

How does the portrayal of female beauty by  
the media influence young Irish girls between  
8 and 12–years-old?

By

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## Declaration

*I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of the MA in Journalism & Media Communications, is my own; based on my personal study and/or research, and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation.*

*I also certify that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarised the work of anyone else, including other students.*

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Dated:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Abstract

This study poses the question: *How does the portrayal of female beauty by the media influence young Irish girls between 8 and 12-years-old?* It examines female perceptions of beauty within the media and how these contribute to body dissatisfaction among girls aged 8 to 12 years-old. The study focuses on three research aims:

(1) To gain an insight into how Irish primary school girls aged between 8 and 12-year-olds understand the term 'body image.'

(2) To explore how the media (social media, magazines, television) impacts on their self-esteem.

(3) To develop an understanding of how children consume the media in an educational setting and if media literacy is important in the Irish Primary School Curriculum.

This small-scale qualitative study was carried out in a DEIS (disadvantaged) primary school in North Dublin over two school days. The researcher devised a powerpoint presentation (Appendix 3) of current images within the media, illustrating pictures of celebrities before and after the use of photo editing software, Photoshop. This facilitated two all-female focus groups, with the researcher as the moderator. One focus group consisted of five 3<sup>rd</sup> class female students, while the second focus group consisted of six 5<sup>th</sup> class female students.

The study was carried out in an effort to understand how girls between 8 and 12 years-old are affected by the portrayal of beauty and the 'ideal body' within the media. Themes that were explored upon analysis of both focus groups included the idealisation of 'thinness,' body dissatisfaction, negative peer influence, appearance evaluation, body image, social comparison, social media influence, celebrity adoration and positive peer or parental influence on self-esteem.

The results confirmed that the socio cultural influence of image-focused media is the biggest contributor to negative self-esteem and body dissatisfaction. Currently, there are no objectives within the Irish Primary School Curriculum to teach basic media literacy.

These findings illustrate the need for an established programme of objectives for teachers to teach media literacy. This could aim to increase primary school children's awareness of the impact of image-focused media.

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## **Glossary of Acronyms**

AUP            Acceptable Use Policy

BMI            Body Mass Index

CSM            Covariance Structure Modeling

DCYA          Department of Children and Youth Affairs

DEIS          Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (Disadvantaged school status)

NCCA          National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

SPHE          Social Personal Health Education

UCC            University College Cork

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

*'As students develop their digital literacy skills, they improve their capacity to know what they are looking for, what information to ignore or discard...they learn to discriminate between the multiple sources of information available online and to challenge the views they find there.'* (NCCA, 2014, p.4)

Enhancing media literacy in Irish schools is one of the aims of the Department of Education in their Digital Strategy for Schools plan 2015 – 2020. Although there are guidelines advising on internet safety, where every school should implement an AUP (Acceptable Use Policy), there are currently no specific curriculum guidelines to teach primary school children about the basic facts of media literacy. In particular, Irish primary school children are not specifically taught about the importance of good communication skills regarding mental health, maintaining a state of positive self-esteem and sustaining a positive body image. Therefore, this is valuable to note under the area of journalism and media communications.

### **Purpose of Study**

Emerging from this, is the research area explored in this dissertation, which focuses mainly on how the media can influence perceptions of female beauty and body image among Irish girls between 8 and 12 years-old.

As outlined in chapter two, there has been a considerable amount of international research regarding female body image, peer influence and socio cultural factors that affect this. However, this published research has been focused primarily on adolescents.

Ultimately, the media and peer influences play a crucial role in forming children's views concerning themselves and other issues, such as self-esteem and body image.

In particular, this research centralises on the portrayal of female beauty within the media (social media, television, radio, magazines) and how this influences young Irish girls.

Undoubtedly, the media's obsession with the 'ideal body' and how it portrays certain 'ideals' linked to female beauty, such as weight, appearance or body image is a concern in today's society. This small scale exploratory study was carried out using the qualitative method of focus groups.

As Swami et al (2011) suggest, the media and celebrity culture have the potential and power to influence people on a 'particular idealised body type.' This body type is beautiful, slender and fit. This results in a desire 'to look like idealized media icons [that] may result in negative body image when those bodily ideals are not attained' (Swami et al, 2011 p. 58). This is similar to Goodwin et al's 2011 study in the UK, where it was found that media influences played an important role in creating a desire to be thin among adolescent boys and girls. Due to the fact that there are notable differences between adolescents and children, and male and females, this research focuses on the responses of Irish female children between the ages of 8 and 12 years-old.

In addition to this, the pressure to be thin and look a certain way is an important point to remember when analysing young people's perceptions of beauty. The ever-evolving celebrity culture and fame status has been noted as a trigger of body dissatisfaction among young people. In McSharry's 2009 study of body image with 30 female and male adolescents, it was found that 'beautiful, fulfilled, assured celebrity bodies dominate popular press. Many of the girls talked about celebrities adoringly and with longing, while boys talked about their physical qualities and successfulness' (McSharry, 2009, p. 127).

McSharry discovered that teachers involved in the study felt that they did not have adequate training to support students who may be experiencing negative body image or body dissatisfaction. This reinforces the need for an increase in personal development programmes on body image and mental health awareness within the Irish SPHE (Social Personal Health Education) curriculum.

Due to the fact that a negative body image is inextricably linked to poor self-esteem, bullying, excessive exercise and disordered eating, McSharry highlights that the 'sociological factors' such as the influence of peers and the media, needs to be addressed.

Similarly, Gavin et al state that 'peers, the media and self-perception are the most frequently cited influencing factors on body image.' (Gavin et al, 2015, p. 46)

According to the Dáil na nÓg Body Image Survey, 2012, 77% of participants (aged 10 to 21 years old) rate body image as an important issue. The key recommendation from the young delegates at Dáil na nÓg in 2010 was that 'the Government should enforce a law that all altered advertisements and images must indicate that they have been altered by means of a symbol and text, because of the negative impact of such images on teenager's body image.' (Dr. O'Connell, A, and Dr. Martin, S, 2012 p. 4)

## **Research Aims**

The research aims of this study were:

1. To gain an insight into how Irish primary school girls aged between 8 and 12-year-olds understand the term 'body image.'
2. To explore how the media (social media, magazines, television) impacts on their self-esteem.

3. To develop an understanding of how children consume the media in an educational setting and if media literacy is important in the Irish Primary School Curriculum.

By using the qualitative methodology of focus groups, as outlined in Chapter 3, this gave me live feedback on the thoughts of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> class children in an Irish school, on the topic of body image and perceptions of beauty. I then incorporated an original powerpoint presentation to analyse how image-focused media influenced the participants. Chapter 3 also contains the ethical aspects of this research, the details of my data collection and any limitations that I noted during the course of this research. In relation to raising awareness of the impact that the media has on children, Dr. O'Connell & Dr. Martin state; 'for raising awareness of a healthy body image thus centre around awareness-raising campaigns, and while some of these suggestions focus on promoting self-esteem, the majority relate to raising awareness of the role of enhanced images, celebrity culture and unrealistically thin models.' (Dr. O'Connell, A, and Dr. Martin, S, 2012 p. 27)

This is in a similar vein to Gavin et al, who state that when children from 12 to 17 years old were asked what influences how they feel about their own body image, they found that 'peers, the media and self-perception were the most frequently cited influencing factors on body image.' (Gavin et al, 2015, p. 14)

Although many studies on body image are focused on adolescents, this research focuses on the impact that the media has on the body image of children. This research analyses sociocultural factors that influence body image perceptions in children, along with a comprehensive literature review in chapter two, containing a review on published work relating to the topic. This includes peer influence, peer teasing and body dissatisfaction, along with theories relating to body image and beauty, such as Social Comparison Theory, Objectification Theory and Social-Learning Theory.

