expanded on (i.e. contextualized) in Section 6.1 (see Figure 6.1). Following Murray's (2002) critical re-inquiry of how individuals consume fashion, this study's orienting conceptual framework reflects the dialogical processes between two competing forces: hegemonic (patriarchy) and counter-hegemonic (feminism). Similarly, these macro forces may also be conceptualized in terms of structure (hegemonic domination) and agency (new social movements). However, as illustrated in both Figure 2.2 and Figure 6.1, the orienting conceptual framework presented in this study is more complex and nuanced than Murray's dualistic conceptualization and includes a meso level (i.e. marketized ideologies) to more clearly illustrate how consumers engage with macro ideological forces.

The fact that the orienting frame-of-reference was constructed *during* rather than prior to the data generation process did not preclude the use of an interpretive lens. As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study went through a number of revisions and iterations, yet at the time of the data generation, it was primarily concerned with how emerging-adult women in the United States interpreted sexualized advertisements from the context of their sexual narratives. This ultimately generated data on a *specific type* of experience that allowed inferences to be drawn with regard to how young women experience and relate to the feminist movement. Accordingly, extensive analysis was undertaken prior to the data generation process, in order to become familiar with the socio-cultural, historical, and political context of young women's lives in America in relation to issues of sex and sexuality<sup>31</sup>. While much of this research was situated within consumer and feminist disciplines (as was elaborated in Chapters 2 – 5), other disciplines and literature sources were consulted on the study of sexuality, including psychoanalytic views (Freud 1962/2000; Freud 1963/1997b; Lacan 1985), quantitative research employing standardized surveys (e.g. Andersen and Cryanowski 1994; Herbenick et al. 2010; Kinsey 1948, 1953; Laumann et al. 1994), physiological research (e.g. Chivers et al. 2004;

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<sup>31</sup> Although this study focused on the contemporary feminist movement in the United States, research that expanded beyond this historical and national focus was consulted in the construction of the orienting framework.

Masters and Johnson 1966, 1970), economic perspectives (e.g. Baumeister and Mendoza 2011; Baumeister and Vohs 2004), and evolutionary and sociocultural viewpoints (e.g. Baumeister and Tice 2001; Bergner 2013; Friday 1973; Gagnon and Simon 1973; Holland et al. 1994; Tolman and Diamond 2001). This research, along with the insight gained from the preliminary interviews, worked to shape the orienting contextualized conceptual framework.

### **6.3.2 Sampling**

In line with most qualitative research, snowball and purposive sampling was employed to facilitate an intensive analysis of a small body of empirical materials, where, following Sartre (1981), to study the particular is to study the general (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). This section outlines the sampling procedures as they relate to the selection of the 14 informants and the media materials.

#### **6.3.2.1 Sampling of Informants**

In accordance with the process of bracketing, the gendered, spatial (national), and temporal (generational) context of the study also needed to be narrowed and defined. This was especially pertinent given the dispersed and disaggregated nature of the contemporary feminist movement (Haenfler 2004; Mann and Huffman 2005). Indeed, given the historical and generational specification – or idiosyncrasies – of the contemporary feminist movement (Kinser 2004; McRobbie 2004a), I decided it most appropriate to sample *young women*, who are most likely to be in tune with or accustomed to these idiosyncrasies, as opposed to men or older women who might be more closely aligned with a previous feminist movement. Given the sensitive nature of sexual research (Plummer 1995), I thought it best to interview young *American* women, particularly because I myself am a young woman from the United States, which could be helpful in establishing rapport, i.e. a common ground or shared experiences (Dickson-Swift, et al. 2007; Kaiser 2009). Importantly, this is not to suggest that contemporary feminism and women's relations to it developed or occur in isolation; rather, this study adopts a

relatively ‘narrow’ perspective on broader issues. Of course, such delineations are not without their limitations, as further discussed in Section 6.5.

Data generation took place in a Mid-Southern state in the United States. The metropolitan area of the state houses nearly 24,000 students from the public university alone, contributing to a diverse population, with competing religious, ethnic, class, and educational backgrounds. The public university served as the primary place for recruitment and informants came from all over the United States. Because the contemporary feminist movement incorporates intersections of race, education, social class, and sexual orientation (Valentine 2007), the sampling criteria was intentionally flexible. Adopting a snowballing or ‘chain’ technique, I relied extensively on the social networks and contacts provided by friends, colleagues, and former informants (Noy 2008). Accordingly, women from all different backgrounds were considered, as long as they fit the criteria of identifying as a (1) young, (2) American (3) woman. The informants also varied in terms of race, education levels, sexual preferences, sexual experience, and relationship statuses, for example. And although this study was conducted in a Mid-Southern state, over half of the informants (eight of the fourteen) resided in different states for at least some period of their lives and continued correspondence shows that this number has increased to at least eleven of the fourteen informants (one informant now resides in another country).

Using Arnett’s (2000) concept of emerging adulthood (those 18-25 years of age) as a loose guide, my actual sample ranged from women between 20 and 31 years-old. This age-range notably extends Arnett’s original definition of emerging adulthood, but is justified in light of recent socio-economic trends and research demonstrating how adolescence has become prolonged in our current industrial society, where careers are postponed and more adults find themselves returning home after a period of independent living (Davidson 2015; Marsh 2016; Mitchell 2006). Furthermore, this age group has featured prominently in the existent, though primarily quantitative sex in advertising research (e.g. LaTour and

Henthorne 1993; LaTour, Pitts, and Snook-Luther 1990; Simpson, Horton, and Brown 1996), as younger people are believed to favor sex in advertising more than older adults (Eck 2001; Wise, King, and Merenski 1974). Additionally, many of the sexualized adverts and selected brands appear to target this age group.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, it was somewhat difficult to recruit informants, although this may have been attributed more to my fear of asking random women to participate in a study about sex than a lack of enthusiasm on their side. Thus, in addition to relying on friends and former informants to spread the word, small incentives (i.e. lunch, wine, snacks, and a chance to win a \$100 gift-card to Amazon) were offered to all of the informants.

Table 6.2 below offers a summary of the fourteen informants’ demographics. More detailed explanations are offered in Appendix 6. Additionally, Chapter 7 details five idiographic cases that constitute the intracase findings of this study.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Sexuality</i>	<i>Relationship Status</i>
<i>Ivy</i>	22	Currently a 3 <sup>rd</sup> year university student; works at a fast-food chain	Caucasian	Heterosexual	In a relationship (1.5 years)
<i>Lucy</i>	23	High school; works as an artist and a waitress	Korean	Heterosexual	In a relationship (about one year)
<i>Natasha</i>	26	Bachelor’s degree; works as an art preparator at an art gallery	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Married (two years)
<i>Madison</i>	22	Currently a 4 <sup>th</sup> year university student	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Single
<i>Aaliyah</i>	21	Currently a 3 <sup>rd</sup> year university student; works at a fast-food chain	African	Heterosexual (with self-proclaimed queer tendencies)	In a relationship (four months)
<i>Kris</i>	25	Some college; works as a bartender	Vietnamese	Homosexual	Single



<i>Nikki</i>	31	High school; works as a bank teller; studying at the community college to be a physical therapy assistant	Caucasian	Homosexual	Divorced (from a man after six years); single mother of two daughters; in a relationship with a woman (off-and-on for four years)
<i>Audrey</i>	28	Currently a PhD student	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Single (dating someone off-and-on for nine months)
<i>Chelsea</i>	24	Master's degree; stay-at-home wife	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Married (three years)
<i>Lauren</i>	22	Currently a 4 <sup>th</sup> year university student; works in retail	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Dating someone (for two weeks)
<i>Angela</i>	26	Some college; works as a receptionist	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Recently engaged (have been together for about one year)
<i>Khloe</i>	20	Currently a 3 <sup>rd</sup> year university student; works as a waitress	Caucasian	Heterosexual	In a relationship (two years)
<i>Mia</i>	25	Bachelor's degree; works for a Christian faith-based charity	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Single
<i>Krista</i>	24	Bachelor's degree; works as a waitress	Caucasian	Heterosexual	Single

**Table 6.2:** Informant Demographics

### 6.3.2.2 Sampling of Advertisements

In addition to selecting an orienting framework and a range of informants, it was also necessary to clearly define a medium of ‘mass media’ from which to explore the interested phenomenon. Forms of mass media can span from films, television, advertisements, literature, and social media platforms, all of which have the potential to convey different aspects of contemporary social movements (Kellner 1995). Advertisements, however lend themselves useful in exploring themes of consumer culture, particularly given their tendency to fetishize commodities and the commodity self (Ewen’s 1976/2008), as discussed in the previous Chapter 5.

In accordance with existential phenomenology, contemporary print ads were considered in order to understand how young women interpret sexual content within ads they are exposed to in their every-day lives. Of course, an exact simulation of this was not possible, given that the informants were knowingly in a research-setting environment. Print – or magazine – ads were selected to allow the women to physically see, touch, and pick up the ads to rank, compare, order, and/or categorize them. However, these ads generally had a widespread and online presence, indicating the likelihood that the informants were previously exposed to the ads, or at least ones similar to them. Many of the informants also discussed other ad mediums (e.g. digital and TV ad campaigns) and forms of media (e.g. movies, TV-shows, and books). Finally, more attention was placed on the women's (micro) interpretations of the ads, as opposed to the (meso-level) ads, brands, and/or magazines themselves; these ads simply functioned as commercial and cultural artifacts mediums from which to generate interpretations.

In generating these interpretations, informants were asked first, to select and look through the current issue of a magazine and discuss the ads within it, and second, to discuss 18 pre-selected advertisements. With regard to the first activity, I presented a number of female-targeted magazines made readily available at the check-out line in any American grocery store<sup>32</sup>. These included '*Cosmopolitan*', '*Vogue*', '*Harper's Bazaar*', and '*InStyle*'. I also included two male-targeted magazines in case the informants tended towards these, as did one informant; these included '*Details*' and '*GQ*'. Informants were not required to bring in their own magazines, however, all informants were shown the same range of magazines and asked to select one they were likely to read in a waiting room.

With regard to the 18 'core' advertisements, the primary purpose of showing the informants this set was to evoke a multitude of interpretations across similar stimuli.

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<sup>32</sup> I selected magazines that I knew would have more ads with sexual content and thus avoided genres, such as news, trade and professional, and in-house, for example.

These ads were selected based on three criteria: (1) coverage of themes indicated by the sexuality literature<sup>33</sup>, (2) particular content elements (i.e. various number of models, different types of positions and poses, as well as different levels of explicitness) (Eck 2003), and (3) the target audience of the ads (i.e. selecting ads that targeted women either directly or indirectly. For example, one Giorgio Armani advertisement was advertising a men's cologne, but was featured in a magazine targeting women) (Beetles and Harris 2004; Elliott and Elliott 2005). With regard to the first point, a multitude of sources (e.g. Baumeister and Twenge 2002; Bergner 2013; Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010; Friday 1973; Hite 1976; Holland et al. 1994) were consulted in comprising a guiding list of potentially relevant sexual themes, e.g. love and romance, passive females, active/empowered females, sexualized males, fantasies of voyeurism, sadomasochism, group sex, rape, exotic and/or public places, homosexuality (lesbians and gay men), ethnic men, role play, and sex with strangers. See Appendix 5 for a full description and outline of the sexual themes that I identified in the selected advertisements. These themes were not shared with the informants, as the aim was to invite their interpretations, rather than test the interpretations I developed based on previous literature. In other words, consistent with the notion of polysemy (Puntoni, Schroeder, and Ritson 2010), or multiple readings and interpretations of texts, informants were expected to read their own histories and politics into the advertisements.

All advertisements were selected from contemporary advertising campaigns (from the years 2012 to 2014), with the exception of one notorious Dolce and Gabbana advertisement that was released in 2007. This particular advertisement was selected based on its reference to rape, specifically gang rape (Burnett 2007). No contemporary advertisement was found to represent this theme so overtly.

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<sup>33</sup> Refer to Appendix 5 for a full description and outline of the sexual themes depicted by the selected ads. Specific locations/ magazine titles of the advertisements are not explicitly mentioned as they appeared in multiple print and online publications; thus only the date of the campaign is revealed. Note also that each informant viewed each advertisement differently and thus a multitude of themes were identified in addition to and in contrast from the themes that I deemed important.

### **6.3.3 Research Design**

Three separate, yet inter-related methodological procedures were adopted in this study. These comprised two in-depth interviews informed by existential-phenomenology and a visual projective collage.

#### **6.3.3.1 Existential-Phenomenological Interviews**

The purpose of this study is to understand how ideology expands across multiple levels (i.e. macro, meso, micro). While macro level ideologies do not lend themselves to empirical study, data can be generated with regard to both the micro and meso levels, although given the microsociological approach adopted in this study, I adhered strictly to the former (i.e. micro-level data). I conducted two<sup>34</sup> depth-interviews with 14 informants. The first interview considered the informants' interpretations of sexualized advertising content. Following an introduction where the informants were told about the study, reassured of their privacy through the use of pseudonyms, and asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix 1), all interviews began with grand-tour questions (McCracken 1988), concerning their families, friends, background, education, work history, religious and political affiliations, personal interests, and media preferences (i.e. television series, movies, advertisements, magazines, books, etc.). Here it is important to note that although the southern region of the United States (around about where this research was conducted) is often associated with certain socio-political leanings (e.g. fundamental Christianity and the right-wing republican party) (Lublin 2004), each informant was questioned about these topics individually, so as to avoid making broad generalizations. In fact, well over half of the informants did not adhere to any specific religion and most identified themselves as having liberal or no political leanings whatsoever.

Informants were then asked to discuss their general thoughts about sex in advertising and share any examples that came to mind. Subsequently, they selected either a contemporary

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<sup>34</sup> In one case, three separate interviews were conducted, given certain time restrictions and the lengthiness of her sexual narrative.

female-targeted magazine (i.e. *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, or *InStyle*), or a contemporary male-targeted magazine (i.e. *Details*, or *GQ*<sup>35</sup>), which I provided<sup>36</sup>. All of the informants were familiar with the magazines presented and most said they had read one or more of the magazines at least once. Informants were asked to look through the magazine and share their thoughts about the advertisements they felt represented or attempted to represent sex in advertising. These two exercises allowed the informants to operationalize the meaning of 'sex' and/or 'sexy' in advertising.

The informants then discussed 18 advertisements that I had pre-selected (as discussed in Section 6.3.2.2). Unlike the magazine ads discussed in the previous activity, here the informants saw 18 ads (high-quality color ads that I printed and laminated) in isolation, that is not within the context of a particular medium, such as a magazine. This allowed for the generation of multiple interpretations across similar stimuli. The women were asked to discuss any of the advertisements that stood out for them and then performed a series of ranking (e.g. sexiest ads to least sexy ads), grouping (e.g. based on common themes), and categorizing exercises (e.g. in a series of three ads, which ad does not fit and why). At the end of the first interview, informants were asked to prepare for the next interview by making a projective collage using Pinterest, Tumblr, or through traditional methods (cut-and-paste), containing any images, personal pictures, words, videos, songs, etc. that they deemed as 'sexy,' to be discussed in the following interview.

The second interview was typically scheduled one week after the first interview and focused on the women's sexual narratives, including their current and past relationships, sexual histories, fantasies, thoughts, feelings, and experiences with sex. Many of these discussions expanded to include elements of their broader identity projects, such as their vocational endeavors and aspirations, their platonic friendships, and their identifications

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<sup>35</sup> One informant claimed that she did not read any female-targeted magazines and instead selected a male-targeted magazine (e.g. *Details*).

<sup>36</sup> The circulation rates and reader demographics for the magazines used in this study are available in Appendix 2.

with groups, clubs, movements, trends, religious, and political affiliations, for example. The collage functioned as a projective technique that helped to ‘autodrive’ the conversation (Heisley and Levy 1991). These were discussed either a precursor to the sexual narrative interview and/or were used during the interview as a way to make reluctant or apprehensive informants feel more comfortable.

All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim<sup>37</sup>. On average, they lasted 1.5 – 2.5 hours each, resulting in over 52 hours of recorded dialogue and over 1,060 single-spaced pages of text. The interviews took place at various locations (i.e. the informants’ houses, my apartment, the university campus, coffee shops, bars, restaurants, and etc.). Example transcripts of the two interviews are provided in Appendix 3.

### **6.3.3.2 Projective Collages**

As was previously indicated, at the end of the first interview informants were asked to construct a visual collage using a social media platform (e.g. Pinterest or Tumblr)<sup>38</sup> containing any images, personal pictures, words, videos, advertisements, songs, and etc. that they considered ‘sexy’. This was done for two reasons. First, just as the existential-phenomenological interviews generated data on a specific type of experience (sexual) without asking them to theorize about themselves and their relation the feminist movement, the projective collages functioned as a phenomenological device eliciting rich and non-verbal qualitative data. This was particularly useful given the sensitive nature of the interviews, leading to the second advantage of this projective exercise, whereby the collages functioned as a photoelicitation technique to help autodrive and enrich the conversations (Heisley and Levy 1991). In their study on consumer desire, Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (2003), found that some of their informants were reluctant to verbally elaborate on their private desires, and thus projective collages were employed as a way to evoke

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<sup>37</sup> A transcriber was hired to transcribe approximately half of the interviews, but I double-checked and edited these to ensure accuracy.

<sup>38</sup> Two of the informants did not have Pinterest or Tumblr accounts and created their collages by cutting and pasting images onto a word document.

discussions about sexual “fantasies, dreams, and visual imagination”, which they argued helped to “bypass the reluctance, defense mechanisms, rationalizations, and social desirability that seemed to block the direct verbal accounts of some of those studied” (332). Correspondingly, the collages in the present study were sometimes discussed as a precursor to the second interview and/or during the interviews in instances where informants were shy or apprehensive. Notably, the social network platforms used by the informants to create their collages had a ‘private’ option, which most opted to use. This is unsurprising given the sensitive and private nature of the collage. The collages were analyzed and written in conjunction with the existential-phenomenological interviews, as is explained in Section 6.4; they were also used in presenting the idiographic cases in Chapter 7. For an example of a collage in its entirety, refer to Appendix 4<sup>39</sup>.

### **6.4 Data Analysis**

In accordance with the heuristic guidelines put forth by Thompson, Locander, and Pollio (1989), later refined by Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997), a hermeneutic approach was adopted in order to analyze the data. Hermeneutics was originally a method used to interpret sacred texts (O’Shaughnessy 1985), yet, in consumer research, it involves a dialogical process of interpreting “consumption meanings in relation to both a consumer’s sense of personal history and a broader narrative context of historically established cultural meanings” (Thompson 1997: 439). In particular, this analysis entails two primary interpretive procedures, referred to by Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) as bracketing and the hermeneutic circle.

Bracketing was discussed in Section 6.3.1, thus the focus here is on the second interpretive procedure necessary to hermeneutic analysis, the ‘hermeneutic circle’. This encompasses the iterative and dialogical process of relating a part of the text to the whole of the text, or

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<sup>39</sup> To further ensure the informants’ privacy, the collage and the sample interview transcripts are from different informants. Additionally, names, pseudonyms, and identifying details have been removed.

relating consumer experiences to the orienting frame-of-reference (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997; Thompson 1997). In particular, this occurs via two distinct, but interrelated processes. The first involves an idiographic interpretation, where each informant is treated as an individual case. Because each informant was interviewed twice (or three times in one case) on two distinct issues (advertising interpretations and sexual narratives), two separate analyses were conducted, generating two separate narratives for each informant. Both narratives were interpreted from the lens of the orienting conceptual framework and were constructed around a summarizing metaphor or theme that represented (1) how informants' read sexualized advertisements and (2) how they constructed their sexual narratives. The sexual narrative also took into account the temporal sequencing of key events (Murray 2000; Stern 1995; Thompson 1997), yet this proved irrelevant for the advertising narrative. In addition, each of the informants was ascribed an 'identification', following Elsbach's (1999) typology introduced in Chapter 5, in order to explicate and distinguish among the primary modes of identification in relation to the contemporary feminist social movement. In line with the tenets of existential-phenomenology, the informants were not asked directly about their relation to the feminist movement, rather inferences were made based on an in-depth analysis of their transcripts and visual collages. Notably, these classifications are not intended to be static or rigid, but rather work to position the informants' multiple and diverse experiences in relation to broader themes that capture complex and nuanced modes of social movement identification.

In addition to these analyses, the informants also engaged in their own informal 'analysis' when asked to interpret advertisements, which implicitly drew from their 'life themes' and 'life projects' (Mick and Buhl 1992). Following the two mainstay analyses, which resulted in one advertising and one sexual narrative per informant, I interpreted the sexual narrative from the perspective of the advertising narrative. The informants' visual collages were also implemented at this stage, focusing on their accounts of the images. In this way, the images (also videos and songs) themselves were less important than the conversations



generated about them. These discussions provided insight into how media artifacts are directly interwoven in the informants' sexual narratives, thus enriching the combined narrative. Importantly, the 'units of analysis' of this study were the women's identity projects and how they relate to the feminist movement as opposed to their interpretations of advertisements or other sexualized imagery. In this way, the informants' interpretations of ads and their collages enhanced understandings of how young women relate to marketized artifacts that signify various representations of feminism and patriarchy. These readings, thus, functioned as micro level activities that provided further insight into the young women's identity projects. In other words, it is important to recognize that this is not an advertising or visual analysis study, nor is it a study purely interested in issues around sex and sexuality.

Altogether, these analyses resulted in one comprehensive narrative per informant that was organized and presented around a central metonym incorporating the orienting frame-of-reference, all relevant interview transcripts, and the informants' visual collages. Additionally, it was through this process that the informants were ascribed a feminist 'identification' to facilitate a clearer understanding of how they related to the feminist movement. These subjective identifications were made based on the informants' dominant lived experiences and relations with the feminist movement. Samples of these intratextual analyses along with snapshots of their visual collages are presented in Chapter 7<sup>40</sup>.

The second relevant process to the hermeneutic circle involves a nomothetic interpretation, which requires the researcher move up a level of abstraction to identify themes and common story lines across the informants (idiographic cases). Thus, each case was interpreted in the context of all other cases in order to facilitate a holistic

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<sup>40</sup> Given the large volume of data and space limitations, only five intratextual cases are presented to ensure the scope and richness of informant's stories. Similarly, only five to six images from informants' visual collages are offered, although many of these collages spanned many pages. The presented images were selected based on their ability to represent the overall 'look' of the collage. For example, many of the informants posted multiple images of the same celebrity or multiple images that represented 'a toned body', thus one image was selected to represent their affinity for that celebrity, attribute, or theme. Again, to see an example of a complete collage, please refer to Appendix 4.

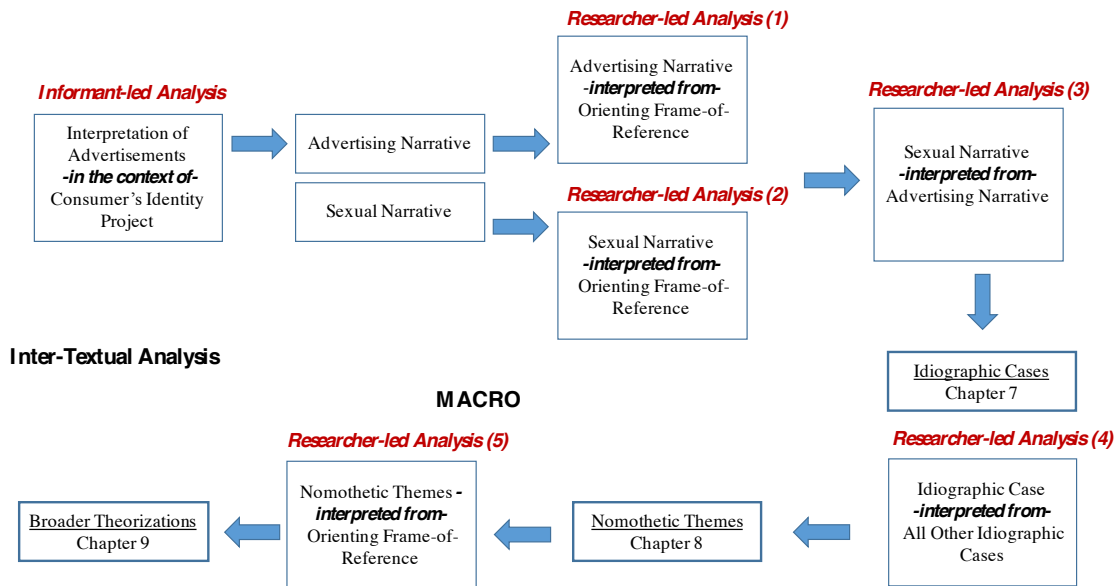
understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson 1997; Thompson 1997). This process resulted in the identification of two primary themes, presented in Chapter 8 as the intercase analysis. These meta-level themes served as the basis for the revised conceptual framework presented in Chapter 9.

While much phenomenologically-based hermeneutical research stops here in order to ensure the findings remain rooted in individual's first-hand experiences, this study goes one step further, following recent calls to consider the 'context of context' and expand beyond mere descriptions of individuated and decontextualized 'appearances' (i.e. experiences) to pursue a critical agenda in questioning what 'appears' and why (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Borgerson and Schroeder 2002). In achieving this, the intertextual analysis and nomothetic themes were repositioned to function as *emic* texts. These themes – that describe how the informants practice activism, relate to marketized ideologies, and interpret advertisements – were re-interpreted through the orienting frame-of-reference, focusing explicitly on the macro hegemonic and counterhegemonic ideological forces. Through a recursive process of 'dialogical dynamism', this entailed an "oscillation between analysis (of parts) and synthesis (of the whole), between the particular and the general, between the empirical (based on observation) and the rational (based on logic)" (Askegaard and Linnet 2011: 398). Hence, through this process, greater emphasis is placed on macro systemic and social theoretical concepts, which are largely discounted in consumer culture studies employing an existential-phenomenological method. Through two iterations of emic to etic, this study moves beyond descriptions of experience that invoke a strictly micro or 'psychological' context, to consider etic 'internal' contexts, i.e. the social and cultural context that entail the (meso level) material structures and institutions, as well as 'external' contexts, i.e. (macro level) global structures, phenomena, and ideologies. Although these theorizations are embedded in an abstract, namely a Marxist viewpoint, they can still be traced back to informants' concrete experiences, as Chapter 9 will illustrate. In this way, the theoretical contributions complement, yet move beyond the philosophical foundations of existential-

phenomenology in seeking to offer a critical and holistic approach corresponding more closely to the tenets of critical theory.

In total, the data went through four iterations of research-led analyses and one iteration of an informant-led analysis. A summary of this multi-step hermeneutic analysis, which, to the best of my knowledge, has yet to be undertaken in consumer research studies is provided below in Figure 6.2:

**Intra-Textual Analysis**



**Figure 6.2:** Multi-Step Hermeneutic Analysis

As is illustrated above, the first step involved the informant-led analysis, whereby the informants interpreted advertisements in the context of their own identity projects, resulting in the generation of their ‘advertising narrative’. The second step involved analyses one and two, whereby the women’s advertising narratives and sexual narratives were separately interpreted from the orienting frame-of-reference. The third analysis subsequently interpreted the women’s sexual narratives in the context of their advertising narratives, resulting in fourteen complete idiographic cases – five of which are presented in Chapter 7. The fourth analysis looked across these idiographic cases, interpreting each case from the context of all other cases, in order to identify nomothetic themes – presented

in Chapter 8. And while the majority of consumer research implementing a hermeneutic analysis stops there, the fifth and final analysis re-interpreted the nomothetic themes in the context of the orienting frame-of-reference, which resulted in a broader theorization of the meso and macro levels of analysis, as presented in a theoretically informed discussion in Chapter 9. This multi-step hermeneutic analysis contextualizes (responding to the call made by Askegaard and Linnet (2011)) and critically investigates the meaning behind micro phenomena, as described by the informants (responding to the call made by Borgerson and Schroeder (2002)).

## 6.5 Limitations

While an existential-phenomenological approach was deemed most appropriate for this research, it nonetheless has some clear limitations. The first of these is not uncommon in qualitative research and concerns the project's scope. Given the sensitive nature of the initial research topic that involved generating sexual narratives, in addition to the extensive time requirements, only fourteen informants took part. Thus, as is the case with other qualitative and interpretive studies, the findings of this study are not generalizable. Additionally, this research was contextually, temporally, and spatially bound to examine the contemporary feminist movement among emerging adult women in the Mid-South region of the United States. While not all of the women were originally from this region, their perspectives may reflect experiences of living, working, and/or attending university in that particular state. Their reasons for moving there ranged from convenience (i.e. receiving a scholarship to a university in that area), to ties with family and friends, or merely a preference for wide open spaces. As previously mentioned, steps were taken in order to gauge *individual preferences* or *leanings* towards socio-political and feminist issues, so as to avoid making generalizations and drawing from stereotypes. Nonetheless, it is fair to suggest that different conclusions may have been drawn if interviews had been held elsewhere, such as in a metropolitan city in the United States, or outside the United States altogether.

The second limitation has to do with my own position as an emerging adult, American, female researcher. My choice to interview other emerging adult, American women was intentional, insofar as it helped to establish a rapport and facilitate deeper understanding that was necessary given the sensitive nature of the topic. Nonetheless, this also implied certain limitations. For example, the informants may have responded differently in front of me (conceivably their peer) than they might have a man or an older woman; however, in any situation it is important to acknowledge that people are always reciprocally performing to an audience (Goffman 1959), and this performance undoubtedly changes depending on who that audience is. Another limitation associated with my position as a researcher had to do with the aspects of the research findings that I took for granted, particularly as they pertained to American femininity, sexual rituals and practices, and the contemporary feminist movement, as it was experienced and expressed in the United States. To this end, I remained reflexive throughout the data generation, analysis, and writing-up process, as is expanded on in the next section. Additionally, my supervisors in the U.K. played a large role in helping me identify significant issues or practices that I took for granted as an emerging adult American woman. For example, access to the birth control pill is not readily available in the U.S., thus many informants enacted various strategies and methods to manage their reproductive health, which to me seemed quite normal, but my supervisors found this to be interesting, if not slightly unusual.

A third limitation stemmed from the fact that the direction of this research project altered dramatically after conducting the preliminary interviews and analyses. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, the original aim of this thesis was not initially to understand how women identified with the contemporary feminist movement, and thus the interviews were not focused on this phenomenon, *per se*. Alternatively, this could be viewed as a benefit to the research, inasmuch as the women's sexual narratives touched on many issues that were central to the contemporary feminist movement and did so without being prompted.

The last limitation identified here concerns the microsociological approach that was adopted as a way to make meso and macro level theoretical inferences. Such a method was employed strategically, replicating the research methodology suggested and employed by Bourdieu himself to understand the interaction between material structures (ideology) and human experience<sup>41</sup>. Nonetheless, this research may have benefitted from a more in-depth analysis of meso level structures and phenomenon (e.g. social movement organizations, media corporations, advertising companies, advertising texts, etc.) in their own right. However, such an undertaking was limited by the time and scope of this project and would have added to the already large volume of data that had been generated.

## 6.6 Ethical Considerations

This research complied with both the University of Edinburgh's Code of Research Ethics (level 3) and also the University Institutional Review Board in the United States, where the data was generated (see Appendix 7). Prior to data generation, an extensive review was undertaken in order to account for the challenges associated with qualitative research, but more specifically, qualitative sex research. In conducting research pertaining to such an intimate topic as sexuality, both the researcher and the research participants become vulnerable parties. Holland and Ramazanoglu (1994) discussed research contexts when women interview other women, asserting that interviews are social events where contextual issues of control and power become crucial in shaping and producing the data. Certainly power imbalances may arise from factors outside of gender differences, such as age, education, sexual orientation, and social class, however, these were somewhat minimized as, like my informants, I am an emerging-adult, American female and as such it was relatively easy to establish some common ground, despite some intersectional differences. In cases where it was more difficult to establish mutuality with the informants, especially those who were more withholding, I thoroughly reviewed and

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<sup>41</sup> Bourdieu typically employed ethnographic methods when generating empirical data (Bourdieu 2003; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), however, ethnography was not appropriate for the current study, given the sensitive and personal nature surrounding the topic of sex.

reflected on my notes and recordings from the first-interview in order to locate a point of commonality from which to begin the second-interview. For example, I was unable to establish good rapport with one of the informants in the first interview, perhaps given her religious background that I was unaccustomed to. Before our second interview, I reviewed her transcript, my notes, and did some research on the religious organization she worked for. This allowed me to approach the second interview with more empathy: understanding her affliction with discussing issues of sex due to her religious ties. I remained reflexive throughout the data generation, analysis, and writing-up processes, in terms of how my demographics, values, and experiences lined up with those of my participants.

Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) noted that one difficulty associated with sex research is differentiating between the role of counselor and researcher, as participants may easily confuse the two. The interview process certainly appeared to be very cathartic for some of the women, especially when discussions concerned issues such as rape, child molestation, incest relations, domestic abuse, miscarriage, drug addiction, and mental anguish. In these instances, I tended to listen more than probe for details. Often, once the recorder was turned off at the end of the second interview, the informants would comment on ‘how nice it was to talk to somebody about these issues’ or that ‘it really made them think about their relationships and their lives’. In one case, an informant said that I reminded her of her best friend (also her cousin) because I was so ‘easy to talk to and non-judgmental’. In a similar vein, Dickson-Swift et al. (2007) identified that in establishing rapport, the “boundaries between the researcher and research participant can become blurred” (336), thus necessitating an obligation on the researcher to spend extra time with the participants. This was both a positive and negative experience. On the one hand, I became very close to some of the women I interviewed, however, this sometimes led to what Lofland and Lofland (1995: 28) refer to as an ‘ethical hangover,’ or “a feeling of persistent guilt or unease over what is viewed as a betrayal of the people under study”. At times, it became somewhat challenging to juggle a busy schedule, interviews, and these

‘post-interview’ interactions, occasionally mirroring the experiences of Sam Young, Schouten’s (2013) fictional character, who worked as an ‘ethnotherapist’.

Finally, it was crucial to be reflexive and respectful throughout the data analysis and writing-up process, particularly with regard to issues surrounding deductive disclosure, which occurs when individuals or groups are able to identify themselves in the research (Sieber 1992). Karen Kaiser (2009) discusses the ethical challenges of presenting rich, detailed, and sensitive accounts, proposing that through deductive disclosure, one should consider their audience through a “re-envisioned informed consent process” (1632). Thus, in the interest of deductive disclosure, I omitted some aspects that felt too potentially identifying (of my informants) and/or irrelevant to the context and audience of this project. This was similarly reflected in my decision to offer excerpts of the two interview transcripts as opposed to the full script. Additionally, I did not include names or pseudonyms in either the sample transcript or sample (complete) visual collage, given that this data is presented out of context, particularly with regard to the visual collage, since the informant’s descriptions of the images are not made available. Furthermore, in line with my analysis method, narratives were used as a way to keep the women’s stories coherent rather than analyzing them in a decontextualized fashion.

### **6.7 Summary**

This chapter serves to bridge the front-end (literature review, orienting conceptual framework, and context) to the back-end (findings, discussion, and conclusion) of the thesis. This chapter first presented a contextualized orienting framework and introduced the research questions that guided this study. Following a critical theory paradigm, this thesis adopted a variant of phenomenological interviewing, along with a visual projective technique, in order to capture a specific type of experience that was used to make micro, meso, and macro level inferences about how informants relate to and experience the feminist social movement. Again, the analytical focus was on the informants’ relation to the feminist movement, as opposed to their sexual narratives or advertising



interpretations. Section 6.4 introduced the multi-step hermeneutic analysis approach adopted for this study, which allowed for a more holistic theorization of micro, meso, and macro phenomena. Finally, the limitations and ethical considerations were outlined. Following a hermeneutic approach, the findings have been divided into two sections: the intracase and intercase results and analysis, presented in Chapters 7 and 8, respectively. This separation facilitates a detailed understanding as to how the analysis was conducted and how theoretical inferences were drawn from the empirical data.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

### INTRACASE RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

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The first part of the findings includes the intracase results and analysis. This section is thus divided into five representative case studies that focus on five informants, each fostering distinctly different identifications with the contemporary feminist movement. The cases were selected based on their ability to exemplify a particular relationship with feminism following Elsbach's (1999) typology: identification, schitzo-identification, disidentification, and neutral-identification. Two cases each were selected to represent a feminist identification in order to highlight the idiosyncratic nuances that this identification entails.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. The first is to offer a largely emic analysis of how key informants relate to a feminist ideology as they negotiate and defend their sense of identity. The second is to further explore the informants' identifications with feminism through their interpretations of media imagery, specifically sexualized advertisements. Selected images were taken from their Pinterest collages to provide a visual account of their identifications<sup>42</sup>. Each of the five cases integrate both interviews (capturing their sexual narratives and interpretations of ads) and have been interpreted in reference to the contextualized orienting conceptual framework, presented in Chapter 6 (Figure 6.1). Related theories and ideas were incorporated as necessary. Following the tenets of hermeneutic analysis (Thompson 1997), each case was assigned a metaphor, or an overarching theme that was used to organize the temporal sequencing of key events and guide the construction of the narrative.

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<sup>42</sup> The images presented are intended to provide a visual synopsis of what the informants find sexy, thus the individual images were not analyzed or discussed in their own right, per se.

## 7.1 Identification with Feminism

Five out of the fourteen informants in this study self-identified as feminists, although of these, one (Aaliyah) was presumed to foster a schitzo-identification with the movement and is discussed in Section 7.2. This section offers two representative case studies that demonstrate two types of feminist identification: Lucy, who identifies with countercultural feminism and Ivy, who adheres to a popularized or ‘girlie’ feminism.

### ***Lucy the Riot Grrrl***

*“[F]rom punk culture I realized like, you don’t have to be blonde and white and blue-eyed to be pretty. You can be anything you want to be” (Lucy, Interview II).*

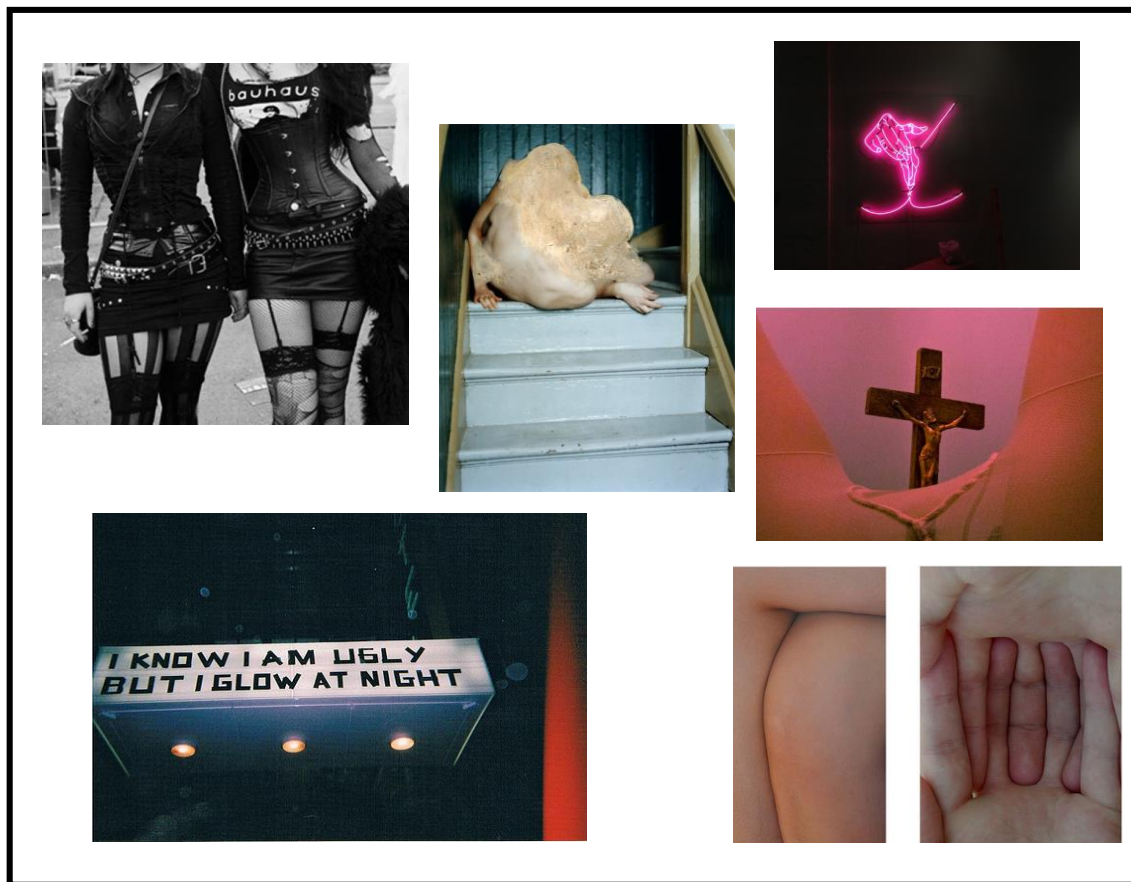


Figure 7.1: Selected Images from Lucy's Collage

I met twenty-four-year-old Lucy at a local coffee shop where she works full-time as a waitress. For our first interview, she rode up driving a moped, sporting a leather brown aviator helmet, steampunk goggles, combat boots, and a black lacy dress, which she described as her “I went out last night outfit.” With her pixie haircut, over-embellished eyeliner<sup>43</sup>, and au natural attitude to body hair, Lucy is the epitome of punk culture (Hebdige 1979). As a first-generation Korean-American and the eldest of three, Lucy talks about growing up with an abusive father, who was incapable of holding down a job, and a negligent mother. She recalls battling with anorexia and experimenting with a variety of narcotics for a number of years. Her affiliation to punk culture and to feminism, more specifically, began when she was twelve when her family relocated from Queens, New York to a small town in Arkansas. It was here where Lucy was introduced to punk culture, a facet of her outlook that has remained an encompassing and defining force in her life, as demonstrated by the quote at the beginning of her narrative:

[F]rom punk culture I realized like, you don't have to be blonde and white and blue-eyed to be pretty. You can be anything you want to be. And on top of that, it's probably better for the environment and it's probably better for... like your sense of well-being and your safety [...] All these different things I was just feeling or things I was worried about or things I felt like scared about, like that [punk] music talked about, man. And that's why to this day like, you know, I can't let go of that culture and I ultimately am a part of it, and like I wanna perpetuate it, you know.

Her awakening to punk culture afforded her an outlet, a lifestyle, and a mindset that helped her cope with the authoritative cultural, societal, and familial pressures placed on her. Punk allowed Lucy to ‘rebel’ and create an identity in opposition to these expectations, rather than internalize the ‘shame’ that she asserts was imposed on her.

Lucy failed high school twice, but did eventually graduate. Despite her setbacks, Lucy's confident and assured demeanor shines through. She is not only articulate, but is also,

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<sup>43</sup> Press and Reynolds (1992: 262) attribute heavy eyeliner and makeup as “a child's attempt at grown-up seductiveness,” embracing Riot Grrrl's celebration of preteen girlhood (Gottlieb and Wald 1994) and revealing the parody of ‘girlish’ femininity (Eileraas 1997).

critical and self-reflective. In accordance with the Riot Grrrl movement, Lucy advocates a grassroots activism and criticizes consumer culture for fostering a reliance on consumption as a replacement for an authentic belief system, which she believes results in a false sense of activism. She strongly asserts that no advertisement can be empowering “because it serves to another purpose that isn’t the person in the ad, cause in that way they’re being commodified, and so to be commodified would be to be objectified.”

Lucy is currently in two bands, one of which is a feminist punk band that she started with her boyfriend. She recounts a time when they performed at the local university’s Battle of the Bands, where they covered a song by Thee Headcoatees (a former Riot Grrrl band), “called *Cum into My Mouth*, and the words are really raunchy. It’s like, ‘I want your little boy to rise, cum into my mouth. I want my tits to explode and my cunt to burn, cum into my mouth.’ And like we actually – there were a lot of older people who like left apparently – it was so funny”. Thus, like the Riot Grrrl bands, Lucy employs subversive tactics in order to *reclaim* the social meanings embedded in predominant discourses (Gottlieb and Wald 1994). Such insurgency is also evidenced in her collage that she made using Tumblr (see Figure 7.1 above), which includes images ranging from the perverse, the sacrilegious, to the bizarre. The notion of ‘ugliness’ that is so central to the Riot Grrrl movement (Eileraas 1997) is also depicted in her collage. She explains:

“‘I know I’m ugly but I glow at night,’ so it’s sort of like this feeling of extreme and dire insecurity that one may have in yourself. ... [I]t’s almost like saying like, I may be repulsed by myself, but I still want to enjoy what I enjoy. ... I may hate myself or like I might not hate myself- I might not find myself necessarily attractive, but I glow whenever I am- I find the things that pleasure me”.

Here, she attempts to redefine what it means to feel empowered in terms of hedonism as opposed to feelings of security and love, of which she has been largely denied.

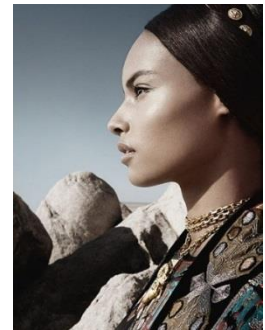
In addition to her music, Lucy is also a visual artist. Her artwork similarly reflects a punk aesthetic and zine-like quality, ranging from homemade portraits of politicians, to metaphorical drawings of the societal and familial pressures that have been placed on her.

Some of her most recent artwork (set to be featured in an upcoming show) showcases Korean brides, which act as a “metaphor for like something that – *it’s like this expectation that was placed on me* by my parents, by Korean culture”. As a first generation Korean-American, Lucy’s ethnic-identity is unfitting; she not only views herself as an unorthodox first-generation Korean-American in the sense that she deviates from the traditional language, family, and religious values, but she also strongly resents the fact that her ethnicity operates as a discernible ‘othering’ mechanism:

Like every day at work someone asks me, ‘where are you from?’. I was born in Queens, New York and it’s like... why the fuck are you asking me where I’m from? *Would you ask someone who’s white where they’re from?... And then more importantly like, why do you have to be white to be American and not be questioned? ...* And I’m genuinely offended... And so I ask them back, you know, like ‘where are you from?’. And they’re just like, ‘well, I don’t know, Vermont’. And I’m like, ‘well I don’t know, I guess I don’t know either’. Cause it’s like if you’re not interested in your cultural heritage, then why the fuck are you interested in mine? ... *I don’t owe that to you and you’re not entitled to it.*

Accordingly, race plays a defining role in her commitment to feminism and also in her interpretation of ads. She expresses a particular sensitivity towards ads appropriating race, culture, and ethnicity that is evident in her reading of the Valentino ad (see Image 7.1):

And this looks like Native American. It’s just like... Oh my god, this is awful. Like I’m just so fucking sick of people using tribal print and thinking that it’s okay. And then people not like screaming to them, like they’re being extremely racist and insensitive.