In addition to this, Chapter 4 outlines the research findings and results of the qualitative study, where I discuss the data collated from both focus groups, the analysis of codes and how I identified the main themes and sub-themes.

Finally, Chapter 5 outlines my research question and main research aims. This section also identifies any suggestions for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### What is Body Image?

Body image relates to a person's perceptions, feelings and thoughts about his or her body, and is usually conceptualized as incorporating body size estimation, evaluation of body attractiveness and emotions associated with body shape and size. (Grogan, 1999, Muth & Cash, 1997).

It is identified as a complex psychological construct that involves body-related thoughts, beliefs, emotions and behaviours. This cognitive-behavioural perspective has been supported by Cash (2011). In 2002, Cash devised a cognitive-behavioural model of body image using two constructs. This portrayed the importance of 'cultural socialization, interpersonal characteristics, physical characteristics and personality attributes' in evaluating body image. Grogan highlights that Cash 'differentiates between two kinds of body image attitudes: body image evaluation (body dissatisfaction), and body image investment (the cognitive, behavioural and emotional importance of the body.)' (Grogan, 2016, p. 5)

The first component refers to 'a person's evaluative thoughts, beliefs and emotions' regarding their physical appearance. This can also be defined as the way in which an individual is content or discontent with their appearance. Body image evaluation refers to the degree to which an individual's appearance influences their own self-esteem.

The second factor is body image investment, which according to Chang et al (2014), outlines the cognitive and behavioural importance that individuals place on their appearance.

This delves deeper into the psychological and physiological behaviours that can occur when an individual analyses their own body image.

In 1950, Schilder argued that body image was 'the picture of our own body which we form in our mind, that is to say the way in which the body appears to ourselves.' (Schilder, 2013 edition, p. 11) He was intrigued by the 'elasticity of the body' and the attitudes and reasons as to why there were fluctuations in the ideal body size.

However, the definition of body image has evolved from this, and according to Grogan, body image is now focused on 'weight satisfaction, appearance evaluation, appearance orientation, body concern, body esteem, body schema, body percent, body appreciation, body acceptance and more.' (Grogan, 2016, p. 3),

Although the notion of body image has physical and mental traits, Grogan discusses the perceptual body image and the attitudinal body image. Perceptual body image is measured by finding out an individuals' perception of their own body size, versus their actual size.

Attitudinal body image refers to four components, 'global subjective satisfaction (evaluation of the body), affect (feelings associated with the body), cognitions (investment in appearance, beliefs about the body), and behaviours.' In relation to these components, Thompson et al (2012), state that the psychological measures of body image assess one or more of these components, therefore assessing where body dissatisfaction lies.

Body dissatisfaction is defined by Grogan as 'a person's negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body.' (Grogan, 2016, p. 4) My aim for this research is to pinpoint the factors that cause young girls from the age of 8 to 12 years-old to develop a negative body image or 'body dissatisfaction.'

According to Jones, as cited in Rumsey & Harcourt (2012), the appearance culture is a huge factor in today's society. The cultural norms within one's own environment and within the media causes 'interactions [that] reciprocally influence each other.'

For example, Jones refers to 'appearance training', outlining how 'peer groups often engage in discussions about physical attractiveness, clothing, and other aspects of appearance.'  
(Rumsey & Harcourt, 2012, p. 259)

Naturally, as children progress into adolescence 'biological changes such as puberty and socio-environmental changes such as increased time spent with peers and the initiation of romantic relationships will alter the dynamic processes within the appearance culture.'  
(Kierans and Swords, 2016, p. 673) Adolescents' concerns are related to their body shape and size. These 'can be influenced by a variety of fluctuating state factors, such as body surveillance in a particular social setting, and more stable or fixed trait factors, such as internalization of the thin ideal.' (Cash, 2002; Cash, Fleming, Alindogan, Steadman, & Whitehead, 2002; Thompson, Coover, & Stormer, 1999)

### **Peer Influence**

I am focusing my research on young girl's body image, as it differs from research conducted on male's body image. As Grogan, 1999; Pope et al, 2000 states, social pressure on men is quantitatively and qualitatively different from pressure on women. Men and boys are, on average, most likely to want to become more muscular (Grogan & Richards, 2002; McCreary et al, 2005), whereas women and girls are likely to want to be thinner (Grogan & Wainwright, 1996; Tiggemann, 2004). Carey, Donaghue & Broderick (2013) found that body comparisons with peers significantly mediate the relationship between the endorsement of thinness norms and body image concern among adolescent girls. They identified friendship groups that had higher levels of media influence had higher levels of body dissatisfaction and insecurity in themselves. Furthermore, Jones (2004) found that conversations linked to appearance and peer comparisons were 'significant predictors of change in body dissatisfaction among adolescent girls over a 1-year period.'

## Peer Teasing

This brought me to the term 'peer teasing.' As Frank states, 'teasing about body weight was associated with low body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, high depressive symptoms, and thinking about and attempting suicide, even after controlling body weight.' (Frank, 2008, p. 368). In addition to this, peer pressure to change behaviours in relation to image and body ideals predicts body dissatisfaction among both girls and boys. (Xu, X., Mellor, D., Kiehne, M., Ricciardelli, L. A., McCabe, M. P., & Xu, Y, 2010)

During Kenny et al's research in 2016, they undertook a qualitative study to establish the way in which peers influence body image, and the processes that pre-empt this.

They 'hypothesized that peer pressure, peer teasing, and peer exclusion would dominate, whereas the positive influences might include peer support and advice to help adapt to adolescent-related body changes.' (Kenny et al, 2016, p. 5) This is similar to Berger's view of the 'spectator buyer' and peer influence. This 'spectator-buyer is meant to envy herself as she will become if she buys the product. She is meant to imagine herself transformed by the product into an object of envy for others, an envy which will then justify her loving herself.' (Berger, 1972, pp.134) In comparison to this, Lawler & Nixon (2011) found that peer influences on body image in relation to age and gender were reported to have lower levels of body dissatisfaction among boys.

## **Disturbances in body behaviours - The Tripartite Influence Model**

In 1999, The Tripartite Influence Model of Body Image and Eating Disturbance was developed by Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn. This model suggests that peers, parents, and the media influence body dissatisfaction via internalization of body ideals and appearance comparison.

According to Bearman and Stice, 2008; Neumark Sztainer et al, 2006; Yanover and Thompson, 2008, these disturbances in body behaviours have been found to be associated with a variety of psychological and social variables, including 'depression, suicidal ideation, disordered eating, low self-esteem, academic performance and physical activity participation' (as cited in Kenny et al, 2017, p. 2).

In order to identify how certain factors may influence body image, Thompson et al (1999) developed the tripartite model of body image and eating disturbance. As a result of these developments, Papp et al (2013) and Shroff and Thompson (2006) have identified a relationship 'between sociocultural influences and body dissatisfaction for girls' (as cited in Kenny et al, 2017, p. 2).

In addition to this research, Kenny et al (2017) developed the biopsychosocial model of body image concerns and disordered eating. This model 'takes into account the role of sociocultural, psychological and biological variables in the development of body image concern and disordered eating, to further increase our understanding of established body image influences.' This model was tested with adolescent girls, whereby Rodgers et al (2014) found negative effect, body mass index (BMI) and sociocultural influence 'as predictors of body image concern and disordered eating' (as cited in Kenny et al, 2017, p. 2).

According to Carey, Donaghue, & Broderick, 2013, 2010; Clark & Tiggemann, 2006; Jones, 2004; Jones & Crawford, 2006, 'the peer environment provides them with a forum to discuss and reinforce appearance-related issues, to share appearance-related behaviors and to single out and/or criticize those who do not conform to specific appearance ideals.'

This again reinforces the goal of the 'ideal body' and the pressure that surrounds females to attain this. Upon researching what theories have been established to explain body dissatisfaction and negative body image, this led me to Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) and Fredrickson and Roberts Objectification Theory (1997). These were established to allow us to comprehend how sociocultural influences affect body image and may cause body dissatisfaction.

### **Social Comparison Theory**

As Festinger (1954) originally suggests, social comparison theory is a cognitive explanation of body dissatisfaction. It states 'that people are generally motivated to evaluate their opinions and abilities and that one way to satisfy this need for self-evaluation is to compare themselves to others.'

This theory suggests that individuals pick out traits that they value the most and compare themselves to other people in their environment based on these traits. If an individual is more accomplished on a certain trait, it is an 'upward comparison.' Whereas individuals who may be less accomplished on a trait are known as a 'downward comparison.'

According to Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, (1999), 'upward comparisons would be expected to result in negative affect, while downward comparisons generally result in enhancement of one's self-esteem.'

Due to the fact that social comparison is a 'manipulated independent variable and a dependent or process variable,' studies have shown that these approaches have found how crucial social comparison and body image is in understanding body dissatisfaction.

In a similar vein, Rieves and Cash (1996) reported on participant's comparison with their own siblings. They found that individuals compared themselves through body image, especially when they remembered during their adolescent years.

Furthermore, Stormer and Thompson (1996) found that social comparison tendencies predicted body dissatisfaction 'in a sample of college women, even after removing the effects of Body Mass Index (BMI) and self-esteem, both of which are established correlates of body dissatisfaction' (as cited in Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999).

Interestingly, they found that appearance comparison in relation to weight or size was 'most predictive of body image dissatisfaction.'

In addition to this appearance culture, Thompson, Coovert and Stormer (1999) conducted a 'Covariance Structure Modeling' (CSM) study, whereby they 'investigated the mediational role of comparison between appearance-related teasing and body image disturbance.' The results showed that social comparison was a main factor in causing body image disturbance.

This is similar to Lawler and Nixon (2011), who found that girls reported 'greater internalization of appearance ideals than boys.'

In 2002, Van den Berg, Thompson, Obremski-Brandon and Coovert conducted a CSM study, and investigated how family, peers and media influence individual's appearance, eating disturbances and body image. They found that social comparison was a 'mediator of the relationship between media and family influences on body dissatisfaction.'

Social comparison theory suggests a view that social attitudes with regard to the 'thin-ideal' are associated with body dissatisfaction. Social comparison theory proposes that people are constantly evaluating themselves, and do so by comparing themselves to others (Festinger, 1954). Similarly, Festinger states there are upward and downward comparisons.

Downward comparisons occur when people compare themselves to someone else, and find the other person to be lacking. Upward comparisons, however, are when people compare themselves to someone else and find themselves to be lacking.

Tiggemann and Slater (2003) suggested that 'the process of social comparison may provide the mechanism by which exposure to media images induces negative effects.'

When women compare themselves to thin media figures while evaluating their own attractiveness, and cannot match what is physically portrayed, body dissatisfaction can occur (Tantleff-Dunn & Gokee, 2002). Women who watch television and are influenced by the thin-ideal showed signs of body dissatisfaction. These females compare themselves to ideal body images of models, celebrities or 'influencers.'

Similarly, Kierans and Swords (2016) state that 'the media are overloaded with flawless images of models and celebrities, messages regarding body shape ideals.'

Murnen (2011) agrees with this and says that appearances and behaviours are altered, such as extreme dieting or exercising.

## **Objectification Theory**

In order to understand the social construction of the females' body image, there has been research carried out in the area of how women view their bodies and how society views them.

The Objectification Theory, devised by Fredrickson and Roberts in 1997, centralises on the way in which the female body is sexually objectified. The theory 'suggests that existing in a sexually objectifying culture means that women may experience self-objectification on two levels: state self-objectification... and trait self-objectification.' The first trait highlights the attention that is drawn to the female body in 'particular contexts,' such as in photographs. (Grogan, 2016, p. 7).

The second trait causes the woman to 'develop a chronic view of their bodies as objects, leading to habitual body monitoring, shame and anxiety about their bodies.'

Calogero identifies sexual objectification as a person who is 'treated solely as a body or a collection of body parts for sexual use.' (Calogero, 2012, p. 574)

She states that the Fredrickson and Roberts' Objectification Theory highlights the 'extreme and pervasive tendency to equate women with their bodies and why this can have such negative consequences for women's body image and beyond.'

Calogero discusses the influence of the objectification theory on disordered eating.

She states there is 'a large body of evidence [that] has demonstrated that self-objectification and self-surveillance directly predict more disordered eating attitudes and behaviors, and that these links can be partially or fully explained by body shame and appearance anxiety.'

This is in a similar vein to Nita Mary McKinley's Objectified Body Consciousness Theory, which attempts to 'measure the degree to which women engage in chronic self-policing of their physical appearance.' It was also devised to identify how 'self-surveillance has become conceptualized as the manifestation of self-objectification because it captures the habitual body monitoring that accompanies the adoption of an observer's standpoint on one's own body.' (as cited in Calogero, 2012, p. 577)

### **Albert Bandura's Social-Learning Theory**

In Bandura's Social-Learning Theory (1963), people learn through observing other behaviours, attitudes and outcomes of those behaviours. The theory explains human behaviour with regard to cognitive, behavioural and environmental influences.

It highlights the link between retention, reproduction and motivation and how people react to behaviours seen. This is relevant to the analysis of body image and social comparison theory. Bandura states that in social-learning 'an identificatory event is defined as the occurrence of similarity between the behavior of a model and another person under conditions where the model's behavior has served as the determinative cue for the matching responses.'