**Image 7.1:** Valentino (2014)

Her interest in feminist issues also inspired her to engage with the subject on a more intellectual level. She often sits in on lectures offered at the local university and streams free lectures on YouTube, which she claims, provide her with the appropriate language to be able discuss feminist issues on an intelligible level. In this way, Lucy’s feminist education is slightly unorthodox in the sense that she fosters a feminist identity to match her beliefs and experiences, as opposed to a more conventional route of third-wave feminism, where the pedagogical doctrine serves

as inspiration and shapes the personal (Sowards and Renegar 2004). Thus, Lucy manages to avoid many of the pitfalls that come with adhering to a movement's dogmatic script. Garrison (2000: 168) notes that Riot Grrrl feminism can be considered a 'pseudomovement,' in the sense that "'pseudomovement' is preferable to 'movement' for the simple reason that it can resist some of the problems 'movements' experience, in terms of hierarchical leadership and organizational structures, the impulse to unify around a single issue or ideology, and the seduction of institutionalization". In a similar vein, Lucy appropriates feminism for her own purposes, without blindly adhering to a dogmatic doctrine.

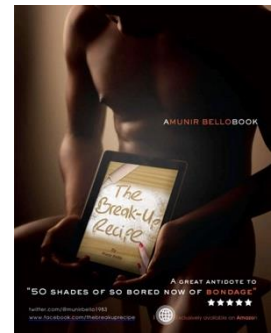
Lucy is also reflexive in her romantic relationships, most of which have been connected to her artistic (musical and/or visual) identity. This is evidenced, for example, in her collage (Figure 7.1), which depicts artistic, abstract, and sometimes unsettling instances of intimacy, such as the 'symbiosis' image (in the center) by photographer and artist Rick Garrett, which is intended to convey alchemy and mutually beneficial partnerships. At times, Lucy expresses a degree of contempt with her current boyfriend, stemming from what she interprets as his resistance to this notion of egalitarianism:

The only reason I'm interested right now in like him going down on me [performing oral sex], or things like that is because... *it's by principle!* Like if I go down on you why don't you go down on me? ... I'd be fine if I felt like I was being like compensated or if things were like really equalized between us, but he's younger than me and he doesn't make as much money as I do, cause he doesn't work as much as I do. But then sometimes he does super nice things for me and he does encourage me to play the trumpet and he's encouraged me to do all these creative processes, so in that way it's kind of balanced out. But I can't help- I don't know why I feel like, you know... why do I feel like he needs to compensate me financially? Why is that tied to sex, that's so strange, like why I went there so quickly. But, it's something that I have been tossing around in my head and I haven't mentioned it to him obviously, because I think it's something that... honestly, like I shouldn't.

Herein, Lucy's guilt is not entirely debilitating, as it enables her to question the status quo and explore *why* she feels a certain way. Yet, she sometimes struggles with mediating between her personal expectations ("why do I feel like he needs to compensate me") and

those stipulated by a feminist agenda (he should perform oral sex on her “*by principle*”), where feminism comes to represent a ‘technology-of-the-self’ (Foucault 1976). At times, this can come across as privileging the political over the personal, as is similarly evidenced in her reading of an ad for Munir Bello’s (2014) book, *The Break-Up Recipe* (see Image 7.2):

**Lucy:** This is so weird... because it’s showing this guy, but then it’s still being like oddly like, he’s still empowered and the woman’s still, is not, just because her finger is right here, and it’s like where his member would be. Oh that’s weird. That’s weird how they did that.



**Image 7.2:** The Break-Up Recipe (2014)

**Interviewer:** Would it change your mind if I told you this was also from ‘*Bust*’, the feminist magazine?

**Lucy:** That does change my opinion of it completely. ...But, I mean if it’s in ‘*Bust*’, surely it’s not... shitty. Hopefully it’s not a shitty book. But I mean, I think it’s kind of a distasteful thing. ... I mean, maybe ‘*Bust*’ like, I don’t know. I don’t know why they would put that in that in ‘*Bust*’. Well, just because, you know, feminist magazines used to have such a like cool like, like punk aesthetic to it and this just reads to me like ‘*Eat, Pray, Love*’- a book for like- I don’t know a bitter divorcee who discovered feminism.

Here, Lucy attempts to legitimize the ad after becoming privy to its publication source by commenting on the nature of the product itself (“hopeful it’s not a shitty book”), but she also expresses a sense of dysphoria with regard to the mainstreaming and lack of grassroots quality of feminist magazines today, and in so doing, attempts to reassert the emphasis she places on her personal beliefs towards the feminist movement. This is important for Lucy, as a primary motif in her narrative is to rebel against structure rather than comply with one, even if that structure is a feminist one.



## Ivy the Girlie

*"I intentionally don't catch the bouquet..."* (Ivy, Interview II).

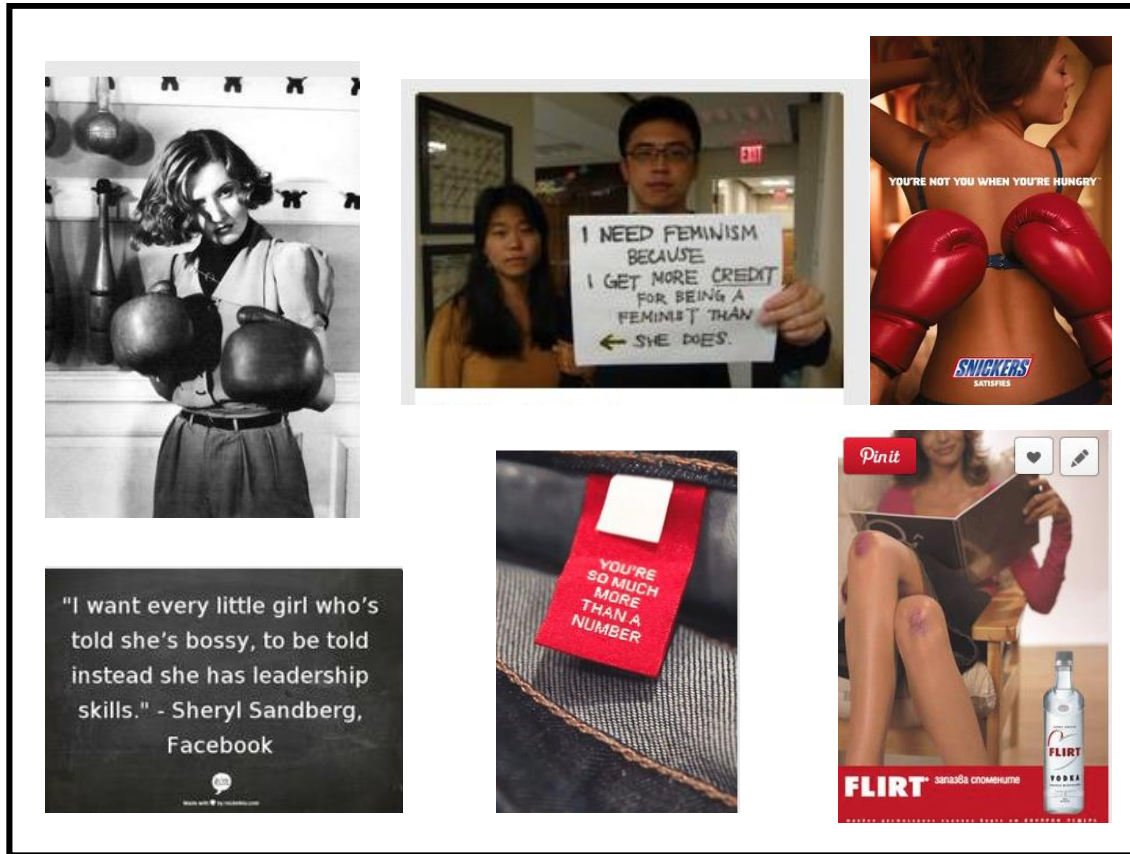


Figure 7.2: Selected Images from Ivy's Collage

When I first met Ivy, she looked as though she stepped out of an Urban Outfitters catalog, sporting a cheerful smile and heavy, blunt bangs. Currently a junior at her home state university, Ivy is pursuing a double-major, double-minor degree in International Relations, Middle Eastern Studies, Arabic, and Political Science. Her enthusiasm to participate in the study is initially palpable, but throughout the interviews, she evidences some tension negotiating between the personal and the political, tensions that are inherent to the neoliberal brand of feminism she subscribes to (Gill 2008); these underscore the metonym of her narrative.

The youngest of five, Ivy, who is now 22, was born and raised in a small Mid-Southern town, located, as she describes it, in “Bible Belt central<sup>44</sup>.” Her parents divorced when she was young, and she was raised by a single mother, who, despite her conservative Christian beliefs, never forced these onto her children. When Ivy was 18, she graduated high school a semester early and took an unpaid internship position in California, working in a charitable organization that focused on ending the practices of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) to restore peace in Central Africa. This afforded Ivy the opportunity to travel and speak at various institutions around the nation. It was at this point when Ivy began her identity transformation towards a feminist praxis. She indicated that the transition was not an easy one, as she was faced with much resistance from her former relationships and the structures/institutions she had been so accustomed to:

I think it really just *fueled my association with being a feminist* when I moved back to Arkansas cause I realized, oh my gosh, things are a lot different here – didn’t realize that until I left. And it’s been really overwhelming, cause it’s been hard in some regards, cause I have felt that. I have felt people treating me differently because I’m a woman or questioning me, or associating certain names to me because I am this or that.

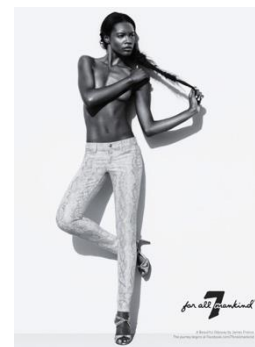
This ‘feminist’ awakening inspired Ivy to formulate a new perspective, one that incorporated a feminist consciousness. However, unlike Lucy who sought feminism as a way to make sense and reconcile certain experiences she had, Ivy turned to feminism in order to shape her personal experiences and fashion a ‘new’ identity. Her activism is thus one focused on individual modes of self-expression (Kellner and Share 2005) enacted primarily through social media (i.e. writing and sharing blogs and social media posts that advocate empowering portrayals feminism and vilify ‘objectifying’ media images and practices). Examples of this can be seen in her Pinterest collage (see Figure 7.2 above) that she entitled ‘Sexy? Sure! (S)ertainly/What I like/What I DONT like’. During the course of our conversations, she made a concerted effort to switch from talking about her personal experiences to theorizing about her political beliefs. This tendency sometimes

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<sup>44</sup> The Bible Belt is an informal term used to describe an area located in the Southern region of the United States, where its inhabitants zealously subscribe to fundamental Christian and conservative ideals and values.

came across as a masking technique, where her feminist identity helped to compensate for her perceived lack of personal experience and/or the guilt she felt in relation to her privileged identity as a middle-class white woman (Jaggar 1994). It also caused palpable tensions and contradictions within her narrative, leading her to impart a brand of dogmatic feminism, which paradoxically advocates the tenets of neoliberalism.

On the one hand, she aligns herself with what is considered the mainstream, namely (white) third-wave feminist rhetoric, such as the ‘ban bossy’ and the ‘I need feminism because...’ campaigns. Yet, she is cognizant of the fact that because of this she is occasionally “*casted out*” by other feminist groups, noting that “[s]ometimes you can’t serve every single fragment”. On the other hand, she rejects traditional notions of explicit femininity that are often celebrated in third-wave discourse (Baumgardner and Richards 2000), such as the color pink, marriage, children, and other limiting labels (e.g. ‘boyfriend’/‘girlfriend’). This resonates with the quote presented at the beginning of the narrative, wherein she claims to avoid catching the bouquet at weddings, so as to evade the imminent marriage foretold for the recipient, according to the myth. These actions speak to the findings offered by Riley and Scharff (2012), who found a neoliberal sensibility emphasizes “individual solutions to structural constraints [...] absencing the vibrant field of ongoing feminist activism.” And to be sure, Ivy deems it her *personal* and *individual* responsibility to retaliate against heteronormative structures and practices, finding solace in her feminist (‘other’) identification. In enacting this feminist identity, Ivy endorses advertisements that feature minorities, while often criticizing ads that perpetuate white, heteronormative archetypes, despite the fact such portrayals better reflect her own attributes. At times she even expresses feelings of regret or guilt for not being ‘othered’ enough in terms of race, class, ability, and so on. For example, Ivy expresses a fondness for ads showcasing racial minorities, such as the Seven Jeans ad (see Image



**Image 7.3:** Seven Jeans (2013)

7.3) claiming to appreciate their power stances, body language and confidence:

I love this one. When I view this I think of like an element on *confidence* with her and her body and her *body language*.

Alternatively, she considers the blonde female model in the Juicy Couture ad (see Image 7.4) to be “obnoxious”, “typical”, and “Barbie-esque”. Thus, while Ivy identifies the objectifying aspects in an ad featuring a white, heteronormative model, she fails to make these connections in ads featuring ‘othered’ models, instead, granting them sexual agency, resulting in a hodge-podge feminist sensibility



**Image 7.4:** Juicy Couture (2013)

Ivy’s notion of female sexual agency is even more convoluted when considering that it seems, at least in part, to be predicated on men’s approval, desire, even commitment, i.e. men should desire women, but not the other way around. For example, Ivy finds the



**Image 7.5:** Cesare and Paciotti (2013)

Cesare Paciotti ad (see Image 7.5) to be particularly amorous: “It’s like the desire’s coming from the man. Like he wants her. ... *He’s got a ring on it*<sup>45</sup>”. This reading demonstrates the contradictions inherent in her narrative, especially when considering her antagonistic stance towards marriage. Alternatively, ads featuring a desired (presumably) heterosexual male protagonist, such as the Giorgio Armani ad (see Image 7.6) is considered “unsettling” because “*he’s the focal point*, which, I mean, there’s ads

where women are only the focal point too... but *it’s just this is more typical and that’s why I think I reject it more*, cause I’m like oh, it’s too typical of course, like he’s going to get the girl, blah, blah, blah”. This interpretation further confirms her desire to maintain an



**Image 7.6:** Giorgio Armani (2012/2013)

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<sup>45</sup> This phrase comes from Beyonce’s song, ‘*Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)*’, which indicates that a woman is engaged or married.

alternative or subversive identity that she fashions by aligning herself with what she perceives to be ‘non-typical’ discourse via the feminist movement.

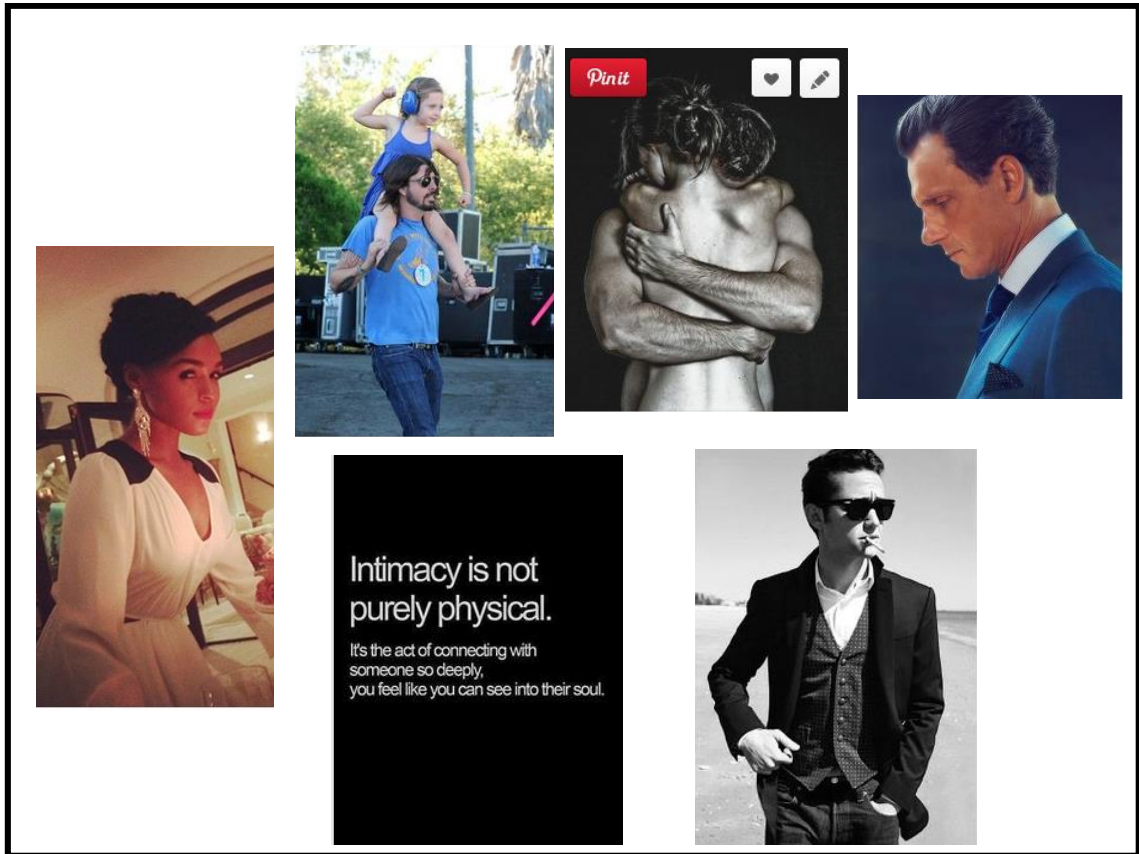
While the explicit brand of feminism adopted by Ivy is somewhat ambivalent given its conflation of feminine and feminist values, Ivy’s reflexive dispositions and the major role that feminism is awarded in structuring her experiences (regardless the brand), signifies a stronger identification, as opposed to a schitzo-identification with the movement, which is discussed next.

## **7.2 Schitzo-Identification with Feminism**

Schitzo-identification implies the simultaneous identification and disidentification with a single organization (Elsbach 1999; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). This type of identification invites significant identity conflicts, revealing the complexity and contradictions between social movements and identity. As mentioned, all the informants expressed a degree of schitzo-identification with the feminist movement and to suggest otherwise would over simplify this subject of inquiry. Yet for some of the informants, this ambivalent identification overtly characterized their narratives. Aaliyah was among one of the four informants fostering an explicit schitzo-identification with the feminist movement.

### ***Aaliyah and the Paradoxical Struggle for Love and Autonomy***

*“It’s very important for me not to feel inferior” (Aaliyah, Interview II).*



**Figure 7.3:** Selected Images from Aaliyah’s Collage

Aaliyah is a twenty-one year-old African-American female, raised in the outskirts of Los Angeles, California. Growing up with limited financial resources, Aaliyah’s family relied on support from external organizations, such as the YMCA<sup>46</sup>, where she and her sister became what she described as “poster children” at a very young age. At eighteen, Aaliyah moved to the Mid-South, to attend university. She is currently in her final year with plans to attend graduate school and start a career in public administration. The dominant theme

<sup>46</sup> The YMCA, standing for the Young Men’s Christian Association, is a worldwide, non-profit, charitable organization that promotes communal activities, such as after school programs, daycares, and physical fitness activities (YMCA 2016).

arising from Aaliyah's narrative revolves around the precarious relationship that she fosters with conventional binaries: femininity versus masculinity, feminism versus patriarchy, passivity versus rebellion, and most notably, autonomy versus dependency, which manifests primarily in the context of her current romantic relationship.

Aaliyah emanates a strong third-wave feminist sensibility, wherein her raised-consciousness mediates her autonomous sense of self, media perceptions, and relations with others. For example, this raised-consciousness manifests in her response to the infamous ad by Dolce and Gabbana (see Image 7.7), which insinuates a woman about to be gang



**Image 7.7:** Dolce and Gabbana (2007)

raped (Burnett 2007). Aaliyah recalls seeing this advertisement in one of her college courses, but interestingly remarks, “I wouldn’t pick up on the rapeyness if I didn’t know any better.” Clearly, this is an indication of feminist consciousness raising, which occurred under an educational setting (Sowards and Renegar 2009).

Aaliyah's personalization of feminism is particularly evident in the context of her role as the eldest child, demonstrated by her felt need to protect and educate her nineteen-year-old sister about the perils of a White patriarchal society. Aaliyah characterizes she and her sister in terms of binary opposites: “She’s so, you know, bubbly and warm and exciting and like *super innocent and pure*. And, you know, *I feel like I’m a tainted rebel*.” Aaliyah's identification with rebellion is closely tied to her feminist beliefs and protective inclinations, but there is also a sense of bitter obligation, as if identifying as the ‘rebel feminist’ is her burden to bear. Thus, on the one hand, she identifies with ‘rebels’, such as Marilyn Manson, Malcom X, and Janelle Monáe. Yet, on the other hand, she rejects this label insofar as she associates it with feelings of isolation:

I don't fit in with the norm, I'm automatically labeled as not normal, as the rebel. And it's like, why can't I be what's normal, you know? Like this should be, I don't want to say it should be the status quo, but why can't I be accepted?

This insecurity is similarly evoked in an ad from Dolce and Gabbana's Byzantine collection (see Image 7.8), which made Aaliyah feel very uncomfortable:

**Aaliyah:** I feel like I've been in this situation before... Where there's just – like you're being crowded and I mean she almost looks uncomfortable here. ... *I tensed up just looking at it*, you know, for her. Cause I can imagine like, I dunno, I just feel like that'd be... that's a lot of almost unwanted attention. But then she's sitting down too, and I just realized that. I thought she was standing up.

**Interviewer:** When have you felt like that?



**Image 7.8:** Dolce and Gabbana (2013)

**Aaliyah:** Um, gosh, like when I've been approached by a guy that's just like you know, dropped like a really awful one liner or you know, like was just staring at me, and I'm like, do I have something on my face, *is something wrong with me, is it because I'm black*, like what is happening right now? Like why are you staring at me? And, you know, I don't... *I don't think I'm that pretty where people have like gape at me sometimes, and it makes me feel uncomfortable*. And I feel like there's like a level of discomfort here to some extent, you know.

Here, Aaliyah's sensitivities regarding her gender, race, and individual appearance are readily apparent. Throughout Aaliyah's narrative, feminism is employed as a way to balance these tensions. For example, she describes the sense of empowerment she enjoyed by rejecting cultural stereotypes about how she should behave or look as a black woman:

I used to chemically straighten my hair and I felt like I had to do this to fit in as a black woman, because my kinky hair, as it is now, was not okay. And so I would buy all these products to make me feel better about myself...if my hair was nappy then people wouldn't like me or they would think I was dirty or I smelled bad. And I realized when I was reading some [feminist] stuff a few years ago that it doesn't have to be like that. ... And so out of impulse, I took some scissors to my hair with a friend and we cut it all off. And I've been growing my hair ever since...



However, although Aaliyah enacts a feminist identification to mediate anxieties and struggles she faces as a young black woman, the precariousness of her relationship with the movement becomes particularly evident in the context of her relationships with men, which, up until this point, have all been with white men. The importance Aaliyah places on notions of traditional masculinity is clearly indicated in her Pinterest collage (see Figure 7.3), which depicts older powerful men (e.g. Tony Goldwyn for his role as the President in the TV series *Scandal*), men who are susceptible to ‘bad’ habits, such as smoking (e.g. actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt), and men who are caring and attentive fathers (e.g. David Grohl, the lead singer for the Foo Fighters). A strong desire for closeness and intimacy is depicted in both her collage and narrative.

Her sexual narrative focuses primarily on her first serious boyfriend, Paul. She recalls the decision to “lose her virginity” to him as a very conscious one, despite the fact they had only known each other for a few weeks. Aaliyah treasures the feelings of deep connection and vulnerability she has with Paul. A degree of passivity, even submission is evident in her account of her intimate relationship. For example, describing a recent sexual encounter with Paul, she notes:

I didn’t say it like outright, but I was like, you know, you could have your way with me, you know, like do what you want. And like that night like he just kind of...he actually took both of my hands and he held them above my head and he did whatever he wanted that day, which I thought I liked a lot, you know. Again, like kind of giving someone that power and feeling very vulnerable at the same time.

Thus, it becomes evident how Aaliyah’s relationship with feminism is somewhat situational and characterized by both intersectionality (McCall 2005) as well as ambivalence. Aaliyah appears to be aware of the tension between her autonomous and passive selves. She justifies her submissive role in her relationship on the basis that “*he [Paul] is not very much of a feminist in the way that I am.*” Of course, the very idea of leaving one’s feminist identity aside in order to align oneself with a man’s disposition is rife with contradiction. Problematically, Aaliyah’s falls victim to the perils of

postfeminism, whereby her attempts to liberate or empower herself leave her susceptible to subjectification as well as objectification, as is further evidenced by her excerpt below:

I mean, I'm that girl that like – he has friends over all the time – and I'll walk around in my underwear, like just to go to the kitchen or something, and like if his friends look, they look ... and if they do then just like, oh she's walking in her underwear, *it's just another chick*, or whatever ... *I feel like I shouldn't have to cover up myself*. And we've talked about that, you know, and I'm like, 'that doesn't bother you?' And he said, 'no it doesn't bother me'. I said, *great, less work for me*, you know.

Here, Aaliyah indicates a deep felt insecurity in referring to herself as “just another [naked] chick”. While she may have hoped to instigate some sort of jealous reaction from Paul, given his nonchalant response she resorted to a sex-positive feminist discourse in order to justify why she “shouldn't have to cover up” in front of Paul's friends, arguing that it is anyway “less work” for her. The tensions she experiences in the context of her current relationship reveal a personal struggle to be both strong (i.e. sexually active) as well as passive.

Aaliyah's ambivalent identity, where she, on the one hand, fosters an autonomous, Afrocentric, self-reliant attitude, fighting the 'good fight,' but on the other hand strives to maintain an intimate, vulnerable, even submissive position within the context of her romantic relationship, gives way to the insecurities she fosters towards her perceived 'abnormality.' Thus despite Aaliyah's adherence to the feminist movement, she expresses some resistance to this identification, which manifests most prominently in her normative views towards men, romance, and sex.

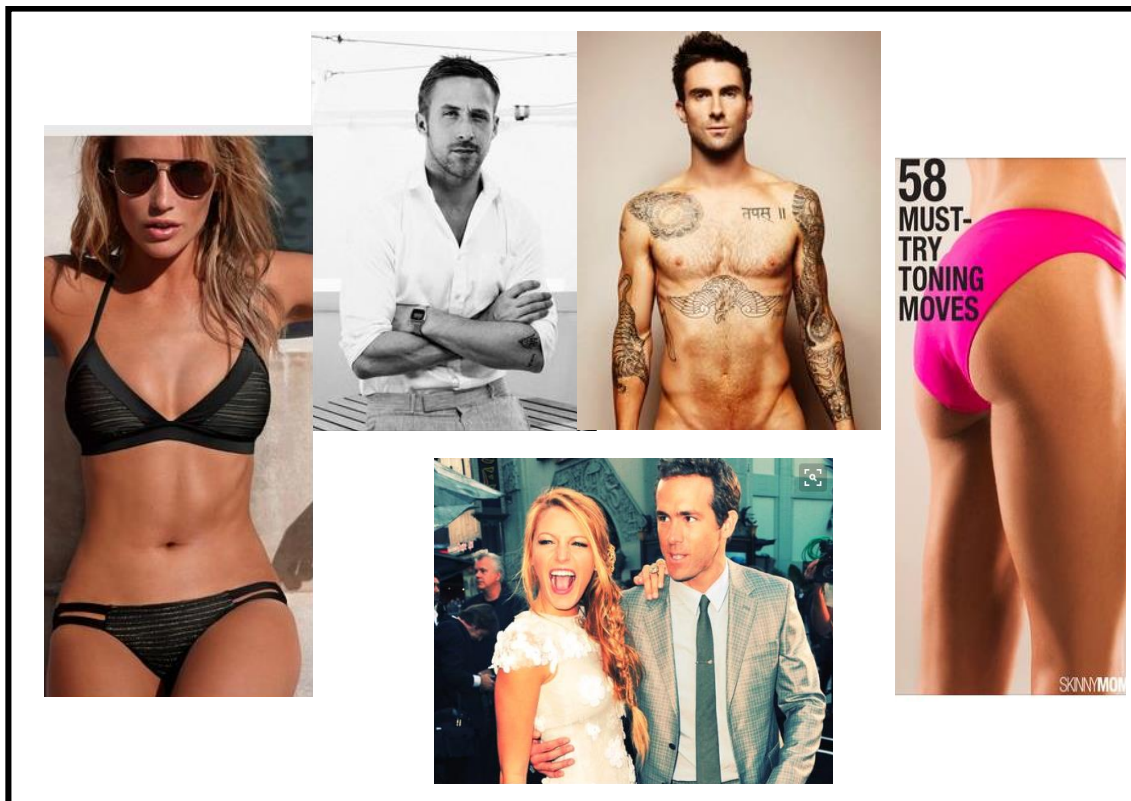
### **7.3 Disidentification with Feminism**

As was discussed in Chapter 5, organizational disidentification implies that individuals define themselves through the negation of a social group(s) that they *do not* belong (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). Again, this is not to suggest that they necessarily associate with a counter-movement or organization, but that they actively disassociate

from a movement/organization as a way to construct a salient identity. Chelsea is among one of the two participants fostering a disidentification with the feminist movement. Notably, this disidentification is more explicit than an apathetic neutral-identification, but is not so extreme as to qualify as an anti-feminist identification, per se.

***Chelsea the Southern Belle***

*“I’m really into like men and women roles. So I like for the man to be the man and the woman to be the woman” (Chelsea, Interview I).*



**Figure 7.4:** Selected Images from Chelsea’s Collage

Twenty-four year-old Chelsea is the epitome of a modern-day Southern housewife, an identity that she has carefully cultivated and refined over the past five years throughout the course of her relationship, which subsequently led to marriage. She recently graduated with a Master’s degree in business, but stays at home to support her husband in his

doctoral program. Chelsea appears preoccupied with her marital identity, which works to uphold the defining metaphor of her narrative premised on traditional values associated with marriage, the nuclear family, and gender roles; Chelsea strives to maintain a traditionally feminine identity demonstrated by her adherence to her role as a proper Southern housewife.

Chelsea grew up in Tennessee. Since her mother worked for her father's travel company, she recalls being raised primarily by a nanny, along with her twin brother. Following the success of her family's business, they quickly became accustomed to an affluent lifestyle, where money and elaborate vacations replaced genuine affection. In this way, Chelsea has been vigilant in her attempts to construct an identity to counter these experiences, but one that is nonetheless in accord with the ideal of the proper housewife.

Chelsea recalls meeting her first boyfriend at the age of 16 and has not been single since, jumping from one monogamous relationship to the next. She met her husband on their university running team. At the time, Chelsea was involved in a two-year relationship, but grew restless without any indication that their relationship was moving forward, i.e. towards marriage. Fearing her looming singlehood, she made a calculated decision to settle-down with her current husband, who had "confessed his love [to her] repeatedly over and over". They dated for two years before getting married two years ago and they are planning for children later this year<sup>47</sup>. Her desire to be defined as part of a couple suggests an avoidance of the 'single woman status', long marginalized in contemporary American society, insinuating their 'difference' or even 'dysfunction' (Reynolds and Wetherell 2003). And to a large extent, Chelsea's identity is dependent on her relationship status, as she relies on her male counterpart (husband) to supplement her role (as a wife) (Burke and Cast 1997).

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<sup>47</sup> Continued correspondence with Chelsea revealed that she and her husband had their first child in July, 2015.

As the quintessential ‘Southern Belle’ (Rice and Coates 1995), Chelsea strives to live by idealistic, traditional, patriarchal values, reflected in the quote presented at the beginning of her narrative:

I’m really into like men and women roles. So I like for the man to be the man and the woman to be the woman. ... I think the man like does like the handy work around the house. I think he is the sole provider of income. I mean if you have a flat tire, he’s the one you call. Just things like that, I mean, just the typical like Southern man roles. ... I think that women should take care of the child, they should clean the house, do the cooking, laundry. I mean, typical.

Consequently, these values are also reproduced in her interpretations of advertisements, wherein she often adopts a normative and uncritical view. Her affinity for traditional gender roles is similarly reflected in her understanding of what it means to be masculine or feminine. For example, with regard to the Chanel ad (see Image 7.9) Chelsea asserts:

The models are ugly though. No, I don't like that look. I don't like the androgynous or whatever look, when they look like men, I don't like that. ... I mean, the hair is slicked back. They have really like dark makeup on with rings around their eyes. I just don't like that look. ... It's not feminine and it's not sexy.

This reading suggests Chelsea’s disdain for gender blurring (Goulding et al. 2004: 12), represented by the “temporary destruction of existing gender structures” as evidenced by the androgynous female models. Chelsea’s adherence to heteronormativity also shapes her perception of beauty, which is largely at odds with mainstream feminist discourse (Kilbourne 1994). For example, upon being asked what makes a sexy woman, she hastily responds, “5’10, size 2,” and claims:

I have a thing about being skinny, *I think skinny is always better no matter what.* ... When I was running I felt very like sexy because I was like itty bitty and I was ripped. ... Like when I first started gaining weight, I think our sex life probably went downhill then because I just didn’t feel like cute at all.



**Image 7.9:** Chanel (2013)

Thus for Chelsea, normative “skinny” portrayals of female beauty are inspiring rather than oppressive. This is similarly evidenced in her Pinterest collage (see Figure 7.4), which includes a number of images of thin and toned women, and in her reading of ads. For example, while Chelsea feels the Juicy Couture ad (refer to Image 7.4) is inauthentic, the model’s body type compensates:

I mean, doesn’t look very natural at all. She’s in the air, obviously. Like she looks like she was copy and pasted over on to a scene of palm trees. But she is sexy cause of her legs ... I just like her legs.

In a similar vein, she is quick to criticize the model in the Seven Jeans ad (refer to Image 7.3) for failing to meet her own standards of attractiveness, wherein skinniness is equated with sexiness:

That’s more like natural beauty. ... But actually, I think the Seven ad would look better if they had a smaller model on it. ... maybe more toned in the legs or something, like I feel like this could look better. Like the jeans don’t look the best on her.

Chelsea’s criticisms of the model’s body resonate with stereotypes of strong and large black women, with echoes of “the deviant and devalued womanhood that they are expected to embody both within and outside their culture” (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003: 11).

While Chelsea espouses a positive attitude towards clichéd gender roles, she is nonetheless open to some of the various rights and struggles associated with feminism, such as supporting women’s rights to birth control and gay marriage. Additionally, Chelsea’s university degree ensures that she could have a successful career if she wanted one, yet she *chooses* to afford her husband the role as ‘sole breadwinner’. It is her role as a wife that underlies her feminine identity, which as Blakemore, Lawton, and Vartanian (2005) suggest, often implies a weak commitment to feminism and future parental aspirations:

I clean everyday or do laundry, or go to the grocery store. Sometimes I take Nick lunch if, like its something hot or whatever, or if I didn’t get up that morning and he didn’t pack it himself. He doesn’t usually, so I usually take him lunch, like

today I did. Then we [she and her dog] just kind of hang out. I mean, I'll run. I go the gym, there's a couple days a week that there's classes at the gym I like to go to. So, I'm really just a stay-at-home mom without the kid right now.

To this end, Chelsea performs her feminine identity, which she constructs in opposition to a feminist one. However, this identity is nonetheless constituted on an acknowledged feminist platform, that paradoxically 'empowers' her to disidentify with a feminist ideology.

#### **7.4 Neutral-Identification with Feminism**

The last type of organizational identity offered by Elsbach (1999) is that of neutral-identification, wherein one expresses apathy towards an organization or group in one way or another. This type of identification differs from a schitzo-identification given its apathetic as opposed to ambiguous connotations. Four out of the fourteen informants fostered this type of identification with the feminist movement and thus do not acknowledge the role that feminism plays (or does not play) in their lives. Angela serves as the representative case for this identification.

### **Angela and the Quest for Sexual Redemption**

*“Everybody’s gonna be like zig-zaggy, but it’s like what keeps you zig-zaggy in the right way, you know” (Angela, Interview II).*



**Figure 7.5:** Selected Images from Angela’s Collage

Angela is a 26-year-old Caucasian woman, who grew up in Missouri. She exudes an affable and relaxed demeanor and came to play an integral role in my friendship network during my stay in the U.S. The above excerpt was made in reference to her spirituality, but could easily be applied to her current relationship with her fiancé. Angela’s narrative is a story of redemption, following her struggles with drug abuse and sexual transgressions. Her narrative weaves together elements of her past, present, and future and her advertising interpretations largely function as “self-authenticating acts” (Arnould and Price 2000) that constitute her ‘reborn’, ideal, or aspirational-self.



Angela's story begins during her first year of college at Kansas University, when she moved in with Ryan, who was her current boyfriend at the time. It was at this point when she started experimenting with oxycodone and heroine:

I moved in, I went to college. I didn't do the dorm thing, which I regret, horribly. Moved in with, my boyfriend, at the time, who was horrible, but I was just like *comfortably uncomfortable*, you know, one of those situations. So he was the one who introduced me to oxy at first and so it was like, party stuff, if it was around, sure I'll do it. . . . And then, that morphed into me going and finding it on my own; getting it on my own; hiding it, obviously, not sharing, and then ended up like dealing to other people. So it just like spiraled out of control.

Angela describes her relationship with Ryan as being "comfortably uncomfortable," and in our discussions, she bears much of the responsibility for her past choices, purporting that "he is the most manipulative person that I know, but *I let it happen*." Angela moved out of their apartment and ended things with Ryan during their junior year of college, but this did not impede her appetite for limit experiences (Bataille 1943; Foucault 1994/2000) or edgework activities (Celsi, Rose, and Leigh 1993):

It was like I felt free and on my own, and I was dealing and I was making money, so of course you have this whole thing where you're just awesome and on top of the world . . . It just was kind of this weird period where I would like go to a party and there would be somebody and we ended up talking the whole night, and then it's like we'd go do drugs and then have sex. It was like that whole thing, where *I was just kind of numb to everything*.

Nothing bad ever happened to me. I was never like taken advantage of or anything like that happening. *It was just my poor decisions of choosing to just give it up, you know, of just like oh, just cheapening myself*, of 'sure wanna have sex with me? Cool, I'll let you,' you know. I just shake my head at myself.

Eventually Angela's parents caught on to her drug habit and enrolled her in a 30-day drug rehab facility, where she was subsequently discharged for drug use and having illicit sex with another patient. She was then admitted to a Christian-based, six-month rehab facility, where she managed to graduate in four months, because she "*just got it*". However, Angela found herself in a foreign place following her release:

After I graduated [rehab] I came home, and it was this really weird space, where like I didn't know what to do. . . . I had so much expectation of like, what's Angela

gonna do next? Is she gonna save the world, or is she just gonna be a normal person like everybody else? It was really like how I was feeling.

On the one hand, Angela continued to yearn for the impulsivity and excitement she experienced in her previous life and pursued this through various, often sexual avenues, such as dating women and engaging in threesomes. On the other hand, Angela craved the discipline and structure afforded to her at the rehab facility. She began working at a Christian church in her hometown, which she did for over two-years, leading a class at the church for those struggling with life controlling issues (e.g., drugs, alcoholism, pornography, etc.).

Following her stint with drugs, striving for ‘normality’ became an enduring objective for Angela, which is realized through her relationship with James. They moved in together just under a year ago with their three dogs and recently became engaged. The sex with James is “*what sex is supposed to be like . . . It feels ‘normal’*”, and for the first time, she claims to be “emotionally engaged”. However, despite her recent attainment of a more ‘traditional’ relationship, Angela still expresses notions of guilt and remorse for her previous sexual transgressions. She makes a conservative effort to legitimize these:

We waited to have sex for a long time though [three months]. I mean, I was very promiscuous back in my day . . . cause like during my drug years it was like I didn’t care. I was like ‘sure, let’s – I met you tonight, let’s . . .’ I mean, that only happened like three times, but still like, three is a lot for any *normal* person. Now I think about it and I’m like, that’s so gross.

I wish that I’d waited, sometimes, you know, of like how great that would be too . . . I just see both sides of it. Like how great it would be to like give myself to him, cause it’s like *the one thing you can give this person*, but at the same time, now that we haven’t, it’s like okay, we make the best of it . . .

Herein, she expresses much anguish and guilt associated with living a ‘liberated’ life that, in part, corresponds to the unbridled freedoms afforded to Angela by the feminist movement. Additionally, she frames her virginity in terms of a gift (“*the one thing you can give this person*”) that is not uncommon among women in American society

(Carpenter 2001). In many cultures female virginity is prized and respected, particularly within the marriage market and many women are chastised, or at the very least, stigmatized for ‘losing’ their virginity prematurely (i.e. before marriage); notably, the same does not apply for male virginity (Baumeister and Vohs 2004).

Despite Angela’s candidness about her past, she makes a conservative effort to detach herself from it as she approaches a new ‘morally-acceptable’ future:

It feels like I don’t even know who that person was, if that makes sense. I feel like I am who I am now, but I’m like, who is that crazy person back there...

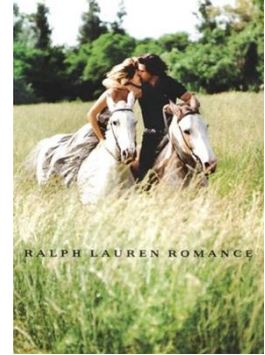
In addition to the structure and normality Angela enjoys in her current relationship, James represents the personification or embodiment of Angela’s redemption. He figuratively cleanses her of her promiscuous past and literally discards of it, to which she is more than obliging:

He threw my vibrator away, cause he’s like, ‘you don’t need this anymore’, and it was because I had used it with other people, you know. So I get that, totally.

Angela welcomes this level of control by her fiancé, inasmuch as it pushes her away from a liberated, yet chaotic past to a future that is dependent on traditional values that stipulates women’s sexual passivity and modesty (Holland et al. 1994). Her collage (Figure 7.5) also depicts many ‘normative’ images representing clichéd gender roles. In particular, the men in her collage are portrayed as rugged ‘manly’ men, who wear burley beards and work outside, whereas the women are depicted as sexual objects, focusing on the female body or specific body parts. She also includes an image of a brain to signify the importance she places on intelligence, which corresponds to her felt sense of agency, inasmuch as she likes to avoid “*being had*” or taken advantage of when it comes to the media, for example.

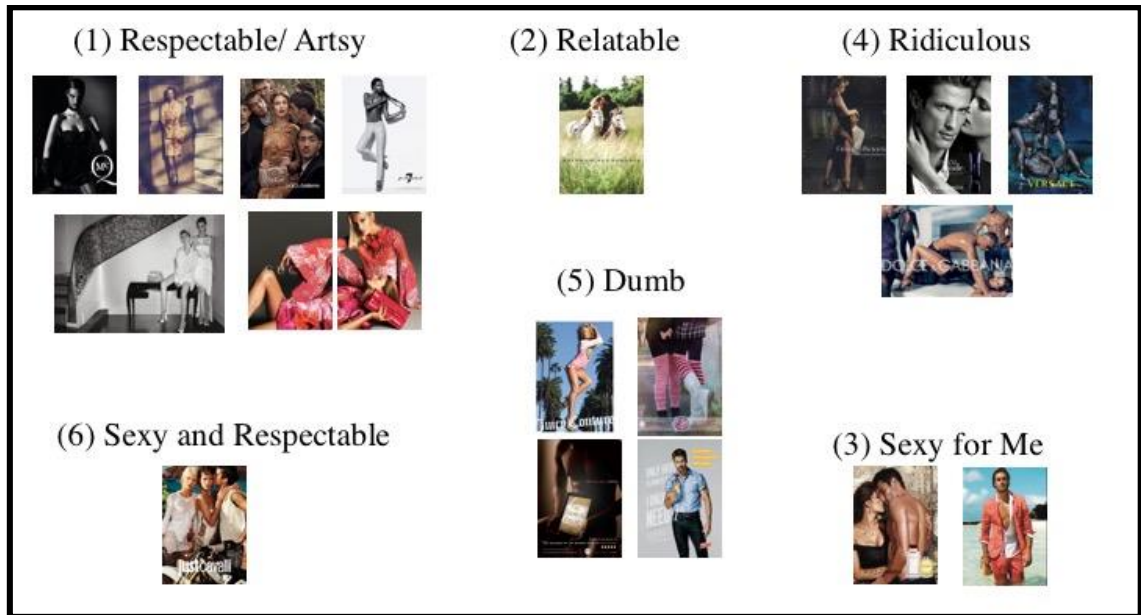
The embodiment of sociocultural norms is clearly evident in the rejection of Angela’s past narrative, in favor for her ideal redeemed one, and she selectively draws from ads that

symbolically reflect those newly implemented ideals. For example, Angela describes how the Ralph Lauren Romance ad (refer to Image 7.10) “could be my favorite ... because it’s the most realistic”, the authenticity of which is ostensibly premised on her relationship with James.



**Image 7.10:** Ralph Lauren Romance (2014)

Angela further demonstrates her advertising literacy, by simultaneously demonstrating her cultural capital (knowledge of what constitutes legitimate taste) and her own habitual predispositions (i.e. habitus) (Bourdieu 1984), evidenced in her categorization of the 18 pre-selected ads, which she organized into six self-titled groups (see Figure 7.6): (1) Respectable/Artsy, (2) Relatable, (3) Sexy for me, (4) Ridiculous, (5) Dumb, and (6) Sexy and Respectable. Placed on a continuum, her conceptualization ranges from the ads she personally likes (groups 2, 3, and 6), the ads she respects (group 1), to the ads she dislikes (groups 4 and 5).



**Figure 7.6:** Angela’s Categorization of the 18 pre-selected Advertisements

A comprehensive overview of her schema indicates her internalization of Western ideals of propriety, revealing the workings of her cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). However, while she grants authenticity to a ‘highbrow’ culture present within the haute couture ads (group 1), she does not identify with it, finding solace (i.e. “relatability”) in middle-brow or popular representations (Bourdieu 1984). Angela’s insight demonstrates the roles that subjectivity and class play with respect to the cultural hegemony and the realization of ‘her place’ within the hegemony. This categorization also reveals her desire to distance herself from values that deviate from a Western, Judeo-Christian tradition present within the ads insinuating ‘transgression’, particularly those in groups 5 and 6.

Angela’s narrative is structured around an emergent identity that is, on the one hand, idealistic, hinging on heteronormative values that are played out in the context her current romantic relationship: James is what keeps Angela “zig-zaggy in the right way”. Because her redemption is fragile and impermeable, it must be continually reinforced by her hegemonic readings of ads, for example. On the other hand, she is unable to fully rid herself of her past and in an attempt to cultivate an authentic identity project, readily admits responsibility for her past transgressions, affording her a sense of control and empowerment present within feminist discourse. Consequently, fostering an apathetic identification with feminism does little to preclude her idealistic identity, nor does it deny her past. Furthermore, her neutral-identification does not forestall her negotiations with the dichotomous ideologies at play (patriarchy and feminism), it merely implies her refusal to reflexively engage with them.

### **7.5 Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results and analyses of the first phase of the hermeneutic interpretation of the informants’ transcribed interviews. Each narrative was read from the perspective of the orienting framework. Given space limitations, only five of the fourteen informants were considered here, however, a brief description of each

informant is offered in Appendix 6, as all of the informants informed the intertextual analysis, presented in the next chapter.