He highlights that 'behavior' includes the 'motoric, cognitive and physiological classes of response.' He states that it is crucial that both the characteristics of the behavior and 'its antecedents' are present when defining the properties of identification.

Observational learning is the 'basic learning process underlying identification,' and Bandura mentions it has two 'representational systems,' which are an imaginal and a verbal system.

The imagery formation of learning happens through 'sensory conditioning,' whereby the observer is influenced by repeated stimuli.

Conant, 1964; Ellson, 1941; Leuba, 1940 state that 'if perceptual sequences are repeatedly elicited, a constituent stimulus acquires the capacity to evoke images of the associated stimulus events even though they are no longer physically present.' (as cited in Bandura, 1969, p. 220) This highlights that consistent modelled behaviours influence the observer.

The second representational system is the 'verbal coding of observed events.' Bandura says that after something has been changed from a visual symbol to a verbal symbol, 'performances of matching behavior on later occasions can be effectively controlled by covert verbal self-directions.' In addition to this, one could say that Bandura predicted the huge influence that the mass media has on shaping individual's behaviours today. In his discussion, Bandura states how television affected young people and their pictorial influence in moulding people's opinions or behaviours. Bandura suggested that 'with further advances in communication technology, parents, teachers and other socialization agents may become relatively less influential role models.' This is similar to recent research carried out by Kenny et al, whereby peer modeling was widely discussed. The adolescents that participated in that study 'modeled the appearance of their peers in order to achieve peer similarity' (Kenny et al, 2016, p. 23). This correlates with Bandura's theory of social-learning, and also with Festinger's social comparison theory. Kenny et al highlight that 'individuals use information about others to derive conclusions about the self, body weight, and shape, comparisons were used by the adolescents to approximate how closely they physically resembled their peers.' (Kenny et al, 2016, p. 20) This constant comparing of themselves to their peers feeds into social media and how adolescents compare themselves to 'social media influencers', models, actresses and celebrities. Kenny et al identify that 'social media outlets were used by the girls to self-compare with peers; with such comparisons having a negative impact on their body image' (Kenny et al, 2016, p. 20).

## **Celebrity Culture Influence**

With the popularity of social media and the celebrity culture today, both men and women of all ages are open to becoming influenced by certain ideals of body image.

As Heinberg, L.J & Thompson, J.K state; 'our cognitive body image includes attentional body-focus and related self-statements, as well as beliefs about our bodies and bodily experience... the emotional component includes our experiences of comfort or discomfort, satisfaction or dissatisfaction associated with our appearance as well as with many other aspects of body experience.' (Heinberg & Thompson, 1995, p. 338). In a world where a wealth of information is available through technology, it has become the norm to 'just google it.' In relation to how children and young adolescent's body image is affected, the media is 'overloaded with flawless images of models and celebrities, messages regarding body shape ideals, and appearance management products and behaviors, such as dieting and exercise (Murnen, 2011). With the internet at their fingertips, children and adolescents have a huge variety of content to consume every second of every day.

As Currie et al, 2012 and Ito et al, 2010 discuss, adolescents can choose an unlimited amount of content from mobile phones, online media, print media or television. Tiggemann (2011) has a similar view that due to all of these technological amenities, children and adolescents may develop body dissatisfaction issues as a result of consuming content in the media.

When discussing the influence that the media has on body image, researchers have delved further into this and focused on celebrity role models.

With the vast amount of information at our fingertips in today's tech-savvy world, it is apparent that celebrities, influencers and other role models influence young people both in a negative and positive way.

In relation to identifying if girls or boys have a greater risk of body dissatisfaction, Grabe, Ward & Hyde found that 'exposure to appearance-focused media increases vulnerability to body image concerns in girls.' (Grabe, Ward & Hyde, 2008, p. 472)

The 'distal appearance environment' is discussed by Kierans and Swords (2016), who found the huge impact that the media and cultural appearance norms have on individuals. They state the importance of recognising the interactive way in which observers receive these images from the media. They found 'through discussing the messages transmitted by role models in the media, it was apparent that an aspirational appearance standard had been set, and that the social consequences of emulating celebrity looks and deviating from the ideal was further substantiated from this macro-level influence.' This again refers back to the notion of the 'ideal body' and how females place importance on body shape, type and characteristics of appearance. In their study, Kierans and Swords found that some of the girls who participated 'spoke of an ambition to follow celebrity looks predominantly to attain a strong social standing and appear attractive to potential partners.'

Furthermore, Kierans and Swords found that the girls 'perceived that the emulation of celebrity bodies would improve their social standing and contribute toward the pursuit of romantic relationships.' This can be observed when one group of girls voiced their opinion on celebrities who were too thin, yet boys desired them. When discussing an American actress, one participant said '*seriously, 7-and 8 year olds, that's how skinny she is,*' and another responded with '*all the lads like her.*'

It was interesting to note how these girls retrieved information on celebrities. Kierans and Swords state that 'information on how to accomplish celebrity looks was sourced from television, mothers' magazines, and also from peer appearance discussions.

The girls discussed how television programs and magazines mainly contained young people with ideal bodies and how this triggered a drive for thinness.

Similarly, as cited in Kierans and Swords, Tiggemann (2011) highlights how the appearance culture and culture norms are 'highly gendered.' She states that 'societal ideals for males and females are, respectively, hyper-muscular and hyper-thin.' (Kierans and Swords, 2016, p. 675). This correlates with Murnen (2011), who feels that cultural norms have created gendered roles, especially on 'what the female body should look like and what the male body can do.'

On the other hand, despite the constant pressures to look a certain way, Kierans and Swords found evidence of girls realising that some celebrities are too thin. 'The girls did not accept the societal ideal passively, yet their defense of a celebrity on an extreme diet because the celebrity did not appear 'really skinny' highlights how unhealthy notions may be promoted through negotiation within the peer context.'

It is clear that young girls have a contorted perception of body image ideals. This is why I am focusing my research on young girls between the ages of 8 and 12, to find out the main media and peer influences that affect their body image.

### **Advertising female beauty in the media**

It is fascinating to note how women adapt and assess their appearance in accordance with what they read, see, consume and hear. Advertising plays a pivotal role in this. Rudd & Lennon (1994) state that women learn to alter their appearance to try to conform to the cultural ideal. This is similar to Bell (1992) when he observed how young women practiced strict and 'ritualized behaviours' in order to maintain the 'ideal' appearance and to conform to this appearance ideal.

As Thompson et al (1999) state, when body image is distorted or disturbed, this can be as a result of various factors, including 'cognitive, affective, behavioural and perceptual.'

According to Martin and Kennedy's (1993) study, comparing an 'average looking woman' to an advertisement that featured an attractive model, they found that girls rated the 'average looking' woman as less attractive. This further confirms that the media has the potential to influence a negative body image or disordered eating behaviour upon a young female.

A common theme in these studies is using the experimental technique of upward or downward comparisons. Kierans and Swords comprehensive focus group research on young people's perception of appearance is very interesting. *'They might want to dress the way they want to dress but they dress like the way the popular people dress'* — James, Boy Group 4), while some participants felt that the influence of peers was, at times, so ingrained that young people were unaware that they were changing in order to conform.' (Kierans and Swords, 2016, p. 680)

According to Kierans and Swords, 'research supports the notion that exposure to appearance-focused media increases vulnerability to body image concerns in girls (e.g., Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008).' This further ignited my interest in how girls are affected by the media and societal pressures, and in particular, how these factors influence young girls.