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## CHAPTER EIGHT

### INTERCASE RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

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The second part of the findings includes the intercase results and analysis. This implies moving up a level of abstraction, to the etic, to identify themes across narratives. Consequently, this stage of the analysis moves one step closer to responding to the research questions outlined in Chapter 6 (Section 6.1.1) by facilitating iterations between the data and theory, thus allowing for a critique and an extension of the orienting conceptual framework. Two dominant themes emerged from this analysis with regard to the informants' dialogical engagements among ideologies of patriarchy/feminism, their sexual narratives, and interpretations of sexualized advertisements. In particular, I found that young women foster diverse identifications with feminism in order to meet two overlapping goals: (1) *ontological security* and/or (2) *status*, each of which are discussed separately. While the intracase results, offered in Chapter 7, focused on five key informants, this part of the analysis was informed by all of the 14 informants who participated in this study.

#### 8.1 Seeking Ontological Security

The term 'ontological security' was coined by R.D. Laing (1960) and later adopted by Anthony Giddens (1991). According to Giddens, ontological security is not conscious nor completely unconscious, but rather non-conscious, operating in much of the same way as Marx's elementary definition of ideology, "*they do not know it, but they are doing it*". Both Laing and Giddens' original conception of ontological security is closely associated with psychoanalytic theory, whereby ontological insecurity is deemed a sort of pathology that occurs when the bond between an infant and its parents are severed or not fully formed. Following suit, many have noted the importance of early childhood experiences



and its impact on one's identity and future relations with others (e.g. Bourdieu 1984; Bowlby 1988; Erikson 1950; Freud 1962/2000).

However, while acknowledging the pervasive influence of primary socialization, this research focuses explicitly on a particular life stage that Arnett (2000) calls 'emerging adulthood' and Erikson (1950) refers to as 'early adulthood'. According to Erickson, the shift from 'adolescence' to 'early adulthood' is marked by an 'identity crisis', wherein one is faced with developing and conveying a comprehensive sense of self (i.e. one that subsumes past experiences and accommodates future aspirations). As the individual moves into emerging<sup>48</sup> (or early) adulthood, the social roles one adopts with respect to his or her occupational and sexual identities become pertinent. Accordingly, individuals begin to establish a sense of '*grounding*' or '*ontological security*' in the society they inhabit.

Emerging adulthood is characterized largely in terms of experimentation (i.e. experimenting with different lifestyles, ideologies, sexualities, romantic relationships, and political beliefs, for example) (Arnett 2000; Erikson 1968). As the present study will demonstrate, much of one's sense of grounding (or conversely, angst) is particularly contingent upon the romantic and/or intimate relationships one forms. Accordingly, ontological security, in the context of this research, refers to a subjective sense of grounding that individuals *non-consciously* seek that stems from the material structures of society. The emphasis on the non-conscious element is intended to stress the non-reflexive aspects of ideology, as discussed at length in Chapter 2. The following sections outline the two ideologies that young women internalize to establish a sense of ontological security: hegemonic (patriarchal) and counter-hegemonic (feminist) ideologies.

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<sup>48</sup> While both terms (emerging and early adulthood) are deemed appropriate in the current context, 'emerging adulthood' will be used here on out, as to emphasize that these are not static or fixed identities.

### 8.1.1 Hegemonic Internalization

Hegemonic internalization refers to the non-reflexive adherence to the hegemony in order to feel grounded, safe, and secure. It relates most closely to what Gramsci described as cultural hegemony, wherein the hegemonic ideology operates within the cultural or civil society, receiving 'spontaneous' (i.e. non-reflexive) consent by the masses. Indeed, an internalization of the hegemonic ideology, or patriarchal values, in the context of this research, was evident to some extent across all fourteen participants. This internalization was most clearly evidenced in how the women discussed sex explicitly, as opposed to their romantic relationships (although this notably implied some overlap).

Erickson (1950, 1963) notes in his typology of psychosocial development that young adulthood is marked by intimate relationships. The tendency for these young women to internalize hegemonic notions in their sexual relationships reveals the deep-seated ontological insecurities they foster with regard to intimately exposing themselves to another person, when their identities may not yet be fully formed. In particular, this theme was most discernible among those informants who were classified as schizo-feminists. Aaliyah, for example, employs feminism as a way to avoid feeling "*inferior*", which she regularly enacts in her role as a student, an older sister, and a black woman, yet she readily abandons this position in the confines of her sexual/romantic relationship, inasmuch as her boyfriend "is not very much of a feminist in the way that I am". Aaliyah thus draws from a traditionally hegemonic ideology in order to position herself in relation to men and in sexual relationships, which ultimately affords her a sense of knowingness, power, and cultural capital. This ambivalence, however, is not fully apparent to Aaliyah, suggesting a non-reflexive internalization of the hegemonic ideology. This shift was readily prevalent among the other informants, particularly in relation to the institutions of heterosexuality and marriage. This section is thereby divided into three parts that explore how women internalize a hegemonic ideology in order to experience sexual pleasure, form a sexual identity, and a marital identity.

### 8.1.1.1 Female Sexual Pleasure

One of the main ways that women internalized a patriarchal ideology was through their embodied experiences of sexual pleasure. Two sub-themes exemplify this finding. The first considers how female sexuality has become commodified and embedded within the logic of a gift economy. The second considers women's inclinations towards masochistic sexual practices.

#### ***The Commodification of Female Sexual Pleasure***

An internalization of the hegemony was most clearly illustrated in the women's discussions of how they experienced sexual pleasure. In particular, most of the women did not make a distinction between their own sexual pleasure and their partners'. In other words, the informants tended to feel sexually satisfied upon sexually pleasing their partners to orgasm. While the male orgasm was considered central to the act of sex, the female orgasm was not a primary goal for any of the women, regardless of their feminist identification. For example, Chelsea (*disidentification*) states: "I just always expect him to [orgasm] I guess. I've never really thought about it. I just assumed he always would." Madison (*identification*) believes "it [sex] only works if he does [orgasm]." Even Nikki (*schizo-identification*), who is in one of her first homosexual relationships, adopts this view, enacting a feminine role (i.e. identifying as lipstick lesbian) in her relationship, while her partner takes on a more masculine role (i.e. chapstick lesbian). She claims that when it comes to her own orgasm, "I can count on one hand how many times I've not gotten off with her. ... The majority of the time it's me, you know, like if I'm just not feeling good or if I'm really drunk then it's really hard for me to get off. I'm just like, you're gonna be going at it for hours if you don't stop." Yet when it comes to pleasuring her partner, "It's very important. *I need her to get off!*" Nikki's penchant for framing her homosexual relationship in heteronormative terms is another example of an internalization of hegemony that is expanded on later in this subsection.

Some of the women, like Krista (*neutral-identification*) go even further in taking responsibility of their partners' orgasms, internalizing their inability to do so as a personal fault:

**Interviewer:** When you do have sex, how important is it for you that you orgasm?

**Krista:** I don't think it's the most important, just because I've had so many experiences when I don't and I feel like it'd be like okay if you don't, because it's harder for females to. So it's not the most important.

**Interviewer:** How important is it for you that they [partners] orgasm?

**Krista:** I really feel it's pretty important because I feel like it's unfinished business if they don't, because I feel it's so much easier for them, *it makes me feel like I haven't done something right if they don't*.

Angela (*neutral-identification*) expresses a similar sentiment, proclaiming:

It's not really that important [that my fiancé orgasms] cause it always happens, you know? I don't think about it like that, where it's like, 'oh god I have to make James cum, oh god! He has to orgasm!' It just kind of usually happens, so I don't have to, thank goodness, right now, I don't have to . . . that would be sad, where I'd be like, 'what's wrong?'

This type of hegemonic internalization with regard to female sexual pleasure is well documented in the literature concerning female sexuality (Fahs 2011a, b; Kaplan 1983; McClelland 2014). Research on gendered sexual satisfaction demonstrates how men and women tend to follow different cultural scripts, resulting in lower female sexual satisfaction as a result of gender norm conformity; women are expected to value the relational and emotional aspects of sex, as opposed to the physical outcomes (Sanchez, Fetterolf, and Rudman 2012). Kaplan (1983), using psychoanalytic theory, suggests that women derive sexual pleasure through two primary mechanisms: (1) Narcissism: their objectification (a women's desire to be desired) and (2) masochism, typically reflected in a tendency to be passive in sexual situations, but can take on a much more prominent form in the realm of fantasy. Indeed, there are many examples within media culture that exemplify both themes of narcissism and masochism, to which women have come to

(perhaps non-reflexively) identify with and find sexually titillating (Bergner 2013). Further, as McClelland's (2014: 89) research shows, sexual satisfaction is typically linked to a masculine-feminine role dichotomy and these roles are often pinned "in opposition to one another, indicating a heteronormative organization of gender such that femininity and masculinity were interpreted as mutually exclusive" in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships.

Defining sexual pleasure outside the restricted confines of the orgasm does indeed lend itself to a more inclusive definition of what constitutes sexual satisfaction. And certainly, this is not to deny women's phenomenological experiences of sexual satisfaction, inasmuch as sexual pleasure is an embodied experience, which incorporates inseparable notions of culture and the self (Fahs 2011b). Yet, many have noted that it nonetheless seems to uphold power relationships that work to maintain women's objectification and favor "patriarchal privilege in heterosexual sexual encounters" (McClelland 2014: 90), which comprises Bourdieu's (1990b) notion of the gendered habitus (McCall 1992). Further, because gendered forms of capital cannot function as profitable capital, at least within the broader socioeconomic hierarchy (McCall 1992; Skeggs 1997), women exploited their femininity in order to secure the legitimation of their desirability and self-worth. This is significant, particularly considering what Edmund White (1980/2014: 282) identified as "the collapse of other social values (religion, patriotism, family and so on), [wherein] sex has been forced to take up the slack, to become our sole model of transcendence and our only touchstone of authenticity". Waning links between traditional ideologies and contemporary identity projects (McAlexander et al. 2014) has led to the uptake of new ideologies that are largely based on neoliberal discourses of agency, choice, and empowerment. As White (1980/2014), among others (Evans 1993/2004) have indicated, one area in which these new ideologies have played out is in the context of sex, wherein sex (i.e. sexual attractiveness, capabilities, and compatibility) increasingly acts as a mechanism for which to ascertain one's personal worth and legitimize one's identity project. This is particularly true of women, who are socially pressured and judged based

on their ability to maintain a monogamous relationship (Jackson and Scott 2004), where great sex often serves as a benchmark for a healthy relationship. In other words, as sex is increasingly afforded status as a central pillar of identity, so too is the pressure for women to internalize a patriarchal ideology.

The tendency for women to enact a passive role with regard to their own sexual satisfaction is similarly evident in many of their interpretations of a Revlon ad, featuring Olivia Wilde, who appears to be in a state of sensual ecstasy (see Image 8.1). Khloe (*neutral-identification*) identifies the sexual connotations straightaway, commenting:

[It] looks like she's having an orgasm. ... I mean it's pretty, like the background, but her [sic] isn't sexy in this picture, I don't like it. ... Maybe because I'm a girl and I'm not attracted to women, so like seeing that doesn't really attract [me]. I'm like no, maybe if you had like the fierce face, that would look good because [her] nails are fierce. But that face, I don't know, it didn't work.

Khloe's reading is interesting inasmuch as she juxtaposes the model's orgasmic face with a 'fierce' one that is typically associated with an 'empowered' and 'sexually agentic' woman (Gill 2009a, 2009b). It would appear then that too much sexual agency is dangerous if it threatens the implicit passivity and objectivity that is central to femininity.



**Image 8.1:** Revlon (2013)

Additionally, as Stern (1992, 1993) argues, while women are able to read gynocentric texts as women, they read androcentric texts as men and because sexual discourses have historically been framed in androcentric terms, Khloe views this ad by adopting a male gaze. Thus, 'fierce' representations of women tend to be better received, as they comply with marketized depictions of female sexuality, which speak to the desirability of women, while those that deviate are perceived as threatening. This was made explicit by Khloe's admission that she is "not attracted to women", suggesting the unfeasibility of framing sexual discourses in gynocentric terms.

Other informants offer slightly less insight than Khloe, reporting that the ad insinuates a general feeling of unease, such as Madison: “I really hate the face she’s making ... I don’t like the feeling she’s giving me by making that face. It’s just awkward”; Chelsea, who thinks it looks “strange ... cause she’s doing this like groan face and she looks like she’s sleeping”; Lauren (*disidentification*) who finds it “scary, kind of like funeral-ish”. And Angela, who is not offended by the ad, but rather finds it to be quite humorous, ironically stating in between giggles, “She’s just so overtaken by the scent of her nail polish. It just makes her feel so sexy that *she doesn’t even know what to do.*” Despite Angela’s humorous spin, however, her reading conjures up another aspect of the ad that contributes to the discomfort it incites, that is, a loss of control (i.e. “*she doesn’t even know what to do*”). The notion of control is central to neoliberal discourse that underpins contemporary feminist ideology and the notion of empowerment (Bay-Cheng 2015; Gill 2008a). Angela’s reading also corroborates the juxtaposition noted by Khloe, who distinguished between an unattractive ‘orgasmic’ and a ‘fierce’ face, wherein the latter enjoys a state of control and thus sex appeal.

Audrey (*schizo-identification*), who is slightly more sex-positive and sexually experienced than the other informants, tries to reconcile this loss of control, suggesting that while the model’s facial expression is “okay” it is also somewhat disingenuous: “I mean it’s, she’s faking it, but how many girls fake it. Many. ... I don’t think I know a single girl who hasn’t. Or if they haven’t, they don’t actually know what an orgasm is.” The pressure Audrey indicates to fake orgasms gives way to what Fahs (2011b) identifies as the commodification of the female orgasm, wherein a “woman derives satisfaction by virtue of her performance as a commodity, not as an authentically orgasmic being. Orgasm – whether real or fake – allows the male subject to reflect himself, to copy himself, to make a product, to exchange such a product in the symbolic marketplace enacted upon the collective of women’s bodies” (187). Other feminist scholars have indicated how the female orgasm has become embedded within a ‘gift economy’ (McClelland 2014; Nicolson and Burr 2003), wherein women are ‘given’ orgasms and men ‘take’ them.

Framing female pleasure in terms of a ‘gift’ was further confirmed by the favorable readings of the Cesare and Paciotti ad (see Image 8.2), particularly by those women who strongly identified as feminists. This ad signifies a woman experiencing/about to experience, what was often interpreted as sexual pleasure via cunnilingus, as Lucy (*identification*) notes:

It looks like he’s about to go down on her in the middle – by like the Champs-Élysées or something like that. It looks really French to me... But it just kind of looks like she’s like really leaning in towards him and like really wanting him to go down on her, which is interesting because I don’t think female pleasure is something that’s like acceptable really, but Cesare Paciotti – sounds like Italian – so maybe they’re more open to having female pleasure being something that’s actually talked about.



**Image 8.2:** Cesare and Paciotti (2013)

While Lucy identifies the exotic aspects of the ad (mentioning both its French and Italian connotations), recall that (in Chapter 7, Section 7.1) Ivy (*identification*) found the ad amorous given that “the desire’s coming from the man” and “he’s got a ring on it”, despite her proclamations against marriage. Madison offers a similar interpretation, noting the empowering aspects of the ad: “I think what’s sexy to me about this one is definitely him and his placement and his just, his look of desire for her. It just looks like he just wants her right now. I mean, he’s touching her and his face and the way he’s sitting and just, it’s like she’s in control and he’s just very enticed by her.” Others indicate the “intimate” (Chelsea), “comforting” (Lauren) and “romantic and sexy” (Khloe) qualities of the ad. Consequently, it seems that a woman depicted as experiencing physical sexual satisfaction (orgasm) is off-putting (exemplified by readings of the Revlon ad, refer to Image 8.1) unless this sexual satisfaction is mediated by the presence of a man. Building on Stern’s (1992, 1993) work, the indication of a (heterosexual) couple may transform an androcentric discourse of sex to a gynocentric one of romance, of which women are more receptive.



### ***Perpetuating Female Masochism***

Another example with respect to how women internalize hegemonic discourses during sex is offered by Aaliyah and Audrey (*schitzo-feminists*), who express inclinations towards BDSM sexual practices that involve elements of bondage, domination, sadism, and masochism. This is unsurprising, particularly given the up rise of BDSM discourses in popular media, namely postfeminist chick lit, evidenced, for example, in *the Fifty Shades of Grey* books/movie/products (Deller and Smith 2013; Downing 2013; Dymock 2013; Roiphe 2012). Such discourses have become popular, particularly at a time when feminist gains are becoming actualized in civil society and women are beginning to surpass men in the workplace and in terms of educational qualification (Dymock 2013).

When asked about her interest in BDSM, Aaliyah remarks:

I've expressed interest in that [BDSM], for sure. And he's kind of [sigh] I told – I hinted to it actually, I didn't say it like outright, but I was like, you know, you could have your way with me, you know, like do what you want. And like that night like he just kind of – he actually took both of my hands and he held them above my head and he did whatever he wanted that day, which I thought I liked a lot, you know. Again, like kind of *giving someone that power and feeling very vulnerable at the same time*.

Here, Aaliyah's desire to give up control in her intimate relationship is made clear. It would appear that female vulnerability and submission are pre-requisites to the female orgasm becoming framed in terms of the gift economy. In particular, those women who schitzo-identify as feminist often relinquish their feminist identities in the context of sexual situations, in order to receive their partners' gifts, thus affording them a sense of masculinity and power.

This tendency towards traditional gender roles and female masochism is made even more conspicuous in Audrey's reading of the infamous Dolce and Gabbana ad (refer to Image 8.3):

There's something about him dominating her that I think is really, really sexy, and now I will be the first to admit, I've never been in her situation where there are multiple men standing around like that, but at the same time it's kind of sexy to be seen in that position where it's very animalistic to me, it's very, this is very clearly all about sex. He's taking control of her and they're all kind of watching. It's a bit of a performance, but it's, again, very kind of, it's very animalistic to me. But he is definitely in control, which I'm not going to lie, I kind of like.



**Image 8.3:** Dolce and Gabbana (2007)

Notably, Audrey has incorporated some BDSM practices into her sex life and while these have been restricted to one partner (at a time), she is open to the idea of involving others who would play a voyeuristic role, rationalizing this curiosity by stipulating that ‘life is short’:

Watching, I'd be okay with that [men watching]. Otherwise there might be a few too many sets of balls. There's a limit to how many balls one can deal with at one time. ... I think this is a sexy ad. I mean, I think that I'm pretty open and willing to try quite a bit. I think life's too short to not try things, so looking at it from that perspective, I think it would be interesting to try it from that perspective.

In both instances, Aaliyah and Audrey attempt to incorporate the ‘taboo’ into their sex lives, adhering to the ‘transgression-as-liberation’ tenet of sex-positive feminism (Dymock 2013). While this speaks to a wider debate about what constitutes empowering sex (i.e. a subjective feeling versus false consciousness) (Gavey 2012; Lamb and Peterson 2012), the liberatory effects of such transgression remain questionable. Aaliyah and Audrey both internalize scripts learned from popular culture, which as Dymock (2013: 887) makes clear, “testifies to the power of the commodification of sexuality to co-opt ‘alternative’ sexual practices into heteronormativity, accommodated through their commercialization”. Thus, such sexual taboos (i.e. BDSM) are less transgresses than they are masked instances or symbols of hyper-patriarchy.

To this end, the women's penchant for both heteronormative and non-heteronormative sex corresponds to Gill's (2008a) notion of subjectification, wherein women sexually objectify themselves in order to afford their partners a position of superiority that maintains the imbalance of power and contributes to the reproduction of the status quo. From this perspective, the embodied experience of sexual satisfaction functions as a mechanism of symbolic violence that perpetuates the patriarchal society, regardless of whether it is perceived as an 'empowered' feminist choice or not.

### **8.1.1.2 Sexual Identity**

How women experience sex undoubtedly speaks to the construction of their sexual identities. While this was implied in the previous sub-section, where women's desirability and self-worth were shown to be largely dependent on men, this section explores two ways that this was more explicit.

#### ***Renouncing the Female Body***

For some women, an internalization of the hegemony had more profound effects on their sexual identities than it did others. Khloe (*neutral-identification*), the youngest of fourteen participants, at twenty-years-old, demonstrates this theme in the disavowal of her genitals:

I always perform [oral sex] on him. I don't really like it when he does on me. I think vaginas are gross. Don't touch me down there. Don't look at me down there. ... *I just don't think you can ever be fully 100% clean down there* and I don't want someone's mouth there, so. I wouldn't want to put my mouth down there, so.

Such disdain, and on some level, disgust of female genitalia is similarly expressed by both Chelsea (*disidentification*) and Angela (*neutral -identification*), although to a notably lesser extent than Khloe. Chelsea states, "I don't like it [oral sex], on me. ... it just like tickles and it's awkward and then you have to kiss them after. It's just gross". Angela, similar to Khloe, incorporates the issue of cleanliness in her discussion of when her partner gives her oral sex "like *if I get out of the shower* or something, then we'll like sit and watch TV, or he'll like call me over, and kind of do that". These interpretations of the female body as being somehow 'dirty' or 'gross' correspond to early and outdated

conceptualizations of gendered and classed sexuality, where unbridled sexuality was assumed to be characteristic of lower-class women, as opposed to a bourgeois femininity, which purports sexual modesty (Arthurs 1999; De Beauvoir 1949/2010; Russo 1994/2012). These sentiments also involve elements of shame. In her study of young, white, working-class women, Skeggs (1997) reported that shame was often a consequence of women coming to terms with their sexualized working-class selves. In the context of the present study, shame has seemingly transcended issues of class. Additionally, shame may be tied to an inability to meet unrealistic beauty standards portrayed in the media, as was evidenced in the women's propensity to discipline their bodies.

For example, as discussed in Chapter 7 (Section 7.3), Chelsea expresses a strong aptitude for the thin ideal (Myers and Crowther 2007), contending that "all women should try to look like that." While Chelsea, among some of the other informants, appear generally concerned with diet and exercise, others engaged in more serious body transformations. For example, Khloe recently got breast implants to make the top-half of her body match the bottom-half, which she described as more "curvaceous". Her best friend also got breast implants, but Khloe made it a point to be the first among her friends. Thus, it would appear that in addition to shame, there is an element of *competition* driving young women to make hegemonic investments, as a way to secure their corporeal capital within an allegedly saturated market of heterosexuality.

### ***Reframing Homosexuality***

As was hinted to earlier in relation to the commodification of female sexual pleasure, another instance where an ontological reliance on the hegemony becomes abundantly clear is in the case of Nikki's (*schizo-identification*) sexual identity. Nikki recently 'came out' as a lesbian; thus, despite being the oldest of fourteen informants (at age thirty-one) she lacks sexual experience in relation to her new homosexual relationship. To compensate for this, Nikki draws extensively from a heteronormative framework in order to make sense of her experience as a lesbian and provide her a sense of grounding or security. To this end, she often discusses her relationship in terms of their respective

(dichotomous) gender roles (i.e. Nikki as the feminine and her partner as the masculine). This resonates with McClelland's (2014) study, which indicates the importance of mutually exclusive gender roles in achieving sexual satisfaction. In this way, Nikki conforms to what Lisa Blackman (2009) terms '*heteroflexibility*', where straight men and women "open themselves to the possibility of emotional and sexual same-sex relationships. ... This both/and rather than either/or opposition, particularly of lesbianism to feminine heterosexuality, marks the heterosexual woman who embraces a lesbian identity as a temporary interruption to the solid and indomitable march of heterosexual desire" (p. 124-125). Notable parallels can be drawn between Nikki's newfound lesbian identity and contemporary 'homosexual' media, such as the film, '*Kissing Jessica Stein*' and television series, '*Orange is the New Black*', both of which largely comply with the tenets of heteronormativity:

You know, that [*Kissing Jessica Stein*] for a long time was my favorite movie, before I actually came out. ... it's about this girl; she had had a lot of failed relationships with men and so she got on a dating site, ended up having a girl respond to it. And completely did not expect it, did not want it, was not open to it at first, and then she just kind of fell into it and it was great.

Notably, Nikki makes it a point to mention that this was her favorite movie *before* she came out as gay, which might suggest her desire to disidentify as a heteroflexible (i.e. a heterosexual woman who happens to be dating a woman), in order to afford herself a more authentic lesbian identity (i.e. as a homosexual woman dating a woman).

Nikki's case is particularly interesting, insofar as she is one of the only informants to rely on an internalized hegemonic ideology in order to secure a sense of ontological security in the context of her sexual and *romantic* relationship. While many of the informants drew on a patriarchal ideology in the context of their *sexual* relationships, most felt secure enough in their relational roles to move beyond seeking security to begin seeking status (discussed in section 8.2). This confidence was evidenced in the positive interpretations women attributed to romantic discourse, portrayed, for example, in the Cesare and Paciotti ad (refer to Image 8.2), versus the discomfort they expressed when faced with overt sexual

discourse in the Revlon ad (refer to Image 8.1). Although sexual identity formation is believed to occur at a relatively early age in adolescence (Erikson 1968), particularly among women (Adams 1998), because Nikki came out at age 30, she has relatively limited experience as a lesbian and thus tends to rely on homosexual discourse that has become co-opted by the hegemonic media in order to make sense of, or legitimize unfamiliar experiences (Blackman 2009). She differs from Kris (*schizo-identification*), who ‘came out’ at the age of 16 and has had over a decade of experience in fashioning a homosexual identity for herself.

Nikki’s inexperience is particularly conspicuous in her reading of ads, inasmuch as she often interprets ads from multiple positions simultaneously. For example, in her reading



**Image 8.4:** Liquid-Plumr (2014)

of the Liquid-Plumr ad (see Image 8.4), Nikki offers two conflicting interpretations. At first glance, she attempts to distance herself from her past heterosexual identity, as was similarly evidenced by the renouncement of her favorite movie (*Kissing Jessica Stein*) once she came out:

I bet you some straight girls would like that! ... It makes me laugh. My girlfriend always gives me shit, because you know, I’ve obviously been with a man. And so she is always making crude male jokes. And I’m just like, you’re seriously gonna make me gag. Just shut up, please.

But later, she offers a reading that corresponds more closely to hetero-normative values and gendered stereotypes, revealing an underlying acquiescence to traditional hegemonic (patriarchal) values:

I just don’t see how that’s going to appeal to anybody. I mean, I guess it’s mostly women that go out and do the shopping for the home, but you know, you would think that something like this would be a man’s job. You know, a man is gonna take care of something like this, so a man will be going to get that. I don’t understand why they would have a man trying to be sexy, advertising plumber liquid.

Herein Nikki reveals her non-reflexive adherence to traditional gender roles, rejecting the ad for its failure to conform to such roles, wherein women do the shopping, while men

take care of the plumbing, for example. In this way, Nikki continues to organize her relationship based on heteronormative male-female roles<sup>49</sup>. And despite her attempts to redefine her sexual identity in new or alternative terms, she often falls victim to this binary dichotomy that is enacted in both her sexual *and* relational engagements.

### 8.1.1.3 Marital Identity

Thus far, this section has explored how seeking ontological security via an internalization of the hegemony contributes to the social reproduction of patriarchal society. However, a slightly different view may be adopted in the context of women's marital identities, inasmuch as marriage, which implies emotional and economic security, allows women certain freedoms in fashioning a unique identity project. Lauren (*disidentification*) expresses her yearning for such security in her idealization of marriage:

A marriage says like, I like can't leave you. Like, even if there's like a week or a day or a month when I want to, I'm not going to because like I know that like we can stick it out, and like things are gonna work, and I'm not ever gonna leave you because I've like promised this to you.

And in fact, based on the interviews in this study, a woman's marital status does indeed afford her a great sense of security and more ideological freedoms than even an internalization of feminism, as will be explored in the following Section 8.1.2. Recall, for example, Chelsea's (*disidentification*) narrative and the significant role that her marriage played in the construction of her identity as a quintessential 'Southern Belle'. As was evidenced, Chelsea disidentifies with the feminist movement in order to align herself with a more traditional mode of femininity. The construction of this identity, however, is not a non-conscious uptake of hegemonic values, but rather a reflexive *choice* to invest in this ideology. This choice, while assuredly influenced by the broader cultural context, is more so mediated by her marriage and the legal and cultural legitimacy it grants her. A conscious uptake of hegemonic values can similarly be seen in the case of Angela

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<sup>49</sup> Kris similarly adheres to dichotomous gender roles in her relationships with women, yet for Kris, this is less about establishing ontological security and more about gaining status; accordingly, this is discussed in Section 8.2.

(*neutral-identification*), who was recently engaged. While she is less assured than Chelsea with regard to her identity, a comparable theme can be identified.

In a similar vein, though on the opposite spectrum, Natasha (*identification*) fosters a very strong identification with the feminist movement. Natasha has been married for just slightly over a year and feels that feminism is just “beginning to play a big role in my life”. Natasha’s affiliation with feminism stemmed from an old relationship, where:

all of my sexual experiences with my ex-boyfriend could play into that because I didn’t feel like I was in control and I didn’t have any power and I was just kind of like there and along for the ride. And even though I wasn’t like telling him no, I most of the time didn’t want it to happen and I didn’t really feel like I could say anything. And, but that in and of itself has made me want to like feel strong.

Yet, it was not until later, after Natasha met her husband that she was able to make these connections and identify with the feminist movement. Thus, like Chelsea, Natasha’s ideological affiliations are mediated by the affirmation that her marriage grants her.

Extensive research beginning in the late 1970s demonstrates how a woman’s sex role, particularly her adherence to femininity, was a major determinant of ego integration, i.e. a reliable sense of self (Erikson 1950; Schiedel and Marcia 1985; Skeggs 1997) and it would seem that, despite women’s advances, much of this still holds true today, where marriage serves as the ultimate symbol of a woman’s desirability and cultural worth (Greer 1990). However, it is important to note that an identity status is never permanent and can be disrupted in instances of divorce, for example, as demonstrated by Nikki (*schitzo-identification*), who has recently re-entered a ‘crisis period’ (Erikson 1950) in search of new ideological and sexual commitments, as well as friendships:

[We were] together for so long, we had so many mutual friends, like all of our friends were mutual. ... And so I lost basically all my friends when that [the divorce] happened. So I started reaching out to all my old friends, who I kind of lost contact with after [my ex-husband] and I got married and then getting, you know, into the LGBT community here and getting new friends through that.



In this instance, Nikki is no longer able to rely on her past (marital) identity to legitimize her self-worth, yet she nonetheless relies on a hegemonic framework, namely one purported through the media in order to afford her some semblance of ontological security, which she lost when her marriage ended.

#### **8.1.1.4 Summary**

In summary, hegemonic internalization coincides with Gramsci's (1971) notion of spontaneous or non-conscious consent. A patriarchal ideology was internalized, at least to some extent, by all of the informants in this study. This section outlined three of the primary ways this was enacted, focusing on women's sexual pleasure, their sexual identities, and marital identities. These three themes reveal that ontological security is primarily achieved via a non-reflexive implementation of dichotomous (male-female) gender roles, perpetuated by a patriarchal ideology. This was primarily evidenced by the way women experienced sexual pleasure (by pleasuring *masculine* others), and in the construction of their sexual identities, both of which drew heavily from heteronormative media discourse. Finally, ontological security was realized through marriage, inasmuch as this legally and culturally secures one's feminine role. The security gained through one's marital identity is a testament to Bourdieu's (1984) assertion that women are capital-bearing objects, whose value increases according to which group (i.e. man, family) they *belong*. The struggles women face in their attempts to act as both capital-bearing objects *and* capital-accumulating subjects is considered below.

#### **8.1.2 Counter-Hegemonic Internalization**

Starting with women's right to education in 1833 and women's suffrage in the 1920s, women have increasingly come to play a major role in shaping contemporary American society. However, as McRobbie (2004b) suggests, this inclusion may also give way to a postfeminist society, where feminism is taken into account to suggest that equality has been achieved, thus forestalling the need for a feminist movement. Counter-hegemonic internalization, then, refers to one's non-conscious adherence to a counter-ideology (i.e.

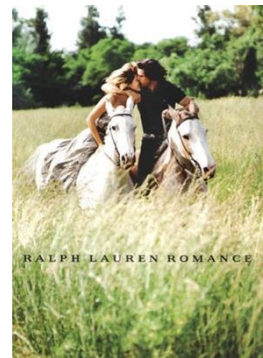
feminism) in order to make sense of one's subjective place in society. In other words, counter-hegemonic internalization, in the context of this research, refers to the non-reflexive uptake of feminist values that are often 'taken-for-granted' by those who grew up with many feminist-won rights (Kinser 2004). Whether or not this precludes a feminist movement is considered further in the discussion Chapter 9.

An internalization of feminism was witnessed primarily in the realm of how these young women autonomously approached their vocational opportunities (work and school) and interpersonal matters of relationships and dating. At times, these two fields – vocational (i.e. the labor market) and relational (i.e. marriage market) – were at odds, causing tension and angst in the informants' identity projects. This section focuses on how the informants negotiated their inter-relational power in light of their potential for institutional power (i.e. offered through vocational opportunities). Assuredly, this caused angst among the informants and thus the second part of this section considers the strategies employed as a way to mediate between these tensions.

### 8.1.2.1 Interpersonal versus Institutional Power Struggles

Unlike how the women experienced sexual pleasure, many of them felt confident in their abilities to maintain deep and meaningful romantic relationships. This was similarly evidenced in the confidence they expressed in interpreting gynocentric ads promoting romantic discourses (as opposed to overtly sexual ones). For example, many of the informants liked the Ralph Lauren Romance ad (see Image 8.5), given, what Natasha described as, its "whimsical romantic feel". A common theme in viewing this ad was its noted authenticity that was less common among the more sexually explicit ads. For example, Angela (*neutral-identification*) states:

I think maybe I like this one the most because it's the most realistic... We have horses, so that one's easy for me to do,



**Image 8.5:** Ralph Lauren Romance (2014)

and I used to do that, so, you know. It's just like, I mean as realistic as riding two horses through a meadow can be, you know.

Angela interprets the ad within the context of her own life experiences. Kris (*schizo-identification*) similarly makes connections between the ad and her identity project, despite the ad's depiction of a heterosexual couple:

It's very dreamy. This is the helpless romantic in me coming out, cause this is something I would do, ignorantly and stupidly, but yes, I would do this. It's actually what I had planned today for Lindsey and I, to go horseback riding. So, yay. Yeah, I'm that loser.

Kris's admission, "I'm that loser", in part speaks to the contradiction she feels in adhering to a feminine cultural script that conflicts with her masculine-oriented gender role. Yet, on a broader level, it may speak to the contradictions women feel in adhering to a traditional patriarchal script (i.e. desiring an idealized romantic relationship), while trying to maintain their autonomy and independence as 'contemporary' women, stipulated by a feminist script.

Employing a Marxist framework, Kipnis (1998), equates marriage to production, which she argues, involves 'intimacy labor' or 'relationship labor', wherein "one sphere [slides] so smoothly into the other – production/reproduction, public/private, wage labor/relationship labor" (297). And to be sure, many of the informants feel that they excel at this type of 'relationship work'. In particular, they believe that this was an area of their lives where they could exercise some power or control. Kris, for example, illustrates her affinity for control by equating dominance with male chivalry:

I feel like I'm dominant [because] I believe in chivalry. I still open doors. I still buy flowers. I still pay for dinner and everything. ... I don't believe that men should... take care of the women, and do all the money, and so on and so forth ... but I like to portray that role a lot.

In this way, Kris's relationships afford her a platform for which to exert a masculine archetypal power over her female partners. While this was an extreme case, many of the other participants engaged in subliminal manipulations of their partners that ranged from

the mundane, e.g. influencing their fashion choices, as Khloe (*neutral -identification*) indicates upon viewing the Guess ad (see Image 8.6): “He’s wearing cool clothes that I want my boyfriend to wear. . . . makes me want to take my boyfriend to Guess and go get him clothes”; to regulating their day-to-day whereabouts, as Chelsea (*disidentification*) jokingly implies, “I would like cut his balls off if he didn’t show up when he was supposed to”. Chelsea later clarifies, “I mean he just, he does what he’s supposed to, I guess. And I know that sounds like controlling, but, I mean, I think, that is part of marriage though, you have to like be able to trust each other.” From this perspective, Chelsea equates control with trust (or her husband’s submission). Thus, dominance and control are major themes structuring how Kris, Chelsea, and to a lesser extent, Khloe, approach their romantic relationships.



**Image 8.6:** Guess (2013)

This sense of ‘relational empowerment’ was also enacted in some of the stories women shared with regard to their dating experiences. For example, Audrey (*schizo-identification*), who uses online dating platforms, claims, “it’s a nice way to meet people. It’s kind of nice to be able to screen out some things that you may not be interested in. I’m tall and I hate to say, I’m not attracted to men who are significantly shorter than me, but I’m not.” In addition to short men, Audrey also attempts to “weed out” those men who may not be aligned with a feminist ideology in terms of women’s reproductive and employment rights. Lauren (*disidentification*) also adopts an empowered position when it comes to dating with respect to her ‘texting practices’, claiming: “some of my friends have like commented and been like, you’re like the boy in the relationship, cause I’m like, I’m not gonna wait before I text him, you know?” Herein, Lauren attempts to establish herself as being somewhat ‘above’ the so-called ‘dating game’, establishing her autonomy outside of standard (heteronormative) relationship practices, wherein one should strategically ‘wait’ before responding to a text message, so as to not seem desperate.

However, while the informants were comfortable exercising their interpersonal power, particularly in the context of their relationships, this was at time at odds with how they approached institutional power with regard to their vocational opportunities. For example, Lauren currently works at a national department store and has recently been accepted to attend their ‘manager in-training’ program in the summer following graduation. However, she demonstrates some insecurity with regard to her new position and what it might mean in terms of her feminine status:

Like sometimes if I meet a girl that is like an engineer or something, I’m kind of like taken back. ... I know this is like really stereotypical, but [I think of] women [as] kind of really good around kids and really good with just [doing] like girly things ... and just like being really sensitive and like [doing] jobs that don’t involve a lot of like confrontation... *I wouldn’t say that I’m like super feminine, but I obviously enjoy being treated like really feminine, so like taken out on dates and like guys respecting you for emotions that you do have, because like as much as I try sometimes, I’m just like you can’t escape being feminine. But I also think that I have a lot of characteristics that are very – not very masculine – but kind of like something that would be more masculine than a lot of the traits I just described. So like I’m very like business-minded and like, I wanna be a manager.*

In the first half of this excerpt, Lauren describes what she perceives to a “stereotypical” female job. Such a rigid characterization precludes her from qualifying as “super feminine”, inasmuch as she is “business-minded and like [wants to] be a manager”. However, this acknowledgement that she is not “super feminine” is worrisome for Lauren because she “enjoy[s] being treated like really feminine” and “you can’t escape being feminine”. Thus, the implication of institutional power, that has traditionally been afforded to only men, proved quite contentious for Laurant, inasmuch as it was perceived as a threat which could diminish her feminine cultural capital and status in the marriage/dating market. The fact that one type of capital (economic) in one field (labor market) can threaten the capital (cultural) in another field (marriage market) has been well documented in previous literature (McCall 1992; Moi 1991).

Audrey approaches this discord in a slightly different way, capitalizing on her feminine cultural capital in order to acquire economic capital within her respective career. As a

female doctoral student working in a male-dominated field of sport's marketing, Audrey has experienced her fair share of sexism in the workplace:

I mean, the number of times as a female where you're not talked to because you're smart, even though you're in a PhD program; the number of times men are like, 'oh, you're in a PhD program?' and they're shocked. But yet a man who's a year younger than you, 'oh you're in a PhD program, that's awesome'. I can't even tell you how many times that's happened. ... You know, when you're a female, people may not say it, but you get the once over from every man when you walk into a room. ... And the first thing that's said about you is not anything about how smart you are or how good a teacher you are, it's going to be 'oh, she's hot', or 'she's not attractive'. Like that's the first thing that's said about you.

However, in line with the ethos of neoliberalism and NSMs, where individuality precedes collectivity, Audrey accommodates the institutionalization of patriarchy rather than speak out against it, to further her own career prospects:

I like to say I've learned to balance the two and I've learned to play dumb when I need to. ... I can absolutely be the dumb blonde and laugh at the dirty jokes that I don't actually find funny, you know, the dirty sexist jokes that men are going to make. Some of them I find entertaining, *mainly because I know I'm not dumb* – and what's the quote – 'I know I'm not dumb, but I also know I'm not blond'. I think it's the Marilyn Monroe quote... And so, you know, I've learned men are very disarmed by blonde women in a pair of heels. So you know what, I work with it.

In this way, Audrey acts, looks, and dresses a certain way in order to adhere to a male-dominated institution because she knows she is entitled to it, even if others are a bit slow on the uptake. This sense of entitlement, her ability to critically reflect on such a situation, and her choice to handle the situation in one way over another, are all byproducts of an internalized feminist ideology. Furthermore, Audrey understands that exploiting her femininity has a large impact on her ability to acquire both economic and cultural capital in the labor market, which should, in theory, allow her to gain access to institutional power. Nonetheless, the contradictions implicit in Audrey's actions and a feminist ideology are readily apparent.

Notably, while many of the informants were generally aware of a sort of disconnect between the struggle for institutional versus interpersonal power, it was rarely explicitly articulated. Khloe attempts to vocalize these tensions in relation to the Versace ad (see Image 8.7):

**Khloe:** She's got control. Control is sexy. In a good... I mean, it depends, power and control is different. But if you have control in like a sexy way, like that, that's good.

**Interviewer:** How are power and control different?

**Khloe:** Like Hitler sucks. He's not sexy because he like brainwashed people.

**Interviewer:** And Hitler's an example of power or control?

**Khloe:** A combo. He had like power, but forced power... basically. I don't think she was necessarily forced. She's like sexy so these people... and strong and these guys want to like love her and stuff or, I don't know, have sex with her or something. I don't know.



**Image 8.7:** Versace (2013)

While Khloe's metaphorical comparison is a bit unusual, she is, nonetheless, acutely aware of an underlying dichotomy of power (i.e. interpersonal versus institutional), differentiating between 'power' and 'control'. Moreover, she is able to articulate that these discourses are diametrically opposed and understands that the type of power (or control) that commands men's attention, confirming women's desirability is 'sexier' than the other.

In tying back to the issue with framing marriage (or relationships) as 'work' (Kipnis 1998), the problem is twofold. First, as with Marx's earlier claim that women's work (e.g. procreation) does not contribute to the accumulation of one's economic capital, neither does the type of interpersonal or relational work that these women excel in, and thus it is largely disregarded as work on a broader societal level. Second, given the current economic climate, most women are forced to enter the labor force (Sidler 1997), which suggests that women are burdened with two jobs, but are only recognized for one – the

one that contributes to their accumulation of economic capital. And indeed, even this is a tightrope to walk, inasmuch as too much economic capital in the labor market can devalue their cultural capital in the marriage market. Mediating between these two fields consequently causes a great deal of angst, which is considered next.

#### **8.1.2.2 Managing Angst**

As has been made evident throughout the course of this chapter, there is much pressure on women to simultaneously conform to both patriarchal and feminist cultural scripts. This gives way to the 1980's catch phrase that women *can* and *should* 'have it all' (Brown 1982; Szalai 2015). An internalization of this ostensibly feminist phrase, however, has given way to women's pervasive feelings of guilt in failing to materialize this expectation. Such omnipresent feelings of guilt and angst motivated the informants to engage in a variety of hedging strategies designed to offset their perceived or anticipated shortcomings; three of these are considered below.

#### ***Denouncing Femininity***

The first of these strategies relates to the informants' tendency to speak out against their gendered habitus. Thus, despite the fact many were quite confident in pursuing 'relationship' or 'intimacy' work, many of the informants rejected the institution of marriage and motherhood. A rejection of marriage was particularly evidenced by those informants who aligned themselves with a feminist ideology, whereas many of the women (regardless of their feminist identification) hesitated at the notion of having children, as if it were too much to expect of their future partners and/or themselves.

Ivy (*identification*) and Lucy (*identification*) both reject the notion of marriage on the basis of their feminist commitments. In renouncing the institution of marriage, the women afford themselves a sense of control, which simultaneously negating the possibility of failure (e.g. failure to find someone, failure to make a marriage last, etc.) and/or getting hurt. Lucy claims, melancholically:



I never want to get married. . . . it makes me feel more secure to have this individual freedom that like if we were to divorce there isn't this whole hub-ub of getting detached. It's already a process to like detach yourself from someone in a break-up. . . . and I don't want to feel like I always have to like honor [a partner] in some kind of weird social stigmatism to feel validated.

While Lucy's rejection of marriage is seemingly based in her desire to ward off feelings of attachment and commitment to protect her autonomy and independence, Ivy rejects marriage in order to confirm her status as a feminist:

[T]here's a ton of TV shows like, *Say Yes to the Dress*, there's so much pressure on the woman to like dresses, pay for the wedding, things like that. Like you need to think about your life and envision your wedding day. And I think we've all experienced that, like I have had the thought of that in my head before when I was younger. But now that I am older and have questioned a lot more things, I'm like no, I reject a lot of that actually.

Ivy further notes that what began as an intentional rejection of the status quo (in the name of feminism) has now become embedded in her mentality: "I think initially it [my rejection of marriage] was to reject a lot of things, but now I just generally feel that way". For Ivy, being on what she calls the "opposition" also grants her a sense of moral authority. Given Ivy's insecurities with regard to her lack of personal experience and her position as a feminist, she often adopts a dogmatic uptake of feminism, wherein she feels the need to intentionally reject her femininity (e.g. marriage, relationship labels, children, the color pink, and etc.) in order to qualify as an 'authentic' feminist.

Other informants were slightly more open to the possibility of marriage, but then felt the need to reject other aspects of their femininity, which often implied a refusal to have children. For example, upon being asked if she wants to get married, Audrey (*schizo-identification*) hesitantly responds:

[Sigh] I think so. I do. I do. I'm just [*pause*] it would take a lot to get me to trust someone enough to really, you know, be in a good place to say, yeah, I'm gonna trust you to spend the rest of your life with me. I think I would. I'm not necessarily crazy about having kids and I think for that it would have to take meeting the right person. Right now I see a kid and I'm just like, what do I do with it? Like it's sticky, what do I do with it? Like it's staring at me, I don't know how to handle it.

If you want to see me have a panic attack like hand me a child. It's ahhh! I'm not stupid, but I don't know what the hell to do with them. But like I have no desire to have a child. I have a cat.

In revealing her desire to get married, Audrey is left feeling vulnerable and must thus counteract these feelings by positioning herself outside of the 'norm', denouncing her maternal instincts. And in fact, even this denunciation is precarious at best, where at once she claims, "it would have to take meeting the right person" to have children, only to subsequently follow up with, "I have no desire to have a child". Thus, Audrey is engaging in a hedging strategy, which involves rejecting part of her femininity as a way to offset any potential shortcomings she anticipates in this realm of her life. Madison (*identification*) expresses a similar sentiment:

**Madison:** I think that [having a family] all depends on if I meet someone, you know what I mean? I think if I met someone that I thought, if they wanted a family and like it was worth it that I would take that extra step to do that, but as far as like, if that doesn't happen, I would never like want to have kids of my own, without – like adopt, like I would never wanna do anything like that.