Upon researching into this in more detail, Kierans and Swords noted that Blond (2008) found the impact of appearance-focused media was 'less substantial for boys, but effects are noteworthy all the same.' Although these researchers have found that it is often difficult to measure the specific factors that contribute to body dissatisfaction, Field et al (2001) have found that celebrity role models have had 'negative effects on body image attitudes and behavior...for both boys and girls.'

This correlates with Kierans and Swords, as they suggest that 'biological changes such as puberty and socio-environmental changes such as increased time spent with peers and the initiation of romantic relationships will alter the dynamic processes within the appearance culture.' (Kierans and Swords, 2016, p. 673) Everything from factors in their own personal environment, to their group of peers or family members, may have a negative influence on their own body image.

In relation to 'the ideal body,' Kierans and Swords mention that depending on an individual's personal characteristics, these 'changes' may 'lead to endorsement of the values, expressions, and activities of groups and symbols in the immediate and distal environment that promote the ideal body.' This confirms that an individual's body image depends on the level of 'endorsement' they engage in, i.e. images from the media, advertising and so on.

These idealised perceptions of female beauty have been explored by Martin and Kennedy (1993), who found that 8 to 11 year-old girls tended to compare and contrast themselves to models in advertisements, and that this in turn contributed to low self-esteem issues and 'lower ratings of participants' own attractiveness.' Their studies explored how media exposure and comparison processes affect individuals' body image. This is in a similar vein to developing body dissatisfaction, such as Botta's (1999) study where teenage girls and college women compared media images to themselves.

During this study, Botta used social comparison theory and 'critical viewing' among the sample group to 'predict adolescents' body-image disturbance and thin ideal endorsement.' Her results highlighted that 'body image processing' is crucial in comprehending how 'television images affect adolescent girls' body image attitudes and behaviors.'

Botta established that it was 'media variables' that caused 15% of participants to strive for 'thinness', '17% for body dissatisfaction, 16% for bulimic behaviors, and 33% for thin ideal endorsement.'

The mass media, which includes television, advertisements, print media and the internet often create unrealistic ideals of body shape, appearance and how we should look to others.

The ideal of a perfect female is a thin attractive model. McCabe, Butler and Watt, (2007) found 'over 60% of women are dieting in order to attain a perfect body image.'

The media create an environment of imitation. Celebrities are used constantly to promote products, while the general public are becoming more and more influenced at an intense level. Ata, Ludden, and Lally (2007) found that that females reported higher peer support, teasing from family about weight, pressure from friends to lose weight and pressure from the media in the eating and body image measurement.

Media is one of the sociocultural factors that affected how they eat and their body image (Ata, Ludden, & Lally 2007). Females were also at higher risk of developing distorted eating behaviours. The way that young people see themselves is of great interest, as body image is both a psychological and physical construct that involves body-related thoughts, beliefs, emotions and behaviours.

Cash and Smolak describe the complicated term here: 'body image transcends a singular experience. It is complex and multidimensional. It is gendered. It is ethnic and cultural. It is age dependent. It depends on the state of the body and the state of the mind.' (Cash and Smolak, 2011, p. 10)

In addition to this, there is the idea that the media creates idealised images of women.

Martin and Gentry (1997) carried out a study on females' appearance values and self-esteem. They gathered their responses to advertisements and how these compared to their own appearance. The participants were asked to use the pictures of these models to evaluate their own appearance and how they could improve their own appearance. Finally, the participants were asked to try to boost their self-esteem by 'discounting the models' appearance or making downward comparison to some aspect of the model.' The researchers found that the participants' self-esteem was lower when they 'were instructed to use the images of models to evaluate their own attractiveness.'

Van den Berg outlines similar studies in her research, for example Cattarin, Thompson, Thomas, and Williams (2000). They carried out a study on social comparison in relation to television advertisements. Van den Berg outlines that 'they showed appearance and non-appearance television commercials to participants who had been given an instructional set either encouraging social comparison or leading to distraction from the models in the commercials.' (Van den Berg, 2005, p. 19)

They found a "marginally" significant interaction between video and instruction conditions, with participants who were instructed to engage in social comparison having lower body satisfaction.

## **The 'ideal body'**

Upon researching literature on the 'ideal body' and at what point females become aware of their own body image, it was interesting to find that young females compare themselves to their peers. In 1998, Levine & Smolak found that 'during late childhood and early adolescence, when social comparison plays a more significant role in self-perception, females who do not have the ideal body shape agonize about their bodies.' As cited in Thompson and Heinberg (1999, p. 344), 'it is proposed that media influence may play a secondary role by providing information on problematic means of achieving the idealized body size, such as fasting, over exercising, and purgative techniques.' They state that not only is it young female's peers that may influence their perception of their own body image, but 'it is through the flashy images of "perfect" female beauty promoted ubiquitously in magazines, television and films.' Similarly, Thompson et al (1999) found through studies that this 'perfect body has flawless skin, a thin waist, long-legs and well-developed breasts.'

These themes are integrated into recent research by Grogan (2016), who says that 'fashion and lifestyle magazines continue to carry airbrushed images of young men and women with slender, toned bodies.' Grogan also refers to the negative impact that the media have on individual's body image, as she states that 'popular media such as tabloid newspapers continue to run articles critiquing the bodies of celebrities.' She poses the question as to whether or not societies perception of acceptable beauty and body image standards have changed.

## **Irish Research on Body Image**

Kierans and Swords (2016) state that negative body image, or body dissatisfaction, 'is a growing health problem for adolescents in Western societies.' They also explore studies from Bucchianeri, Arikian, Hannan, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013; Neumark-Sztainer, Paxton, Hannan, Haines, & Story (2006) on body dissatisfaction among gender, body mass index scores, socioeconomic status (SES), and ethnicity.' Kierans and Swords state that 'cultural norms regarding the body are omnipresent within many cultures and widely dispersed in the distal environment through the media' (Kierans and Swords, 2016, p. 672). They highlight that 'these values and expectancies can be reinforced through immediate socialization agents such as family members and peers, creating an appearance culture where individual-context interactions reciprocally influence each other.' This view is shared by Jones, Vigfusdottir, and Lee's (2004) opinion on peer culture. They state that 'norms, beliefs, and expectations related to appearance are transmitted to, or created within, a peer group, shaping attitudes and behaviors about one's own and others' appearance.' This further solidifies the point that Kierans and Swords make regarding Irish appearance culture among young people. They discuss below three main themes to explain how young people's body image is formed in today's society.

(a) 'appearance related norms and processes' which operate in young adolescents' environment.

(b) 'means by which more distal levels of sociocultural influences are transmitted' and

(c) 'individual characteristics that shape the experience of the appearance culture.'

Children are particularly influenced by their family and peers as they approach adolescence because there seems to be a societal pressure to form an acceptable social identity.