**Interviewer:** And how important is it to you that you find someone?

**Madison:** I would say it's pretty important [to find someone] because I don't really wanna spend my life alone, but I mean, I think that I could find a way to be happy if I didn't, you know.

Here, Madison engages in a similar strategy to Audrey, leaving the decision about whether to have children (i.e. a family) or not up to her future partner. In this way, both Madison and Audrey do not feel confident in admitting that they want children for themselves; rather, it is a decision that must be validated by a future partner, which further nuances the way a woman's femininity is intertwined with, and dependent on the approval of men. Chelsea (*disidentification*) similarly demonstrates how femininity, as a form of cultural capital, must be legitimized and confirmed by men:

I didn't think that marriage was important until I met Nick and I didn't think children were something that I wanted before I met Nick either. I just didn't think it was for me, but it was like that same day I fell in love with Nick. Like, I don't

know, I just saw myself I guess getting married and having kids, so. I think when you find the right person it becomes something that you want.

Chelsea was consequently able to capitalize on her feminine cultural capital, something she previously felt unentitled to, the moment it was validated by Nick. The fact that Nick would be “ecstatic if we had three kids right now” offers Chelsea a sense of security in making feminine investments, a luxury associated with a marital identity that many of the informants were not (yet) privy to. Nikki (*schizo-identification*) also recalls making the choice to have children the first year she was married to her now ex-husband:

Like when my kids were born, it was one of those things where I had a calendar and I had it scheduled out, like mapped out, like we need to have sex these days.

Yet, while her marriage verified her maternal instincts, it failed to sustain itself, which inevitably caused Nikki to leave the marriage:

It’s hard for me to say that if he was there, if he was present, and a good husband and good father, you know, if I would have actually left the marriage or not. So, I don’t know, that’ll always be one thing that’s kind of in the back of my mind, like would I have or would I not.

In an attempt to counteract the losses incurred to her femininity via her failed marriage, Nikki denies the institution of heterosexuality altogether, yet fails to radically challenge it, evidenced by her proclaimed identity as a ‘lipstick lesbian’ and tendency to frame her homosexual relationship in heterosexual terms, as discussed in Section 8.1.1.2. Nonetheless, she still attends to the institution of marriage, claiming she and her girlfriend would like to get married, once it becomes legalized. Thus, she is able to reject part of her ‘femininity’ (i.e. her heterosexuality) in order to protect herself and manage expectations, without incurring any major losses to her feminine capital.

Consequently, it would appear as if many of the women operate under the premise that they can ‘have it all’ by narrowly defining what ‘having it all’ means. One cannot fail at ‘having it all’ if marriage or children, or even men, are not a part of that equation. Thus, engaging in a hedging strategy that involves a rejection of at least part of their femininity

allows these women to offset feelings of angst with regard to matters of love, marital affairs, and motherhood. However, many of the informants remain open to these issues as possibilities, particularly if they meet the ‘right’ person. This suggests the primacy placed on (typically masculine) others to legitimize their feminine cultural capital, affording men the privilege of dictating women’s cultural worth, such as whether or not they are fit to have children, for example. Furthermore, many women privilege pursuing vocational goals over their marital and maternal aspirations, inasmuch as the former are perceived as more attainable, whereas the latter necessarily involve another person(s). This relates back to a desire for control that is central to a both neoliberal discourse and the contemporary feminist movement.

### ***Denial of Disempowerment***

Another phenomenon that has been attributed to the psychosocial uptake of feminist values relates to the eradication of a feminist platform and female oppression at large (McRobbie 2004b). Even those informants fostering an identification with feminism tended to speak about a feminist agenda that expanded well beyond gender discrimination to include broader instances of minority oppression. While many informants indicated instances of sexism, most refused to acknowledge them as such. This leads to the second strategy women employed as a way to ontologically ground themselves in a postfeminist society that involves *denying* feelings of disempowerment, particularly as they related to gender oppression.

In order to illustrate this theme, it is useful to begin by exploring some of the informant’s responses to the infamous ad by Dolce and Gabbana (refer to Image 8.3). While many of the women picked up on the “rapeyness” (Aaliyah, *schizo-identification*) and “demeaning” (Lauren *disidentification*) aspects of the ad, they were hesitant to critique it as such. For example, Lauren acknowledges that the ad is disconcerting, but immediately feels the need to justify why it is not depicting rape:

Maybe something’s happening that she doesn’t necessarily want. And *not that he’s like raping her* cause obviously they’re like wearing clothes and he’s like not

doing anything to her except holding her hands down. But just the fact that there's others watching makes it not sexy... not good sexy.

Lauren's excerpt reveals the fluidity of the concept of rape, which has indeed undergone a series of various legal and social characterizations (Freedman 2013). Her reluctance to identify the connotations of sexual assault has less to do with a lack of media literacy, which emerging adults are well endowed with (McRobbie 2004b; O'Donohoe and Tynan 1998), but more to do with her interpretation of rape itself. In an increasingly sexualized society, the meanings behind 'rape' and 'consent' have become blurred, constituting what scholars have indicated as a 'rape culture' (Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth 1993/2005; Marcus 1992), wherein instances of rape have become pervasive, nuanced, and normalized. This is further evidenced in Lauren's story about the first (and only) time she received oral sex, albeit unwillingly:

Well, we were just like making out and he – he wanted to have sex, but I was like, 'I'm a virgin, like no'. And so he was just like, 'well, let's just do something else then'. And I was like, 'okay', and so he starts taking my pants off, and took my underwear off and I was like, okay he's probably like just still trying, even though he said that he didn't want to or that he was okay with like not, he probably still wants to [have sex] and I was like – I was like trying to keep him from taking my underwear off and he's like, 'it's fine', 'it's okay'. And so, I don't know, *I really regret things like that* because obviously I wasn't interested in anything else with him and he's really kind of disgusting to me now.

Lauren's failure to identify her own experience as rape is both unnerving and disconcerting, but many other informants admitted to having similar unwanted sexual experiences that they similarly did not identify as rape or assault. Accordingly, it seems as if young women unwittingly deny feeling sexually disempowered, because to do otherwise – to admit to their powerlessness in these situations, in a society where women are expected to be sexually empowered and agentic – might leave them feeling ashamed and violated. And "shame is profoundly disempowering" (Barkty 1991: 97).

Other women bypass the issue of rape in the Dolce and Gabbana ad completely, as does Chelsea (*disidentification*), who identifies several particular “sexy” cues, indicating that the whole is indeed more than the sum of parts:

This one is sexy because they’re oiled up for one. And he’s on top of her and she’s in like a *sexy bustier* or I don’t know what... like thrusting. Yeah, *it doesn’t get much sexier than that*. I mean, looks like they’re gonna do it any second. ... I do think it’s sexy. I think she makes it sexy with like the, *the thrust pose that she’s in*.

Chelsea finds this ad exciting (“it doesn’t get much sexier than that”), perhaps because she screens out the three men standing by and reads it as a couple on the verge of having “thrusting” sex. Consistent with Gill’s (2008a) notion of postfeminist subjectification, Chelsea emphasizes the woman’s “sexy bustier”, and the “thrust pose that she’s in”; this woman, in Gill’s terms is evidently “up for it.” At the same time, the man exerts control by being “on top of her,” which seems to sit well with Chelsea’s identification as a Southern housewife who wants “the man to be the man.”

Even those informants who readily align themselves with a feminist ideology often failed to fully acknowledge the oppressive attributes of the ad. Both Aaliyah and Ivy (*identification*) had dissected this ad in university classes, and in this respect, their interpretations reflect a degree of socialization into a particular academic perspective (Renegar and Sowards 2009). Ivy’s reading, however, is surprisingly circumspect:

This one is very interesting to me. *I’m more on the like offensive lines*. ... *I don’t necessarily know what they’re necessarily trying to convey* through this image, but it’s just like, it’s just the body language, is what stands out, like is almost eerie to me. It’s just like being held down kind of thing. This one doesn’t settle well with me. ... I just don’t like *that whole dominance role* portrayed in this, like I can have you, kind of thing. And *maybe that’s not what they intentionally meant by it*, but that’s the unintended consequence.

Ivy’s language here is hesitant and indirect. While she expresses unease at “the whole dominance thing” and sees herself as “on the offensive lines,” she also conveys uncertainty (“I don’t necessarily know what they’re trying to convey”), and gives the

advertiser the benefit of the doubt (“maybe that’s not what they intentionally meant by it”). In this case, the political does not translate easily into the personal. Aaliyah is similarly cautious in her interpretation, and while she acknowledges the connotations of rape in the ad, she also notes that she “wouldn’t pick up on the rapeyness if I didn’t know any better”:

I’ve seen this one before actually. Yeah, and I felt like it’s really rapey. Ugh, I just remember her [former teacher] talking about how unusual this like – where this woman was placed in this ad and like the way these men are around her in a way that may not be so positive and how this company was selling rape in a weird way and contributing to rape culture. I dunno if, like if I saw this before seeing that, I’d be like, this is kinda weird, but you know... *I wouldn’t pick up on the rapeyness if I didn’t know any better.*

The qualifications and hesitations in Aaliyah’s account of this ad are notable. It could be argued that she is struggling to recall what she was taught about it rather than engaging with it in her own terms.

These interpretations suggest a wider pattern, whereby women are reluctant to critique ads for oppressing women, since “the younger female viewer, along with her male counterparts, educated in irony and visually literate, is not made angry by such a repertoire. She appreciates its layers of meaning; she gets the joke” (McRobbie 2004b: 259). Thus, unsurprisingly, none of the women admitted to being personally implicated or harmed by popular culture or the media, invoking Pollay’s (1986) myth of personal immunity, where readers afford themselves stronger defenses against the effects of advertising that might otherwise impact less worldly-wise readers. This is exemplified by Madison’s (*identification*) who claims:

I don’t think it’s [sex in advertising] hurt my self-esteem. I think it’s definitely been something that I’m like, oh, that’s wishful thinking to ever look like that. You know, something to like strive for, like try to encourage me, like, you know, putting the swimsuit picture on your mirror, and be like, get out of bed and go work out, you know, stuff like that. But I feel like I’ve always been pretty confident in the way my body is. I am definitely fully aware and I’m not naïve and I will never attain that you know.

Others claimed that while sexualized representations in the media do not impact them directly, they can have negative impacts on society, namely children, as demonstrated by Mia (*neutral-identification*): “I don’t think it affects me in a huge way, but I think that it does with kids, you know”, and Lucy (*identification*): “I mean, [I was impacted] to a certain point, like when I was like 11. And then when I was 12, I like rebelled super hard”. Consequently, this suggests that an admission of disempowerment is akin to aligning oneself with that of a defenseless child, who does not know any better and certainly lacks any sexual agency.

Further, as Lauren’s story of sexual assault indicates, the informants readily deny feelings of disempowerment in their own sexual narratives. That is not to suggest that they did not reflect upon negative sexual experiences, however. In fact, many reported feeling disenfranchised by former partners and previous relationships. However, these feelings of vulnerability were always mediated via notions of agency and were rarely expressed in the context of their current relationships or partners. Recall, for instance, Natasha’s (*identification*) admission of feeling powerlessness in her previous sexual relationship (“I didn’t feel like I was in control and I didn’t have any power...”) (see Section 8.1.1.3). Such was also apparent in Angela’s (*neutral-identification*) recollection of being “comfortably uncomfortable” with her ex-boyfriend who she described as “the most manipulative person that I know”, but nonetheless insists, “I let it happen” (see Chapter 7, Section 7.4). In both of these instances, Natasha and Angela acknowledge their own role in their oppression, affording themselves an agentic standpoint that offsets the notion that they were fully disempowered or defenseless. Indeed, this also speaks to the fluidity of ‘empowerment’ and how relatively fleeting it is (Lamb and Peterson 2012). For what might be considered an empowering act or situation in one moment, can often be interpreted as otherwise, in retrospect.

Additionally, feelings of vulnerability are not afforded to all women equally. In fact, these feelings were typically only expressed by those informants currently involved in a



romantic relationship, which speaks to the emotional security afforded to women in relationships. Those informants identifying as ‘single’ felt less entitled to feel remorse and did not readily admit to being disenfranchised by previous partners and/or dating experiences. This was exemplified by Lauren’s internalization of guilt stemming from her sexual assault (“I really regret things like that”). Krista (*neutral-identification*), who is also single, similarly avoided feelings of disempowerment. For example, in recounting her experience with online dating, she recalls:

I was going through a really weird transition in my life. I wasn’t really happy with my job or anything else that had been going on. And one of my best friends from childhood had recently killed herself. And so just on top of everything else and then that happening, I wanted a change ... I’ll try Match [a dating site]. So I tried Match, and I dated around. It’s probably the reason why my number [of sexual partners] went up so quickly I feel like in the last few years, just with serial dating. ... But I think on-line dating has made me realize how many more douche bags there really are. I wasn’t impressed. ... At this point in my life, I know what I want and I’m not going to settle for anything less than that.

Herein, Krista tries to retrospectively legitimize her participation on an online-dating site, citing the negative circumstances surrounding her life that drove her to do it as a way to offset the embarrassment she feels in resorting to an online dating platform, which still has somewhat of a stigma attached to it (Wildermuth 2004). Further, in order to validate her “number [going] up so quickly”, which similarly implies feelings of shame, she asserts:

I don’t think I’ve ever felt bad about it [number of sexual partners], nothing ever told me like, oh my god, you shouldn’t have done that. It was just, at this point in time in my life I feel like you live and you learn. I mean, there were a couple times where I’ve just been like – really, this guy? *Never any remorse*, just like it happens, I can’t do anything now other than move past it.

Krista frames these conceivably ‘negative’ or potentially ‘disempowering’ experiences in such a way that ultimately grants her a position of even greater empowerment, endowing her with the knowledge of who she wants in terms of a partner and the assurance that she is “not going to settle for anything less”.

In sum, this strategy reflects the extent to which feminist and consumerist ideologies have become enmeshed, wherein a liberated woman has come to be equated with the liberated female consumer as is depicted in the media. The liberated female consumer is autonomous, independent, desirable, desiring, and above all – she is empowered (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010; Gill 2008a). Thus, to suggest that a woman is not empowered, but rather *disempowered* not only discounts her (situation) agency, but suggests a denial of any such ‘female liberation’ on a macro (societal) level, which is perhaps more unnerving than the (ephemeral) feeling of disempowerment itself. Accordingly, the women in this study continually qualified representations and instances of sexual discrimination in order to reestablish a sense in control as opposed to subjecting themselves to feelings of victimization.

### ***Enacting Moral Ideologies***

A final response to the angst caused by an internalization of a feminist ideology speaks to the desire some informants had to constrain it. In this way, some of the women drew from external ideologies in order to help them navigate and offset some of the tensions associated with inhabiting a postfeminist society. The sense of entitlement or freedom of choice underpinning young women’s exploration of new ideologies can be attributed to an internalization of feminism (Ferguson 2010) – even in instances when the chosen ideologies do not align with a feminist doctrine, *per se*.

In the same way that some women were drawn to identify or disidentify with the feminist movement, others were particularly drawn to religious ideologies, which have traditionally served as a ‘existential anchors’ (Üstüner and Holt 2007: 49) for which to construct one’s identity project. Thus despite recent claims about the detraditionalization of religion (McAlexander et al. 2014), this study finds that some informants rely extensively on religious institutions in order to make sense of their experiences and instill a sense of moral guidance. These religious adherences are not merely the effects of primary socialization, but are rather the result of reflexive choices made by the informants during adolescence and/or emerging adulthood.

Lauren (*disidentification*), for example, made the choice to become religious in college, following an unsatisfying freshman year:

[It] was kind of a wild freshman year and then I just kind of got sick of it. I was like, I'm not happy doing this, like that was like high school, I was having fun, but I wasn't happy and I couldn't figure out why. ... And so I was like, I just need to kind of change and be different cause I just felt really bad about myself and *just decided to change*. ... I started going to church and met all these girls that day. And I had prayed about getting friends that like, like real friends and not just people that I partied with and then didn't talk to all week and then partied with on the weekend.

Religion provides Lauren with a sense of entitlement from which to make moralistic judgments, particularly in reference to her dating life, stipulating the type of men she should date (e.g. Christian men), when to have sex (e.g. waiting until marriage before engaging in intercourse), and how to approach controversial topics (e.g. rejecting pornography). While somewhat inconsistent with the sex-positive discourse in contemporary feminism, Lauren's religion *affords her the freedom* to fashion a unique and individualized identity project, which allows her to orient herself in a moral space. Additionally, it works to *constrain certain freedoms*, allotted to her by a feminist ideology, which might otherwise lead to feelings of angst and uncertainty.

Mia (*neutral-identification*), a devout Christian, similarly indicates a desire to constrain and control an open and uninhibited society that is underpinned by a feminist ideology. Her affiliation with religion began much earlier than in Lauren's case, when an anatomy teacher from her high school invited her and some friends to take part in a religious organization that catered specifically to young girls. Mia strives to implement religion in every facet of her life in order to extricate some of the angst and ambivalence brought on by a postfeminist society. Like Lauren, religion acts as a 'technology-of-the-self' (Foucault 1988), yet her adherence to this ideology is mediated by the notion of choice, through which she is made to feel empowered:

I'm trying to like go by the rules, but just, you know, sex before marriage is *not something that I want to do*. ... the whole idea of keeping yourself pure is more

than just not having sex. And like I said, for me, you know, masturbation is just one of those things where it's like, I'm not keeping my mind pure, I'm thinking about other guys, I'm thinking about, you know, and not necessarily the guy that I'm going to marry and whatever.

In this excerpt, Mia demonstrates how sex before marriage in any form (masturbation or otherwise) is not something that she *wants* to do, which works to reaffirm the value system she has set out for herself. By adhering to the rules that she has autonomously implemented in every facet of her life, Mia is afforded “not a sense of pleasure but rather a sense of *affirmation* attained when the person abides by his or her own moral commitments” (Gecas 2000: 95 [emphasis my own]).

This conservative mindset was similarly perpetuated in Mia's readings of ads. At the start of the interview, she warned me that “I might be a boring interviewee” and in fact, she was relatively disengaged, often giving short (i.e. one-sentence) responses and commenting exclusively on the models, scenery, and/or products. For example, in response to the Versace ad (refer to Image 8.7), Mia circumvents any implication of sexual deviancy, with the exception of noting its “evil” overtones:

I just don't like [it]. I mean, it's dark and the colors are dark, and it's like they're trying to go for this like *evil* whatever. ... They're all kind of just into each other and they don't have very much clothes on. I get like a medieval type theme, you know, with his shoes and all of that. I don't know really what they're trying to sell. I mean guess perfume or something?

Lauren, who also comments extensively on the products and brands featured in the ads (perhaps, in part, because she studies marketing), is also made uncomfortable by the ad, but is able to more clearly articulate why it does not fit with her religious ideology that largely condemns gay relations:

They're really oiled up and ... like guys touching guys is not – that doesn't appeal to me at all. ... If it was just like the guy and the girl, but I think it's the fact that the two – well maybe not even, two guys in it would be fine – but that he's touching this other guy just like makes it weird.

The fact that Lauren engages with the ad in a way that Mia does not, is perhaps attributed to the recency of Lauren's religious awakening.

The sense of affirmation that both Mia and Lauren feel in adhering to a religious ideology provides them with a sense of grounding (i.e. ontological security) – a framework that helps them make sense of past experiences and manage new ones. Notably, Lauren and Mia's commitment to a religious ideology is, on the surface, antithetical to a feminist ideology, inasmuch as it re-introduces hierarchal and in some instances, deeply patriarchal structures (i.e. morality is channeled through hierarchal structures). However, their *choice* to subscribe to a rigid religious doctrine is nonetheless necessarily underpinned by a feminist ideology, which affords them the privilege of constructing individuated identity projects drawing from a multiplicity of available ideologies (Binkley 2007).

### **8.1.2.3 Summary**

To reiterate, an internalization of feminism refers to the non-conscious uptake of feminist values in order to make sense one's subjective place in society. This was evidenced primarily in how the women approached their vocational opportunities and romantic relationships. However, because these two fields require two oppositional forms of capital, women are perpetually stuck in a struggle for interpersonal versus institutional forms of power, where femininity is both an asset and a liability for women in the labor market. Such is further affirmed by McCall's (1992: 846) assertion that "Whatever gendered capital women possess in one respect, they lose in others", suggesting the incompatibility of hegemonic feminine capital and that which opposes it, i.e. non-hegemonic feminist capital. Additionally, because women are expected to excel both fields, they experience a great deal of angst. To mediate these tensions, the informants engaged in a series of hedging strategies, which involve narrowing what it means to 'have it all', denying feelings of disempowerment, and occasionally relying on external ideologies as a way to disengage from the constant struggle implied within a postfeminist society.

If feminism advocates women's autonomy and/or freedom from the constraints placed on them by the patriarchal hegemonic ideology, then it follows that an internalization of this counter-ideology confirms McRobbie's (2004b) thesis, suggesting that social equality has been 'achieved'. And to some extent, equality has been achieved in American society, whereby American women are at least as equally *entitled to participate* in the labor market and education system as their male counterparts. However, an internalization of a feminist ideology does not account for the inequality embedded in this participation<sup>50</sup>. It does not account for the inconspicuous acts of sexism that Audrey feels the need to accommodate, rather than retaliate against. It also does not account for the interpersonal and intrapsychic struggles that the informants face in their attempts to try and 'have it all', yet these can all be framed as *autonomous choices* that women make (Ferguson 2010; Hirshman 2006).

Thus, it would appear as if an internalization of feminism has led to the materialization of Marx's 'gender-blind society', where gender divisions are no longer acknowledged. Correspondingly, this works to impede any platform from which a feminist social movement can occur. In a paradoxical fashion, an internalization of feminism has managed to *reinforce* a hegemonic patriarchal ideology, relegating women's oppression to the domain of doxa, that is, unidentifiable and intrinsic to what Gill (2007a) denotes as the 'postfeminist neoliberal' social world. This suggests that ontological security, in this context, is always predicated on an adherence to the hegemonic ideology (patriarchy). Further, it can be argued that the pervasive sense of angst experienced by the young women in this study is caused by a lack of hegemonic security, which they attempt to acquire through various strategies that ultimately uphold a patriarchal ideology.

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<sup>50</sup> While women may be entitled to participate this is not to suggest that their participation is in any way *equal* to men's. In fact, much evidence would suggest the contrary, given the discrepancies with regard to pay as well as the imbalance of men and women holding top positions in the workplace (Hartmann 2015).

## 8.2 Seeking Status

“*Just as society itself produces man as man, so it is produced by him. Activity and consumption, both in their content and in their mode of existence, are social activity and social consumption*” –

Karl Marx (1844/1992: 349 [emphasis in original])

Section 8.1 delineated how society produces ‘man’, i.e. members via their non-conscious uptake or internalization of (hegemonic and feminist) ideologies in order to acquire a sense of ontological security in the world in which they inhabit. This section addresses the second half of Marx’s claim, which considers how society is produced by its members through their activities and consumption. In particular, it examines the consumption practices, aesthetic tastes, and choice preferences that work to shape distinct identity projects, the marketplace, and as Marx argued, society more broadly.

Status seeking is a much more reflexive practice than seeking ontological security, and speaks to the ways individuals make *active* and *purposeful* investments into their identity projects. The motivation here appears to be establishing a culturally legitimate identity project, which is achieved in one of two ways. The most common way is to invest in dominant forms of cultural capital, so as to secure one’s social standing in broader society (Allen 2002; Holt 1997). Alternatively, individuals might invest in a low status consumption field and thus subordinate forms of cultural capital, which does not grant legitimacy within the broader society, but can secure one’s position within a field-specific hierarchy (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Kates 2002; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). Following Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013: 21), “higher status fields are oriented around dominant forms of cultural capital whereas lower status fields are sites where subordinate forms of cultural capital have significant currency”. In the context of this research, feminism (the feminist social movement) represents a low status field, inasmuch as it is positioned as a counter-hegemonic ideology that is (at least in theory) opposed to the hegemonic society. The hegemonic society is not in and of itself a field,

but is made up of high status fields that individuals may participate in, assuming they hold the requisite amount and types of dominant capital<sup>51</sup>.

With the exception of Chelsea (*disidentification*), none of the informants were previously socialized in a high capital culture milieu in the economic sense of the term (Bourdieu 1984; Holt 1997, 1998). However, many of the informants were endowed with embodied feminine cultural capital (HCC), displaying attributes that adhere to conventional notions of beauty and sexiness (i.e. white, thin, heterosexual, and young) valued in Western society (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010; Gill 2003). Those informants who were not endowed with feminine cultural capital (LCC) typically evidenced marginalized identity projects in terms of racial, ethnic, sexuality, and/or class intersections, for example.

The following sections overview the two ideologies that young women reflexively invested in as a way to gain status and construct culturally legitimate identity projects that involved either investing in dominant forms of feminine capital (adhering to a hegemonic ideology) or subordinate forms of feminist capital (adhering to a counter-hegemonic ideology).

### **8.2.1 Hegemonic Identity Investments**

Hegemonic identity investments, in the context of this research, refer to the consumption practices, aesthetic tastes, and choice preferences that correspond to enactments of traditional femininity. Consistent with prior research (see Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013 for a review), the informants make hegemonic identity investments for one of two reasons: to reproduce an elite distinction, or to seek status and participate in high status consumption fields. As was previously indicated, only one of the participants (Chelsea, *disidentification*) was socialized in an HCC background (economically speaking), and to

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<sup>51</sup> As an aside, it is important to note that feminism is not considered a ‘low status’ consumption field in every context. From a Marxist standpoint, a feminist ideology is relegated to the bourgeoisie or upper class, inasmuch as working-class women are not afforded the economic or cultural capital to question their current state of affairs in relation to society (Jaggar 1983).



some extent, even this is debatable from a Bourdieusian point of view, since her father came into money as a result of his entrepreneurial endeavors, rather than through a lineage of family wealth. However, in turning to the secondary principles of division with regard to one's social positioning, many of the informants were endowed with embodied feminine capital (McCall 1992) by being white, young, thin, and heterosexual, thus dispositioning them to an HCC status, at least on a local level (i.e. among women). Those informants who were reflexively aware of their positioning thus evidenced the first strategy, making hegemonic identity investments in order to reproduce elite distinctions and improve their status specifically as *women* in a patriarchal society.

Other informants evidenced the second strategy, making hegemonic identity investments in order to acquire capital affiliated with a high social status, which, given their embodied habituated predispositions, they were not necessarily privy to. For these informants, the desire to realize upward mobility, was based on a need to (re)establish a sense of 'normativity' in their identity projects that was either missing or lost. The two motivations for hegemonic identity investments and how these were enacted are examined in detail below.

### **8.2.1.1 Maintaining Elite Status Distinctions**

Chelsea and Lauren, who both exemplify HCC dispositions and foster a disidentification with a feminist ideology, best represent this first theme – investing in a hegemonic ideology in order to maintain and acquire additional feminine capital. As Section 8.1 demonstrated, all of the informants invested in hegemonic feminine capital to an extent, yet for Lauren and Chelsea, this pursuit was directed and intentional. Thus, while their hegemonic identity investments sometimes mirrored an internalized patriarchal sensibility, this was not always the case given their reflexive positioning.

Inasmuch as feminine capital functions as an asset primarily in the marriage market (Hakim 2010; Lovell 2001; Skeggs 1997), it is no surprise that marriage served as the

ultimate status symbol, affirming these informants' femininity. Both Lauren and Chelsea value the institution of marriage, as was discussed in Section 8.1.1.3, and evidenced in Lauren's view of marriage as the ultimate goal (Greer 1990):

I've heard a lot of people, like Ivy, for instance, doesn't ever wanna get married, and I can see that. Like I can. I understand like if you don't ever wanna get married. But I think like *if you don't wanna get married then you don't need to try to be in a serious, involved relationship with someone*. And so a lot of things, like Ivy and I don't agree on a lot of things, so it'll kinda be like interesting for you to compare everything that we say. But, yeah, I just think if you don't plan on ever getting married to someone, then *you shouldn't act in a way that you would if you were trying to get married to someone*, if that makes sense. So if I never wanted to get married, I probably – I just wouldn't have serious relationships ever. *Like if I never wanted to get married I would just be hooking up with random people because it wouldn't matter*.

Lauren's perception of marriage is not rooted in discourses of love, romance, or even friendship; rather, marriage is discussed in terms of its *commodity form*, involving economic and emotional security as well as status. Desiring such status allows Lauren to differentiate herself from "a lot of people" who reject the institution of marriage. Thus, Lauren positions herself in direct opposition to people like Ivy<sup>52</sup> (i.e. those identifying with a feminist ideology), since they invalidate her pursuit of the marriage commodity. However, rather than feel undermined by a feminist sensibility, Lauren adopts a position of moral superiority, casting judgment on women who do not actively pursue marriage as an end goal ("*you shouldn't act in a way that you would if you were trying to get married to someone*"). In this way, Lauren distinguishes between Ivy and herself, equating a rejection of marriage with a sanctioning of sexual lewdness or deviance ("*Like if I never wanted to get married I would just be hooking up with random people because like it wouldn't matter*"), which is characteristic of low class sexuality (Skeggs 1997). Additionally, Lauren's assertion that she has "heard a lot of people" denouncing the institution of marriage illustrates how feminism, in Lauren's mind, has become relegated to an ideology for the masses. In this way, feminism has acquired a reputation as a

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<sup>52</sup> Lauren and Ivy are long-time friends and roommates. I met Ivy through Lauren because Lauren thought Ivy would serve as a good counterpoint to her own views and opinions.

popularized, low status consumption field, wherein everyone, despite their creed, class, economic standing, or status, has the right (and even the expectation) to participate. Ironically, it seems as if repudiating feminism has taken over from feminism as the subversive and distinguishing act. Accordingly, Lauren engages in various practices that involve emphasizing exemplars of femininity, in order to secure and acquire feminine capital. For example, despite sharing a house with four other young women, Lauren often reads *'Better Homes and Gardens'*, a magazine offering advice on interior and garden design, home décor, recipes, and home entertainment. This speaks to Lauren's recognition of her role in *converting* (rather than acquiring) capital through a display of cultural taste (McCall 1992).

Chelsea's feminine identity investments are primarily made in the realm of an embodied capital, with a focus on aligning her self/body with hegemonic ideals of beauty and femininity. In particular, weight is a key concern for Chelsea. Nick and Chelsea met on their college track team, at a time when Chelsea was running and swimming upwards of 70 miles a week: "When I was running, I felt very like sexy because I was like itty bitty and I was ripped". Since graduating and getting married, Chelsea notes that it is harder to keep the weight off (although I thought she was thin in any case). She often idealizes media representations that feature skinny 'itty bitty' women, as was evidenced in her Pinterest collage (refer to Figure 7.4 in Section 7.3) and also in her ad interpretations. When asked about her take on sex in advertising, she adopts an androcentric view (i.e. a male gaze) and responds:

So I have a thing about being skinny, I think skinny is always better no matter what. So I think anytime you have a beautiful woman and that has decent sized breasts, and that is tiny in the waist and she's wearing lingerie is sexy. I mean, anytime you have beautiful women doing anything, I think it's sexy.

Herein, Chelsea is not carelessly adhering to an internalization of patriarchal values; rather, she is reflexively and purposefully rejecting a mainstream view of feminism that threatens to devalue gendered stereotypes and traditions. In particular, she is challenging the 'love your body discourses', promoting women of a 'healthier' weight, which have

recently witnessed a surge in the mass media (Gill and Elias 2014). She does this in an attempt to honor the traditionally desired aesthetics of beauty with respect to Westernized women (Evans, Riley, and Shankar 2010; Gill 2003), which also reinforce the value of her feminine HCC. Chelsea does not apply a similar lens to men's bodies, however, and is generally unimpressed by advertising discourses that sexualize men:

I don't think that men have an appeal like women do. I don't know. I think men get more of a kick out of a woman in a bikini than women get out of men in underwear. Does that make sense? ... I suppose I'd rather see women than men.

The desire to protect her cultural capital is suggested by her reluctance to afford others, such as men or heavier women, a degree of sexuality, which would threaten her own status. Interestingly, both Chelsea and Lauren are also unconcerned with the physical attributes of their male partners. For example, although Lauren indicates that an attractive man would have "dark skin, dark hair", when asked if her current 'love interest' fits those specifications she answers:

No [*Laughing*]. No, that's why I think it's so funny, is because I am really attracted to him, but he's not what I would normally be attracted to. ... . That's another reason that this is so real, is because it's not – like I'm not dating him because I think he's attractive.

Similarly, for Chelsea:

I think prior to Nick it was almost the complete opposite. I wanted like tall, dark and handsome and Nick is, you know like, not tall or dark, so. But now I think Nick is my fantasy guy.

The fact that Lauren's current love interest and Chelsea's husband do not fit the 'tall, dark, and handsome' archetype, resonates with prior research that argues the physical attractiveness of a romantic partner is not a top priority for women in comparison to men (Baumeister and Tice 2001; Meltzer et al. 2014). This suggests that investments in corporeal capital (i.e. physical appearance) might be more important for women than for men, whereas men may be judged more on their ability to acquire economic capital, for example. Furthermore, accruing more corporeal capital than their male partners may

contribute to the interpersonal power these women feel they have within their romantic relationships.

Hegemonic identity investments were also apparent in a process of ‘othering and distancing’. This was evidenced, for example, in Chelsea and Lauren’s interpretations of the Seven Jeans ad (refer to Image 8.8), featuring a sexualized black model:

**Chelsea:** I like this one because it’s all about the jeans. I mean that’s the only thing to focus on. ... I do like that she is black with the white jean, I think it stands out more, but her herself doesn’t make it sexy I wouldn’t say. ... I think any model that was darker skinned would look good in that, and it would be sexy. ... But actually, I think the Seven ad would look better if they had a smaller model on it. ... maybe more toned in the legs or something, like I feel like this could look better. Like the jeans don’t look the best on her.



**Image 8.8:** Seven Jeans (2013)

**Lauren:** She’s topless, and so it’s obvious that they’re trying to show the pants. Whereas if she had a shirt on, first of all it wouldn’t get your attention because she would just look normal. So drawing your attention to the pants, but also to the ad as a whole because she’s not wearing a top at all. She looks more serious, whereas the Juicy [see Image 8.9 for the Juicy Couture ad], she looks more playful. And so that’s why I think the Juicy [ad] one is a little bit more sexy because she’s being like playful, whereas in the Seven [ad] she’s being just like super serious.

Again, Chelsea equates sexiness with skinniness and her criticisms of the model’s body resonate with stereotypes of strong and large black women (Beauboeuf-Lafontant 2003). Further, in both Chelsea’s and Lauren’s readings, the model’s skin color appears to invite a degree of objectification, reducing her to an aesthetic effect, where all darker skinned models are viewed as interchangeable in making the white jeans “stand



**Image 8.9:** Juicy Couture (2013)

out”, “draw your attention”, and look “sexy”. Further Lauren indicates that the appeal of the Seven Jeans ad rests solely on the fact that the model is topless, otherwise “she would just look normal”, whereas the model in the Juicy Couture ad is sexy and playful, despite being fully dressed. While Lauren and Chelsea may not be entirely reflexive of the

distinctions they make between heteronormative and othered representations, they nonetheless work to protect their own cultural capital as young, white, thin, heterosexual women.

Although these informants are investing in a script that denies *sexuality* to those deviating from hegemonic portrayals of Westernized femininity, this was not the only way that othering could serve as a source of capital. For example, having acquired marital status, Chelsea seeks to improve on it by having children – raising her status from stay-at-home-wife to what she sees as the more culturally legitimated stay-at-home-mom:

I would like a boy and a girl and then I have always wanted to adopt. I was a babysitter for our family friends – our family friends, he's a doctor. My parents are real close to him. But he adopted a little Chinese girl and I babysat her from three to ten every summer. I was like her nanny in the summer and ever since then I've always wanted to adopt. So a child from a different country.

Here, Chelsea not only demonstrates her desire to invest in a 'nuclear family', with two biological children ("a boy and a girl"), but she also sees the potential for capitalizing further on her role as a mother and enhancing her family's cultural capital by making a well-regarded, benevolent contribution to society (on a global scale) by adopting a child from another country. In this instance, othering is crucial in improving upon Chelsea's capital for two reasons. First, Chelsea equates this act with that of a higher social class, making it a point to elaborate on the well-regarded profession of the (male) family friend who adopted a baby girl from China. Second, Chelsea likely understands that a child from a different country is bound to 'stand out', at least in terms of appearance, communicating her family's altruism, as well as their economic standing (given the high costs associated with adoption) (Child Welfare Information Gateway 2011).

Lauren is not yet married, however, she nonetheless understands the importance of improving upon her cultural capital once the marriage commodity is obtained and she similarly seeks to do this by having children:

I definitely want to have kids and like I know that it'll, like it won't always be like fun, but I think that that's like another thing that's like cool about it. *It's another form of commitment that's just part of your relationship and part of your marriage.*

In this way, at least on a conceptual level, children become the medium for which to strengthen the marriage commodity that underlines women's feminine cultural capital. Thus, while Chelsea's motivation for children stems from a desire to broadcast her cultural capital, Lauren's motivation is rooted in an insecurity that she feels might dissipate once she is married with children. The differences in motivation suggest the different amounts of HCC held by Lauren and Chelsea, yet in both cases, children are used as a means of further legitimizing their HCC statuses and hegemonic identity projects.

Both Chelsea and Lauren make significant identity investments in a hegemonic ideology in order to maintain and improve their status as women, particularly in the marriage/family market. While Chelsea was socialized in an HCC environment, both she and Lauren enact similar strategies to add to their feminine cultural capital, given their physical characteristics and dispositions consistent with heteronormative standards of femininity. These strategies notably involve a process of 'othering and distancing' in order to deny sexuality to those differing from a heteronormative framework, which work to protect their own HCC. In another context, othering was used to bolster Chelsea's familial capital and aspirational role as a mother. Accordingly, these hegemonic identity investments were closely aligned with a repudiation of feminism, inasmuch as the movement has become popularized, losing its status as legitimate or even middle-brow taste indicator (Bourdieu 1984). These findings correspond with those of Allen (2002) and Holt (1997), who show how an HCC habitus makes it easier to invest in dominant forms of cultural capital. Notably, these investments are not quite as straightforward for women who do not exhibit HCC feminine dispositions, as is explored next.

### 8.2.1.2 Establishing Normality

Another motivation underpinning some of the informant's hegemonic identity investments stems from a desire to establish a sense of normativity in what I denote as a '*frustrated identity project*'. This draws from Berry's (1980) definition of a 'marginalized identity' and Üstüner and Holt's (2007) characterization of a 'shattered identity project'. Like these previous conceptualizations, a frustrated identity project indicates an element of defeat, where the myth of emancipation is revealed as a fallacy. However, unlike these previous conceptualizations, informants seek to *improve* their social standing, even if they implicitly acknowledge that they will never fully succeed. This occurs through post-assimilation (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005) or postmodern acculturation (Üstüner and Holt 2007) strategies. The literature on acculturation and assimilation focuses on the context of migration, examining how individuals socialized in one social context manage to adapt to another (Berry 1980). However, ideas of acculturation and assimilation appear relevant in this context, considering what happens when LCC individuals attempt to acculturate to HCC status fields.

Two informants evidence frustrated identity projects: Angela (*neutral-identification*) and Kris (*schizo-identification*), although they are enacted very differently. While both informants invest in a hegemonic ideology as a way to attain a higher social status and (re)establish a degree of 'normativity' in their lives, Angela's strategy resembles a process of assimilation, whereby she rejects her frustrated identity project in the hope of cultivating a new one that fits the dominant ideology. Kris, on the other hand, engages in a complex and contradictory process of assimilation and integration, wherein she simultaneously rejects her gendered habitus while incorporating gendered norms.

Like Lauren and Chelsea, Angela displays many of the embodied feminine dispositions granting HCC in Western society (she is young, white, thin, and heterosexual). However, as discussed in Chapter 7 (Section 7.4), she struggles with deep feelings of guilt and shame about her previous 'liberated' lifestyle and sexual promiscuity that she sees as tainting her



current identity project. Thus, Angela's frustrated identity project stems from her sense of lost feminine cultural capital, arising from some poor choices made in college. Given her rebellious past, Angela is very involved in recreating her identity project, not least by investing in a hegemonic ideology. Like Lauren and Chelsea, she makes hegemonic identity investments primarily in the context of her relationship with her fiancé. These hegemonic identity investments (e.g. moving in with her partner and getting engaged) are intended to transform her narrative and reestablish a sense of normativity.

Although Angela appears to embody feminine dispositions, she indicates significant subjective incongruences and constraints when attempting to invest in a hegemonic ideology. To this end, Angela relies heavily on her fiancé to validate her identity investments that might otherwise come across as inauthentic. The unease Angela feels in attempting to inhabit a status that she does not feel fully entitled emerges throughout her narrative and ad interpretations, where she feels implored to make frequent references to her past, so as to not come across as disingenuous. This was also made clear in her categorization of the 18 pre-selected ads (refer to Section 7.4, Figure 7.6), where she communicates her knowledge of what constitutes 'highbrow' culture, but does not position herself within it, so as not to come across as inauthentic.

For Angela, whose life has been characterized by instances of drug abuse and sex, investing in a hegemonic identity allows her to feel redeemed despite her past transgressions (made possible under the banner of feminism) and pursue a heteronormative life. However, Angela will never fully be rid of her past, regardless how much she invests in a hegemonic ideology. The subjective incompatibilities between her desired HCC status position and her past cause feelings of unease and insecurity, which are simultaneously perpetuated and mediated by investing in a hegemonic ideology.

Kris, on the other hand, does not exhibit the dispositions associated with Westernized femininity, and thus has not experienced a loss of normativity; indeed, she has never

experienced it. Thus, her frustrated identity project runs much deeper than Angela's. Identifying as a lesbian in a traditional Vietnamese family and growing up in the Mid-South, where prejudice against homosexuals is still prevalent, has not been easy for Kris. For a time, Kris, like Angela, engaged in a process of assimilation, dating men in an attempt to disavow her homosexuality and investing in a hegemonic ideology "just to be normal" and appease her family. This, however, led to a traumatic experience of rape and a subsequent miscarriage. Kris then adopted a hybrid strategy resonating with Berry's (1980) notion of integration, which implies the incorporation of aspects from both the dominant and non-dominant culture into one's narrative. The integration of two antithetical ideologies (i.e. patriarchy and feminism) is made possible by the multiculturalism of the cultural context.

Adhering to this strategy, Kris makes hegemonic identity investments, thus upholding dichotomous gender roles, but does so by adopting a masculine subjectivity. To this end, she enacts a 'hypercultural' identity position (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005), attempting to become more masculine than men. She continually tries to "one up the boys", particularly in terms of sexual relations. Seeking to bypass her assigned gendered habitus, Kris competes for HCC status by investing in what she considers to be masculine capital: she engages in acts of "chivalry" (i.e. holding open the door, paying for flowers, buying dinner, and "making grand gestures") and presents as masculine in her outward appearance, dress, and sexual prowess ("I'm good, I can do one-handed, unsnap your bra"). However, this is not to suggest that she fully dispenses with her feminine cultural capital. Rather, Kris seeks to use both masculine and feminine cultural capital in acquiring hegemonic (masculine) capital:

I'm a girl's worst enemy. I am a woman, I know what they want to be said to them, I know what they want done and I'm inside their heads because that's what I want and therefore I use that, you know.

However, seeking HCC status by making masculine identity investments as a woman is problematic given the intimate connection between class and gender (Bourdieu 2000).

Structural, (biological) incompatibilities notwithstanding, Kris faces social persecution in pursuing this HCC status on a daily basis and seems resigned to accommodating this:

The places that I tend to shop are, there are a lot of people around my age if not younger, so they're a little bit more open-minded. But I've definitely gone into Men's Warehouse trying to look for a suit and an old gentleman will be like, I can't tailor to you. So I'm like, eh, I'm going to go elsewhere. So, but I get it. So, it [sexual discrimination] happens.

Further, unlike the other informants in this section, Kris seeks validation and legitimization from not one, but two groups. On the one hand, she desires to be accepted, even admired as being superior to men *by men*. This is particularly evident in her boasts about sleeping with heterosexual women, for example, which allows her to compete for dominant cultural capital that is typically reserved for men. Despite proclamations that she does not “need to make myself look good at all, especially to you boys”, her desire to be recognized as equal or better than men is palpable and often manifests itself in misogynistic claims about women as mere commodities or sexual conquests (“I've hooked up with that, and that, and that, and that, and they're [men] like nuh uh. I'm like, you want her phone number? Because you can call her and she'll say yes, I guarantee it”).

On the other hand, Kris also seeks validation from women who validate her sexual desirability and masculine, i.e. “*bad boy*” subjectivity:

I was mean, I was rude, I was crude, I was cocky and women loved every bit of it. They ate it out of my hand and I just didn't understand, but I didn't care. I told them straight up, I'm like look, I'm not looking for a relationship, I don't want you, I want to fuck you, that's about it. So if you're okay with that we can keep doing this, if not, then go away because *I've got other girls lined up*. And then these girls would get attached. I'm like, what's wrong with you? *Like is it really the bad boy thing* cause, I just don't understand.

Yet, despite Kris's chauvinistic tendencies, employed as a way to assert her dominance, she also makes hegemonic identity investments in order to receive affirmation that she is a loveable person, deserving of a stable and ‘normal’ family and relationship, which she

has never fully experienced, romantically or otherwise. This is exemplified in her desire to start a family:

[I've always wanted kids] because of the way that I grew up and everything. Like I want the family that I never thought that I actually really had. So I want to be able to love unconditionally and raise a family the way that I [think] is the right way to raise a child. ... Just unconditional love no matter what.

Kris's hypercultural identity position that integrates both masculine and feminine capital identity investments is however, tentative at best – and does not, for example, translate into her engagement with media representations, as it does for the HCC informants making hegemonic identity investments. For example, as Lauren (*disidentification*) and Chelsea (*disidentification*) demonstrated, interpreting ads in line with a hegemonic ideology involves a process of othering, followed by the subsequent negation of that which does not conform to the cultural norm. And while Kris is able to adopt a masculine subjectivity in reflecting upon her encounters with other men and sexual endeavors with women, she is not able to apply this subjectivity in her reading of ads. Rather than reject non-normative portrayals, she often aligns herself with an othered subjectivity, as is exemplified in her reading of the Versace ad (refer to Image 8.7) that the other informants regarded as “really gay” (Chelsea), “weird...that he's like touching this other guy” (Lauren), and not normal in the context of American society: “I'm sure in other parts of the world- I mean, we tend to keep our American hats on, but who knows, that could be somewhere else in the world, where that's normal” (Angela).

In contrast, Kris comments:

I can almost relate cause these gentlemen... These men have a desire to be her. ... That or it could be necessarily foreshadowing too, cause in the way my head plays, like it's stages. Even becoming like a transgender. Like this is originally how he is, and then he moves to this, and then finally he becomes the woman he wants to be.

Kris thus aligns herself with a subordinate position when reading this ad, inasmuch as she understands how it feels to undergo a process of transformation, which she experiences on a daily basis as a result of her frustrated identity project. Kris is unable to invest in

dominant forms of (masculine) cultural capital when it comes to reading ads, not because she fears being revealed as somehow ‘inauthentic’, as Angela appears to do, but because adopting such a position would force her to read against and thus negate her own identity project as a homosexual, non-white woman. While she is able to overlook the structural constraints in the context of her daily interactions, they become more conspicuous when she is confronted with visual representations of her own oppression.

Like Angela, Kris is engaged in a frustrated identity project, making hegemonic identity investments primarily in the context of her relational, familial, and sexual endeavors as she seeks to establish a sense of normativity in her life. However, perhaps unbeknownst to Kris, her hegemonic identity investments uphold and perpetuate the conventional gender stereotypes that she so desperately seeks to overcome. Her desire to be not only included, but also accepted and legitimized as a dominant member of the hegemonic ideology, highlights the barriers denying her access. Being confronted with hegemonic visual representations of gender in the mass media appears to bring home to Kris her subordinate position in society.

Both Angela and Kris make identity investments in a hegemonic ideology in seeking to instill a sense of normativity that was either lost (Angela) or non-existent (Kris). These investments were made through processes akin to the assimilation and integration strategies identified in cross-cultural studies, involving the simultaneous rejection and acknowledgment of one’s previous status in the pursuit of a new one. For Kris, this process was more complex, since she not only sought HCC status, but attempted to do so as a dominant HCC status member (investing in masculine capital). In both cases, Angela and Kris made hegemonic identity investments predominantly in the context of their relational, sexual, and familial endeavors and aspirations. In particular, the fragility of their HCC status became apparent in their ad interpretations, as they were unable to completely distance themselves from their LCC statuses, either for fear of being

recognized as ‘inauthentic’ (Angela), or because to do so would imply confronting one’s disempowered and/or marginalized position (Kris).

### **8.2.1.3 Summary**

In summary, status seeking via investing in dominant forms of cultural capital relies on the hegemony in order to become one’s aspirational or ideal self. The informants discussed above made intentional hegemonic (patriarchal) identity investments for one of two reasons and from one of two positions. First, those informants endowed with HCC (i.e. feminine dispositions consistent with heteronormative standards of femininity), *improved* upon their capital in order to reproduce an elite distinction at a local level (among other women). Such improvements were often made in the familial, relational, and marriage domains, with the women acting as capital repositories rather than capital accruing subjects (Bourdieu 1984; Lovell 2000). In this way, both Chelsea and Lauren recognized their role in *transforming* or *reconverting* their (future) male partner’s and family’s capital in a way that communicated their elite status by their refined taste distinctions (i.e. interior design, marriage, children, beauty practices). Notably, in accordance with Bourdieu’s taste classification schema, the women distanced themselves from what they considered to be popularized aesthetics that, in the context of this research, involved repudiating feminism. Accordingly, these informants reverted back to traditional feminine values and aesthetics, which they considered to be less widespread and more exclusive. Their adherence to a legitimate taste scheme thus functions as an ideological distinction, upholding their own capital investments (embodied feminine dispositions), maintaining their elite positions as women in society.

While both Chelsea and Lauren were concerned with *improving* their HCC status position, which they accomplished by playing the requisite status games, other informants invested in a hegemonic ideology in order to *acquire* hegemonic forms of cultural capital that was either lost or non-existent. In these cases, informants vied for status using a series of post-assimilation or postmodern acculturation strategies. Readily apparent, however, were the

*structural* and *subjective* incompatibilities that limited their participation. While structural incongruences have been widely documented among LCC individuals seeking capital in HCC fields in terms of economic, social, and cultural restrictions (Üstüner and Holt 2007, 2010, 2012), less research has examined the subjective constraints, such as those hindering Angela's HCC status.

Further, these informants simultaneous desire to improve their status and implicit acknowledgement that doing so is unlikely, leads to what has been described here as a 'frustrated identity project'. Thus, unlike those HCC informants investing in a hegemonic ideology as a way to reproduce and improve their elite distinctions, the informants following this second strategy merely perpetuate the structural and subjective incompatibilities contributing to their own oppression. This challenges claims that investing in femininity can halt one's losses in the broader society (Huppatz 2009; Skeggs 1997). Rather, it seems that hegemonic cultural capital is not something that can be attained or acquired, but can only be reproduced or improved upon, thus questioning the potential for 'upward mobility'. Further, while resonating with Bourdieu's conceptualization of embodied cultural capital, these findings add nuance by emphasizing both its structural and subjective components and the potential for it to be lost as well as accumulated.

### **8.2.2 Subordinate Identity Investments**

Subordinate identity investments refer to those consumption practices, aesthetic tastes, and choice preferences that reflect an identification with the counter-hegemonic ideology i.e. feminism. Previous research examining why consumers make subordinate forms of cultural capital investments in low status consumption fields argues that this is done for one of two reasons: to valorize subordinate forms of capital in order to gain recognition from mainstream institutions (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Kates 2002; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thornton 1996), or to acquire social distinction within a field-specific hierarchy/subculture (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Kozinets 2001).

Eight out of the fourteen informants in this study aligned themselves with the feminist social movement one way or another, even though this study did not set out to ask about their views on feminism. During the data analysis process, four of the informants were classified as identifying strongly with the feminist movement and four were classified as schitzo-identifying with it. Nonetheless, all eight informants made subordinate identity investments – drawing on feminism – in pursuit of realizing their ideal selves. These identity investments differ markedly from those indicating an internalization of feminism, as was discussed in Section 8.1.2, inasmuch as they were intentional, reflexive, and were often executed as a means of either validating a position in broader society and/or gaining status in a subculture.

Many of these informants displayed ‘marginalized identity projects’, since they did not have a significant amount of embodied feminine capital and thus looked to other sources for validation, such as participating in a social movement. Pinel and Swann Jr. (2000: 148), argue that for people joining social movements, “one of their prepotent concerns is to receive validation for important aspects of themselves. Paradoxically, in seeking to identify with others, people are striving to be themselves”. This paradox is explored in the following section, which considers the accounts of those making subordinate identity investments in order to validate (in the case of LCC informants) or fetishize (in the case of HCC informants) a marginalized identity project. These two strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive, however, but can involve a dialogic of *push* and *pull* impetuses, even within the one informant.

### **8.2.2.1 Self-Validation**

This first strategy relates to the ‘push’ of feminism: here, individuals rely on a social movement to mitigate any negative stigmatization or self-devaluation arising from a marginalized identity project, defined in terms of racial, ethnic, sexuality, and class intersections, for example. In this way, feminism was used to ‘depersonalize’ or submerge



a marginalized personal identity into a socially inclusive one, thereby emphasizing commonalities, a collective sense of ‘we’; and a sharing of “fate with others who belong to that category” (Brewer and Silver 2000: 153). This was made particularly clear in the case of Aaliyah, Lucy, and Kris, who have all experienced racial, ethnic, classed, and/or sexual discrimination. Notably, feminism was applied selectively and as a remedy, particularly in instances where informants experienced intersectional vulnerability. This confirms prior research that finds feminism is a useful framework for interpreting *negative* experiences (Skeggs 1997).

For example, Aaliyah (*schitzo-identification*) is quite selective in her application of feminism, leaving it aside in the context of her romantic and sexual relationship. She does, however, make subordinate identity investments when seeking to reconcile the insecurities she occasionally feels as a black woman. This is evidenced in her resistance towards hegemonic beauty stereotypes, as was discussed in Chapter 7 (Section 7.2), whereby upon “reading some [feminist] stuff a few years ago” she “took some scissors to my hair with a friend and we cut it all off. And I’ve been growing my hair ever since”. Here, Aaliyah demonstrates a reflexive acceptance of her position as a black woman. Through feminism, she is able to validate and even embrace her black subjectivity, rather than try to change it by making hegemonic identity investments (e.g. chemically straightening her hair). Additional connections between feminism and her racial and gendered identity are evident in her interpretation of the Seven Jeans ad (see Image 8.8):

[O]vercoming skin is such a big deal. And for this woman to kind of bare it the world, I think that’s hot, like you know. And while she’s not even doing anything that’s super sexual besides be shirtless here, I don’t even know that you can consider that being sexual, I think this is sexy because she is proud.

In this reading, Aaliyah admires the ad for its validation of otherness, where she displaces potential feelings of ‘shame’ with ‘pride’, an endeavor of many identitarian social movements (Britt and Heise 2000). However, she does this in such a way that resonates with Gill’s (2012) argument that those who do not comply with heteronormative standards are not afforded sexual subjectivity: black women, for example, may be presented in

educational or informational contexts, but not in sexualized ones. Lutz and Collins (1993) contend that images of naked black women are common in ‘*National Geographic*’ and are closely associated with nature and notions of primitive culture. Thus, interpretations of the model as not “super sexual,” despite being topless, serve to naturalize and de-eroticize “the nude dark-skinned woman” (Lutz and Collins 1993: 172). This sheds further insight on Aaliyah’s own schitzo-identification with feminism, where feminism proves useful in validating her subjective position as a black woman in society, yet is discarded in her romantic relationship and sexual selfhood.

Kris (*schitzo-identification*) similarly makes feminist identity investments particularly in her interactions with media culture, as demonstrated earlier in her reading of the Versace ad (refer to Image 8.7), where she identified herself in a constant state of transformation (“I can almost relate cause these gentlemen... it’s stages. Even becoming like a transgender”). While both Aaliyah and Kris have felt othered in terms of their racial identity, Kris’s sexual subjectivity comes to the fore in her readings of ads. This supports previous research that individuals align themselves with the classification which they feel most oppressed (Buechler 1990; Roth 2000), which is race for Aaliyah and sexuality for Kris, respectively.

Another example of Kris acknowledging her subordinate subjectivity is evidenced in her reading of the Gucci ad (see Image 8.10):

**Interviewer:** Do you feel like this is a homosexual ad?

**Kris:** Yeah, in my mind. In my mind, yeah.

**Interviewer:** And are they attractive to you?

**Kris:** Are they attracted to me? No.

**Interviewer:** Attractive?

**Kris:** Oh attractive, yes, yes. I was like attracted to me? No, no way in hell. I couldn’t score that. I couldn’t score someone like that.

This reading is telling for a couple of reasons. First, Kris interprets this ad from the perspective of a stigmatized (i.e. homosexual) consumer, offering what Kates (2004) has described as an ‘insider interpretation’, attending to the ‘double coding’ or ‘polysemy’ (Puntoni, Schroeder, and Ritson 2010) of the ad.

In this way, she does not align herself with a heterosexual man making hegemonic investments in an attempt to raise her (gendered) status, but focuses on her stigmatized (homosexual) identity. As discussed earlier in this chapter (see Section 8.2.1.2), it was difficult



**Image 8.10:** Gucci (2013)

for Kris to interact with media culture from a heteronormative point of view, despite the fact she often made heteronormative investments, since visual representations flaunted the structural limitations to her identification with straight men.

The second important facet of Kris’s reading relates to the low self-esteem implied by the comment, “no way in hell. I couldn’t score that”. Thus, behind Kris’s chauvinistic and objectifying remarks (often referring to women as things, e.g. ‘that’), this statement reflects the insecurity she feels as a lesbian playing status games across a platform of heteronormativity, where lesbianism is increasingly packaged in a way that reflects heteronormative scripts of female attractiveness and heterosexual male porn (Gill 2009a). To compensate, she aligns herself with her lesbian subjectivity as a way to *verify* or *justify* her inability to fully participate as a legitimate (i.e. male) HCC member in society. Yet, despite recognizing her lower status position, Kris is not actively committed to a social movement, be it feminist or LGBT. Rather, she employs feminism in order to *justify* her marginalized identity project, which particularly comes to the fore when confronted with media culture. Accordingly, Kris’s feminist identity investments are made out of *necessity*, in order to validate a marginalized identity project that was essentially ‘*pushed*’ upon her. Because the majority of her identity investments are made in a hegemonic

ideology (in an attempt to achieve upward social mobility) she is largely unconcerned with gaining status as a feminist and does not aim to alter the status of the LCC collectivity as a whole.

Feminism was also somewhat ‘pushed’ on Madison (*identification*), who is not othered or oppressed via intersections of race or sexuality, as was the case with Aaliyah and Kris; rather, Madison’s marginalized identity stems from the insecurity she feels in relation to what she perceives as her lack of corporeal capital. She uses feminism to *legitimize* never having been in a romantic relationship, her lack of a sex life, and her drive to establish a career. For example, upon viewing the Versace ad (refer to Image 8.7), Madison claims:

**Madison:** I find myself one of the least – I mean, *I just feel like I don’t have a sexy bone in my body*. Like you know, I just feel like there’s those people who are like naturally just look sexy and there’s those people who like, like me who, I mean, I just look like I’m a kid all the time. ... I would have hoped thinking that I could stand in her shoes, but I don’t know that I would be able to give off the persona that she’s giving off.

**Interviewer:** You would like to be in her shoes?

**Madison:** Yes, I would.

In this reading, Madison exemplifies a yearning for an embodied feminine capital that she realizes is unattainable (“I just feel like I don’t have a sexy bone in my body”). She uses feminism to offset her perceived shortcomings, stemming from lack of femininity and insufficient feminine cultural capital. In this way, Madison distinguishes between being feminine or feminist, actively attending to the latter. However, this is not to suggest that she abandons her pursuit of feminine capital altogether. For example, during her Freshman year at university, Madison joined a sorority, a traditionally gendered and classed institution. Lisa Handler (1995: 237) suggests that women join sororities for two reasons:

First, by joining a sorority, women engage, individually and collectively, in constructing themselves as women. Notions of womanhood are very much shaped and bound by the sorority's needs and purpose and the sorority's relationship to Greek life and campus culture. Second, sororities are a strategy for dealing with the complexities of gender(ed) relations – both among women and between women and men.

From this perspective, the sorority symbolizes Madison's feminine (and economic) cultural capital, inasmuch as sororities are gendered, costly, and selective institutions. In particular, her affiliation with the sorority helps to offset pressure she may otherwise feel to make hegemonic feminine investments in terms of romantic or sexual relationships. Nonetheless, she remains acutely aware of her LCC status in the sorority, conceivably a high status consumption field, since she deviates from the traditional or "stereotypical" gender presentation of emphasized femininity that is often expected in Greek organizations (Handler 1995; Risman 1982). To compensate for such feelings of gendered deficiency she employs a feminist sensibility to her role in a traditionally feminine organization:

You know, sororities can be very stereotyped, and some of the stereotypes are true, definitely, but a lot of them aren't. *And I really think that it's helped me grow as a leader* and as, I mean it sounds really like corny, *and as a woman*, just because *I served in multiple leadership roles* in my sorority and it really taught me how to deal with people who have different views than I do... *I was the vice-president of standards. So I was like, I was basically in charge of the discipline of the girls who did stuff wrong*, who did go to the hospital or got arrested or even just stuff like attendance and academics, if you didn't meet the standards that we set, stuff like that, they'd have to come see me ... I was behind the president and, you know, she got to be the face of us and I had to be the whip behind her. That was – I honestly really didn't like it at all just because I didn't like having to be responsible for other people's actions, but I mean, *I think that at the time I was the only one who was capable of taking on the position*, so.

Here, Madison reveals that rather than serve as a purely hegemonic identity investment, her involvement in her sorority also constitutes as a feminist identity investment by helping her become a responsible and authoritative leader who is capable of performing undesired roles for the benefit of a collective; she can be a strong, feminist woman within a feminine organization.

Lucy (*identification*) also makes feminist identity investments to offset negative experiences in her past, as well as those associated with her racial and gendered identity, although she readily alters with regard to which type of oppression she is offsetting. For

example, in Lucy's reading of the Seven Jeans ad (refer to Image 8.8), she does not address the issue of race, taking offense instead at the sexualization and objectification of women:

The only thing keeping like the viewer from her breasts is like just her arm being over there and even her arm being there it wasn't her choice, it was like whoever was directing the advertisement. ... it serves to another purpose that isn't the person in the ad, cause in that way they're being commodified, and so to be commodified would be to be objectified.

At other times, Lucy expresses a palpable sensitivity about ads appropriating race, as discussed earlier in Chapter 7 (Section 7.1), which relates to her experiences as a Korean-American. In many of her ad readings she identifies a paradox of values, observing that companies engaged in cultural appropriation often partake in unethical practices (e.g. sweatshops and poor working conditions) within the cultures they are exploiting. This was exemplified particularly in her reading of the Valentino ad (refer to Image 7.1 in Section 7.1), which labeled the advertisers as "extremely racist and insensitive".

Lucy also differs from Aaliyah, Kris, and Madison inasmuch as she explicitly seeks status in terms of her intergroup position within a local status hierarchy, i.e. feminism (Jenkins 1992; Schouten and McAlexander 1996; Thornton 1996). This is particularly evidenced in the 'brand' of feminism she espouses, which reflects a grassroots, anarchist politics akin to the countercultural movements of the 1960s (Portwood-Stacer 2013):

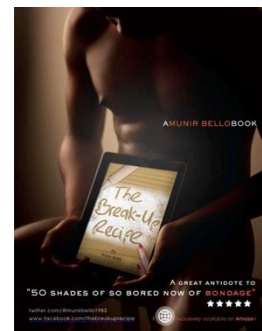
I'm also against like consumer culture in general. ... who else in America would have spare time to care about those types of things. Like someone who's in a comfortable social status in our country. ... Who else in this country would have the luxury of like sitting around and like be victim to that essentially, to that dream, to that illusion, that is like the ultimate like, the end goal is to have you buy that, but it's affecting your belief system.

In this excerpt, Lucy associates consumer culture with those who have high – or at least comfortable – social status. In contrast, she acknowledges her lower class position, which she believes affords her a more authentic 'belief system', one not based on consumerism and illusion. This sense of authenticity affords Lucy self-efficacy and status within the feminist social movement. By exploiting the cumulative stigmatization that she has

experienced from conventional society, she establishes a sense of agency; she takes control of her subordination. The precepts and ideals delineated by a grassroots DIY feminist social movement serve as Lucy's "new system of values, [where] previously stigmatizing personal attributes now become the basis for self approval" (Kaplan and Liu 2000: 218). The symbolic value of subordinate capital is thus redefined in this low status field, whereby markers of oppression hold symbolic value, affording Lucy a high status position (in a low status field). Accordingly, a 'high' status within the feminist movement is seemingly related to the magnitude of one's oppression (i.e. intersectionalities) and one's proclivity to go against the status quo. This is further evidenced in Lucy's antagonistic interactions with consumer culture, where she positions herself as a 'privileged' reader, able to discern marketers' hidden agendas to see that no ad can be empowering because "to be commodified would be to be objectified".

Given her subjectively high status in the movement, Lucy is afforded a position from which she feels entitled to *define* what constitutes valuable capital in the contemporary feminist movement, taking the form of subversive, perverse, and/or sacrilegious aesthetics and behaviors, as is readily evidenced in her music and art work. This, however, is not to suggest that Lucy does not feel pressure to comply as a member in the feminist social movement – she does, as is exemplified in her reading of the advertisement for Munir Bello's (2014) book, *The Break-Up Recipe* (refer to Image 8.11), featured in *Bust* magazine. Upon hearing where the ad was published, she "change[d] [her] opinion of it completely", as the feminist publication source legitimized the ad that she had initially considered offensive and "weird". Further, while deeming ads commodifying female sexuality and/or race as insensitive, those focusing on less conventional issues, such as gender blurring, are considerably less objectionable, as demonstrated in her reading of the Chanel ad (see Image 8.12):

I mean, I think it's better [than other ads] just because it kind of questions like what does a male or female look like or what's acceptable for a male or female to



**Image 8.11:** The Break-Up Recipe (2014)

wear. And like whether they are both men or both women or whatever, like what does that matter.



**Image 8.12:** Chanel (2013)

Thus, unlike many of the other informants investing in the feminist movement, Lucy is not completely dominated by a feminist ‘script’, questioning the readability of feminist magazines in relation to the *Break-Up Recipe* advertisement (“feminist magazines used to have such a like cool like, like punk aesthetic to it and this just reads to me like *Eat, Pray, Love-*

a book for like – I don’t know a bitter divorcee who discovered feminism”). In this way, she emphasizes her personal beliefs and values over those prescribed by a social movement. On the other hand, she nonetheless reveals a tendency to favor (fetishize) the subversive (i.e. androgyny) over the popular for, what appears to be, the sake of merely communicating difference, as evidenced in her reading of the Chanel ad.

Finally, unlike the other women evidencing the ‘push’ of feminism, Lucy invests in additional feminist cultural capital through conventional methods of feminist consciousness raising in an educational setting:

I didn’t even take all of it [the course], I just like was there for a couple of lessons and that was enough for me to be like wow, if this is being taught in university, these are not just concepts, these are things that actually exist and they do exist, but she’s showing me how they exist in like many different planes of culture. And it was like in that moment, I was like why isn’t this talked about all the time? And then it was just like, oh my God, this is evil as shit.

In highlighting that she did not take the course, she attempts to emphasize her lower-class position, which grants her greater clout in her inhabited marginalized position. Thus, her consumption of education is not in pursuit of conventional institutionalized capital (a diploma or degree) as it is for most of this study’s informants, but nonetheless enables her to acquire cultural capital, i.e. knowledge, which enhances her feminist status.



In summary, Aaliyah, Kris, Madison, and Lucy valorize subordinate forms of cultural capital in order to manage, mitigate and/or validate their LCC positions and marginalized identity projects (Kates 2002). In this way, these informants invest in a sort of '*functional-feminism*', where their investments are those made out of necessity, in order to offset their LCC positions that were essentially 'pushed' upon them. Importantly, this is a process of *validation* as opposed to *legitimization*, inasmuch as subordinate capital is not considered legitimate (i.e. tradable as an asset) in a broader societal context. Notably, Lucy also attends to the second motivation prompting consumers to make subordinate identity investments: seeking dominant status in a local (feminist) hierarchy, which allows her to redefine the symbolic value of subordinate capital and determine the basis of its distribution (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Kozinets 2001). The following section expands on this strategy by in examining how HCC informants seek dominant status positions in a low status field, illustrating the 'pull' of feminism.

#### **8.2.2.2 Self-Handicapping and Suffer Mongering**

While the previous discussion of self-validation explored how some informants used a feminist ideology to *mitigate their marginalized identities*, this section examines how women seek to acquire social distinction within a localized field (the feminist social movement) to *enhance their sense of self-worth, self-efficacy, and above all, to gain higher status*, albeit within a low status field. As Lucy (*identification*) demonstrated, such status offers local (interpersonal) as opposed to societal (institutional) power, the latter of which is often denied to women (Lovell 2000; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). Thus, it can be argued that these informants seek field-specific power at a local level (i.e. among other women), rather than accept their relatively powerless position at the broader societal level. Unlike those informants investing in a low status field to offset stigmatization, these informants tended to inhabit a more privileged position, embodying a significant amount of feminine HCC. This theme was evidenced most clearly by Ivy (*identification*) and Natasha (*identification*), and to a lesser extent, Audrey (*schitzo-identification*) and Nikki

(*schitzo-identification*). These informants engage in strategies that reflect the ‘pull’ of feminism, whereby a marginalized (feminist) identity is actively sought to enhance one’s idealized identity project and local power position.

In some ways, these women’s HCC works in their favor, affording them self-esteem, efficacy, and competence – qualities associated with one’s propensity to join a social movement (Gecas 2000; Owens and Aronson 2000). In addition to being white, thin, heterosexual, and middle-class, Ivy, Natasha, and Audrey are all highly educated and well-traveled women, who came to identify with the feminist social movement through a range of vocational and relational experiences. Thus, these three women cultivate ‘dominant’ personalities; they enjoy wielding control over their vocational and romantic life choices by their enactment of feminism. Ivy, for example, uses feminism to disassociate herself from the tenets ascribed to heteronormative relationships:

I don’t associate with boyfriend/girlfriend title. I am that person. I don’t know, it almost like puts a limiting category on yourself. I’m like, this is what it is, let it flourish how it does and if we walk away from it, great, it’s been positive. I regret nothing.

Maintaining a sense of autonomy is important for Ivy who prioritizes her career and travel aspirations:

Like if there’s a break [in the relationship], I’m like, okay, I’m in Chicago or I’m in New York or I’m somewhere else. And then my hope is to go abroad and live in Jordan so I can get my dialected Arabic fluent.

Audrey, a second-year PhD student working in sports marketing, also adopts an active role in her vocational and relational endeavors, using online dating platforms as a way to “screen out some things that [she] may not be interested in” in terms of one’s physical and personal attributes, for example. Even Natasha, who is recently married, believes that she inhabits the dominant role in her relationship (“most of the time”). Nikki differs from the other three women in terms of her educational capital and sexual orientation. However, what she lacks in educational capital (never graduating from college or university), she makes up for in embodied capital; she is tall, blonde, and thin, and has travelled across

the U.S. in her amateur modeling career. Further, although she no longer readily identifies as heterosexual, she inhabited such a position for over thirty years, with the materialized capital (a marriage and two children) to prove it. Thus, for the most part, these informants enjoy a privileged position that allows them to exercise a greater degree of control over their lives than those with more marginalized identities.

In other ways, however, this privileged position acts as a liability, hindering their abilities to acquire LCC, or rather, field-specific capital. Because these women do not experience much, if any, intersectional stigmatization, they sometimes express feelings of ‘privileged guilt’ (Jaggar 1994) and thus fetishize intersectional forms of oppression, which can be described in terms of ‘self-handicapping’ (Pinel and Swann Jr. 2000) and ‘suffer mongering’ (Brown and Halley 2002); both strategies perpetuate a cycle of oppression that might not otherwise exist, at least not to the extent to which these informants claim they do. These two strategies are presented as mechanisms through which reflexively privileged women (endowed with feminine HCC) attempt to acquire field-specific capital in a low status consumption field (feminism).

### ***Self-Handicapping***

Self-handicapping has typically been discussed in the realm of psychology and relates to how individuals manipulate a situation in order to enhance their successes and offset any potential failures. Berglas and Jones (1978: 406) describe this as “any action or choice of performance setting that enhances the opportunity to externalize (or excuse) failure and to internalize (reasonably accept credit for) success”. Here, self-handicapping may be understood as a way to acquire field-specific capital while simultaneously preserving HCC (status) in the broader socioeconomic hierarchy; this occurs even when the types of capital required for each field contradict one another (McCall 1992). Theoretically, this strategy should be considered temporary and presumably stopped once an individual feels secure enough in a newly acquired status within a newly inhabited field<sup>53</sup>. Further, it

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<sup>53</sup> This is a hypothetical allegation that expands beyond the scope of this research, inasmuch as it would require longitudinal data, which the current study does not offer.

should be noted that self-handicapping is believed to be pursued particularly by those lacking confidence in their abilities (Berglas and Jones 1978) and to be sure, many informants engaging in this strategy did appear to lack some confidence or experience in terms of their identity projects. This was most prominently illustrated by Ivy (*identification*), who continually switched from describing her personal experiences to theorizing her political beliefs, perhaps in order to compensate for her lack of experience and confidence in her feminist status, and Nikki (*schizo-identification*) who lacks the *necessary* kind of experience and capital in relation to her new homosexual identity project.

In this context, self-handicapping took the form of emphasizing abstracted instances of oppression faced by white, middle-class women (reverting back to first- and second-wave feminist issues), bypassing personal injustices and intersectional differences emphasized in the contemporary feminist movement. In this way, many of these informants highlighted oppressive experiences that had the *potential* to be relevant to their own (gendered) marginalization as women in society, despite whether or not they actually were. Again, this strategy was undertaken to *create* a marginalized identity, rather than *validate* one, as was discussed earlier in this chapter (Section 8.2.2.1).

Many of these informants commented on generalized experiences of gender oppression, such as Ivy, who claims:

I have felt that [sexism]. I have felt people treating me differently because I'm a woman or questioning me, or associating certain names to me because I am this or that, kind of thing.

To combat this, Ivy takes to social media activism in promoting feminism, the democratic effects of which have been widely debated (Dean 2010; Carroll and Hackett 2006). Other informants, including Audrey (*schizo-identification*) and Natasha (*identification*) discuss more specific instances where they feel sexism is prevalent, primarily in the workplace. Audrey tends to “work with” a system she sees as oppressive to further her professional endeavors, while maintaining, possibly even exploiting, her feminine capital. In contrast,

Natasha, who works in a field that “is more like masculine in nature and dominated by men... (I work a lot with tools. I work a lot with heavy lifting and things like that)”, tries to challenge the system, but, like Ivy, does so largely through individuated and intimate methods. Notably, this is common practice among contemporary (third- and fourth-wave) feminists (Sowards and Renegar 2004). Natasha addresses these issues in a ‘feminist group’ that she and a friend started a few months back, where they discuss their personal opinions and experiences, as well as literature and documentaries addressing gender oppression. Nikki offers one of the most proactive strategies among these informants, “scream[ing] out” against gender oppression by “volunteering for like rape awareness and stuff like that and teaching women self-defense classes”.

Crucially, in such instances, gender oppression is largely recognized and refuted at an abstracted societal level, but does not seem to resonate deeply with the women’s micro identity projects. In other words, these informants recognize that gender oppression happens, but make crucial distinctions between themselves and those who are actually disempowered (e.g. rape victims, women featured in social media campaigns and in documentaries). Thus, these informants make subordinate (feminist) identity investments on *behalf of less privileged women*, without risking their own HCC; to do otherwise would require these women subject themselves to a disempowered position. This reflexive positioning, combined with their HCC fosters their high self-esteem, allowing them to feel like competent, altruistic leaders, working towards a better society.

This strategy is particularly evident in the case of Nikki, who is well aware of the generalized stigmatism associated with homosexuality, noting the restrictive laws and court rulings pertaining to same-sex marriage and same-sex cohabitation in child-custody cases (particularly in the South of the U.S.)<sup>54</sup>. However, presently, Nikki remains largely unaffected by homosexual stigmatization in her day-to-day interactions, and “the

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<sup>54</sup> While these laws have recently changed, at the time of the interview it was illegal for same-sex couples to marry and/or cohabit when children were involved (at least in this particular state).

majority, most people have been really happy for [her coming out]”. In fact, it could be argued that the aforementioned restrictions allow Nikki to retain a certain degree of HCC while still investing in a low status field, given that she cannot legally marry or move-in with her current partner. In any event, Nikki inhabits a uniquely privileged position, allowing her to advocate for the gay community within a heterosexual one, setting women ‘straight’ with regard to ‘gay’ relationships:

I’m not shy about it [talking about sex] in the least, like you know, cause I don’t really hang out with the gay community, and so most of my friends are straight, so they’ve got all these questions. ... Like would messing around be, you know, cheating? And a girl that I work with, she was like, ‘tsss, that’s not cheating’. And I’m like, ‘honey, what would you do if you found out your boyfriend went down on another girl?’ And she’s like, ‘oh hell no’ and I’m like, exactly.

Thus, one of the ways self-handicapping occurs in this context is through emphasizing an oppressive environment, albeit one that may not be experienced directly. This allows privileged informants to exploit their HCC capital in a low status field. This differs from both the aesthetic and edifying appropriation of LCC documented in previous CCT literature (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Holt 1997; Kozinets 2001), insofar as self-handicapping highlights the value of HCC in a low status field. In effect, these informants are made to feel like valued representatives acting on behalf of marginalized women; they see themselves ‘relinquishing’ their status in the broader society, in order to stand up for those who are oppressed because they are less privileged, knowledgeable, and/or willing. This corresponds with Marxist characterizations of feminism, whereby an HCC ideology is relegated to the bourgeoisie or upper class given that marginalized women are not afforded the luxuries (i.e. economic or cultural knowhow) to question their current state of affairs in relation to society (Jaggar 1994).

Similar conclusions can also be drawn from an analysis of these informants’ interactions with ads. Much in the same way that Kris was unable to disassociate herself from her LCC marginalized identity when faced with visual representations of it, so too were those

embodying a privileged position. In other words, those with HCC were unable to read against their privileged position. Thus, often times, ads were read in order to emphasize an oppressive environment that these informants felt they were largely immune to (Pollay 1986). For example, Ivy resists the stereotyped gender roles present in the Liquid Plumr ad (refer to Image 8.4):

I'm really not attracted to the typical male plumber. ... just like, men solve the problems. Maybe *I get too politicized in all these things*, but it's like the handy man, like he'll fix the problems, he'll fix the plumbing. I do it too sometimes when I think of like, oh I need some... well no! But then my mom teaches me things about my car. But like when you think of having an exterminator come over if you have a bug problem or if you need a plumber, you automatically start registering 'he's' in your brain. *Not necessarily that that's an awful thing*, I just... Again, I try to reject those types of typical like scenarios. And I'm like, you know what, no, it could be a female engineer, so. And I'm just not super attracted to like buff muscle, that's probably why I also did that and because it says plumber, and I'm like, no.

Ivy treats this ad as a test of her feminist credentials, a situation requiring her to fashion a link between the personal and the political. By emphasizing an oppressive environment, she takes this ad as an opportunity to demonstrate her reflexive resistance to such stereotypes. Remaining on guard against being drawn into lazy gender stereotypes, she rejects the ad for its celebration of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987, 1995), and by implication, passive femininity. In this way, she appears to be consciously, conscientiously resisting the intended meanings of a text she sees as androcentric (Stern 2000) and limiting to women. At the same time, she qualifies her critique by noting that she may "get too politicized in all these things", and that associating certain roles with men is "[n]ot necessarily... an awful thing". This suggests that Ivy expresses what Thompson (2005) refers to as reflexive doubt with regard to the intensity of her identification as a feminist, or perhaps the way she performs this in daily life, including her advertising interpretations.

Such expressions of doubt are indicative of a broader self-protective strategy that operates as a counterpart to self-handicapping, which involves adopting an inclusive interpretation

of feminism, where multiple instances of female representation are considered ‘empowering’ and ‘feminist’. This corresponds with the tenets of ‘choice feminism’, where women “abstain from judging the content of the choices women make. It is definitionally impossible for a woman to choose her own oppression” (Ferguson 2010: 248). Ivy illustrates this in her reading of Kate Upton’s SuperBowl party spread in ‘Vogue’ (see Image 8.13) that she feels combines normative symbols of femininity and masculinity. She sees this ad as a progressive celebration of the neoliberal, sexually agentic subject:



**Image 8.13:** Vogue "We've Got Game" (2014)

**Ivy:** I like this a lot actually. Because it shows, you know what, I can know a lot about football and I can still look great while doing it. And she’s holding a journal pad. She’s like, I can flaunt it and still be taken seriously or try to be.

**Interviewer:** So do you find her to be sexy?

**Ivy:** Yeah, I think this is sexy. ... I would even argue this, it’s just like – whenever we all grow up, like being exposed to all these images, it’s almost like you have to choose. Like do you wanna be fashionable or do you want to be a successful business woman? And I’m like, if you love both you can absolutely combine the two. I mean, you might meet some uphill battles along the way, but if that’s your version of beauty and what like you ideally find sexy yourself, then more power to you, kind of thing. But I like that they did that, cause it kind of encompasses the whole like, you can’t love sports and dress this way, like you have to wear a baseball cap. She’s like, no. Love that. That’s the favorite, yeah that’s my favorite.

Such inclusive readings with respect to what constitutes ‘feminism’ were not only commonplace among these informants, but were also necessary; to adopt judgmental or exclusive readings of feminism could highlight their lack of field-specific capital (in the form of intersectional stigmatization) and thus threaten their statuses as feminists. Thus, unlike Lucy (*identification*), who makes subordinate identity investments by critiquing most media representations, these informants celebrated a multitude of female subjectivities.



Natasha initially adopted a different viewpoint from Ivy in relation to Kate Upton's (2014) 'Vogue' spread, criticizing it for embracing "extreme stereotypes":

My husband played football and he really likes to watch football. And a lot of times when we'll be watching football there'll be like one of the women anchors or news people and that's kind of what this reminded me of at first. ... And a lot of times, I feel like they act as though they're like *not intelligent* in the way that they talk and the way that they act around these football players. ... And then, I don't know, *I feel bad about saying that* because then it's just like just assuming that she fits this like typecast, *which is negative on a whole other spectrum*. But it's just, I guess I've come to associate like blonde, tiny, like really sexually dressed women as being in these roles. ... And there's, to me, *there's nothing wrong if you want to dress like this*.

Initially, this spread perpetuates the 'dumb blonde' or 'blonde bombshell' (Glick and Fiske 1996) archetype, popularized by Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s (Greenwood and Isbell 2002), which Natasha feels could contribute to an oppressive environment. However, like Ivy, she comes to express some reflexive doubt, abandoning her exclusive reading that "really sexually dressed women" cannot be feminists, for one that is more inclusive and less judgmental. Ultimately, this works to protect Natasha's own status as a feminist, for while she may not dress like Kate Upton, she is acutely aware of her feminine HCC that could threaten her field-specific status in a low status field under more exclusive or narrow definitions of what constitutes a feminist.

Audrey and Nikki did not highlight an oppressive environment in their readings of ads, but opted for a celebratory interpretation of sexualized media representations. Audrey comments on the societal benefits to be realized in affording women an autonomous sexuality in ads:

Women are very sensual and very sexual. The fact that advertisers are now accepting that and kind of taking advantage of that is neat, I think that helps it become much more okay in the general population and much more widely accepted.

Similarly, Nikki claims that she:

like[s] that people are starting to *push the envelope*. You know, and this is my liberal mind thinking that it's not so '*Leave it Beaver*', you know, kind of stuff anymore.

An interesting deviation from these generally inclusive readings, however, is Nikki's interpretation of the Versace ad (refer to Image 8.7). Rather than align herself with a homosexual subjectivity, as Kris (*schitzo-identification*) does for instance, she expresses great disdain for, if not outright prejudice against gay men:

Ew, it looks like some, some boys who should be up on the stage, stripping – gay boy, gay boy, and straight dominatrix woman. ... I mean, even if they had men with some nice jeans on and like a shirt maybe that was unbuttoned or just some nice jeans on and no shirt, but I don't know why they did that. ... I mean, you take these men out right there and absolutely [there is sex appeal].

This reading illustrates the nascency of Nikki's newfound identity project and sexual orientation, more specifically. Like Ivy, Nikki is quick to criticize ads featuring males and celebrate those featuring women, regardless of how they are portrayed, inasmuch as women are perceived as feminist (in the case of Ivy) and the only attractive gender (in the case of Nikki). Men are not afforded the same subjectivities. Indeed, these readings suggest the women's lack of experience in terms of their feminist and homosexual identity projects, respectively; both Ivy and Nikki rely heavily on popularized scripts (of feminism and homosexuality) that are ironically promoted through the hegemonic mass media, in order to form opinions regarding their interactions with consumer culture and in the construction of their LCC identity projects.

In sum, self-handicapping reflects one way that HCC informants acquire field-specific status in a low status field. This involves emphasizing an oppressive patriarchal environment, even though these informants may feel personally exempt from such oppression given their privileged positions and feminist credentials. These informants thus exploit their HCC on behalf of less privileged others, which allows them to make subordinate identity investments (i.e. enhancing their statuses as feminists) without devaluing their HCC identity projects (i.e. offsetting any potential failures). Yet, this

brings into question the depth of their subordinate (feminist) identity projects. In particular, there seemed to exist conspicuous incongruences with regard to how these informants interpreted ads, whereby many failed to align themselves with an LCC (marginalized) subjectivity and when they did, it was on an abstract or general level. In fact, many of the informants adopted inclusive readings of ads, particularly those featuring ‘sexually agentic’ women, since exclusive or judgmental readings could threaten their own statuses as ‘feminists’, given their lack of field-specific capital. This is further expanded on in the next section.

### ***Suffer Mongering***

The second way HCC informants invested in a feminist ideology stems from a post-political argument made over two decades ago by Wendy Brown (1995b), whereby the pursuit of a stigmatized identity works to politicize and differentiate the individual (‘I’), thus avoiding the absorption, and implied negation of a marginalized identity into a collectivity (‘we’):

Refusing to be neutralized, to render the differences inconsequential, to be depoliticized as ‘lifestyles’, ‘diversity’, or ‘personals like any other’, we have lately reformulated our historical exclusion as a matter of historically produced and politically rich *alterity*. Insisting that we are not merely positioned but fabricated by this history, we have at the same time insisted that our very production as marginal, deviant, or subhuman is itself constitutive of the centrality and legitimacy of the center... Just when polite liberal (not to mention correct leftists) discourse ceased speaking of us as dykes, faggots, colored girls, or natives, we began speaking of ourselves this way. Refusing the invitation to absorption, we insisted instead upon politicizing and working into cultural critique the very constructions that a liberal humanism increasingly exposed in its tactic operations of racial, sexual, and gender privilege was seeking to bring to a formal close (53 [emphasis in original])

Suffer mongering was evidenced by Ivy (*identification*) and Natasha (*identification*), both of whom fetishized stigmatized identities in order to acquire status in a low status field, whereby subaltern identities and capital are valued in order to define oneself as a unique individual and feminist. This resonates with Brewer’s (1991) theory of optimal distinctiveness, whereby the “need for inclusion is naturally moderated by an opposing

need for differentiation that regulates group identification processes” (Brewer and Silver 2000: 155). Thus, paradoxically, the need for inclusion is met through the collective identification as ‘feminist’, while differentiation is emphasized via one’s politicized stigmatization.

As was discussed in Section 8.2.2.1, Lucy (*identification*) emphasizes her stigmatized identity, insofar as symbols of oppression (e.g. racial, ethnic, sexual, and non-heteronormative intersections) have become fetishized into forms of objectified cultural capital that are valuable in this low status field (feminism). These symbols signify a feminist distinction, much in the same way that the hipster subculture is signified by working class consumption objects (Arsel and Thompson 2011). However, here it is important to distinguish between those making subordinate investments in feminism out of *necessity* (reflecting the push of feminism) and those endowed with HCC making subordinate identity investments based on the pursuit of *status* and *distinction* (reflecting the pull of feminism). While Lucy reinforces stigma that is both visual and central to her identity project, Ivy and Natasha engage in various acts of othering, fetishizing, and ‘suffer mongering’ to make up for their lack of field-specific capital (Brown and Halley 2002): seeking to acquire this capital by way of their interactions and involvement with marginalized collectivities. Further, and in direct contrast to Lucy, one key way that these women demonstrate their field-specific capital is through their *inclusive* readings of advertisements, which particularly fetishize minorities. In this way, suffer mongering is a practice fueled by the media, given its inclusive and widespread ‘celebration’ of feminism and increasingly, intersectional feminism (McRobbie 2004b).

For example, Ivy attempts to resist displays of heteronormativity by endorsing ads that feature minorities and criticizing those perpetuating heteronormative archetypes. Such is evidenced in her disparate interpretations of the Seven Jeans ad, featuring a topless black model (refer to Image 8.8), and the Juicy Couture ad, featuring a ‘blonde bombshell’

archetype, dressed head-to-toe in the color pink (refer to Image 8.9). With regard to the Seven Jeans ad, Ivy states:

I love this one. When I view this I think of like an element on *confidence* with her and her body and her *body language*. And like, *I don't look at this and I'm like, that's so risqué or that's too like scantily portrayed*. I like it. I think this one's awesome.

This reading is not unlike Aaliyah's (*schizo-identification*) interpretation presented in Section 8.2.2.1 ("she's not even doing anything that's super sexual besides be shirtless here"), in that it de-eroticizes and naturalizes the black model by asserting that it is not "so risqué" or "too scantily portrayed", despite her being topless. However, similar attributes of courage, tastefulness, and feminist values are not attributed to the model in the Juicy Couture ad:

[T]his is very – almost *obnoxiously* colored, cause it's so pink. I saw this and I was like, is that a *Barbie doll* or is that a human being. ... It looks very *typical* and it's like with palm trees, so it's like the typical – I don't wanna say, well maybe Hollywood? Yeah. I'm just not like attracted to these type of ads. ... and I don't like pink.

Thus, in an attempt to counteract her HCC, Ivy castigates an ad featuring a white model for its heteronormative or "typical" implications, while celebrating one featuring a black model for its portrayal of "confidence". In seeking subordinate (feminist) capital through a proclaimed kinship with minority women, it seems as if Ivy is similarly engaging in a process of 'othering and distancing', mirroring the readings of both Chelsea and Lauren who actively disidentify with feminism. While Ivy distances herself from heteronormative portrayals as opposed to othered ones, in both cases, these distinctions alienate minorities rather than liberate or equalize them.

Natasha offers a similar reading of the Seven Jeans ad:

Yeah, I guess that I really, I like it. I like how empowering it feels. I think a lot of times when I'm looking at something that I think is sexy it's something that like makes me feel *empowered* by looking at it. So like, I don't know, I feel like she's just like representing her sexuality in like a really *vibrant* way. I think that's why it's my favorite. ... she just looks like really *strong and confident* and almost like at ease but in a very like empowered way.

Interestingly, while she also fosters some animosity towards the Juicy Couture ad, characterizing it as “an idealized sexy... like pin-up or potentially like girl across the street, whatever, the girl next door, like hyper sexy”, her distinctions are seemingly born out of a connection/lack of connection between the ads and her own narrative, as opposed to Ivy’s more arbitrary (pro/con) judgments. However, both informants are vague in terms of how the model in the Seven Jeans ad is more empowering and relatable than models in other ads.

These readings reveal three crucial issues involved in seeking status within a low status consumption field. The first relates to these women’s blanket adherence to popularized feminist discourses perpetuated by the mass media. For some, this involves a widespread celebration of female sexuality in ads, as evidenced by both Audrey (*schizo-identification*) and Nikki (*schizo-identification*) (as discussed in the previous subsection). Others, such as Ivy and Natasha, offer slightly more restrained perspectives, where sexual empowerment is primarily reserved for those othered women, who do not adhere to a heteronormative script. Empowerment via feminism, however, is afforded to women across the board (as was illustrated by their readings of Kate Upton’s SuperBowl party spread in ‘*Vogue*’ (see Image 8.13). These exclusive/inclusive readings with regard to sexual empowerment versus empowerment enable Ivy and Natasha to cultivate a sense of distinctiveness from others (non-feminists), alongside feelings of commitment to a broader cause (feminism). Accordingly, it can be argued that the mass media, by which I mean films, television, advertisements, literature, and social media, has become the charismatic champion of the feminist social movement that can satisfy people’s need to belong *and* their need for distinctiveness by offering multiple feminist subjectivities. This recalls Gramsci’s notion of ‘spontaneous’ consent, wherein a hegemonic institution perpetuates its own ‘counter-hegemonic’ discourse under false premises.