As Price (2009) states, 'in order to develop a personal identity and to be accepted socially, others' approval of one's appearance is of high importance, with peer acceptance, romantic relationships, and popularity all inextricably embedded.' This therefore affects their body image and level of self-worth, as they change both physically and emotionally throughout their teenage years. I agree with Kierans and Swords as they make the point that 'the level of endorsement will produce different developmental consequences for an individual's body image.' Essentially, they explain that every adolescent is unique and this impacts differently on their own body image. Factors such as 'values, expressions and activities of groups...in the immediate and distal environment' will each produce a different developmental result per person.

In Ireland, a national survey examining adolescents' perceptions of and attitudes toward body image revealed that 43% of participants aged 10 to 21 years were dissatisfied with their body image (O'Connell & Martin, 2012). Cross-sectional studies in Ireland revealed that 81% of girls and 55% of boys aged 12 to 18 years reported a desire to alter their body shape (Lawler & Nixon, 2011), while 13% of non-overweight children, aged 10 to 17 years, reported that they were on a diet (Kelly, Molcho, & Nic Gabhainn, 2010).

McEvoy (2009) identified that poor self-image (i.e., how individuals perceive themselves and how others perceive them) as the leading contributing factor negatively impacting the mental health of adolescents aged 12 to 18 years in Ireland.

## **Department of Health Ireland**

In addition to this, The Department of Health in Ireland devised an obesity policy and action plan for 2016-2025. The Department of Health consulted with the Citizen Participation Unit, Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), University College Cork (UCC), along with children and young people, as well as their parents to produce 'A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016-2025. Even though this study is heavily based on ways to lower childhood obesity, it has some interesting facts in relation to body image. The study found that young people aged 13-17 years old identified body image and media influences as 'the top barriers to ha healthy lifestyle among teenagers.' For girls, this included the 'pressure to conform to a particular body image – to be skinnier.'

Furthermore, these participants found that causes of stress or anxiety was due to 'negative pressure and bullying.' They felt that there is a need in Ireland to promote a 'greater awareness of the importance of accepting who you are.'

## **Teen Mental Health: The Irish Examiner/Reach Out Ireland survey**

This survey was conducted to record teenagers' views on youth mental health and also identify the issues that affect them. In March 2017, according to [www.reachout.com](http://www.reachout.com), over '2,500 teenagers (13 - 19 year-olds) completed [their] online survey' called 'What's wrecking your head?' Researchers found that 'nearly 75% of teens worry about body shape,' which is an alarmingly high number of teenagers. The Irish Examiner reported that 'girls worry more than boys but the male figures are still high. As teenagers mature, they don't appear to become more confident about their bodies. Rather, they seem to self-berate and self-judge more. The survey results revealed that 72% of the 2,500 teenagers believed body image issues caused them difficulties.'

With regard to body image, the age of the teenager played a big factor in how they viewed themselves. The study found that 61% of participants in their early teens viewed body image as a 'cause of stress,' whereas by the mid-teens, this statistic had risen to 74%. The influence that the media and their peers has on their own body image is a huge factor among teenage girls – '81% of teenage girls named body image as a source of stress.' However, within the male teenage group, this figure was considerably lower at 52%.

Teenagers also found that social media played a huge role in 'the need to have a perfect life.' This is similar to Bodywhys Youth Development Officer, Fiona Flynn's view, which states that this pressure is coming from magazines, TV and movies, as well as from a constant updated social media feed. A lot of what was identified in the study highlighted the decrease in self-esteem among young people, as they seem so pre-occupied with body image. This draws upon the positive effect team sports, extra-curricular activities and reducing time on social media has on teenagers.

Barry Murphy, Communications Officer for Bodywhys: The Eating Disorders Association of Ireland, highlighted that 'teenagers live in a world where 10 million images are added every hour to Facebook and the average phone is unlocked 100 times a day.' He discusses here how 'inextricably linked' body image is to how they compare and contrast themselves online. This mirrored Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, which states how individuals compare themselves to their peers constantly, in order to receive self-validation, in a way.

Furthermore, the survey found that views on social media were generally negative and also linked to body image. One participant said that social media has '*created a false sense of what is right and what is wrong.*' This intense pressure from social media is a sad truth in today's society.

This highlights how these edited posts on social media do not reflect real life, instead they increase a negative body image as people compare and contrast themselves with a superficial view of an individual. I found this particular teenagers' comments very applicable to our current society and intelligently articulated – *'if there was an app to post what's going on in your mind, you'd realise we're all the same, facing the same struggles and battling the same demons every day.'* Although it has been discussed and spoken about widely, there is still a certain stigma attached to mental health problems.

## Chapter 3: Research Methodology

### Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used in this research. This qualitative study aims to address how Irish primary school girls between the ages of 8 and 12 years-old perceive their own 'body image,' along with identifying the risk and protective factors involved in forming these attitudes and beliefs. Although there has been significant research carried out in relation to adolescent body image in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States to date, 'we cannot assume that the influencing processes operating within the Irish sociocultural environment are the same.' (Kierans and Swords, 2016, p. 675)

Kenny et al's evidence finds that 'Irish adolescents describe distinct and predominantly negative modes through which peers impact body image.' (Kenny et al, 2016, p. 24)

Similarly, Carey et al (2014) found that 'among adolescent girls, body comparisons with peers and models have been found to significantly mediate the relationship between the endorsement of thinness and body image concern.'

However, due to the fact that Irish research on children's body image is quite limited, I decided that the research will be based on young primary school aged girls and their perceptions of body image. By conducting a qualitative study through a focus group, the aim is to identify the attitudes and behaviours specific to a poor body image. In addition to this, the researcher will explore how the participants' sociocultural variables (television, magazine and social media exposure, and their peers) impact on these.

Finally, this chapter will discuss the research design, research process, analysis of data, ethical considerations and the power differential between adult and child, as well as challenges involved throughout the research process.

## Design:

### Research Aims and Questions

This research aims to explore the impact of media influences on body image among primary school girls, aged between 8 and 12 years old. In particular, this research focuses on how young girls perceive images before and after Photoshop. Through the qualitative method of focus groups, it was aimed to elicit the children's' understanding of their own body image and how the media and their peers influence this. The research aims can be found on page 3 and 4 of this study.

In addition to this, using open-ended questioning, the researcher explored whether this age group of children experience body dissatisfaction from exposure to the media (social media, magazines, television) and what their opinions are on the appearance culture.

**Table 3.1 Research questions**

Research question 1	What are the current views of girls between 8 and 12 years old on their own body image?
Research question 2	How does the 'media' (as outlined above) impact on their self-esteem?
Research question 3	When presented with pre and post Photoshop images of celebrities, can the girls identify the differences?

## **Purpose of Research and participants involved**

This research is an explanatory piece of work, which aims to gain an insight into how young girls are affected by the media today. It aims to explore the children's perspectives on their own body image through qualitative means and to compare these opinions from two differently aged focus groups. Based in a DEIS (Disadvantaged status) school and conducted during school hours, one focus group consisted of five 3<sup>rd</sup> class students, with the other comprising of six 5<sup>th</sup> class students. Particularly of interest throughout this research is gaining an understanding of how young girls perceive images that have been doctored using the photo editing software Photoshop. In keeping with the nature of exploratory research, it is intended that these research questions are explored, but that no definite solutions are subsequently defined. One research aim is to gain a wider insight into the effects of the media on body image among 8 to 12-year-old girls.