The second issue central to suffer mongering has to do with the guilt HCC women feel on the basis of their privileged identity projects (Jaggar 1994). Fisher (1984: 201) argues that

such feelings of guilt and shame, in relation to the feminist movement, stem from “having failed to live up to its [a political ideal’s] standards, anger at the demands it continually places on us, but fear that our criticisms will cause us to abandon our politics altogether or compromise them beyond recognition”. Feelings of guilt are less ingrained than shame: while shame suggests an enduring feeling of *defenselessness* against the “external construction of superiority” (Skeggs 1997: 123), guilt can be mediated via one’s consumption practices (O’Guinn and Muñiz 2005), consumerist lifestyles, and/or loyalty to a social movement or cause (Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007). However, this is problematic, given that social movements and ‘liberatory consumption’ are increasingly promoted by the hegemonic mass media. This implies that both feelings of – and remedies for guilt stem from the hegemony. In this way, these privileged informants are made to feel guilty for their failure to live up to a contemporary feminist ideal (i.e. one who faces multiple injustices), which leads to a celebration, fetishization, and thus perpetuation of stigma in the mass media.

Because a lack of a stigmatization implies a lack of capital in this local status field, those with HCC often face a fear of exclusion, whereby the authenticity of their political (feminist) identities are called into question. Such feelings of fear and guilt can lead to action, typically in the form acquiring commodities in the marketplace that signify the movement’s ideals, as stipulated by the mass media. This was exemplified in the women’s proclamations that black women in ads are more “*empowering*” than white women. Hence, stigmatization, (e.g. race) has itself become commodified in such a way to signal symbolic capital as it pertains to a feminist identity. Logically then, both guilt and consumption may, in fact, be considered co-constitutive patriarchal notions (Fisher 1984) that essentially render the contemporary feminist movement itself a new hegemonic institution.

The third and final issue involved in seeking status distinction in a low status field relates explicitly to the *effects* of suffer mongering, which implies a comingling of suffering and

pleasure (Brown and Halley 2002: 32; Žižek 1999), both of which are considered central to one's involvement in a social movement (i.e. pleasure is experienced via the relief of suffering). Problematically, however, suffering often takes the form of fetishizing and thus reinforcing stigmatized, rather than valorizing marginalized identity projects. Thus, while privileged informants may feel altruistic, acting on *behalf* of less privileged women, their actions are nonetheless at the *expense* of these women. This implies that acts of suffering are reserved for those with marginalized identity projects, while women with HCC can reap the benefits simply by propagating their suffering.

This point was not lost on some informants who made feminist identity investments, particularly out of *necessity* in order to *validate* their marginalized identity projects, as demonstrated by Aaliyah who recounts the problems she has faced with Ivy and her group of HCC 'feminist' friends:

They had been irking me in different ways, you know. And they're very, *the way they think is very similar, and me being – I always get introduced as a rebel. ...* They've always had this idea of being accepting of others because they're involved with like LGBT movements and stuff in [town]. *And so it's interesting like to be a part of that and for them to be super exclusive at the same time with each other ...* And at one point they're talking about having this super exclusive party, and I was like wow, like I can't bring people that I care about? I mean they're my friends too. And they're like, no, it's dumb. ... And then it kind of got into a four against one thing and I was like, you know what, I'm always going to be that friend that speaks up and says how I feel and speak my mind, but if I can't do that here, then I don't want to be here, you know. And so I peaced out, and I was like, I love you guys, but I'll see you later. And if we talk again we talk again, if we don't, we don't.

Aaliyah's observations highlight the paradox in Brewer's (1991) theory of optimal distinctiveness, where one's loyalty to a collective is tempered by the desire to be simultaneously included (recognized in a collectivity) and excluded (individualized via social distinction). This works on two different levels in this context: first, on a broader level, subscribing to a feminist ideology allows these privileged women to differentiate themselves from other (non-feminist) women by acquiring social distinction through their participation in a feminist subculture. Further, given their reflexive privileged status and



embodied HCC, their subordinate identity investments are deemed particularly meaningful and representative, since their feminist identification is not made out of necessity, but arises from their own ‘free will’, reflecting Bourdieu’s dichotomy between the proletariat’s *taste of necessity* and the bourgeoisie’s *taste of luxury* (1984: 177). Thus, as Aaliyah’s excerpt indicates, these women may feel as if they are part of an *exclusive* and altruistic social network, satisfying both the need to belong and the need for difference. Yet, from Aaliyah’s perspective, this exclusivity diminishes the ideology of feminism more generally, leading her (and perhaps others like her fostering marginalized identity projects) to feel like an outcast or a ‘rebel’.

Importantly, suffer mongering does not only affect those seeking status distinction as feminists or those LCC women, but implicitly devalues women’s capital and status in society, more generally, inasmuch as those investing in a feminist ideology are required to perpetuate their degradation in society. In other words, suffer mongering implies that feminists must always portray themselves as second class citizens in order to have a basis for asserting their subcultural distinction. While privileged informants were the focus of this section, they were not the only ones engaging in practices of suffer mongering, which were similarly evidenced among those women with less feminine HCC, such as Lucy, who highlighted her own marginalization in an effort to raise her feminist status.

### **8.2.2.3 Summary**

This section has explored the pursuit of field-specific capital in a low status field, departing in various respects from much previous literature in CCT (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Holt 1997; Kozinets 2001). The pursuit of status in a low status field can be, at least in part, explained by Brewer’s (1991) theory of optimal distinctiveness, which stresses the simultaneous need to belong (adhering to a collectivity) and stand out (social distinction). The self-identified feminists in this study differed both in their motivations for pursuing field-specific capital and in their positions in society (i.e. habituated predispositions). On the one hand, those with less embodied

feminine capital tended to use feminism as a way to validate or authenticate their marginalized identity projects and did so out of necessity, i.e. functional-feminism (reflecting the *push* of feminism). On the other hand, those with more embodied feminine capital made subordinate identity investments in order to fashion an identity project that allowed them to acquire social distinction within a local field. Associating with a social movement enhanced these women's self-worth and self-efficacy, allowing them to attain high interpersonal statuses, albeit within a low status field (reflecting the *pull* of feminism). Because these informants were typically endowed with a significant amount of HCC, they engaged in processes of self-handicapping and suffer mongering, where they emphasized various social injustices paradoxically on behalf of/at the expense of LCC individuals.

Further, investing in a feminist ideology in order to achieve status, distinction, and/or to become one's ideal self is paradoxical in two ways. The first relates to the multiple 'brands' of feminism communicated by the mass media that foster different types of feminist identifications that vary with respect to their exclusivity and inclusivity. Those informants with LCC tended to read ads more exclusively; they not only identifying the oppressive aspects of ads, but also incorporating those into their own identity projects. For example, despite the fact that Kris tended to invest in dominant forms of cultural capital, she was unable to read against her marginalized identity. In contrast, those with HCC typically read ads more inclusively, identifying the positive and liberating potential of visual representations, inasmuch as to do otherwise could threaten their own status as 'feminist'. While some of these informants rejected ads that they felt reflected an oppressive environment, they did not readily situate themselves in this environment. These informants did not identify themselves as marginalized or disempowered within the realm of consumer culture because to do would be to discount their HCC, which these women were unable to do outside the construction of their reflexive identity projects. Thus, it could be argued that the informants participating in heterologous fields were less reflexive when faced with media artifacts (advertisements), insofar as they prompted

readers to read against their habitual predispositions, which caused “feelings of unease, insecurity, or a reflexive awareness of the social incongruities in play” (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013: 21). The media’s perpetuation of these social incongruities evokes both Gramsci’s notion of ‘spontaneous’ consent and Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction; the former highlights the paradox of a hegemonic institution championing a counter-hegemonic movement, while the latter speaks to the futility of social movements more generally.

Thus, the second way in which investing in a feminist ideology has become convoluted, if not greatly problematic, has to do with the medium (i.e. mass media) through which discourses of feminism are communicated, whereby the feminist movement has itself come to resemble a hegemonic institution. In this way, the *motivations* or *injustices* underpinning one’s loyalty to a feminist ideology and the *actions* stipulated by the social movement reflect a co-constitutive dialogic; instances of suffering and pleasure have become reliant on a patriarchal discourse. In effect, seeking status within a subordinate *political* ideology, such as feminism via egocentric processes of *self-validation*, in the case of those informants with LCC, and *self-handicapping* and *suffer mongering*, as they pertain more specifically to those with HCC ultimately fetishize stigmatized identity projects, be they simply gendered or intersectional. Thus, the criticisms associated with subordinate identity investments, in particular, speak to a broader critique of identity politics, wherein identity (i.e. a feminist identity) becomes an end in and of itself, rather than a means to an end (i.e. collective emancipation or liberation of women).

### 8.3 Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to present the results and analyses of the second phase of the hermeneutic interpretation of the informants’ transcribed interviews. Each idiographic case was read from the perspective of the other cases, from which emerged two dominant themes with regard to how young women relate to patriarchal and feminist ideologies in their sexual lives and in their encounters with sexual advertising content. These two

themes: seeking ontological security and status generally referred to the non-reflexive and reflexive processes of ideological internalization and identification, respectively. Notably, these processes were not mutually exclusive, but were rather overlapping, thus resulting in a fluctuation between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideologies, even within one informant. The theoretical implications of this phenomenon is explored in the next chapter.



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## CHAPTER NINE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

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In accordance with the style of this thesis, this chapter offers a discussion following the micro, meso, and macro divisions as a way to comprehensively and theoretically reflect on the findings presented in Chapters 7 and 8, to respond to the research questions posed in Chapter 6, and to offer a revised conceptual framework from that which was introduced in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.1) and in Chapter 6 (Figure 6.1). This chapter deviates slightly from the structure of the thesis, insofar as it begins with an examination of the micro processes, followed by a discussion of the meso, and then the macro implications. A revised structure was adopted following the microsociological methodological approach employed in this study, which stipulates that theorizing occurs bottom-up (Swartz and Zolberg 2004).

#### **9.1 Micro: Ideological Shifting**

Beginning with the first research question this section considers “*how women’s sexual identity projects relate to their interpretations of sexualized advertisements?*”. On a micro level, the informants in this study engaged in a process of ‘*ideological shifting*’ – a term coined to explain how the informants in this study could temporarily bypass their habitual predispositions and primary socializations (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) to enact multiple subjectivities and exploit competing ideologies simultaneously. Put more simply, ideological shifting implies that the informants were able to identify with multiple and competing ideological positions at the same time. For example, Aaliyah could identify as a feminist in the workplace, but readily abandon this identification for one that adheres more closely to hegemonic femininity in the bedroom (i.e. in the context of her romantic relationship). Ideological shifting was also evidenced in the women’s readings of ads that would invoke multiple feminist and patriarchal discourses, even within one ad.

As the intercase analysis in Chapter 8 identified, the informants in this study attended to two overlapping goals via their engagements and identifications with ideology, where they fluctuated between being non-reflexive (internalizing) and reflexive (status-seeking<sup>55</sup>) actors. Thus, ideological shifting simultaneously invokes both *dupe theory*, famously proposed by the Frankfurt School (Adorno and Horkheimer 1944/1997), which positions individuals as passive, hapless, and manipulated victims of the marketplace, and *agentic consumer models* (Davis 1995; De Certeau 1984; Fiske 1989; Hall 1980; Jenkins 1992), which emphasize consumer agency and subjectivity, whereby consumption is empowering.

As illustrated in Chapter 8, the first of these goals (ontological security) has to do with the non-reflexive internalization of ideology as a way for individuals to feel grounded and secure in society. In particular, this goal was one of *sense-making* that involves making sense of personal narratives (i.e. making sense of past experiences) and/or advertisements (i.e. locating or interpreting an ad and its cues in a familiar social schema). Because this was largely a non-reflexive process, it typically revealed the informants' HCC or LCC habitual predispositions. Accordingly, seeking ontological security always reflected an internalization of the hegemonic (patriarchal) ideology. Even when informants internalized of a counter-hegemonic or feminist ideology, this worked to mask social inequalities, rendering gender oppression both invisible and intrinsic to the social world (doxa). This blanket hegemonic internalization can be explained by way of Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence, where the (non-reflexive) habitus causes individuals to subjugate themselves. Hegemony is experienced as legitimate, something which grants ontological security (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). In this way, just as the fantasy of free trade masks the structural inequalities and unequal distributions of capital (Žižek 1997), the fantasy of feminism conceals the gender inequalities and symbolic violence rooted in

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<sup>55</sup> Notably, processes of internalization and status seeking do not necessarily adhere to a strict binary categorization, whereby one is always non-reflexive and the other is always reflexive, but more often than not, this was found to be the case.

a patriarchal society. Consequently, sense-making, in this context, was always premised on a hegemonic ideology. This demonstrates how a counter-hegemony can become subsumed or co-opted under various hegemonic ‘brands’, while masquerading as something alternative, progressive, and/or liberating. How a counter-hegemony comes to be co-opted under a hegemonic, market-based system is discussed at length in the following two sections. However, on a micro level, suffice it to say that, in relation to seeking ontological security, the informants non-reflexively shifted between two apparently distinct ideologies precisely because they are not actually distinct, but rather symbiotic – jointed in their efforts to reinforce and strengthen the overarching dominant ideology.

The second goal (status-seeking) has received more attention in consumer culture studies adopting an agentic consumer viewpoint, which as Schor (2007: 24) points out, is preferable given that “it is hard to do good social science from the assumption that people are idiots”. In this study, informants were found to reflexively draw on specific (patriarchal or feminist) ideologies in order to *validate their identity project(s)* and/or *gain status* in local and/or broader social status hierarchies. This goal is more dialogical than seeking ontological security, and entails notions of ‘agency’ (reflecting one’s ability to act externally on macro structures) and ‘reflexivity’ (reflecting an inward turn onto one’s actions) (Arnould 2007; Arnould and Thompson 2007; Fuchs 2001; Meyer and Jepperson 2000). Notably, while all informants engaged in various feminine and feminist practices, some explicitly identified or disidentified with a feminist ideology; this involved making purposeful identity investments in order to acquire status in either a low status consumption field (feminism) or within the broader patriarchal society. In accordance with much previous CCT research (e.g. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Thompson and Üstüner 2015; Üstüner and Holt 2007, 2010, 2012), this study illustrates how, through consumption, consumers can, at least temporarily, bypass their primary socialization and habitual predispositions, facilitating conditions of heterology (Bourdieu 1977). For example, those informants endowed with embodied (feminine) cultural capital could



identify as feminists and invest in subordinate forms of cultural capital, and conversely, those with less feminine capital were able to invest in dominant forms of cultural capital. From this perspective, all informants were granted access to multiple brands of identities, indicating the “draining [of] the symbolic potency of objectified cultural capital” (Holt 1998: 5), whereby heterogeneous status symbols are readily accessible, interchangeable, and thus collapsible (Lipovetsky 1994; Schor 2007; Twitchell 1999).

However, this malleability of status symbols proves problematic for a number of reasons. First, while many consumer culture theorists have regarded agency and reflexivity as necessary components in achieving emancipation from oppressive social structures (Murray and Ozanne 1991, 2006; Ozanne and Murray 1995; Ozanne and Saatcioglu 2008; Thompson and Üstüner 2015), recent research has begun to problematize these notions. For example, Arnould (2007) and Schor (2007) both demonstrate how agency – or subjectivity – is essentially a myth that is ‘sold’ in the marketplace, “constructed *by* producers rather than being deployed against them” (Schor 2007: 25 [emphasis in original]) and “derived from actors’ class-based institutional roles within consumer society rather than freedom from them” (Arnould 2007: 100). Consequently, if agency is conceived as a commodity sold in the marketplace, it loses its use-value and becomes expressed in terms of its exchange-value, thus rendering it yet another commodity symbol among a sea of symbols saturating the contemporary marketplace. This, of course, is problematic inasmuch as agency (e.g. in the form of one’s commitment to a feminist politics) is depoliticized and reduced to one of many symbols, including those patriarchal ones. This process of depoliticization is highlighted by Dean (2002, 2007, 2008, 2010, 2013), who expands on Slavoj Žižek’s work to discuss the decline of symbolic efficiency, where “the variety of available identities and the mutability which characterizes contemporary subjects’ relations to their identities render imaginary identity extremely vulnerable – the frames of reference that give it meaning and value are forever shifting; the others who might challenge it, rupture it, can appear at any moment” (Dean 2008: 61). Aspirational identity(s) drives consumption, yet the precarious nature of the market and

of marketized identities render identity “too fleeting and unstable to serve as [a] site of politicization” (ibid: 67).

This leads into the second issue associated with ideological shifting, which considers the extent of which identity investments are made. While many of the informants, particularly those who strongly identified or disidentified with the feminist movement, were reflexive and broadly consistent when discussing their identity projects, the limits of this reflexivity became clear via their interactions with consumer culture. When faced with media artifacts, the informants tended to abandon their desire for status, reverting back to a ‘default position’ that reflected their habitual predispositions (HCC or LCC). Thus, bypassing one’s habitus or primary socialization to participate in a heterologous field was possible, but only superficially: the informants’ desired identities failed to carry through to their readings of ads. This is not to suggest that the informants were unable to meaningfully interact or engage with the advertisements, in fact, they did so in various ways, drawing on multiple experiences, thus confirming prior research disparaging ‘dupe theory’ (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry Jr. 1989; Holt 2002; Mick and Buhl 1992; Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994). However, their interactions seemed to stem from a desire to realize ontological security, whereby informants tried to make sense of an ad (i.e. locate it in a familiar social schema) on the basis of their socialized identity projects, defined by their external social conditions (their habitus). The informants’ readings of ads thus highlight the ephemeral nature of reflexivity, which is, at least in part, explainable by the precarious nature of the marketplace that serves as the site for which reflexive identity investments are made. Further, the inability to fully ‘commit to’ or enact a consistent identity project (reflexively and non-reflexively) highlights the political deradicalization that occurs when counter-ideologies are emptied of their ‘symbolic potency’ (Holt 1998) or ‘symbolic efficiency’ (Dean 2007). In this way, political identities are readily consumed (enacted) and discarded (abandoned), begging the question as to how productive reflexivity is as an insurgency tactic. As Dean (2007: 236) notes “the neoliberal economy does not provide symbolic identities, sites from which we see

ourselves, as loci of collective attachment. Rather, it provides opportunities for new ways for me to imagine myself, a variety of lifestyles that I can try and try on”. Thus, while political identities are valuable, tradable, and exchangeable on a micro and meso level, they fail to engender collective action, which Dean (2007) indicates is required if macro structures and institutions (i.e. the hegemonic ideology) are to be challenged.

The third issue with regard to ideological shifting and the precarious nature of status symbols invokes the original definition of ideology presented in Chapter 3 of this thesis, arguing that the false and oppressive beliefs of a society do not necessarily derive from the interests of a dominant class, but function through the material structures of society, which inadvertently uphold the interests of the dominant class. As the findings demonstrate, those informants with more (feminine) HCC were also more mobile in terms of where they made their identity investments, corresponding with previous research (Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Holt 1997; McNay 1999; Ourahmoune and Özçağlar-Toulouse 2012). Alternatively, women with less feminine capital faced more difficulties when making investments in dominate forms of capital, given structural, namely biological, economical and intersectional (e.g. racial and sexual) limitations (Kates 2002; Skeggs 1997; Üstüner and Holt 2007). In particular, these informants struggled with frustrated identity projects: trying to improve their social standing by pursuing dominate capital that they did not feel entitled to. Conversely, although HCC informants experienced a lack of field-dependent capital valued in the low status field (e.g. in the form of markers of difference, inequality, and distinctiveness), they were able to exploit their HCC to become subjectively more valued and representative members in the local status hierarchy. These informants thus acted on behalf of less privileged women – investing in a low status field out of their own ‘free will’, as opposed to out of ‘necessity’, as it was for some of the informants who invested in feminism to validate their marginalized identity projects. Thus, HCC informants were able to retain their HCC by making subordinate identity investments at the expense of exploiting and reinforcing others’ LCC, through processes of self-handicapping and suffer mongering. This suggests

that although HCC and LCC informants were granted access to multiple status symbols and identity positions, class nonetheless operates through practice (Holt 1997, 1998). In particular, this study finds that class works through technologies-of-the-self (Foucault 1988), where informants' subjectivities constitute as a barrier to participation, privileging the cultural elites who feel entitled to enact multiple identities. Thus, not only has agency lost its utility and thus political value, but it is primarily (albeit subjectively) reserved for those who pose the least threat to the status quo.

In sum, ideological shifting refers to the micro processes that individuals engage in, moving between multiple 'ideological' subjectivities at a given time, depending on the context, situation, their habitus, and/or goal. If, with regard to the first goal (seeking ontological security), the informants non-reflexively shifted between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideologies as a result of a 'falsified' dichotomy between what constitutes one ideology versus the other, those informants who purposefully and reflexively made identity investments (adhering to the second goal of status seeking) *perpetuated* and *enhanced* this fallacy, buying into a marketized form of political action. In this way, the women did not necessarily shift between distinct ideologies, per se, but rather fluctuated among an abundance of depoliticized, marketized ideologies, identities, or brands – many of which were sold as 'progressive', 'agentic', and/or 'political'. Feminism, as a counter-hegemony is thus rendered the political equivalent of a shopping trip. Further, not only do these marketized ideologies facilitate an illusion of political agency, but reflexivity is similarly limited to superficial micro level engagements with meso level structures, rendering the macro or ideological structures indomitable. The next section addresses these meso level structures more explicitly.

## **9.2 Meso: Depoliticized Discourse**

At this point, we begin to move away from individuated micro processes to focus explicitly on the meso level processes, by which ideologies are disseminated through cultural production systems. Addressing the second research question posed in this study,

this section aims to demonstrate how “*patriarchal (feminist) ideologies are received and interpreted by women*”. While this was partly discussed above, it is addressed here further: highlighting how patriarchal and feminist ideologies are disseminated via cultural new social movements and/or the marketplace/media. Given the methodology employed in this thesis, these processes are elucidated from individuals’ micro interactions, but theorized at a broader (meso) level.

Approaching this phenomenon from a meso level gives insight into two social conditions shaping (and shaped by) contemporary society. The first relates to what Dean (2005, 2007, 2013) identifies as ‘Neoliberal Capitalism’, or more commonly, ‘Communicative Capitalism’, where *both* mainstream and leftist utterances have become captured via hegemonic processes of commodification and marketization. The second condition concerns Dean’s arguments about the hegemonizing and depoliticizing effects of status symbols – the decline of symbolic efficiency, which I argue is partly attributed to ‘post-scarcity’ conditions that are beginning to take hold in society, whereby consumer goods and services are produced cheaply and in abundance (Bookchin 1971; Chernomas 1984). While the latter condition speaks to a more macro level argument that is outlined in the following section, it is mentioned here briefly in relation to the process of marketization.

Jodi Dean (2009: 2) defines communicative capitalism as “the materialization of ideals of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify capitalism.” While many of her analyses focus on the depoliticizing effects of network communications, i.e. those via web-based technologies, this concept may be extended to consumers’ individualized, identitarian interactions with ideology and media artifacts, such as advertisements. Throughout her work, Dean demonstrates how the convergence of the media, neoliberalism (i.e. the free market), and democracy have captured both mainstream and leftist utterances under a hegemonic capitalistic system, rendering the promise of democracy a mere marketing slogan. In focusing explicitly on the corporate co-optation

or marketization of the feminist movement, this study indicates how these three elements have come together to produce a multiplicity of identitarian social movements that have become co-opted by the market and sold in the form of ‘feminist’ brands. Yet, through the process of marketization, these ‘feminist’ brands lose their insurgency and come to reflect that of a hegemonic (patriarchal) ideology. This was primarily evidenced by the informants’ ‘feminist’ readings of ads that acknowledged (marketized) symbols of feminism, but ultimately conceded to the hegemonic (patriarchal) ideology. In general, three ‘feminist’ reading strategies were identified:

- *Misinterpreting Agentic Femininity*: This reading strategy is widely acknowledged by scholars writing on the effects of postfeminism, who demonstrate how patriarchal and traditionally feminine values have come to be interpreted as indicators of feminism (c.f. Gill 2012, 2011; Goldman 1992; Goldman, Heath, and Smith 1991). In this way, symbols of traditional femininity have come to represent sexual agency and female empowerment. These readings, as Gill (2003, 2008a) notes, imply a postfeminist shift from objectification to subjectification, illustrating how power and hegemony work through us (Foucault 1976, 1991; Gramsci 1971). This strategy was evidenced primarily by HCC women making subordinate (feminist) identity investments, given their inclusive readings of feminism, where multiple signifiers of traditional femininity came to denote a feminist ideology.
- *Fetishizing Stigma*: This reading strategy was the most common among women identifying as feminist. It involves a fetishization or reification of stigma, where subjectification has essentially become reinstated as objectification. Those engaging in this strategy reified/objectified minorities (i.e. those not complying with the tenets of heteronormativity), in an attempt to communicate their feminist cultural capital (i.e. knowledge) that minorities are underrepresented in the mass media and are thus deserving of more attention, even if this attention is exploitative. This was evidenced primarily by those HCC informants who exploited others’ LCC to gain status in a local

hierarchy (feminism), while preserving their status positions in broader society. This fetishization occurs at the expense of those marginalized individuals, wherein the ‘celebration’ of their oppression is less liberating than it is exploitative. To a lesser extent, this strategy was also evidenced among those aiming to valorize their LCC and validate their marginalized identity projects.

- *Antagonizing the Mainstream*: Finally, even the more antagonistic feminist readings that entail an explicit rejection of consumer culture (as was largely the case with Lucy), correspond to an anti-consumption ideology that is nonetheless an ephemeral identity position sold within the consumer marketplace (Baudrillard 2001; Holt 2002; Schor 2007). Such anti-consumption stances with regard to one’s interactions with media culture are not revolutionary or productive since they function within a hegemonic marketplace and do not necessarily translate into the women’s identity narratives. This was made clear the case of Lucy, who did not, for example, boycott all instances of consumer culture, but merely offered antagonistic opinions towards a certain type of (mainstream) consumer culture (e.g. mainstream feminism) in order to authenticate an alternative one (e.g. grassroots feminism).

These reading strategies indicate *how* the feminist social movement has become captured by the hegemonic marketplace and sold to women in the form of various, often contradictory brands of feminism that are nonetheless interpreted from a hegemonic (patriarchal) frame. Consequently, informants did not appear to engage with macro ideologies, but rather with hegemonic marketized ones made available via unidirectional (top-down) processes of marketization and commodification, rooted in an ontology that remains largely indomitable (Campbell 1987; Meyer and Jespersen 2000). This is consistent with other consumption research (Arnould 2007, 2012; Kozinets 2002) supporting the argument that it is impossible to completely escape the market (Baudrillard 2001) or indeed, capitalism (Jameson 1991). To this end, many scholars have identified the productivity of (anti-) consumption (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Izberk-Bilgin

2012; Sandikci and Ger 2010; Thompson and Üstüner 2015), proclaiming that consumers can be political and progressive without ever leaving the marketplace. I, however, take issue with such proclamations for two primary reasons.

First, as discussed in the previous section, progressive identities are sold and function within the marketplace. This, however, is problematic given that the massive overproduction of commodity signs (Baudrillard 1981b, Lyotard 1979/1984) has rendered these identifications ephemeral, episodic, and thus, ‘politically inconsequential’, since they fail to incite collective action (Dean 2007: 241). Accordingly, designating the marketplace as a site from which to advance counter-hegemonic political action is inherently contradictory, given that the media and the marketplace have been deemed hegemonizing institutions (Gramsci 1971; Herman and Chomsky 1988/2002). Because political action has become relegated to the realm of the meso (marketplace), the enactment of marketized political identities via symbolic indicators paradoxically perpetuate a hegemonic system. Consequently, consistent with criticisms of new social movements (Buechler 2000), these ‘political’ acts are fundamentally reactionary rather than revolutionary, merely “redressing social grievances in order to secure the continued existence of bourgeois society” (Marx and Engels 1888/2015: 44). In accordance with the tenets of neoliberalism and its emphasis on choice, such reactionary actions are endless, resulting in a multiplicity of struggles and stylistic indicators of what it means to be a feminist. This multiplicity affirms the outset of the ‘post-scarcity’ conditions our society is beginning to reflect, which work to flatten or de-ontologize (DeLanda 2006; Schouten, Martin, and DuFault 2015) the symbolic space necessary for politicization (Dean 2005) (rendering the ideological systems indomitable). In this way, attention is paid to the *multiplicity* of movements, indicators, brands, and identity positions, as opposed to fighting an ontological system that structures these struggles in the first instance. Politics via consumption is thus reactionary: strengthening an oppressive (capitalistic and patriarchal) system that continually privileges those who conform to the hegemony, while fetishizing, exploiting, and oppressing those who do not.



Second, as society becomes increasingly less dependent on traditional ideologies offered by the state or the church, for example (McAlexander et al. 2014), individuals are left needing to make sense of their experiences. Social movements and subcultures offer one way of framing, understanding, and controlling lived experiences. Given the prominence of media culture in contemporary American society (Herman and Chomsky 1988/2002; Kellner 1995), mass media –films, television, advertisements, literature, and social media – acts as a primary communication mechanism of social movements. This relationship is unequal, however, since social movements rely on the media far more than the media needs them (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993). The problems associated with market co-optation become readily conspicuous when a hegemonic institution, such as the mass media, becomes the sole champion for a counter-hegemonic revolution.

For example, Coskuner-Balli and Thompson (2013) note that stay-at-home fathers' quest for cultural recognition and legitimacy is made more difficult given the lack of marketplace options and media portrayals attesting to their masculinity. The present study considers the opposite situation, where the media and the marketplace have become saturated with a multiplicity of 'feminist' brands. In such a situation, the collectivity (i.e. the feminist social movement) becomes convoluted, losing its *raison d'etre* in a sea of diversified brands and interpretations. Yet, simultaneously, these convoluted feminist values become consecrated, in the form of marketplace dictated doctrines, from which to judge one's political legitimacy. From this perspective, it would appear that once a social movement gains recognition from mainstream institutions, activism consists of specified acts of consumption that must be continually reproduced in order to advance an identity project that hinges on a changing marketplace to substantiate its meaning. In effect, oppositional (feminist) identity projects become increasingly salient and institutionalized, resulting in an interminable *cycle* of institutionalization and oppression, captured quite elegantly by Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2004: 20):

“There is no capitalism in itself; capitalism is at the crossroads”,

whereby capitalism may be displaced for ‘patriarchy’, to read: there is no patriarchy in itself; patriarchy is at the crossroads (between institutionalized identities).

In this way, identity position(s) and markers (i.e. feminist, anti-feminist, etc.) are politically insignificant. The unceasing influx of new social movements and identity positions merely contribute to an ontological cycle, which masks the overarching forces of hegemonic domination, allowing patriarchy to flourish. Recalling Gramsci, a neo-liberal society becomes more susceptible to the forces of the hegemony, as forces of domination become masked as distinctive commodities (i.e. identities) that are bought, sold, and desired. This suggests not only an unconscious acquiescence to the hegemony, as Gramsci implied, but rather an active celebration of it! Furthermore, as subversive ideologies (i.e. feminism) become increasingly co-opted by the marketplace, ‘transgressive’ practices, such heteroflexible lesbian relationships and BDSM are subsumed under a hetero-normative framework, which works to establish a hyper-patriarchal society (i.e. pressures to sexually perform and reinstate traditional gender roles), rather than instate a liberated one. The question is thus not whether the broader culture confers the cultural recognition and legitimacy sought in the low status consumption field (feminism) – in this context, it does – rather the question becomes a matter of understanding what the social movement(s) is trying to ‘move’ – transform or alter.

In sum, it becomes apparent that through the hegemonic process of marketization, the ‘ideological’ positions the informants shifted between are *brands* within a hegemonic marketplace. Dean’s (2005, 2007, 2013) notion of communicative capitalism illuminates how the hegemonic process of marketization occurs, whereby both mainstream and leftist utterances are captured and materialized in such a way as to intensify the cycle of oppression (i.e. capitalism and patriarchy). Accordingly, *consumer agency can only ever be expressed within the dominant logic of the marketplace*. In effect, communicative capitalism (and neoliberalism more broadly) has commenced a post-scarcity economy

(Bookchin 1971; Chernomas 1984) that promotes an abundance of brands, identity positions, status symbols, and social movements within the marketplace, ultimately masking the ideological forces of domination at play. It is precisely the multiplication and endless opportunities for marketplace resistance, amplified by mass (and participatory, i.e. social) media, which gives the *illusion* that our society is one of a participatory and functional democracy. Importantly, however, the process of marketization can only occur following a process of commodification, as is considered in the next section.

### 9.3 Macro: Liberatory Potential of Consumption

This chapter concludes with a macro level theoretical discussion of the liberatory potential of consumption and social movements, specifically identitarian or new social movements. In particular, it considers how micro interactions (i.e. identity projects and media interpretations) relate to macro ideologies, thus responding to this study's third research question: "*how do hegemonic (patriarchal) and counter-hegemonic (feminist) ideologies relate to women's sexual identity projects and interpretations of sexualized advertisements?*". In addressing this question, this section builds on the discussion above concerning how individuals shift between 'ideological' subjectivities, which are communicated via a hegemonic process of marketization. The process of marketization has been argued to transform macro ideologies into meso or marketized ideologies or brands that were, in the context of this research, always interpreted in hegemonic terms. This produced a multiplicity of identitarian positions that not only distract from necessary political action that might fundamentally alter capitalistic structures (Cova, Maclaran, and Bradshaw 2013), but are also, in and of themselves, depoliticized at their very inception. Importantly, the hegemonic and depoliticizing process of marketization is made possible by commodification.

As explicated at length in Chapter 3, Marx (1867/2013) discusses commodification as the transformation of any good, service, and/or idea into something that becomes 'exchangeable' or 'tradable'. In other words, through the process of commodification, a

good, service, or idea loses its ‘use-value’ and is replaced by its ‘exchange-value’ in the form of capital. From this perspective, the feminist movement has become a collection of commodities expressed as various and contradictory subject positions, stylistic indicators, and/or brands, all with the potential to provide symbolic capital in some local status hierarchy. These commodities may be used by various individuals (although some have more access than others) in various situations and contexts. Furthermore, these commodities are mutable. Thus, consumers are granted agency in shaping consumption practices and determining what is sold/not sold in the marketplace (Thompson 2004a; Thompson and Coskuner-Balli 2007; O’Guinn and Muñiz 2004). As Arnould (2007) argues, late capitalism does not limit the possibility of political action; rather, it expands these possibilities, rendering reforms virtually endless. However, and this is where I diverge from much previous CCT research, influencing marketplace offerings and marketized (meso) ideologies should *not* be confused with political action that challenges the macro ideological system of oppression (hegemony).

Further, I argue that it is precisely the wide (horizontal) expansion of possible reforms that inhibit the potential for any (vertical) revolutionary political action, inasmuch as reforms flatten, de-ontologize, and mask the structural inequalities that pervade society at a grander macro level. The oppressive cycle is obscured and strengthened by an endless chain of reform, whereby groups and individuals fight for rights and recognition (inclusion) in a hegemonic marketplace that ultimately reinforces oppression, since inclusion necessarily encompasses exclusion. Moreover, as Deleuze and Guattari (1987/2004) made clear, oppression does not lie in a static identity, per se, but rather at the crossroads – at the *intersection* of multiple and potential identities. From this perspective, new social movements, addressing identitarian based rights, are rendered quick-fix solutions that serve to perpetuate the oppressive system by expanding the marketplace (i.e. identities sold within the marketplace) and thus the processes of marketization and commodification.

On the one hand, such a conclusion is pessimistic, resembling those post-political theses, which foreclose the possibility of progressive political action and romanticize the notion of a radicalized politics (Dean 2014; Rancière 1999; Žižek 1999). However, suggesting that political revolution is possible via continuous (horizontal) reform via consumption, only works to limit the likelihood of (vertical) collective political action (i.e. depoliticizing the political) and distract from the political issues at hand (i.e. politicizing the non-political). Such a strong critique is not intended to foreclose the possibility of political action, but rather invites critical thinkers to explore alternative possibilities that expand beyond the illusory notion that liberation can be sought via consumption.

Of further importance to a macro oriented analysis of the liberatory potential of commodified social movements is Marx's (1867/2013) notion of 'commodity fetishism', whereby commodities are believed to have the capacity to govern the activity of human beings, resulting in alienation, whereby humans become detached and subsequently governed by the commodities that they themselves created. This implies that power operates productively through *inclusion* (i.e. through the marketplace, commodities, and identifications made available to consumers) precisely to *exclude* micro engagements with macro ideologies. In this way, power (and thus oppression) is proliferated, multiplied, enhanced, dispersed, and diversified through a multiplicity of struggles, social movements, brands, and identitarian position(s) that one may adopt. In the context of this research, this was evidenced by the multiple 'feminist' brands proliferated in the marketplace and identity positions adopted in relation to the feminist social movement. This is not a completely new phenomenon, as social movements have long been framed in disparate ways by various social movement organizations and the media (Gamson and Wolfsfeld 1993; McCaffrey and Keys 2000; Snow and Bedford 1988). Yet as the market continues to pervade social life, social movements continuously assemble, converge, and disband at rapid rates, at which point the market co-opts and reifies the disaggregated pieces, selling them to the public as distinguishing identity markers or symbols of emancipation. The result of this marketization and subsequent consumption leads to what

is described here as ‘ideological shifting’, whereby individuals adhere to many, seemingly competing, marketized, but nonetheless reified identity positions simultaneously, which may masquerade as liberating, but are embedded within a depoliticized ‘politics of the self’ that reinforces the hegemonic status quo. Further, subscribing to such movements requires members do little more than invest in stylistic or aesthetic indicators, since progressive political action is largely understood to be enacted via one’s style, privately held opinions, and/or locally shared utterances (e.g. on social media or among friends with shared interests).

Such conclusions speak to a broader critique of identity politics, wherein identity (i.e. a feminist identity) becomes an end in and of itself, rather than a means to an end (i.e. the collective emancipation or liberation of women). In this way, identity recognition and distinction (symbolic capital) become the focal points, reducing the likelihood of collective action and diminishing the revolutionary potential of a counter-hegemony, or social movement. This reflects the definition of ideology employed in this thesis, which emphasizes how power works to uphold a hegemonic system that ultimately benefits the dominant class via the *materialized* structures of a society. Thus, ideology does not resonate with a dominant group or class, per se, rather ideology/power is materialized in the foundations of society (i.e. identities sold in the marketplace). In other words, the hegemonic ideology operates through marketized ideologies that consumers both influence and are influenced by, thus foreclosing their engagements with macro ideologies. Adhering to a historical materialist approach, power operates through the material structures of society, thus power is emergent, working dialogically through subjects and material structures. While much attention has been paid to the former (i.e. how power operates dialogically through subjects) via postmodern analyses, less attention has been paid to the latter assertion that power operates also through pseudo-objective structures. Such should not be overlooked, as – to offer a twist on Foucault (2003: 34) – “it is necessary to cut off the king’s head: in political theory this hasn’t happened yet”.

To summarize, the commodification of the feminist social movement occurred at the very instant it became trademarked as an identity, which one could inhabit. In other words, once identifying as a ‘feminist’ granted some symbolic capital – as an identity always does – it became commodified. The stylings, aesthetics, practices, doctrines, and statuses associated with a feminist identity(s) and the feminist movement(s) have undergone and continue to experience innumerable transitions, which are, problematically, often confused with political action. Indeed, as more and more identitarian movements continue to pervade contemporary society at an alarming rate, the intersections through which oppression (capitalism and patriarchy) prevail are further ingrained, rendering the possibility for real antagonism or dissent foreclosed (Dean 2005: 56). Consequently, it is essential to recognize that consumer agency, which is always and necessarily enacted within the marketplace, does not equate to political action. Rather, one’s enacted identity or participation in a social movement results in capital accruals that can lead to temporary instances of interpersonal and institutional power. In this way, consumer agency functions as a type of ‘prosumption’ (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010), where individuals act as both the producers and consumers of marketized ideologies. However, because this prosumption operates within the marketplace, it functions as a site of exploitation via hegemonic processes of commodification and marketization, rather than one of emancipation.

In short, macro ideologies impart their influence on consumers autocratically and irrefutably. Just as consumers are unable to escape the market (upholding capitalism), so too are they unable to escape the marketization of feminism (upholding patriarchy). Thus, the women in this study were compelled to identify (disidentify, schitzo-identity, neutral-identify, etc.) with marketized subject positions in relation to the feminist movement. However, their dialogical micro engagements (i.e. investments in – and shifting between marketized ideologies) did less to reproduce and/or resist the macro ideologies at large, than they did proliferate and strengthen the intersections between alternative brands of (anti) feminism, which ultimately worked to strengthen the hegemonic and oppressive

system (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2004). In this way, the incessant proliferation of social movements and various identity positions fragment and decentralize the macro ideological structure rooted within a specific ontology, obscuring it as the key source of such oppression. Thus, consistent with previous post-political arguments, it appears that liberation or emancipation from the macro hegemonic ideologies of patriarchy (and capitalism) have been rendered not only unattainable, but also incomprehensible (Rancière 1999, 2010; Žižek 1999).

### 9.4 Revised Conceptual Framework

Following from the previous discussion, this section offers the revised conceptual framework conceptualized for this thesis, as is shown below in Figure 9.1. This diagram is a revision of the orienting conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 2 (Figure 2.2) and the contextualized orienting framework presented in Chapter 6 (Figure 6.1), based on the findings presented in Chapters 7 and 8.

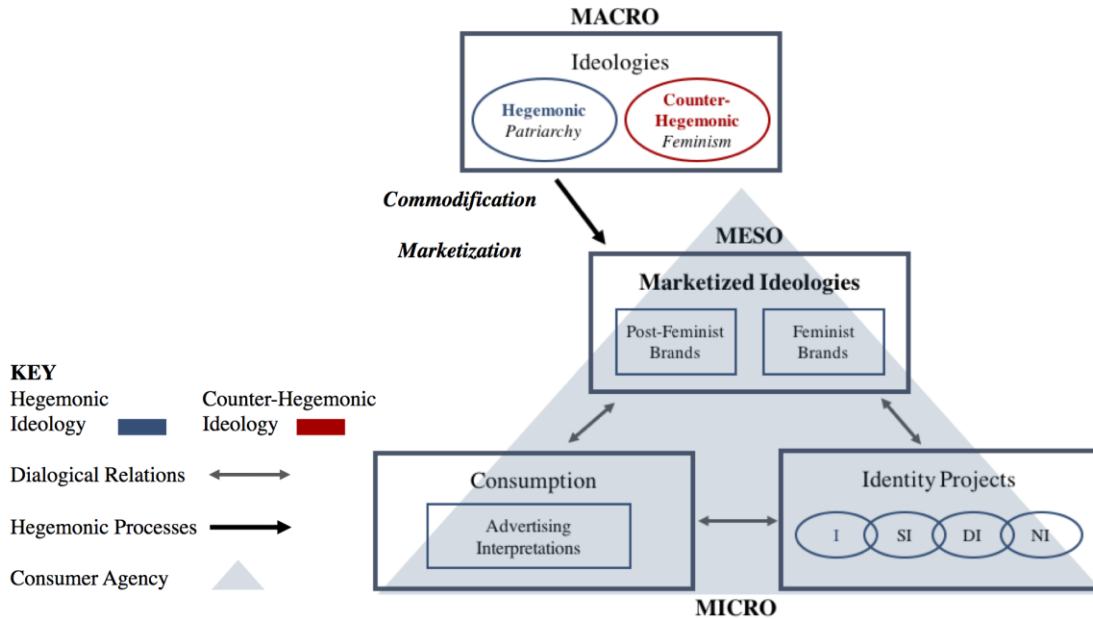


Figure 9.1: Revised Conceptual Framework



This revised framework deviates from the orienting conceptual framework primarily in its indication that ideology is disseminated via hierarchal top-down processes. In this way, it more closely reflects McCracken's (1896) Movement of Meaning model (see Figure 2.1 in Chapter 2), than it does a dialogical one, as is suggested by much contemporary consumer research (e.g. Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Izberk-Bilgin 2012; Luedicke, Thompson, and Giesler 2010; Mick and Buhl 1992) (see Figure 2.2 in Chapter 2). As indicated in the above diagram, the macro ideologies (patriarchy and feminism) are disseminated via unidirectional and hegemonic processes of *commodification*, whereby they become 'exchangeable' and 'tradable' and *marketization*, at which point they become co-opted, hegemonized, and sold to consumers in the form of various brands, commodities, signifiers, and identity positions. Because the processes of commodification and marketization are both fundamentally hegemonic, the counter-hegemonic ideology becomes depoliticized: losing its insurgency (use-value) and functioning as a brand(s) (valued for its exchange-value) that complements the hegemonic ideology. This suggests that consumer agency (as denoted by the blue triangle in Figure 9.1) is solely relegated to consumers' dialogical relations within the marketplace.

Thus, ideological shifting is merely an illusion or fallacy, since individuals shift between different and ephemeral *meso level* marketized ideologies or brands that always reflect the hegemonic ideology. Unlike the contextualized orienting framework presented in Chapter 6 (Figure 6.1), there are no counter-hegemonic or 'fluctuating/in-between' positions that consumers may inhabit. Perhaps the more appropriate, though certainly more banal term for this process, is 'shopping', where individuals shop for brands that signify a 'distinct' identity that may be consumed and discarded haphazardly. Consequently, because consumer agency is limited to the hegemonic marketplace, consumers' engagements did less to disrupt broader power structures than strengthen and uphold them, which paradoxically renders social movements necessary in the first instance. As the market expands via consumer engagements, a proliferation of brands, identity positions, status symbols, and social movements flatten, de-ontologize, and mask the overarching

ideological system that constitutes the very basis of oppression. However, because one cannot escape the dominant logic of the market, they are essentially forced to contribute to their perpetual oppression.

## **9.5 Contributions**

This thesis contributes primarily to CCT by enriching critical understandings of the workings of ideology. Adopting a holistic approach, it explores the influence of ideology on consumers' identity projects from a macro, meso, and micro perspective. Specifically, it offers a critical account of how hegemonic (patriarchal) and counter-hegemonic (feminist) ideologies are disseminated/ hindered via the marketplace and sold to activists and non-activists alike to understand how these shape (and are shaped by) young women's identity projects and their interactions with consumer culture. To this end, this study also offers insight into gender and feminist research, as well as on the workings and limitations of new social movements.

### **9.5.1 Theoretical Contributions**

Theoretically, this thesis has implications for three disciplines: CCT, gender studies, and to a lesser extent, social movement theory. As noted in Chapter 2, much consumer research has avoided critical and holistic studies of ideology, opting for normative studies that examine two levels of analysis (macro-meso, meso-micro, and macro-micro) as opposed to three levels (macro-meso-micro) at once. However, as this study illustrates, three levels are always implicated in studies about ideology, even if they are not always explicitly studied. In adopting a holistic and critical approach, this thesis offers insight as to how ideology is communicated through society and works on – as well as through – consumers. The main contributions as they pertain to each discipline are outlined below.

### **Consumer Culture Theory**

This thesis contributes primarily to the consumer research discipline, particularly to CCT. In adopting a critical perspective, it draws on theorists including Marx, Gramsci, and

Bourdieu, whose critical theories have been largely downplayed in favor of more postmodern theories concerning the emancipatory powers of consumption. This critical theoretical lens allows for this study and the account of women's stories "to be located in a wider context which links the specific activities with a broader social structural and historical analysis of women's oppression" (Harvey 1990: 6). In so doing, this study offers insight into the workings of ideology, which, as the findings suggest, is disseminated via hegemonic processes of commodification and marketization. This suggests that counter-hegemonic ideologies have become stripped of their insurgency, rendered to the realm of abstraction. In other words, because hegemonic processes of commodification occur at a macro level, counter-hegemonic ideologies are hegemonized and thus depoliticized before even reaching the marketplace.

Such a view is far more pessimistic than previous consumption studies that claim counter-hegemonic ideologies can be enacted via transgressive dialogical engagements and consumption practices (e.g. Arnould 2007; Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). However, by examining ideology across all three levels, this study shows that consumer agency is largely relegated to the realm of the marketplace, where consumers' dialogical interactions and consumption practices do not influence the broader ideologies or oppression at large, but rather alter the enactments or expressions of these ideologies within the marketplace. Ironically, it is through these marketplace interactions that renders oppression, namely the 'patriarchy' so elusive, inescapable, and enduring. Consequently, progressive political reforms, transgressive acts of consumption, and the marketization of social movements are short-sighted solutions that inadvertently strengthen the hegemony embedded within the marketplace.

Importantly, this is not to foreclose the possibility of progressive action. For example, Thompson and Üstüner (2015) assert that once transgressive gender resignifications become institutionally established, additional ideological edgework can be performed as a way to continually expand gender boundaries. This is not disputed. Certainly, many

American women today have considerably more rights and entitlements than they did at the start of first-wave feminism. However, once such progressive actions become institutionalized, they also become susceptible to the hegemonic forces embedded in marketplace (i.e. co-optation). This gives way to new oppressions, which will continue to proliferate through the intersections or cracks of these institutionalized resignifications (Deleuze and Guattari 1987/2004: 20). This speaks to a broader debate concerning the problems associated with identity politics, where rights are awarded on the basis of an identity. This is problematic for two reasons. First, the notion of equality, as it pertains to women's rights, is contingent on men (specifically white men): equal rights for women means equal rights to men. Such a conceptualization of equality naturally upholds the hegemonic (patriarchal) ideology. Second, advocating for emancipation via perpetual deconstructions of identity (of gender, sex, etc.) indicates the infinite number of possible identities, all of which will inevitably compete for rights *over* other identities. This was evidenced as early as the 19<sup>th</sup> century when black men won the right to vote *over* white women (Ryan 1992): "After all, one man's hegemony is another man's emancipation" (Hackley 2003: 1345). This begs the question as to what exactly the feminist social movement(s) is trying to 'move', i.e. transform, alter, or change. This is particularly pertinent to the contemporary feminist movement, which advocates intersectional oppressions, expanding beyond just gender oppression. It would appear that a celebration of identity politics, so widely advocated in the CCT literature, warrants some critical consideration. As a result, this thesis urges researchers to critically consider the root of oppression – patriarchy at a macro level – in order to theorize about political strategies that resist and challenge our ontology, rather than create opportunities for more exclusion.

### **Gender Studies**

This study demonstrates how identifying as feminist in any capacity and for any length of time does not radically challenge the power dynamics embedded in heteronormative gender assumptions. While informants could temporarily bypass their habitus (Thompson and Üstüner 2015; Üstüner and Holt 2007, 2012, 2010), this was found to be on a

superficial level. Among those informants making identity investments in heterologous fields (i.e. ones that are structurally incompatible with their habituated predispositions), their desired identities did not carry through to their interactions with consumer culture. Their readings of ads revealed the primacy afforded to their primary socializations, thus problematizing the notion of social mobility. Further, because feminism has been rendered a commodity, used and discarded haphazardly, it has become emptied of its political potency, rendering it equivalent to any other commodity symbol, even those patriarchal ones. This suggests that although social mobility may not be possible, women are ‘free’ to participate (invest) in either high or low status consumption fields, regardless of their habitual predispositions. However, this ‘free market’ system, as it pertains to feminism, does not do away with class-based or other intersectional oppressions. Rather, it merely conceals them.

In particular, this study finds that in addition to the structural incompatibilities hindering LCC consumers’ participation in high status fields/ status in the broader society, informants’ subjectivities also constituted notable barriers. Thus, while HCC consumers could invest in subordinate forms of feminist capital to gain status in a local hierarchy without posing a threat to their embodied feminine capital, LCC consumers were consistently faced with structural (i.e. biological, economical, and capital restrictions) and subjective barriers (i.e. feelings of inauthenticity), resulting in frustrated identity projects.

Further, it would appear that valuable cultural capital, as it pertains to the feminist social movement, involves having an acute knowledge of- and relationship with oppression: what constitutes it, who experiences it, what is to be done about it, etc. In this way, embodied feminist capital consists of visible intersectional differences, which can grant interpersonal status in this local field, but is not necessarily valuable in broader society. While some LCC women attempt to *valorize* these forms of field-dependent capital to gain status, HCC women participating in this low status field *exploit* others’ LCC through practices of self-handicapping and suffer mongering. This allows the HCC informants to

acquire field-specific capital on behalf of marginalized women without risking their own HCC and status in the broader socioeconomic hierarchy. Thus, this study shows how the commodification of the feminist social movement has worked to underscore class-based oppressions particularly among women.

Additionally, in line with previous research it shows how oppression operates through the self-regulating subject of neoliberalism (Gill 2008a), resulting in a feminist backlash (Faludi 1991; Whelehan 2000) at a macro, as opposed to a micro level. Thus, it is not enough to suggest that a revival of the feminist movement is the solution, particularly when considering the intersectional fetishizing it involves. Rather, in line with Hekman (2000) and other post-identity/post-political scholars (Brown 1995b; Dean 2014; Zerilli 2005) this study proposes the need to move past identity politics in order to conceive of how we might begin to combat oppression on an ontological level.

### **Social Movement Theory**

This study posits that identitarian new social movements may hinder democracy for two reasons. The first has to do with the macro social totality that gives way to NSMs, characterized by advanced capitalism, postfeminism, and the fragmentation and multiplication of social movements, which make up a 'movement society' (Meyer and Tarrow 1998). At a micro level, this research highlights the overriding emphasis on an identity ('I') politics over a collective ('we') one, conferring arguments made by post-political theorists (Brown and Halley 2002; Dean 2005; Rancière 1999, 2010; Žižek 1999). This was evidenced by the sporadic employment/deployment of a feminist identity to legitimize one's marginalized status or to gain status within a local-status hierarchy. Further, the findings illustrate that not only are there many different identifications that one may adopt in relation to the feminist movement at any given time, but there are also many different 'brands' of feminism. This fragmentation of the feminist movement is problematic, since it precludes collective action, encourages individualized forms of resistance, and creates apolitical subjects, where politics becomes tantamount to one's

privately held opinions and/or social media page (Dean 2007). Accordingly, this has resulted in an increasing number of reactive movements and activists, which are consistently competing against other NSMs and other brands/members within the same NSM. Thus, from a macro level, the micro level emphasis on one's identity politics forecloses the likelihood of collective action. This ultimately benefits the cultural hegemony, as it diverts attention from itself, to the ongoing (horizontal) struggles at the micro and meso levels.

This leads to the second way in which NSMs preclude democracy, which involves the difficulties associated with seeking emancipation, recognition, and/or inclusion within a hegemonic and oppressive system. As the post-political theorists, mentioned earlier, argue, reforms that work within (the marketplace) rather than against an oppressive system merely reinforce the dominant ideology, deepening domination and social control to a point of irrevocability (Offe 1985). With regard to the feminist movement, these reforms have been politically, institutionally, and commercially co-opted, resulting in an internalization of feminism, where, adhering to the tenets of neoliberalism, women's autonomous choices have come to be interpreted as expressions of liberation. This precludes the possibility of oppression, since "it is definitionally impossible for a woman to choose her own oppression" (Ferguson 2010: 248). In this way, an internalization of feminism functions as an act of symbolic violence, whereby women subjugate themselves in their attempts to 'have it all' based on the intrinsic assumption that they inhabit a 'gender-blind' society (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).

Of course, the problem with these arguments is that their solutions are rooted within a utopian and romantic vision of society, which are perceived as largely theoretical, unattainable, or at the very least, indescribable at present time (Rancière 1999; Žižek 1999). However, advocating for horizontal, cumulative, and/or reactive reforms that are often expressed in terms of consumption, do little to address the problems at hand. The mentioned obstacles should not preclude the possibility of more productive forms of

political action, however, that might involve the construction of political apparatuses that are vital to the political efficiency of social movements (Dean 2013).

### 9.5.2 Methodological Contributions

As Schor (2007: 23) makes clear in her analysis of consumption debates spanning the twentieth century:

the inclusion of both the production and consumption side in the analysis is a major methodological strength, a point that has not been sufficiently recognized. Analyses that look only at production or consumption are always partial and risk either incompleteness or getting it ‘wrong’.

Accordingly, this research takes into account the calls made by Askegaard and Linnet (2011), Borgerson and Schroeder (2002), and Sandikci and Ger (2010) to consider both the *consumption* and *production* aspects of how ideology functions in an advanced capitalist society. This is in contrast to the majority of ideology research in CCT that focuses either on the *production* (e.g. Canniford and Shankar 2013; Visconti et al. 2010) or *consumption* of ideology (e.g. Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Izberk-Bilgin 2012). As this research demonstrates, failing to differentiate between meso level (marketized) ideologies that entail consumer co-creation and macro level (political) ideologies that structure consumption practices, results in an either/or dichotomy, thus resulting in an incomplete analysis.

Such a holistic undertaking requires that ideology be studied across three, as opposed to two levels of analysis. Importantly, while macro-micro studies always implicitly account for meso cultural production systems, a holistic study requires that these be theorized in their own right, as opposed to as uncritical champions of macro level ideologies (Sandikci and Ger 2010). Consequently, this study introduced multi-step hermeneutic analysis. And although there is much research advice on hermeneutic analysis (Arnould and Fischer 1994; Thompson 1997; Thompson, Pollio, and Locander 1994), to the best of my knowledge, there has yet to be a comprehensive study or guide on the interlinking of more than two levels of analysis in consumer research. The step-by-step guide presented in



Chapter 6 (Figure 6.2) can be implemented in other contexts and studies using a microsociological approach to theorize micro, meso, and macro level phenomena. Such an approach is particularly useful in integrating various types of data (e.g. textual and visual), ensuring that they are interpreted from the same orienting frame-of-reference.

### **9.5.3 Practical Contributions**

Although this study did not focus on the managerial implications of young women's consumption and media interpretations with regard to the contemporary feminist movement, their complex engagements and negotiations with media artifacts (advertisements) offer insight that may be relevant to marketers and advertisers hoping to target emerging adult women. However, such applications would indeed miss the point of this research entirely.

In addition to the increasing sexualization of media in general and advertising in particular (Attwood 2009; Gill 2012), stylistic elements of feminist discourse are discernible to a greater or wider extent in a variety of educational, commercial, and media settings, which constitutes at least part of the social and cultural milieu for young women in Western developed economies. The contemporary circulation of both sexualized and feminist discourses suggests that, in general, women may be less likely to object advertisers' use of sexual themes per se, but are more attentive to the gender ideologies underpinning them. Advertisers should be aware of these subtle shifts in discourse and avoid alienating their audience by offering them sexual content that is likely to be read as offensive or derogatory. Women may respond more favorably to sexual themes in advertising if they address them as empowered and autonomous.

Additionally, for some women, particularly those identifying with feminism, the heteronormative agentic subject is losing some of her symbolic impetus as a feminist representation. Therefore, advertisers might benefit by nuancing the sexually agentic subject to include more fetishistic representations (i.e. ethnic, racialized, and androgynous

women), indicating a slight departure from the ‘mainstream’ media, but still complying with the primary tenets of heteronormativity. However, because this view was primarily expressed by those identifying with the feminist social movement, advertisers should consider who their ads are targeting when employing this strategy. To this end, given the range of orientations to feminism that women draw upon in interpreting a single ad, advertisers may also benefit from using strategic ambiguity (Puntoni, Schroeder, and Ritson 2010) when using sexual imagery, since this enables marketers to appeal to diverse audience agendas by inviting them to make sense of a message in light of their particular knowledge, values, and interests.

## **9.6 Future Avenues for Research**

The pessimistic conclusions drawn in this thesis should not foreclose avenues for future research, of which there are plenty. The present research focused explicitly on young women’s relations to the contemporary feminist movement in the United States. Thus, future research could explore this phenomenon in other regions and among different populations considering various demographics. Future research could also consider distinct contexts, such as other social movements, traditional institutions, and/or macro ideologies, for example.

One particularly fruitful avenue of study would be to extend this research to young men in the U.S. to understand how a hegemonic group negotiates and interacts with the marketization of a counter-hegemony (feminism) that is not directly tailored to them. Such research would expand on this work, as well as those studies which explore groups and/or individuals inhabiting high status positions making investments in subordinate forms of cultural capital (Arsel and Thompson 2011; Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2013; Holt 1997, 2004; Kozinets 2001). Additionally, other research could focus more explicitly on meso level structures, offering, for example, a content or visual analysis of advertisements, a genealogical analysis of how contemporary feminism has been portrayed and represented in the media, as well as interviews with media, advertising

and/or creative directors. Expanding the scope would facilitate a more integrative understanding between the interested (macro, meso, and micro) linkages, accounting for the author (e.g. company persona or advertising director), the texts (e.g. advertisements), and the readers (e.g. consumers of advertising) (Stern 1989).

Other avenues of research might adopt a more critical or radical approach, using this study's revised conceptual framework as their point of departure. Such research is likely to follow a trajectory that involves a further elucidation of the problem and the identification of potential solutions. A further elucidation of the problem would entail additional critical examination of prior CCT research that elaborates on the liberatory or emancipatory effects of consumption (Arnould 2007; Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). More attention could also be given to the nuances of commodification and marketization, such as whether or not the logic of the gift is susceptible to these hegemonic forces. While prior research has claimed gifts are able to evade market logics (Belk and Coon 1993; Kozinets 2002), such claims merit further critical attention, since the gift economy nonetheless operates via the use of commodities. This was evidenced, for example, in the discussion about how the female orgasm has become embedded within a gift economy, where women are 'gifted' orgasms from their romantic partners.

The second avenue of critical research might then focus on identifying solutions with regard to how we might begin to approach the origin of oppression as opposed to focusing on continuous reforms via micro-emancipatory acts of consumption and identity deconstruction/reconstruction (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Murray and Ozanne 1991, 2006; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). These solutions might be conservative or more radical in their aim. For example, some might explore new ways of being political that go against the marketplace (Dobscha 1998; Kozinets and Handelman 1998; Ritson and Dobscha 1999), while others may adopt a more radical position, embracing new systems

of production that oppose neoliberal capitalism, such as socialism (Dean 2007; Segal 1999) and communism (Cova, Maclaran, and Bradshaw 2013).

## 9.7 Summary

Although much work in the CCT tradition frames consumption as having transgressive and liberating effects (e.g. Arnould 2007; Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Thompson and Üstüner 2015), I argue that this warrants serious critical consideration. There is a tendency, it seems, for consumer culture theorists to theorize beyond a ‘traditional trajectory’ (e.g. McCracken’s (1986) Movement of Meaning model) or structuralist approach, to instead advocate for a dialogical iterative one. In contrast, this study argues that more attention should be afforded to the cultural and social systems and structures if true emancipation is to be realized (Askegaard and Linnet 2011; Borgerson and Schroeder 2002).

The conclusions drawn in this thesis are pessimistic to say the least. Nonetheless, affording consumers political agency via their consumption practices, as so much contemporary consumption research advocates, seems misplaced and I would argue, does little to improve societal welfare. Instead, I advocate for a more radicalized politics, which theorizes oppression from a vertical rather than a horizontal standpoint. Accordingly, because power is understood as productive, pervasive, inclusive, and operative through the material structures of society, it requires a revolutionary politics that moves beyond dialogical engagements with the marketplace to combat oppression in its multiple, diversified, disaggregated, and fragmented pre-political enactments. Only then can we hope to alter the hegemonic processes that underpin and facilitate oppression in society. Only then can we hope to interrupt the processes of commodification and marketization that render traditional political institutions, including social movements, depoliticized. Any optimistic alternative, which affords social movements and consumption practices emancipatory or liberatory potential, only works to tighten the proverbial ‘chains’ that

constrict the possibility for a radicalized revolution that has the potential combat *oppression at the root*.

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**APPENDIX ONE**  
**LETTER OF CONSENT**

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THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

**Letter of Consent Form**

**Project Title**

An exploration of how women consume sex in advertising

**Researcher(s) Name(s)**

Alexandra Rome

Asrome@uark.edu

479.601.2945

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore how young-adult women read and interpret sex appeals in mainstream advertising, given their lived-experiences.

**Who is doing the research and how will it be used:** This study is for the purpose of Alexandra Rome's doctoral thesis at the University of Edinburgh Business School (within the marketing department). As such, the research will be published in a PhD thesis by the University of Edinburgh. This research is not funded by any outside organizations or persons. Secondary uses for this research might include articles, presentations, and/or books.

**What will you be asked to do in the study:** You have been asked to participate in this

study because you are a young, American woman (aged 20-35 years). This study involves multiple (around three) in-depth interviews (around 2-hours) about how you interpret sex appeals used in advertising, your lived experiences, and your thoughts and experiences about the topic of sex in general. All interviews will be audio recorded. You will also be asked to create a private Pinterest board online and/or a paper collage to be discussed with the researcher in the interviews.

**Confidentiality:** All material collected will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by the law and the University of Edinburgh's ethical policy guidelines. Only the primary researcher (Alexandra Rome) will have access to the full raw data collected. Thus, while the appointed supervisors will have access to the interview analysis and minor sections of the raw data, the primary researcher will be the only one with full access to the raw interview data. An alias will be used in place of your name and/or any other identifier markers in any articles, reports, presentations, and/or published documents. While consent is required by the researcher, no link between the participant's signed consent and the data collected will be made.

All raw data (i.e. transcripts, audio recordings) will be stored in a password-protected computer in a password-protected document.

Material gathered during this research will be anonymous, so it is impossible to trace back to you. It will be securely stored for five years.

**Risks, Benefits, and Compensation:** The only anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study is that you could experience some discomfort with some of the interview questions, however, you are not required to answer any questions of which you do not wish. As a benefit, in addition to your general contribution to new knowledge, your participation could help marketers be both more effective and ethical when targeting young-female consumers using sex appeal. In lieu of your time you will be compensated with a small gift.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You

are free to withdraw your consent to participate and/or discontinue your participation at any time for any reason without consequence.

**Whom to contact if you have questions about this study:** If you have questions about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Alexandra Rome, at any time. Alternatively, you can contact the faculty advisor, Dr. Jeff Murray (Jmurray@walton.uark.edu; Office phone: 479-575-5115).



### Consent

The purpose of this form is to ensure that you are willing to take part in this study and to let you understand what it entails. Signing this document does not commit you to anything and you are free to withdraw at any stage.

I have read and understood the information sheet.  Yes  No

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the study.  Yes  No

I have had my questions answered satisfactorily.  Yes  No

I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without having to give an explanation.  Yes  No

I understand that my data, once processed, will be anonymous and that only the researcher will have access to the raw data which will be kept confidential.  Yes  No

I understand that my data will be stored for a period of 5 years before being destroyed.  Yes  No

I have been made fully aware of the potential risks associated with this research and am satisfied with the information provided.  Yes  No

I agree to take part in the study.  Yes  No

Letter of Consent

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Participation in this research is completely voluntary and your consent is required before you can participate in this research.

**Name in Block Capitals**

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**Signature**

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**Date**

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## APPENDIX TWO

### SELECTED MAGAZINE DEMOGRAPHICS (2013)

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<i>Magazine</i>	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Circulation</i>	<i>Gender Statistics</i>	<i>Age Statistics</i>	<i>Education Statistics</i>
<i>Cosmopolitan</i>	March and February 2014	<b>Subscriptions</b> (including digital and newsstand): 2,120,000  <b>Single Copy:</b> 895,000	Women 85.1%  Men: 14.9%	Media Age: 34.7  Emerging Adults: (18-34): 56.1%	Attended/ Graduated College+: 66.3%
<i>Vogue</i>	February 2014	<b>Subscriptions</b> (including digital and newsstand): 977,025  <b>Single Copy:</b> 269,740	Women: 88% Men: 12%	Median age: 37.8  Emerging Adults: N/A	N/A
<i>InStyle</i>	February 2014	<b>Subscriptions</b> (including digital and newsstand): 1,340,000  <b>Single Copy:</b> 470,000	Women: 91.8% Men: 8.2%	Median Age: 38  Emerging Adults: (18-34): 42.7	Single/Wid/Di v/Sep: 50.9% Married: 49.1%

Selected Magazine Demographics (2013)

<i>Harper's Baazar</i>	December 2013	<b>Subscriptions</b> (including digital and newsstand): 719,715  <b>Single Copy:</b> 127,971	Women: 92.2% Men: 7.8%	Median Age: 45.7  Emerging Adults: (18- 34): 27.7%	Single: 29.8% Married: 46.7%
	December 2013	<b>Subscriptions</b> (including digital and newsstand): 464,415  <b>Single Copy:</b> 40,148	Women: 30% Men: 70%	Median Age: 34  Emerging Adults: (18- 34): 56.1%  Ages 25-49: 72%	Single: 58% Married: 42%
<i>GQ</i>	January 2014	<b>Subscriptions</b> (including digital and newsstand): 804,169  <b>Single Copy:</b> 160,095	Women: 27% Men: 73%	Median Age: 33.3  Emerging Adults: N/A	Single: 68% Married: 32%

**Sources:** Cosmopolitan (2014), Details (2014), Harper's Bazaar (2014), Instyle (2014), GQ (2014), Vogue (2014)

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## APPENDIX THREE

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

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#### 3.1 Sample Interview Transcript One: Advertising Interpretations

**Date:** March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014

**Place:** University Conference Room

**Selected Magazine:** ‘*Cosmopolitan*’, February 2014

<b>Alex</b>	<b>Cool. Um so basically the first interview is, um, kind of just to get a sense of- or it’s about advertising more or less and then the second interview will be more about your kind of sexual narrative. Um, and so... basically before we get started, I don’t know you, so I will ask you to tell me a little bit about yourself.</b>
Informant	Okay.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Maybe how you got to [REDACTED]</b>
Informant	Yeah, um, so, my name is [REDACTED], as you know. I go by [REDACTED] for short though cause [REDACTED] is just too much of a mouthful. And um, I got here because I was a... a very free spirit – I still am in a weird way – um, but I was dating someone that was from, or was living in [REDACTED] but they were from [REDACTED] and they had family here. And I lived in [REDACTED] at the time and, you know, he just drove over every once in awhile. And you know, one time we were talking about college and where I’d go after this, because we were in a relationship for two years. And I was like, oh, I got some places, and he’s just like, well, why not [REDACTED], I have family there. And I was like, there’s nothing in [REDACTED], but I’ll check it out. And uh I did and I fell in love with it, surprisingly. And then... I realized that, you know, we were teenagers and that we were “madly in love” and I said, you know what, I like this school a lot, but I’m going to go for me regardless of what happens to us. And lo and behold, two months before I got here

## Sample Interview Transcripts

	I broke up with the guy, so that happened. Uh, but in the weird way I made the best of this experience. In the end, I got involved in student government and, you know, I do a lot of things on campus, community service, volunteer-volunteerism, whatever, same thing. Uh, and so I feel like in a weird way that's helped me to kind of get to where I need to be, and I'm thankful for that, but we don't talk anymore. I haven't said a word to him in like three years. Um, but I'm thankful that he got me here. So that happened.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>So when did you move here?</b>
Informant	I moved here the summer, August 2010, and we had broken up in June. And uh, I- My mom came down here with me and she was here for three days and helped move me in and then she peaced out and went back to [REDACTED].
<b>Alex</b>	<b>How- how old were you?</b>
Informant	I was 18.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Eighteen. So you just finished high school.</b>
Informant	Mm hm (yes), just finished it.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>And you came down here with the purpose of going to University of [REDACTED].</b>
Informant	Yep.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Okay. And, um what's your major?</b>
Informant	Communication, and I minor in Political Science.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Okay. And what do you want to do after you graduate?</b>
Informant	You know, I've been thinking about that and... I have- I mean, I don't have a plan, so far. I have options in place, cause I feel like nothing ever goes according to plan in life. Um, but I looked at graduate school, I applied to one graduate school that I want to go to and I'm supposed to hear back before April. I'm still waiting on that letter of acceptance, but if it doesn't happen...
<b>Alex</b>	<b>What school is that?</b>
Informant	Oh, [REDACTED]. I want to do my Master's in Public Administration and kind of do public service stuff, because I've been in student government for like seven years, and that's all I've been doing and I really love it. Um and I was like, why not, you know, take up that dream and work for a community that's on a lot bigger level. And so I'm thinking about doing that. Um, if I don't get accepted though, I realize it's not the end of the world. People go to graduate school when they're like 50. Um, and I was just telling someone about this, I want to take a gap year because I've been going to school since I was two and I'm tired. Um, my mom understands that and she gets it. And so I basically said, I will take a break, I will do whatever I want this year, whether it's traveling or working at [REDACTED] forever – I'm just kidding – for maybe like another year,

Sample Interview Transcripts

	<p>it may feel like forever though. Um, or just kind of, you know, lollygag and maybe I'll just be a waitress for a year and just see what happens. But you know, there's- I realize that there's no rush and that's so comforting. And I've been hard on myself all my life to be an achiever and to do well and I have trophies in the box to prove it, but that doesn't mean anything to me. And so it's just like, you know what, just take it easy. Just relax and do what you want for a while, cause I realize I'm doing a lot of things that I have to do in my life right now and not enough things that I want to do. So it's like, chill out, just do what I want.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<b>What do you want to do?</b>
Informant	<p>Um, I- If I could do what I want to do tomorrow morning, it would be to pack a backpack and to just backpack around the world. That would be it. If I can do that, I would- I'd be the happiest person, um cause I feel like there's just so much that I haven't seen. And to be able to remove myself from, you know, belonging to a specific group or from a specific society, I feel like I'd be able to learn a lot more and interact with people and connect, and you know, disconnect and experience life on different levels. And I think that'd be so beautiful to just kind of be a nomad for you know, like a year or two years and just kind of explore. And, you know, maybe I'll do that when I retire or when I'm 30 or something, I dunno, but. I know that at some point in my life I want to do that. Whether it's for a year or a week or whatever. I want to do that at some point.</p>
<p><b>40:31</b></p>	
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Okay. Do you have any general opinions about sex in advertising?</b>
Informant	<p>Um... I feel like it can be negative in a lot of ways. Um, I don't think we do a very good representation of sexuality in media in general. Um and so I feel like this is what people take and say, oh this is what sex is like or oh this is what it should be like, you know. My body should be glistening when I'm done- like no one... um and so it's very glamorized in a weird way. Um, and I can see where it's clever in saying you know everybody wants sex so we'll sell sex, but at the same time it's not always- it's not always good for the consumer. Um, so it's my two pieces on it, or my two cents on it.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Okay and do you have any other examples that come to your mind when I say sex in advertising?</b>
Informant	<p>Um, I can think of like a few ads that are like that, most of them are commercials, um for example, the Old Spice ad. Uh, but that's, that's such- that's such a, I forget his name, he's a football player. Um...</p>



Sample Interview Transcripts

<b>Alex</b>	<b>The one who's on a horse?</b>
Informant	Yeah, that guy, you know like- again, it's not like overly sexually, but you still like look at my smooth voice and you know this sounds sexy and like you know you know you want this, and, you know, I'm gonna be this romantic man, but I'm still sexy and you still want me. Um, and of course I was raving over those for the longest time, cause I was like oh my God this is the perfect commercial for women, cause you know, they're- it was so clever cause they're tapping into a market that they don't have to sell to. You know, usually they target men, but like guys are like, I don't care, I might want to smell bad all day and I don't give a damn about deodorant. But you know, they're like, let's sell this to women who will buy this for the men. And I was like, wow, that's- that's clever advertising.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yeah.</b>
Informant	Um, again, is it good for women and men? Maybe not so much. Um, I can think of another ad like with a- they're with deodorants apparently, uh like the Axe ones where you know, there's this guy that's always, like you know, being chased after women. Um, and you know like- so there are things like that. Um, I'm trying to think of other examples.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Do you like those ads? Did you like them?</b>
Informant	Um, the Old Spice one I can get on board with cause it's kind of- it's really funny, um and it's super campy and so I feel like it makes it okay. But like... you know I can see a middle school boy like watching an Axe commercial and being like, 'yeah, I'm going to get this,' you know. Um, and I've seen examples of that like shown in cartoon shows, where like the guys will buy deodorant and they'll spray it on their bodies thinking all the girls are going to love this, and they don't. Um, and you know, so that's- those are really the two examples I can think of right now.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Okay. So what I'll have you do with this magazine then is just flip through it and um any of the ads that you think represent sex in advertising or that don't represent sex in advertising – or no, only the ones that represent sex in advertising that you think are either sexy or not sexy or if you have any opinion on them just kind of tell me about it. Think of it as like word vomit.</b>
Informant	Okay. Does it have to be for a specific ad or can it be something like this where there's nothing attached to it but clothing? Does that make sense?
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Um, no I mean, do you want to know if you like- you should talk about the copy?</b>
Informant	What do you mean by the copy?
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Like this stuff?</b>
Informant	Yeah.

Sample Interview Transcripts

<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yeah, no, just the advertisements. So like literally like anything you think is sexy, is not sexy, whatever just comes to your mind.</b>
Informant	Okay.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Does that kind of make sense?</b>
Informant	Yeah.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yeah, okay. Yeah, so just like flip through it and then anytime you want to stop. And I'm going to write down the ads that you talk about.</b>
Informant	Well, here's one, here's a start. Um so this is a Cover Girl ad. Um and here the woman is laying, it looks like, maybe she's just tilting her head, but I imagined her laying down, that's what I saw first. Um, and I feel like her lips are slightly apart and she, I dunno, I feel like her look here is almost, I don't want to say coy, but... I dunno, it's very... hm, I don't think it's overtly- it's very subtly sexual, if that makes any sense. You know like, uh her lips are very plump and she maybe... I don't want to say aroused, but like, she's it's flirty, you know and it's, it's, it's almost like a come hither look, that's better, that's what I'm looking for.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yeah, and do you like the ad?</b>
Informant	I mean... it's okay. I mean, like I don't love it. Nothing really sticks out to me about it that is just like, oh I- like go buy Cover Girl now, you know. Um, so not really special to me in any way.
<b>53:00</b>	
Informant	Uh... I have a thing for older guys. I don't think I said that before.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>No.</b>
Informant	Uh, nope. But uh I'd say I find this sexy in a weird way. Um, I also think cigarettes are sexy – I know I shouldn't but there's something about them, that's like- this is a habit that I shouldn't have.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Do you smoke?</b>
Informant	I- no, not regularly. I mean like once in a blue moon. But um... nah.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Does your boyfriend smoke?</b>
Informant	He does smoke. Um, yeah, that's... He wants to quit at some point but I'm like, you should quit soon, like even though I find this attractive and I know that you know that I find it attractive, you should probably stop soon. Um, and he's been smoking for like three years I think. Um, that doesn't make it okay, but you know. Like there was one

Sample Interview Transcripts

	<p>night where I was leaving my friend's house and like he was there to pick me up and like it was dark outside, the moonlight was shining just right, and he just got off work and you know, I saw that little light from the cigarette as he was inhaling and he just pushed his hair back and I was just like, yeah, that's really hot, that's really hot.</p>
<p><b>1:08:12</b></p>	
<b>Alex</b>	<p><b>Okay, perfect. Um so the next, the kind of the last part, um is I just have a couple ads. Um and I'll just have you do like a couple different exercises with them. Um, but the first thing I'm going to do is kind of lay them all out and then if any ads kind of stand out to you for any reason, just pick them out and kind of tell me about them or tell me what you think about them</b></p>
Informant	<p>Okay.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<p><b>Okay. So. Do any of these ads stand out to you in particular?</b></p>
Informant	<p>Uh, quite a few of them do. Um, each in their own different ways. Um...</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<p><b>Well, which ones... I don't know, which ones stand out the most?</b></p>
Informant	<p>The most? Uh, I would say... this one here.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<p><b>This Versace ad?</b></p>
Informant	<p>Yep, and this Dolce and Gabbana ad here.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<p><b>Can you tell me a little bit about the Versace ad?</b></p>
Informant	<p>Um, well, I feel this is very sexy in like a queer sort of way, which we haven't seen a lot of. Um, you've got potential for a threesome and you've got some super muscly guys with a – oh this is gonna sound so- this is gonna sound so bad – um, but I feel like these guys may potentially even be bi at some point or would like to explore, be bi-curious maybe even. Um, and you know, they're both like, this guy here's holding his crotch almost and holding this guy's leg here, and she's touching his back, um and he's looking up at her and he's down here on the floor. So it's like also a power play almost here, um and I feel like there's almost a potential for a threesome, almost, and so, um and it's okay. Like- well as in like them being accepting of that, if you will. Um, and so that kind of stands out to me.</p>
<p><b>1:27:54</b></p>	
<b>Alex</b>	<p><b>Okay... So now what I'm going to do is kind of just show you three sets of ads and then you're going to tell me which one doesn't fit. And then... So let's see. The</b></p>

Sample Interview Transcripts

	<b>Cavalli one, which you said you didn't like. This Versace one and... okay and the Dolce and Gabbana ad. Okay, so it's the Cavalli, the Versace and the Dolce and Gabbana where she's wearing the crown. So out of these three ads, which one doesn't fit?</b>
Informant	I feel like this one here.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>The Dolce and Gabbana with the crown?</b>
Informant	Yeah, and the reason why is because I feel like there are these men that are surrounding here and she almost looks like she doesn't want the attention or she's too good for the attention, whereas I feel like these women here are at least desiring it, you know. Um, so... I don't know, I feel like I've been in this situation before. Uh...
<b>Alex</b>	<b>In this Dolce and Gabbana situation?</b>
Informant	Yeah, where there's just- like you're being crowded and you like, I mean, she almost looks uncomfortable here. Um, and maybe that's just me putting interp- like putting that into face, but I just, I dunno, like I just- I look at this and I tensed up just looking at it, you know, for her, cause I can imagine like, I don't know, I just, I feel like that'd be- that's a lot of almost unwanted attention. But then she's sitting down too, and I just realized that. I thought she was standing up. Um, so I don't know.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>When have you felt like that? You said you were in a situation like that.</b>
Informant	Um, gosh, like when I've been approached by a guy that's just like you know, dropped like a really awful one liner or you know like was just staring at me, and I'm like, do I have something on my face, is something wrong with me, is it because I'm [REDACTED], like what is happening right now, like why are you staring at me. And, you know, I don't... I don't think I'm that pretty where people have like gape at me sometimes and it makes me feel uncomfortable. Um and I feel like there's like a level of discomfort here to some extent, you know.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>So this ad makes you feel uncomfortable?</b>
Informant	Yeah. At least for her, for her I feel uncomfortable.
1:51:05	

### 3.2 Sample Interview Transcript Two: Sexual Narrative

**Date:** March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014

**Place:** Restaurant

Alex	<p><b>Good, so it's recording. Um, so I guess the first thing we can do is pull up your Pinterest, if you want.</b></p> <p><b>Okay, um did you write the captions or no?</b></p>
Informant	Oh, no I didn't. No.
Alex	<p><b>Okay, no problem. No one ever does, I just have to check, because if you did then I'll use that as well, but if not, it's no problem. Okay, so why don't you just um, talk me through- tell me about your Pinterest board.</b></p>
Informant	<p>Okay, so um I was looking for physical characteristics and I realized that that wasn't what always attracted me. And I realized as the more I went into it, it was things about these people that I admired that really interested me the most, like that's what I found sexually attractive. And so if you look, I started down here with like [REDACTED], um and the reason why I like him so much is he's probably one of the first actors I found that was very human and very genuine about his job and what he does. He's very passionate about everything, you know. He's got his own company called [REDACTED] and like he does, like he's filming movies now and he's a director. I mean, he loves what he does and it's so beautiful and I was like, that is hot. Like that is, like... Anyway.</p>
Alex	<b>Um, in this picture where he's smoking...</b>
Informant	Yeah.
Alex	<b>Oh okay, that's because you- is that why you chose that picture?</b>
Informant	Yeah. Um, but you know, that's what appealed to me so much about him. Also I realized that a while ago that I love forehead wrinkles in guys.
Alex	<b>Forehead wrinkles.</b>
Informant	Yes, it's the most unusual thing .
<b>15:00</b>	
Informant	Um, so, um I picked [REDACTED] too because one of the reasons, I mean like I was initially attracted to him when I saw him, I think in [REDACTED], like when I was like 14 or

Sample Interview Transcripts

	something. Um, and it was the second- it was a sequel for the movie. And uh, I thought he was really...
<b>Alex</b>	<b>I saw that actually.</b>
Informant	It's, it's interesting, I kinda wish they'd made a third one, but I'm happy they didn't. Um, anyway, it's worth watching I think, um. Anyway, but he was in the second one, he was really pretty, and I remember like he was probably one of my first celebrity crushes. Um, but like what really like sold me was I was watching this like interview because I do this sometimes, I like when I have free time and I have nothing better to do with my life, I watch interviews of people online and he was talking about how he cried so easily.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Cried.</b>
Informant	Yeah, he cries all the time. Like watching movies, when people say things, he just cries, he just lets it go. And I was like, that is, that is really sweet, you know. Like, I like a man that can cry. And I was like, If you're that in touch with your emotions it makes me, you know, feel like it's okay to be vulnerable. And that- I thought that was really attractive, you know, be like a man that cries, like that's a good feeling.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yeah. Have you ever experienced that in real life?</b>
Informant	Um, you mean as in me crying in front of someone or as in, like watching?
<b>Alex</b>	<b>With them crying.</b>
Informant	Um, I have seen a few men cry. Um, what's interesting is that like I never felt bad for them. And it's... um like for example, my friend uh, [REDACTED], like he was struggling with like a- like this girl that he was seeing awhile ago. Um, I mean, this was like freshman year of college. And um, I mean, you know, he like took her on and he like really tried to help her and found out she was pregnant, and like before- I mean like it wasn't his baby though. Um, and then she miscarried and like he was carrying all of this weight on him. And I mean apparently she wasn't, she wasn't very emotionally stable either. And then his brother was really sick, he had an aneurism and like all this stuff was just happening, he didn't know how to deal with it and so he was crying one night, and I was just like, I'm going to be strong for you, but this is life and it's going to throw you around, you've gotta, you've gotta toughen up and you've gotta move on, you know, and like you gotta take it as it comes, and... This is just from years of like having to deal with the equally same crazy stuff, you know, and I was like this is life and it happens and I'm sorry this is happening right now. Um, if you want me to do something for you I can, but like, I'm not gonna sit here and pity you cause it's not going to make you feel better about yourself. Um, you know, and like he cried it out, and then you know, it was like, what do you want to do now? And he's like, well, I think I'm gonna go home and then I'll think about it some

Sample Interview Transcripts

	<p>more tomorrow, and you know, it wasn't anything super revolutionary, but like, you know... I think it was probably one of the first times I saw like a guy cry in front of me, just like let it all out. And um, again, it was beautiful, but like I didn't feel, like I didn't feel sorry for him or anything. It was like, like I don't know, it made me- it made him more human in my eyes though.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<p><b>So do you think there's a difference between, you know, this celebrity saying he cries versus it happening in real life?</b></p>
Informant	<p>Um, no, I don't think so. I mean, no. I will say that I was initially attracted to [REDACTED] for awhile, um... but I don't know, like I feel like if my boyfriend cried right now in front of me cause he's never done it before, like I- I would probably be more attracted to him as a result. I think that that is something that's very beautiful and you know, like cause I don't feel like men get the chance to let that out. I mean, they have to be strong, masculine, and tough all the time and do it all and like, you don't have to do that with me. You don't have to do that with me, you know, if you need to let it go, let it go. Um, and so for someone to be- for a man of his stature to be – for [REDACTED], which is what I'm saying – for him to be able to be vulnerable as someone that is in a position where people to look up to him, I think that's precious, you know that's beautiful in my eyes. And I mean, I would like for whoever I choose to be with for the rest of my life at some point to be able to be open with me to that extent, you know.</p>
<p><b>1:14:32</b></p>	
Informant	<p>Yeah. Yeah, it does. Um... but, yeah. And then we kind of went into other positions, like I mean, like spooning, which I like a lot. Um, I- I realize I like being physically close to him, like whenever we're having sex. Like I don't like the distance. And I like to be able to look at him and, you know. I also like his shoulders a lot cause he's so tall and I have to like look up at him when I see him. And I don't know, it's, it's weird.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<p><b>So which position is your favorite?</b></p>
Informant	<p>Um... With this one in particular, I like it when – this is kind of weird – but like, I'll let my head like hang off the bed a little bit, and so there's a lot- like a lot of blood rush going on. Um, and I'll have my legs up, like either around his neck or around his back. Um, and I dunno, I like that a lot. Um... my other, well the other one I like the most – oh I take that back, I take that back, I take that back. So, that one's probably the most pleasurable, physically, but the one I like most emotionally, which is what really gets me, um is like</p>

## Sample Interview Transcripts

	when I'm facing him and... I dunno, I dunno if there's like a special name for it, but like when we're kind of both sitting in each other's laps, if you will.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yeah, you're like on top of his...</b>
Informant	Yeah, yeah. Um, and there's just something like when I'm facing him that like really like makes me like feel like anxious and have butterflies and I'm just like, I like that a lot. Um... with that proximity and being able to look at him and I dunno...
<b>1:48:33</b>	
Informant	Yeah, you know, yeah. And I tell him that a lot, I'll be like if you wanna do something, like we can try it, like don't be afraid to bring it up. Um, maybe- I feel like I'm the more adventurous one with sex though.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yeah, I was going to ask you that.</b>
Informant	Yeah, way more adventurous.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>And um, when do you, like what occasions might you bring out your- the toys?</b>
Informant	Whenever I feel like it.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Is it often?</b>
Informant	Uh, no. I mean, like... not in comparison to how often I used to use them. Um...
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yeah, but you always used- or you used them with him in situations, right?</b>
Informant	Yes.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yes, or he uses them on you?</b>
Informant	Mm hm [yes].
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Is that how it works?</b>
Informant	Yeah that's- that's a fair description. He's been watching me though, which also has happened before.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Okay. How does that feel for you?</b>
Informant	I like it, I mean, I like- I feel like I'm very into voyeurism.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Very what?</b>
Informant	Voyeurism, watching people during sex. Um and by like someone watching me, like that's- I've always been like- I've- I dunno, that's always kind of turned me on in a weird way. Um, I don't know why, but.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>What about pornography?</b>
Informant	Um, I used to watch it a lot and then I kind of, after like reading, I used to... [SIGH] I dunno, like after reading some stuff and like with going- like I used to- I read a book about



## Sample Interview Transcripts

	<p>like pornography and like after seeing it put in that framework and like how it's hurtful for both men and women in a lot of different ways, I was like, wow, like this actually really sucks, you know. Um, so it's kinda like finding things that are more healthy that I like. Um, cause I can see that- myself doing those things as well. Um, and not realizing that I'm doing it. And it's just kinda like...</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<b>What do you mean?</b>
Informant	<p>Like... I'm trying to think of a good example. So this book is called <i>The Purity Myth</i>, um and there's a section in it where it talks about like uh pornography for like two or three chapters and like it'll talk about the way the video is kind of like chopped- like chopped them into body parts, you know, um and that's not that all that women are, you know. Um, or like how men are like that, where they're just kind of chopped into different body parts and there was no- there's lack of respect there and there was like a lot of... [SIGH] And so what I kinda- what I struggle with the most is like knowing if these women wanted this or if this is something that they're- that's being done to them, whether it was done for money, whether it was trafficking, you know, and that didn't sit well with me and so I can't bring myself to watch it anymore because it seems unethical now. Um, I'm not saying all porn is bad, but like I can't find anything that I like anymore.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Okay, when did you stop watching it?</b>
Informant	<p>Oh, maybe like... a year and a half ago, at most. Um, and like really what- I'll like revisit it every once in a while, like, like that happened- when I was home alone like back in [REDACTED], and I was like, I think I'll like look at some porn for a little while since no one's here, you know. Um, and it was okay, and then I was like, ugh I felt bad afterwards, it's like, I don't like this anymore. And it was kinda like a sinking, guilt feeling, and I was like no, we can't do this, no.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Would you watch it to like masturbate to it or would you just watch it?</b>
Informant	<p>Both, you know. It was like, I'd watch it just to watch it and then watch it to masturbate sometimes and it was just like, I dunno, it wasn't... both times I didn't feel very good, you know.</p>
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Okay. What kind of porn did you watch?</b>
Informant	<p>Um... I won't say aggressive, but like... it was very, I mean it was a variety, but usually it was just like threesome porn. And so, it was just like a lot of... hm... like I feel like, there wasn't a lot of respect for the woman in a lot of them. And I realized that it was this like this- like after looking at it, I was like, I don't like how this is and it's almost like sex was happening to her and not so much that she was enjoying it, you know. I mean, if she was, I like- I was under the assumption that she did, but then like after thinking about it some</p>

## Sample Interview Transcripts

	<p>more on a more intellectual level, I was like maybe this is something she has to do, you know. Um, maybe she doesn't- like if she's doing it cause she likes it, sure, that's great, but like I will never know. Um, so there's- there are those big questions there where it's just like, I don't know what's happening, I'll never have the answers to them and it just made me really uncomfortable like to think about. Um...</p>
<p><b>1:53:52</b></p>	
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Do you use, um birth control?</b>
Informant	I do. Yeah.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>What do you use?</b>
Informant	Um just protect- what do you mean, like just like, oh, as in- I use a pill, sorry, I was like do- what do you mean, like what method? Like what type of pill?
<b>Alex</b>	<b>Yeah, that's what I mean, the method.</b>
Informant	Yeah, a pill.
<b>Alex</b>	<b>A pill. Condoms as well or no?</b>
Informant	<p>Um, I used to use condoms originally, um and birth control and then I kind of felt more comfortable like having sex without it. Um, and... I dunno, I kinda still struggle with like, this is not okay, this is okay, this is not okay, this is okay. Um, cause I feel there are dangers there that I don't know about like, you know. Um, like for example, I asked him to get tested a while ago and like he- he's very lazy to do things he has to do. Like he won't change his windshield wipers or get his car checked or go get tested or go see a doctor about like a bump he has on his back, he doesn't wanna do it. Um, so not, I guess, immediate needs to him or they're not very important to him. And with me, they are. And so, like I was like you should go do this if we're going to keep doing this. And he's like, well whatever you have you might- like whatever I have you have it now, so that's not a good thing to say, that's really shitty actually. Um, and so actually I scheduled myself to go get tested this week. Um, I think I'm doing it Wednesday morning. Um, just to make sure that I'm okay. And I think, I'm pretty sure I am, but, you know, just to make sure it's nothing that's serious. Um, but like, I dunno, it's kinda like figure out like what to- how to feel with not having a condom because I felt like it was so important and for me to just kind of forego it one night, I was like I don't care, you know, like I'm on birth control, and like, as long as we're with each other, it's okay. Um, but to make sure that I'm still healthy and you know. And if anything that's happening down here is not okay, then we should get it taken care of fast.</p>