This research drew inspiration from Cash's (2002) view of how body image is constructed negatively. It was concerned with the 'evaluative-affective dimension' of negative body image, including body dissatisfaction and a negative view of one's own appearance.

In addition to this, the study focused on young Irish adolescents and their views on the 'appearance culture.' Cash was particularly interested in the 'dynamic processes' that they feel are influential in their own environment and how these affect their perceptions of body image. Cash sought to understand if the participants are affected more so by their immediate peers or by 'appearance related' media.

## Research Process

The research process was carried out in chronological order in Table 3.2. This process outlines the individual role that the school, parents and children played in contributing to this research. Having gained ethical approval from the Griffith College Research Ethics Committee, the researcher then approached the school principal to discuss the research title: *'How does the portrayal of female beauty by the media influence Irish female children between the ages of 8 and 12 years old?'* Upon receiving permission from the school principal, a Parental Consent Form (Appendix 1) and the Information Sheet (Appendix 2) was sent home to the parents of the children involved, and a copy was given to the principal also.

**Table 3.2 Research Process**

Stage	School Visit	Activity
Preparation	Approach the school principal and discuss research aims and process	Give principal the Parental Consent Form (Appendix 1) and Information Sheet (Appendix 2) to keep.
Phase One	After permission from principal is received, visit the group of students	Give the students the Information Sheet and Parental Consent Forms to get consent from the parents to allow the child partake in the focus group. Collect these signed forms in one week.
Phase Two	Focus group discussion – day one	In a vacant classroom, gather the 3 <sup>rd</sup> class students around the interactive whiteboard to discuss the powerpoint presentation prepared. This will involve open-ended structured questions based on the research topic.
Phase Three	Focus group discussion - day two	The next day, the researcher gathers the 5 <sup>th</sup> class students around the interactive whiteboard to discuss the powerpoint presentation prepared. This will involve open-ended structured questions based on the research topic.
Phase Four	Debrief and thank the students for participating	The researcher and children debrief.

## **Focus Groups**

Focus groups were used in this research to give the children the opportunity to voice their views in a safe school environment. The data from these focus groups was then used to analyse how 8 to 12 year-old girls perceive body image and how the media influences this.

Focus groups are intended to create an informal atmosphere and this includes discussing the topic whilst their peers are present.

Essentially, the data from the focus groups was used to inform the research questions and delve deeper into understanding the thoughts of the children involved. To ensure each student understood the relevant terminology such as 'body image' and 'the ideal body,' these definitions were pre-taught before the interview began.

Gibbs states that a 'focus group research model involves planned discussion with a selected group of people 'to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic' (1997).

Originally, I wanted to conduct two focus groups with 6 to 8 early teenage participants and the other group with late teenage participants. On further analysis of these groups, it was found that there has been a considerable amount of study on adolescents, hence why the research focus was centralised on primary school girls, aged between 8 and 12 years-old.

According to Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub (1996), 4 to 6 participants is adequate when conducting a focus group research with children and adolescents. The group is generally made up of the same sex and similar aged participants. A collaborative focus group research allows the researcher to gain a wide variety of information, often using open-ended questioning.

Powell et al (1996) define a focus group as 'a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research.' The questions used as part of this study involved how the media influence this age group, how they make choices based on what they consume as followers of the media and how their behaviour is affected by these factors.

Additionally, as peer influence and cultural norms are important factors in a child's environment, a focus group approach was considered an appropriate means of gaining a collective notion of the proximal processes occurring within the appearance culture with the target population (Tiggemann et al., 2000). As participants will be guided with planned open questions and points of discussion, they will also have opportunities to further explore the topic through in-depth discussion. As Gibbs states; 'the benefits of focus group research include gaining insights into people's shared understandings of everyday life and the ways in which individuals are influenced by others in a group situation.'

The focus groups convened for approximately thirty minutes on both days, as well as a 5-minute break in the middle in order to maintain their concentration and good behaviour.

The researcher ensured there were consented participants on stand-by if there was any student absent for any reason.

The importance of confidentiality within the focus group context was discussed at the beginning of both groups. The role of the moderator is to maximise the interaction of group participants in a non-threatening environment (Heary & Hennessy, 2002). As trust in the researcher is a crucial part of focus groups to work seamlessly, each participant was reminded that whatever they shared within the group will not be disclosed anywhere else and that they should feel safe to voice their opinions within the group session.

## **Reporting on the Focus Groups**

According to Greene & Hill (2005), researchers interested in exploring how children construe themselves and the world they live in are increasingly turning to qualitative methods due to their open-ended, narrative and holistic nature. This is true of the qualitative nature of focus groups. In order to inform the research accurately, the goal of the focus groups was to explore the understandings of the participants in relation to body image and appearance. All participants were in the same class, (a 3<sup>rd</sup> class group and a 5<sup>th</sup> class group).

### **The researcher as a moderator**

The moderator was a vital part of the focus group, whereby I facilitated the group discussion to allow the children to speak about the powerpoint presentation (Appendix 3) and discuss their views on appearance and body-related issues. By facilitating the discussion, I did not prompt the children in any way. Instead I encouraged participants to actively speak and engage with each other. The same line of open-ended questioning was followed to ensure consistency in both groups. These questions included; *which celebrity do you think is the prettiest nowadays?* *'how do you feel about your own appearance/body image?'*

Looking at the pre and post Photoshopped photographs, the children were asked *'how does \_\_\_\_\_ look different here and why?'*

Due to the child protection guidelines in the school, the door of the classroom was left open and a Resource teacher was present in the classroom also. The children and researcher sat in a circle.

These focus groups were audio-recorded using a dictaphone placed in the centre of the group. By adhering to the method of data protection and storage, these recordings were securely stored, along with parental consent forms returned to the researcher.

## **Analysis of Data:**

### **Data Sources**

There are two sources of data within this research. The first data source arose from the detailed responses from the 3<sup>rd</sup> class group, while the second data source came from the second focus group, consisting of six 5<sup>th</sup> class students.

### **Data Analysis and Data Collection**

Qualitative research is based on structured aims, questions and discussions and does not strive to prove a certain hypothesis. Having gathered the audio recordings together, the researcher then transcribed these verbatim, and in line with Braun & Clarke's (2013) suggestion, these were then analysed using a thematic analysis approach. The researcher analysed both focus group discussions and began the coding process, using Braun & Clarke's (2013) thematic analysis model. Important themes were then identified from categorising the codes identified through the coding process.

Braun & Clarke's phases of thematic analysis are outlined in Table 3.3 and as follows:

1. Familiarisation with the data: this involves reading and re-reading the data while collating any analytic observations
2. Coding: identifying 'labels for important features of the data.'
3. Themes: the researcher generates themes or categories that are relevant to the research questions and aims.
4. Reviewing themes: the researcher ensures each theme reflects the data accurately and is interpreted carefully to reflect the participants' responses.
5. Naming the themes: the title of the theme should reflect the data collated.