## Sample Interview Transcripts

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Alex	<b>Yeah. So he doesn't- he's not going to get tested? You're just gonna get tested.</b>
Informant	Um, he's not skipping to get tested, how about that. I mean, I feel like he will, eventually if I pester him enough, but he's not going to go do it any time soon I don't think.
2:25:48	

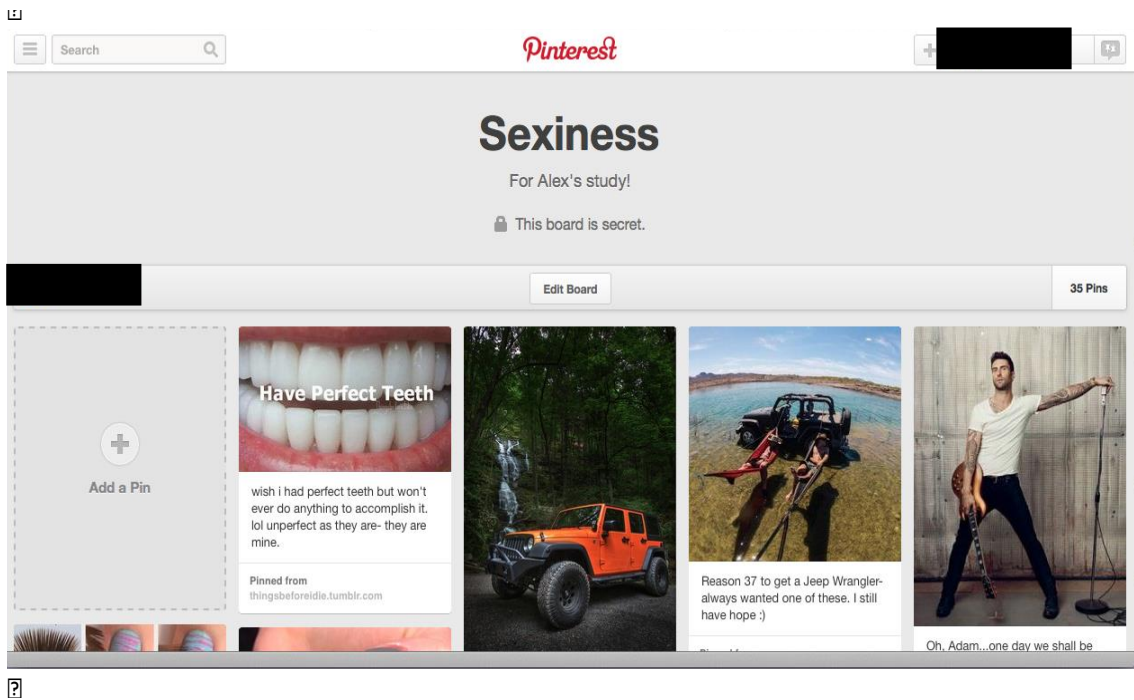
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## APPENDIX FOUR

### SAMPLE VISUAL COLLAGE (COMPLETE)

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**Medium:** Pinterest (did not write captions)

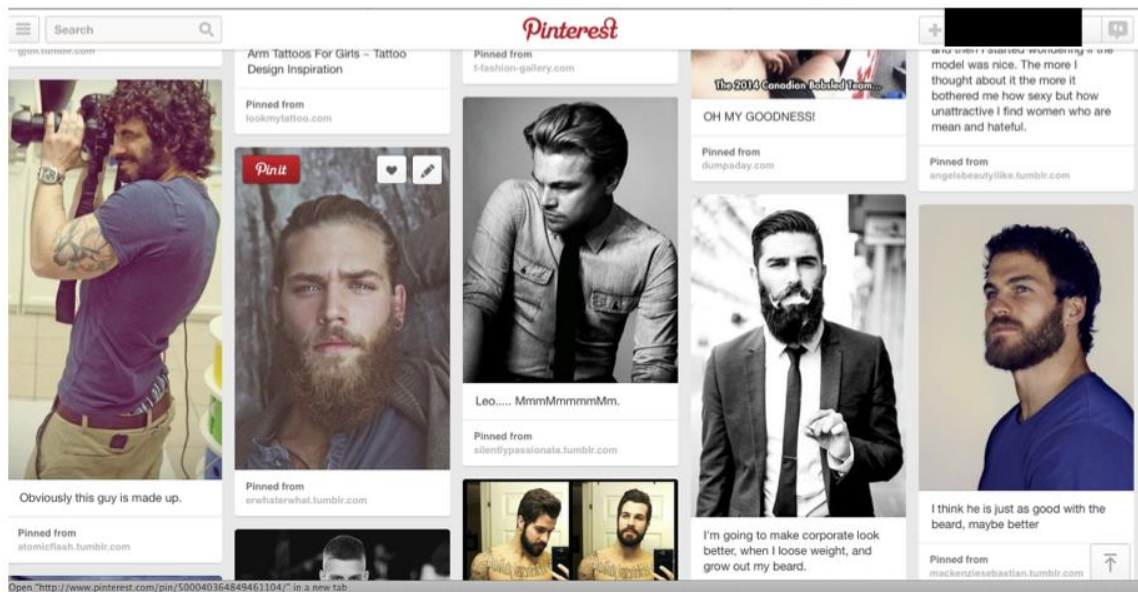
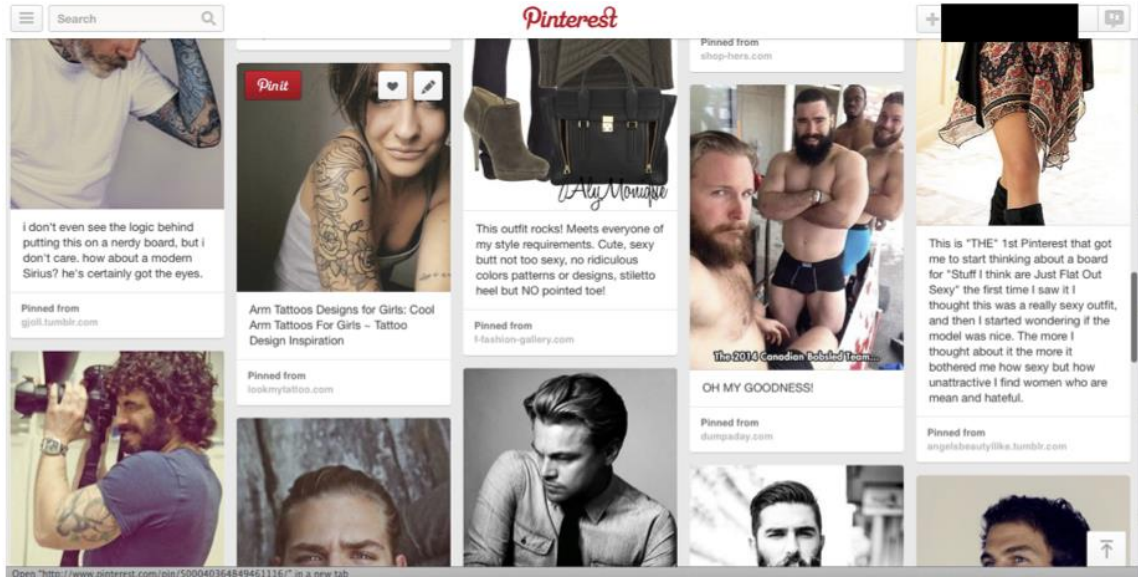


# Sample Visual Collage (Complete)

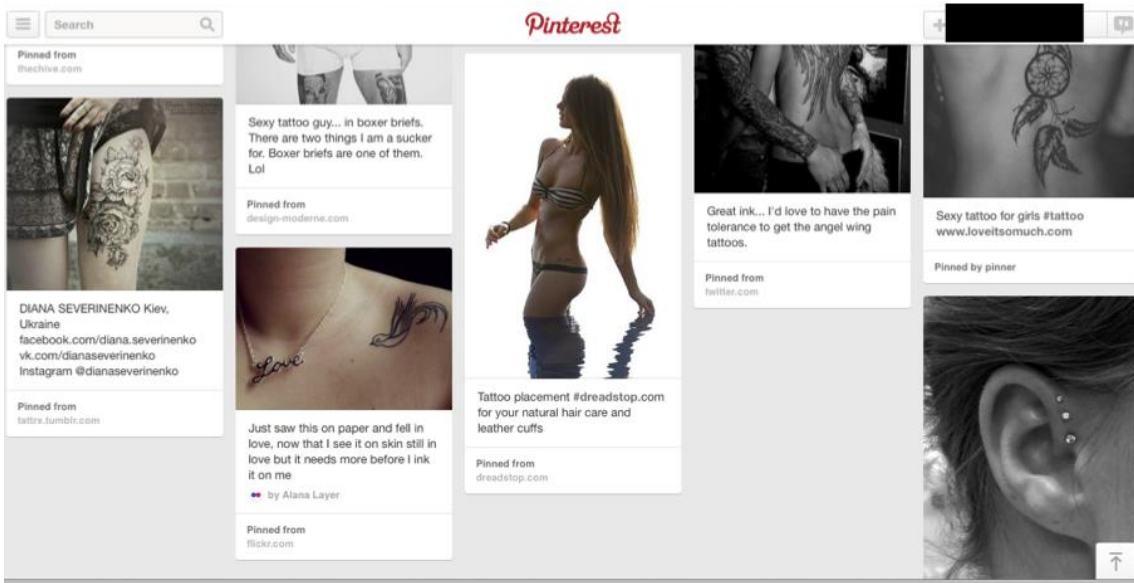
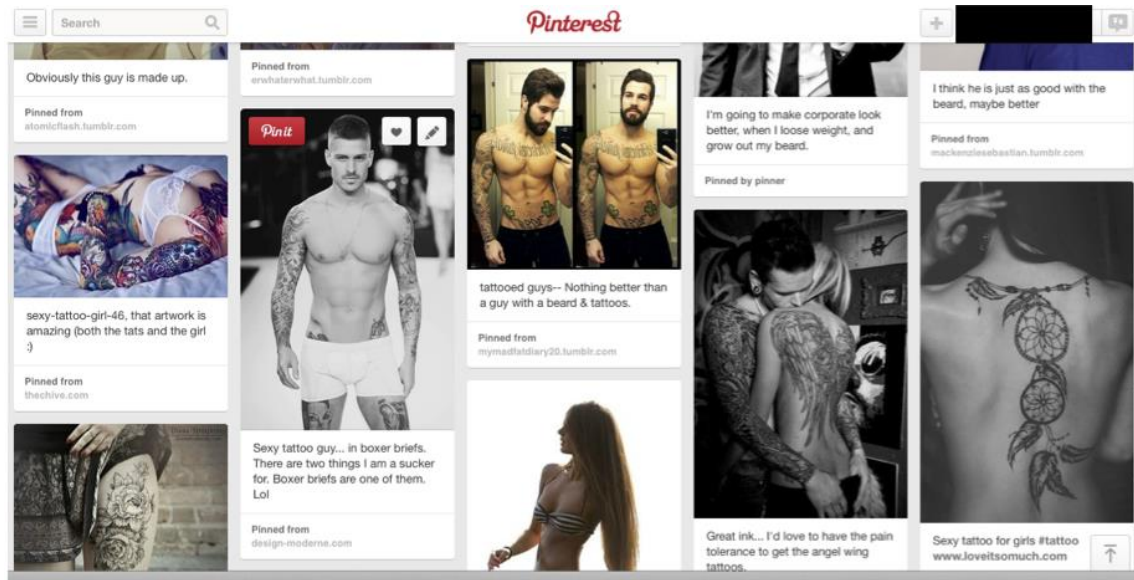
This Pinterest board features a variety of Halloween-themed content. It includes close-up images of dramatic eye makeup, such as Harley Quinn's look and a 'sexy vampire' look with red glitter. Fashion items include a black lace underwire long-line bra, a white backless top, and a purple lace mini dress with an open back. The board also contains abstract black and orange patterns and a blue lace top. Text overlays include 'sexy!', 'Halloween Make-Up', and 'This would be awesome for halloween!'. Source attributions like 'Pinned from weheartit.com' and 'Pinned from blog.birshbox.com' are visible. A URL at the bottom reads: 'Open "http://www.pinterest.com/pin/500040364849461179/" in a new tab'.

This Pinterest board is titled 'goth 90's' and features a mix of fashion and lifestyle images. It includes a 'Malevolence Harness Crop Top sexy bondage' by MaliceApparel on Etsy for \$58.00, a 'Surfer girl Hawaii T-shirt top laddered Hawaiian halter army green cut beach...', and a 'Surfer girl Hawaii Tshirt top laddered Hawaiian' by KittyLovesLou for \$19.00. Fashion items shown include a black bra, a dark long-sleeved top with a white corset-style bodice, a black handbag, and a black cardigan over a patterned dress. There are also photos of a man with tattoos and a woman with tattoos. Text overlays include 'I love this look even if I can't get away with wearing no bra.' and 'This outfit rocks! Meets everyone of my style requirements. Cute, sexy but not too sexy, no ridiculous colors patterns or designs, stiletto heel but NO pointed toe!'. A URL at the bottom reads: 'Open "http://www.pinterest.com/pin/500040364849461133/" in a new tab'.

# Sample Visual Collage (Complete)



# Sample Visual Collage (Complete)





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## APPENDIX FIVE

### SEXUALITY THEMES IN CORE ADVERTISEMENTS

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Ad Brand	Product	Campaign Date	Sexual Themes
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Alexander McQueen</b></p> 	<p>Fashion Label</p>	<p>Spring/ Summer 2013</p>	<p>Bondage Sadomasochism Sexually desiring female Active female</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Bottega Veneta</b></p> 	<p>Fashion Label</p>	<p>Spring/ Summer 2013</p>	<p>Strangers Exotic/ public places</p>

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## Sexuality Themes in Core Advertisements

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<p><b>Cesare and Paciotti</b></p> 	<p>Fashion Label</p>	<p>Spring/ Summer 2013</p>	<p>Love Romance Heterosexuality Oral sex Sexually desired female</p>
<p><b>Chanel</b></p> 	<p>Fashion Label</p>	<p>Spring/Summer 2013</p>	<p>Homosexuality Androgyny Transvestism</p>
<p><b>Dolce and Gabbana (1)</b></p> 	<p>Fashion Label</p>	<p>Spring/Summer 2013</p>	<p>Group sex Homosexuality Sexually desired female Active female Religious Iconoclasm</p>

Sexuality Themes in Core Advertisements

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**Dolce and Gabbana (2)**



Perfume and  
Cologne

Spring/Summer  
2013

Lust  
Passion  
Heterosexuality  
Exotic Places

**Dolce and Gabbana (3)**



Fashion  
Label

Spring/Summer  
2007

Gang Rape  
Voyeurism  
Passive female  
Active males

**Gucci**



Fashion  
Label

Spring/Summer  
2013

Heteroflexible  
indications  
(lesbianism  
captured in  
heteronormativity)

## Sexuality Themes in Core Advertisements

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### Giorgio Armani



Cologne

Fall/Winter 2012  
and Spring/  
Summer 2013

Sexualized male  
Passive female  
Heterosexuality

### Guess



Fashion  
Label

Spring/ Summer  
2013

Sexualized male  
Metrosexuality  
Could be targeted  
to females, but  
also a homosexual  
male audience  
Exotic Places

### Juicy Couture



Fashion  
Label

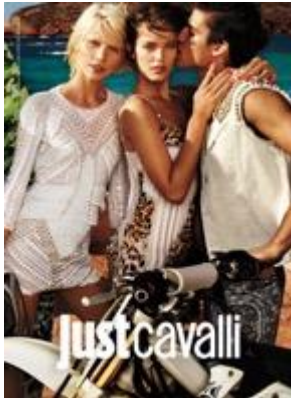
Spring/ Summer  
2013

Sexualized female  
(resembling a pin-  
up girl)  
Traditional  
femininity

Sexuality Themes in Core Advertisements

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**Just Cavalli**



Fashion  
Label

Spring/ Summer  
2013

Threesomes  
Vacations  
Exotic Places  
Heteroflexible  
indications  
(lesbianism  
captured in  
heteronormativity

**Liquid Pluwr**



Liquid Pluwr

Spring/Summer  
2014

Sexualizing male  
Traditional  
masculinity  
Humor  
Anal sex

**Ralph Lauren Romance**



Perfume

Spring/Summer  
2014

Romance  
Love  
Vacations  
Exotic places  
Chastity  
Heterosexual  
Couple

## Sexuality Themes in Core Advertisements

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### Seven Jeans



Fashion  
Label

Spring/Summer  
2013

Sexualized female  
Intersectionality  
Nudity

### Sock Dreams

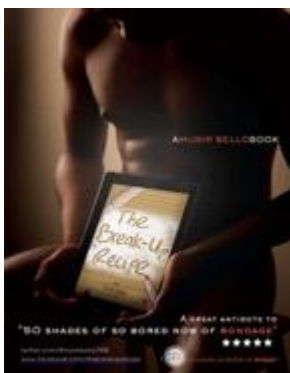


Sock Dreams  
socks

Spring/Summer  
2014

Homosexuality  
Young love  
Alternative style

### The Break-Up Recipe



A Book by  
Munir Bello

Spring/Summer  
2014

Sexualized male  
Passive male  
Nudity  
Could be targeted  
to females, but  
also a homosexual  
male audience

## Sexuality Themes in Core Advertisements

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<b>Versace</b>	Fashion Label	Spring/Summer 2013	Homosexuality Threesomes Fantasy/ Role Play Active, sexualized female Passive, sexualized males
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**Sources:** e.g. Andersen and Cryanowski (1994); Baumeister and Mendoza (2011); Baumeister and Tice (2001); Baumeister and Vohs (2004); Bergner (2013); Chivers et al. (2004); Freud (1962/2000, 1963/1997b); Friday (1973); Gagnon and Simon (1973); Herbenick et al. (2010); Holland et al. (1994); Kinsey (1948, 1953); Lacan (1985); Laumann et al. 1994); Masters and Johnson (1966, 1970); Tolman and Diamond (2001)



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## APPENDIX SIX

### DESCRIPTIONS OF INFORMANTS

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<i>Name</i>	<i>Feminist Identification</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Ivy</i>	Identification	<p>Ivy is a twenty-two-year-old student in her third year at university, pursuing a double degree in international relations, Middle Eastern studies, Arabic and political science. Ivy is the youngest of five and was brought up in a small town in Arkansas by a single-mother. After high school, Ivy joined a charitable organization, which allowed her to travel around the country, which sparked her interest in the popularized (i.e. girlie) feminist movement. Her actions are reflexively mediated by her strong-willed activist identity. She has been in a serious relationship for the past year and a half, but intentionally does not conform to social conventions, rejecting marriage and labels (i.e. boyfriend and girlfriend), for example.</p>
<i>Lucy</i>	Identification	<p>Lucy is a twenty-three-year-old first-generation Korean American. Growing up in Queens, New York, Lucy's family moved to the Mid-South when Lucy was only a teenager. It was at this point that Lucy turned to punk culture to help her deal with some issues, primarily in relation to her abusive father. Lucy failed high school twice after becoming addicted to drugs, dealing with her parent's divorce, and working through a serious eating disorder. She finished high school and has been working at a coffee shop in order to support her visual and musical artistic work that adopts a critical feminist edge, parallel to the aesthetics of the Riot Grrrl feminist movement. She has been in a few serious relationships and is currently dating a younger man, who she sees as her artistic muse.</p>
<i>Natasha</i>	Identification	<p>Natasha is a married twenty-six-year-old from Siloam Springs, Arkansas. Graduating with a bachelor's degree in 2012 in illustration, Natasha currently works as an assistant preparator in an art gallery. Despite growing up in a religious conservative family, Natasha adopts a liberal feminist sensibility that was further enhanced through her international travels</p>



## Descriptions of Informants

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		<p>around Europe in both high school and college. Natasha met her husband of two years following a traumatic break-up with a previous boyfriend. Natasha's feminist identity is heavily structured on notions of egalitarianism, particularly within in her marriage, as opposed to a radical or individualized feminism.</p>
<i>Madison</i>	Identification	<p>Madison is a twenty-one-year-old senior honors student studying journalism. Born and raised in a small town in Arkansas by a single mother, Madison has endeavored to break free of her small town roots. She joined a sorority during her freshman year of college and quickly landed a leadership role as vice president of standards. She is undeniably ambitious and career focused, which has, on her account, precluded her from engaging in any serious relationships. Feminism for Madison affords her a sense of reassurance and empowerment, particularly with regard to her career ambitions, which take precedence over everything else. Madison plans to move back to her small town in Arkansas immediately following graduation, but is confident that it is only a temporary move, while she applies for jobs in broadcast journalism.</p>
<i>Aaliyah</i>	Schitzo-identification	<p>Aaliyah is a twenty-one year-old African-American currently in her third-year of study at a Southern University. Born and raised in the outskirts of Los-Angeles, California by a single mother, Aaliyah claims and emanates a strong feminist consciousness, particularly when enacting her student, racial, familial, and occupational identity. However, her feminist identity seemingly falls by the wayside in the confines of her romantic relationship (of four months), resulting in many discernable contradictions within her narrative.</p>
<i>Kris</i>	Schitzo-identification	<p>Kris is a twenty-five-year-old first-generation Vietnamese-American. Born and raised in Rogers, Arkansas, Kris transgressed all boundaries placed on her by her traditional Vietnamese family when she came out as a lesbian at the age of 16 (although she did not come out to her family until she was 18). Kris describes herself as androgynous and attempts to emulate a masculine aesthetic and enact traditionally masculine values. While drawing on feminism in order to maintain such an identity, she, perhaps inadvertently,</p>

## Descriptions of Informants

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		<p>perpetuates patriarchal values in her attempts to wield a masculine identity, which affords her a sense of power. She currently has two bartending jobs and plans to open her own bar one day.</p>
<i>Nikki</i>	Schitzo-identification	<p>Nikki is a thirty-one-year-old single-mother, born and raised in Arkansas. Following divorce from her husband of six years, Nikki came out as a lesbian and has been dating her current girlfriend, Lin, on-and-off for the past four years. While previously residing in California as a model, she currently works as a bank teller and is studying at community college to become a physical therapist assistant. Nikki has two young daughters who live with her part-time. While not claiming an overt relation to feminism, Nikki aligns herself with some of the popularized aspects of the feminist movement in order to sustain her newfound lifestyle as a lesbian.</p>
<i>Audrey</i>	Schitzo-identification	<p>Audrey is a twenty-eight-year-old PhD student, studying sports marketing at a Mid-Southern university. Originally from Los Angeles, California, Audrey moved to the East coast to get her undergraduate degree and later to the Mid-South for graduate school, where she currently resides. Audrey is sexually active, but is currently dating a man who she met online and has been seeing (non-exclusively) off-and-on for the past nine months. In many respects she expresses a raised feminist consciousness, but other times strongly adheres to notions associated with patriarchal values and traditional gender roles.</p>
<i>Chelsea</i>	Disidentification	<p>Chelsea is a twenty-four-year-old stay-at-home wife living in the Mid-South of the United States. Growing up with money in Tennessee, Chelsea had many opportunities afforded to her and recently received her Master's degree in business. She met her husband of two years on her university track team. Currently, Chelsea is a "stay-at-home mom without the kid right now" and holds traditional gender dichotomies in the highest regard.</p>
<i>Lauren</i>	Disidentification	<p>Lauren is a twenty-two-year-old university student born and raised in Arkansas; she is currently in her final year of study. Coming from a big family (the second youngest of five), she has struggled to fashion a unique identity for herself. This has been a reflexive process that began during her</p>

## Descriptions of Informants

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		<p>second year of college, when she realized she desired something more out of life than partying and drinking. She became actively involved with the church and the Campus Crusades for Christ (Cru) society on campus. Lauren's religious involvement has also shaped many of her views and aspirations particularly as they relate to men and relationships. Like Chelsea, many of her values are structured around an idealistic patriarchal belief system that she construes in quite dichotomous terms, such as 'good versus evil' and 'masculine versus feminine' roles.</p>
<i>Angela</i>	Neutral-identification	<p>Angela is twenty-six-years-old and recently got engaged to her live-in boyfriend of nearly one year. After two years at a university in Missouri, Angela's home state, she became heavily involved in drugs and was forced to drop out. After spending some time in rehab, Angela met her fiancé, which marked a turning point in Angela's narrative. She currently works as a receptionist at a medical office, but has plans to enroll back into school and pursue social work. Angela does not foster an explicit relationship with the feminist movement.</p>
<i>Khloe</i>	Neutral-identification	<p>Khloe is twenty-years-old, the youngest of fourteen participants. Growing up in Texas, Khloe moved to the Mid-South of the U.S. to attend university after receiving a scholarship for playing in the band. While she no longer has that scholarship (and is no longer in the band), she is in her third-year, majoring in dietetics. Health (nutrition and exercise) and beauty play a big role in Khloe's life to which she is largely non-reflective: she likes what she likes, unapologetically. Despite being only twenty, Khloe got breast implants last summer after saving up \$4,000 (her parents contributed the other \$2,000). This, she claims, was an attempt to make the top portion of her body 'match' the bottom portion, which she described as more curvaceous. Khloe has had a few sexual partners, but has been in a serious (and now long-distance) relationship with her boyfriend for the past two years. Khloe does not foster a relationship with feminism and is largely unreflective in the construction of her identity.</p>
<i>Mia</i>	Neutral-identification	<p>Mia is twenty-five-years-old, born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas. She recently received her bachelor's degree in social work and is currently</p>

		<p>employed at a Christian faith-based organization. Mia is devoutly religious and this has played a key role in her daily life, future aspirations, and relationships. Mia was in a serious relationship in high school that ended after two years he became involved with drinking and drugs. Since then Mia has casually dated, although for Mia, sex in any context outside of marriage (physical acts, sexual thoughts, etc.) is a sin, which has certainly impeded the number of intimate relationships she has had. Her singlehood occasionally functions as a source of anxiety, yet because religion is such a guiding force in her life, she refuses to engage in a relationship with anyone who is not as devoutly religious as herself. Despite adhering to a strict religious doctrine, Mia remains open to some of the societal liberties afforded by the women's movement, such as women's right to birth control. However, she does not incorporate these liberties into her own identity project. Thus, the relationship she fosters with herself is sometimes at odds with the one Thus the relationship she fosters with herself and with society/others is occasionally at odds.</p>
<i>Krista</i>	Neutral-identification	<p>Krista is twenty-four-years-old and recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in photography. For the past year she has been sleeping on her parent's couch, in the Mid-Southern region of the U.S, where she grew up. Working as a bartender to save money and pay back her student loans, she is unsure of what the future holds, but is considering a move to Texas within the next two years. Krista is open, yet sometimes remorseful, when it comes to sex, having what she recalls as 'ballpark' 30 to 40 sexual partners. She has had a few serious relationships, but is now single. She dates often, primarily using online dating websites, but her current living situation poses some challenges to this. Krista is currently taking anti-anxiety medication, which makes sex for her generally less enjoyable. Her relation to the feminist movement is largely non-existent, inasmuch as she does not actively reflect on her narrative – passively accepting rather than actively creating an identity for herself.</p>



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## APPENDIX SEVEN

### ETHICS FORMS AND APPROVAL

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#### 7.1 The University of Edinburgh Ethics Form

##### Research ethics checklist

This code applies to all research carried out in the CHSS, whether by staff or students. The checklist should be completed by the Principal Investigator, leader of the research group, or supervisor of the student(s) involved. Those completing the checklist should ensure, wherever possible, that appropriate training and induction in research skills and ethics has been given to researchers involved prior to completion of the checklist, including reading the College's Code of Research Ethics.

This is particularly important in the case of student research projects.

If the answer to any of the questions below is 'yes', please give details of how

<b>1 THE RESEARCHERS</b>	
Your name and position	Alexandra Rome, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Edinburgh Business School (Marketing Group); Principal researcher  Supervisors (Co-researchers): Professor Stephanie O'Donohoe Professor Jeff Murray Dr. Susan Dunnett

## Ethics Forms and Approval

Proposed title of research	How do women consume sex in advertising
Funding body	My PhD is funded by the Principal's Career Development Scholarship at the University of Edinburgh
Time scale for research	Planning to finish: January 2016; Time scale for data collection: February 2014 – May 2014
List those who will be involved in conducting the researcher, including names and positions (e.g. 'PhD student')	Alexandra Rome, PhD Student
<b>2 RISKS TO, AND SAFETY OF, RESEARCHERS</b>	
Those named above need appropriate training to enable them to conduct the proposed research safely in accordance with the ethical principles set out by the College	No
Researchers are likely to be sent or go to any areas where their safety may be compromised	No
Could researchers have any conflicts of interest?	No
<b>3 RISKS TO, AND SAFETY OF, PARTICIPANTS</b>	
Could the research induce any psychological stress or discomfort?	Yes; this is a potential risk of this data collection, due to the sensitive nature of the research topic (sex) participants may at times feel discomfort. In order to minimize this, the data collection will take place over multiple interviews, to allow for the participants to feel more trust and comfortable with the researcher, but to also allow for the opportunity for the participants to opt out at any time.

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Could this research adversely affect participants in any other way?	No
<b>4 DATA PROTECTION</b>	
Will any part of the research involve audio, film or video recording of individuals	Yes, the respondents will be (audio) recorded during their interviews, but all audio records and transcripts will be kept on a password-protected computer (in a password-protected document(s)) and while real names will be used for storage purposes, they will all be assigned aliases in any reports, presentations, and/or published documents; Recordings will be taken on a (again, password-protected) iPhone and will be deleted as soon as they are transferred to the computer.
Will the research require collection of personal information from any persons without their direct consent?	No
How will the confidentiality of data, including the identity of participants (whether specifically recruited for the research or not) be ensured?	Again, all original data and the identity of participants will be stored on a password-protected computer and external hard-drive as a password-protected document(s) (that only the primary researcher will have direct access to), but will be given aliases in any external documents/presentations
Who will be entitled to have access to the raw data?	Only the principal researcher will have access to all of the raw data, however the appointed supervisors and advisors (Dr. Essam Ibrahim, University of Edinburgh, Dr. Stephanie O'Donohoe, University of Edinburgh, and Dr. Jeff Murray, University of Arkansas) will have access to the data insofar as the principal researcher discusses it with them. In this case,



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	transcripts may be discussed, while alias names are provided.
How and where will the data be stored, in what format, and for how long?	The data will be stored on a password-protected computer and hard-drive; it will be stored until the completion of the PhD, sometime at the start of 2016
What steps have been taken to ensure that only entitled persons will have access to the data?	Only the primary researcher will have access to the password that will be required to access the computer and documents (audio recordings/transcripts)
How will the data be disposed of?	Once the PhD is complete all files will be securely deleted and any hard-copy data will be shredded as needed.
How will the results of the research be used?	Results of the research will be used for the intention of completing the PhD, for the purpose of conference papers, presentations, and journal articles and possibly for the intention of book, media, or press releases.
What feedback of findings will be given to participants?	Unless asked by the participants, no feedback of findings will be given to the participants. They will of course be entitled to read the final project. And if asked, copies of their own transcripts and analysis will be sent to them in accordance with the process of member checks, but again, this will only be in instances where the participants explicitly ask for this option.
Is any information likely to be passed on to external companies or organizations in the course of the research?	No, again this data will be collected at the University of Arkansas by a student from the University of Edinburgh. Because the primary researcher will have supervisors and/or advisors from both institutions the information will be shared somewhat between members of both

## Ethics Forms and Approval

	organizations, but again, this will be highly anonymous.
Will the project involve the transfer of personal data to countries outside the European Economic Area?	Yes, because the research will take place in the United States.
<b>5 RESEARCH DESIGN</b>	
The research involves living human subjects specifically recruited for the research project <i>If 'no', go to section 6</i>	Yes
How many participants will be involved in the study?	About 20-30 participants
What criteria will be used in deciding on the inclusion/ exclusion of participants?	Participants will be decided based on where they are from (must be an American citizen) and based on their age (must be a young-adult between the ages 20-35 years). Other than that, the only requirement is that they are willing and wish to participate in the study.
How will the sample be recruited?	The sample will be purposively selected (using snowball techniques). As a visiting doctoral student at the University of Arkansas, USA for the upcoming (2014) spring semester, I will recruit voluntary female participants (some students and some not) and snowball from them.
Will the study involve groups or individuals who are in custody or care, such as students at school, self-help groups, residents of nursing home?	No (it may include students who attend university, but this is not a requisite or requirement)
Will there be a control group?	No (it is strictly qualitative research and there is no need for a 'control' group)
What information will be provided to participants prior to their consent? (e.g. information leaflet, briefing session)	All participants will be generally informed of the study and will be required to sign a consent form

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	(which is provided). They will be briefed on the project during the first interview.
Participants have a right to withdraw from the study at any time. Please tick to confirm that participants will be advised of their rights	Participants will be advised of their rights
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge and consent? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places)	No
Where consent is obtained, what steps will be taken to ensure that a written record is maintained	All letter of consent forms will be scanned and saved along with their audio recordings and transcripts (on a password-protected computer and external hard drive). The original copy will also be saved along with the researcher's other written materials in a locked file.
In the case of participants whose first language is not English, what arrangements are being made to ensure informed consent?	All participants will be required to have English as a first language
Will participants receive any financial or other benefit from their participation?	Yes (participants will receive a small candy pack along with a gift card from Victoria's Secret valued at \$10)
Are any of the participants likely to be particularly vulnerable, such as elderly or disabled people, adults with incapacity, your own students, members of ethnic minorities, or in a professional or client relationship with the researcher	No, this is not a foreseeable issue
Will any of the participants be under 16 years of age?	No
Do the researchers named above need to be cleared through the Disclosure/ Enhanced Disclosure procedures	No

## Ethics Forms and Approval

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Will any of the participants be interviewed in situations which will compromise their ability to give informed consent, such as in prison, residential care, or the care of the local authority?	No
<b>6 EXTERNAL PROFESSIONAL BODIES</b>	
Is the research proposal subject to scrutiny by any external body concerned with ethical approval?	Yes
If so, which body?	The University of Arkansas- this is because I will be collecting my data as a visiting doctoral student at the University of Arkansas during the spring semester (February- May) 2014
Date approval sought?	I have not yet sought approval, as I need to first be approved by the University of Edinburgh
Outcome if known <i>or</i>	
Date outcome expected	I hope to seek approval once I have been approved by the University of Edinburgh; I expect to receive approval by mid-November 2013

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### 7 ISSUES ARISING FROM THE PROPOSAL

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In my view, ethical issues have been satisfactorily addressed, OR

In my view, the ethical issues listed below arise and the following steps are being taken to address them:

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I feel most of the ethical issues have been satisfactorily addressed by the previous questions. I am not interviewing vulnerable consumers and the participants will again be generally informed of the study prior to participating, without any unintentional directing or leading effects. The biggest issue here is any psychological discomfort participants may experience by discussing their lives and their sexuality. In order to address these possible complications, multiple interviews will take place as opposed to just one; this will give them the opportunity to become more comfortable with the researcher and also will

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allow them more chances to opt out of the study, if they feel it becomes too intrusive in any way.

Finally, because the researcher herself meets the similar criteria to the desired participants (e.g.

American, woman, aged 25), there will be an element of reflexivity and commonality that could also prove to make the respondents feel more comfortable.

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31<sup>st</sup> October 2013

Alexandra Rome  
University of Edinburgh Business School

Dear Alexandra,

This is to confirm that your project "How do women consume sex in advertising" as described in the submitted documents has received ethical approval from the School. I acknowledge receipt of your completed Ethics form and confirm that this is a level three project in the School's three tier system of ethical approval as detailed below:

Level one: applies to 'straightforward' non-intervention, observational research (data, observation, questionnaires)

Level two: engagement with participants or participant groups (interviews, focus groups etc.)

Level three: applies to research that uses novel procedures (where there is no recognized protocol for guiding research); is potentially problematic in that it might incorporate inherent physical or emotional risk; research with individuals unable to give consent.

I would like to wish you well in your continuing work and hope that your project is successful.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lynn Walford'.

Mrs Lynn Walford  
Research Support Manager

## 7.2 The University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board Form

### UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PROTOCOL FORM

The University Institutional Review Board recommends policies and monitors their implementation, on the use of human beings as subjects for physical, mental, and social experimentation, in and out of class. . . . Protocols for the use of human subjects in research and in class experiments, whether funded internally or externally, must be approved by the (IRB) or in accordance with IRB policies and procedures prior to the implementation of the human subject protocol. . . . Violation of procedures and approved protocols can result in the loss of funding from the sponsoring agency or the University of Arkansas and may be interpreted as scientific misconduct. (*see Faculty Handbook*)

Supply the information requested in items 1-14 as appropriate. **Type** entries in the spaces provided using additional pages as needed. In accordance with college/departmental policy, submit the original **and** one copy of this completed protocol form and all attached materials to the appropriate Human Subjects Committee. In the absence of an IRB-authorized Human Subjects Committee, submit the original of this completed protocol form and all attached materials to the IRB, Attn: Compliance Officer, ADMN 210, 575-2208. Completed form and additional materials may be emailed to [irb@uark.edu](mailto:irb@uark.edu). The fully signed signature page may be scanned and submitted with the protocol, by FAX (575-3846) or via campus mail.

1. Title of Project: How Women Consume Sex in Advertising
2. (Students **must** have a faculty member supervise the research. The faculty member must sign this form and all researchers and the faculty advisor should provide a campus phone number.)

Name	Department	Email Address	Campus Phone
Principal Researcher Alexandra S. Rome	Marketing	asrome@uark.edu	N/A
Co-Researcher Jeff Murray	Marketing	Jmurray@walton.uark.edu	479-575-5115
Co-Researcher			
Co-Researcher			
Faculty Advisor			

3. Researcher(s) status. Check all that apply.

Faculty     Staff     Graduate Student(s)     Undergraduate Student(s)

4. Project type

Faculty Research     Thesis / Dissertation     Class Project     Independent Study / Educ. Spec. Project

Staff Research     M.A.T. Research     Honors Project

5. Is the project receiving extramural funding? (Extramural funding is funding from an external research sponsor.)

No     Yes. Specify the source of funds

Alexandra Rome (the principal researcher for this project) is a current doctoral student at the University of Edinburgh (visiting doctoral student at the University of Arkansas), and as such receives scholarship funding from the University of Edinburgh under the Principal's Career Development Scholarship.

6. Brief description of the purpose of proposed research and all procedures involving people. Be specific. Use additional pages if needed. (**Do not** send thesis or dissertation proposals. Proposals for extramural funding must be submitted in full.)

Purpose of research:

The purpose of this study is to examine how young-adult women (ages 18-35) experience sex-in-advertising and to uncover the theoretical and sociocultural contextual factors that influence their experiences, namely, their culturally constructed sexuality. Encountering a lack of qualitative and interpretive data on sexual advertising consumption, this research provides an in-depth inquisition of how sexual advertisements position female readers and also considers the subjective lived experiences of the postfeminist sexualized female consumer. This research is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework of consumer culture theory, feminist studies, and adopts a sociocultural viewpoint of female sexuality, attending specifically to mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies.

The provisional research objectives have been put forth:

1. To understand how *advertising texts* depicting sexualized representations position female readers
2. To understand how *female consumers* position themselves in response to sexual advertisements
3. To understand how *female sexuality* provides a lens for reading sexual advertisements
4. To understand the *interpretive strategies* women use to read sexual advertisements

Methodologically this study extends the work of Mick and Buhl (1992), to include a gender specific and culturally situated facet of human phenomenon. Advertising texts are assessed through the application of semiotic theory and art and literary critical methods; consumer perspectives are interpreted using multiple semi-focused phenomenological-type-interviews and projective techniques (e.g. collages/ Pinterest boards).

The significance of this study is twofold. On the one hand, exploring the consumption of sex in advertising in conjunction with the social construction of female sexuality, through qualitative methods may enhance marketers' understanding of how to appeal to women using sexual appeals. This could be used to inform modern sexual advertising campaigns targeted to women as an alternative to the normative sexual advertising conventions that appeal to women, by either treating them as an extraneous group to gay men or by adapting images (i.e. using men as opposed to women) to the typical hetero-male sexual appeals. On the other hand, this research contributes socially in its attempt to expose the societal implications of these mass-mediated depictions and will attempt to more fully understand the consequences and/or benefits of sexually charged media representations and their impact on women's gendered and sexual lived experiences.

Procedures involving people:

This research will primarily collect data following Mick and Buhl's (1992) interviewing protocol, using semi-focused phenomenological-type-interviewing among voluntary participants ( $\approx 25$ ) as the primary inquiry mode. In this sense, the interviews will be unfocused in an attempt to understand the experienced phenomenon, but due to the specificity of the research objectives will also include some pointed follow-up questions in order to obtain the necessary information required to understand this particular phenomenon.

Each participant will be interviewed (and recorded) multiple times (2-3), at an estimated two-hours per interview. The first interview will explore the respondents' lived experiences in a more general sense to get an idea of their upbringings, political and world views, as well as their educational, religious, familial and peer influences. It will then



move to assess how each respondent experiences a number of selected sexual advertisements (from US magazine publications) and will further encourage them to share their own examples of known sexual advertisements. Following this initial interview, the respondents will be asked to construct either a collage or a private Pinterest board, of which will contain any images, personal pictures, words, videos, songs, etc. that the participants define as 'sexy.' Such a technique will be used to inquire deeper into the participant's fantasies, dreams, and visions of desire; participants will be asked to discuss their collage/ board during the course of the following interviews. The subsequent interviews will aim to explore the participants' notions, ideas, feelings, and experiences about their sexuality. In terms of data analysis, these latter insights will be used to interpret the prior ad experiences, again adhering to Mick and Buhl's (1992) protocol.

The data collection will take place primarily in the Fayetteville-Springdale-Rogers metropolitan area in Arkansas. All participants will be emerging and/or young adult women (aged 18-35), students and non-students (no requisite), sampled purposively (through snowballing techniques). The interviews will all take place between February 2014 and May 2014 where the respondents feel most comfortable (i.e. home, school, restaurant, coffee shop, etc.). Participation will be strictly voluntary and participants will generally be informed of the nature of the study, without disclosing too much, as a way to avoid unintentional 'leading' or directional effects. Participants will be asked to sign an informed consent document and will be able to withdraw at anytime during the interview process. All respondents will be kept anonymous. After all the interviews take place (by May 2014), we do not anticipate contacting participants again.

7. Estimated **number of participants** (complete all that apply)

\_\_\_\_\_ Children under 14      \_\_\_\_\_ Children 14-17      \_\_\_\_\_10\_\_ UA students      \_\_\_\_\_10\_\_ Adult non-  
(18yrs and older)      students

8. Anticipated dates for contact with participants:

First Contact: January 2014

Last Contact: May 2014

9. Informed Consent procedures: The following information must be included in any procedure: identification of researcher, institutional affiliation and contact information; identification of Compliance Officer and contact information; purpose of the research, expected duration of the subject's participation; description of procedures; risks and/or benefits; how confidentiality will be ensured; that participation is voluntary and that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. See *Policies and Procedures Governing Research with Human Subjects*, section 5.0 Requirements for Consent.

- Signed informed consent will be obtained. **Attach copy of form.**  
 Modified informed consent will be obtained. **Attach copy of form.**  
 Other method (e.g., implied consent). **Please explain on attached sheet.**  
 Not applicable to this project. **Please explain on attached sheet.**

10. Confidentiality of Data: All data collected that can be associated with a subject/respondent must remain confidential. Describe the methods to be used to ensure the confidentiality of data obtained.

All of the data will be stored on a password-protected computer in a password-protected document. The interviewees' real names will be stored on personal computers and hard drives, but participants will all be assigned aliases in any reports, presentations, and/or published documents.

11. Risks and/or Benefits:

Risks: Will participants in the research be exposed to more than minimal risk?  Yes  No Minimal risk is defined as risks of harm not greater, considering probability and magnitude, than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. Describe any such risks or discomforts associated with the study and precautions that will be taken to minimize them.

Participants will not be exposed to any anticipated risks (greater than minimal). However, due to the sensitive nature of this topic (sexuality), participants could experience a certain amount of psychological discomfort. In order to minimize these risks, the data will be collected over multiple interviews, allowing the participants to establish trust and to feel comfortable with the researcher, but also to allow them to pull out at any stage they feel uncomfortable. Again, they will be informed of the nature of the study prior to beginning and will be assured that all of their information will be kept anonymous.

Benefits: Other than the contribution of new knowledge, describe the benefits of this research.

Other than a general contribution of new knowledge, the benefits of this research may be applied practically and managerially on an advertising effectiveness level (determining which types of sex appeal attracts women under certain circumstances). The benefit of this research could additionally be on that of policy- helping to determine what is objectifying and what hinders and/or facilitates women and particularly their sexualities. Additionally, the participants may enjoy participating in this type of research, as it can serve as an interesting and reflexive activity for them wanting to explore their own sexuality and interpretive strategies when reading advertisements.

12. Check all of the following that apply to the proposed research. Supply the requested information below or on attached sheets:

- A. Deception of or withholding information from participants. Justify the use of deception or the withholding of information. Describe the debriefing procedure: how and when will the subject be informed of the deception and/or the information withheld?
- B. Medical clearance necessary prior to participation. Describe the procedures and note the safety precautions to be taken.
- C. Samples (blood, tissue, etc.) from participants. Describe the procedures and note the safety precautions to be taken.
- D. Administration of substances (foods, drugs, etc.) to participants. Describe the procedures and note the safety precautions to be taken.
- E. Physical exercise or conditioning for subjects. Describe the procedures and note the safety precautions to be taken.
- F. Research involving children. How will informed consent from parents or legally authorized representatives as well as from subjects be obtained?
- G. Research involving pregnant women or fetuses. How will informed consent be obtained from both parents of the fetus?
- H. Research involving participants in institutions (cognitive impairments, prisoners, etc.). Specify agencies or institutions involved. Attach letters of approval. Letters must be on letterhead with original signature; electronic transmission is acceptable.
- I. Research approved by an IRB at another institution. Specify agencies or institutions involved. Attach letters of approval. Letters must be on letterhead with original signature; electronic transmission is acceptable.
- J. Research that must be approved by another institution or agency. Specify agencies or institutions involved. Attach letters of approval. Letters must be on letterhead with original signature; electronic transmission is acceptable.