6. Writing up: this involves combining the ‘analytic narrative’ and ‘data extracts’ to present the data in a concise and structured way.

**Table 3.3 Thematic Analysis Phases**

Phase	Name
1	Familiarisation with data
2	Generating codes
3	Identifying themes
4	Review themes
5	Name themes
6	Writing up data

### **Coding**

Based on the journey of questioning (Table 3.1), a coding template (chapter 4, table 4.3) was devised to incorporate these themes and sub-themes identified from the questions and aims of this research. Codes that represented similar meanings were categorised together at a semantic level. These codes were analysed again and any important data was re-read in order to define the themes, where a thematic map (Table 4.2) was established, in line with Braun & Clarke’s (2006) method. The themes explored in this research were based on a study by Kierans and Swords (2016) and were amended by me in light of the raw data extracted from the focus group interviews. This thematic map is vital in seeing each theme both individually and how they interlink to inform the research aims of this work.

## **Ethics**

### **The Power Differential**

The research method conducted as part of this study involved the qualitative process of focus groups. As these focus groups involved children as the participants, it was imperative that I gained parental consent (Appendix 1) but also earned the trust of the 8 to 12-year-old participants. It is vital to recognise the importance of the generation gap between participants and the researcher, as the participants may feel intimidated by an authoritative figure. Hence why I adopted the 'least-adult' principles from Mandell (1991) to address the power differential. This is similar to Clark's (2011) view, 'a focal concern in carrying out research was to foster children's airing of their own views... approaches that invited kids to narrate, show and tell... or to be playfully engaged were the sorts that generally gained ground.' (Clark, 2011, p. 17) From this, I included the powerpoint presentation (Appendix 3) to try to illustrate the research questions in a child-friendly way.

When conducting research with children it is important to note the 'complex relationship between issues of power, control, responsibility and ethics.' (Veale, 2005 in Greene and Hogan, 2005, p. 270). In this way, it was crucial that I used Mandell's least-adult principles to inform my research in an ethical way. These principles included; (a) ensuring that the children know that the adult believes that their social world is important, (b) decreasing the social differences between adult and child and (b) the children should be engaged in social activities to respond comfortably.

## **Ethical consideration**

This research gained ethical approval from the Griffith College Research Ethics Committee.

As with anyone who is undertaking research with members of the public, it is vital to ensure participants are aware of what the research entails. Ethical considerations are outlined in the Information Sheet (Appendix 2). Parental permission was gained as the participants were all under the age of 18.

One of the most important ethical issues that arises within collaborative focus group research is 'the handling of sensitive material and confidentiality given that there will always be more than one participant in the group. Participants need to be encouraged to keep confidential what they hear during the meeting and researchers have the responsibility to anonymise data from the group.' (Gibbs, 1997) It is important to remind participants that anything they contribute will be heard by the other participants in the group, including the moderator, who has a duty to keep these opinions and views confidential.

The participants had the right to remain in the focus group but they also had the right to withdraw from the research process if required. Therefore, under no circumstances were the participants forced to answer within the focus group.

## Identification of Challenges or Limitations

With regard to any challenges that may arise during research, Gibbs (1997) mentions that 'it may not be easy to get a representative sample and focus groups may discourage certain people from participating, for example those who are not very articulate or confident, and those who have communication problems or special needs.' Thankfully I did not have this issue, as I received parental consent from each participant taking part in the research.

Confidentiality is of vital importance as this research involves minors. Anything discussed within the group is used for academic research benefit and will not be passed onto any third parties. To support data protection guidelines, this includes omitting the names of the participants, and using letters instead.

According to Gibbs (1997) 'problems arise when attempting to identify the individual view from the group view, as well as in the practical arrangements for conducting focus groups.' This highlights the crucial role that the moderator has in the group. There were a few times during both focus groups when I had to refer back to the main question as a focal point, as some of the young children would get side-tracked and trail away from the topic discussed.

In addition to this, because children are easily influenced and respond well to prompting, I ensured not to prompt them in any way. As Gibbs (1997) states: you 'must avoid giving personal opinions so as not to influence participants towards any particular position or opinion... the role of the moderator is a demanding and challenging one, and moderators will need to possess good interpersonal skills and personal qualities, being good listeners, non-judgmental and adaptable.'

Participants from both focus groups often waited for others to respond before they answered, or they waited to be called upon by me, thus preventing potential key responses from being captured on audio.

Therefore, it was vital for the discussions to be short and allow the children to take a short break in the middle of the focus group. In order to run a successful focus group, the moderator requires good leadership skills, empathy and 'interpersonal skills' to manage the group effectively. I feel this was one of the many strengths of this study as the participants felt comfortable and at ease during the focus groups. Resource teacher was present in order to adhere to the schools Child Protection Guidelines, where there must always be at least two adults in a room with children.

## Chapter 4 Results Analysis

This chapter discusses the results of the research and how these were interpreted. The research results are merged together from both focus groups, as they had equivalent themes.

Arising from these discussions, themes were explored relating to body image and the participants' perception of the 'ideal body.' The raw data from the focus groups is typed in *Italic*, while the codes and themes extracted from the raw data is typed in Calibri font.

### Creative Analysis

These codes are found in Table 4.3. Based on the researcher's analysis of the codes in the focus group discussions, these codes were then grouped into themes, subtotalling to 5 main themes, and 2 sub-themes (Table 4.1 below). The themes explored in this research were based on a study by Kierans and Swords (2016) and were amended by me in light of the raw data extracted from the focus group interviews. The publication is called '*Exploring the Appearance Culture in Early Adolescence: A Qualitative Focus Group Approach in the Republic of Ireland (ROI)*' and will be referred to throughout this results analysis.

**Table 4.1 Themes and Sub-Themes**

<b>Category One:</b>	<b>Body Image</b>
<b>Main Theme 1.1</b>	Personal Body Image
<b>Sub-Theme 1.2</b>	Body Dissatisfaction and Idealisation of Thinness
<b>Main Theme 2</b>	Peer Comparisons and Appearance Evaluation
<b>Category Two:</b>	<b>Socio cultural factors that influence the participants, focuses on the influence of the media.</b>
<b>Main Theme 3</b>	Awareness of Photoshop and plastic surgery
<b>Main Theme 4.1</b>	Social Media Influence
<b>Sub-Theme 4.2</b>	Celebrity Adoration
<b>Main Theme 5</b>	Positive Peer and Parental Influence on Self-Esteem

These main themes arose from the analysis of codes from both (3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> class) focus group transcripts, along with reference to a selection of the themes in Kierans and Swords 2016 qualitative study. As this Irish study is based on data from adolescent groups, I amended these themes to apply them to primary school aged girls (8 to 12 years-old).

These main themes were then analysed by the researcher and sub-themes were devised to accompany some themes, for example, the theme of 'social media influence' also includes a sub-theme of 'celebrity adoration.' The thematic map on the next page (Figure 4.1) illustrates the themes and sub-themes.

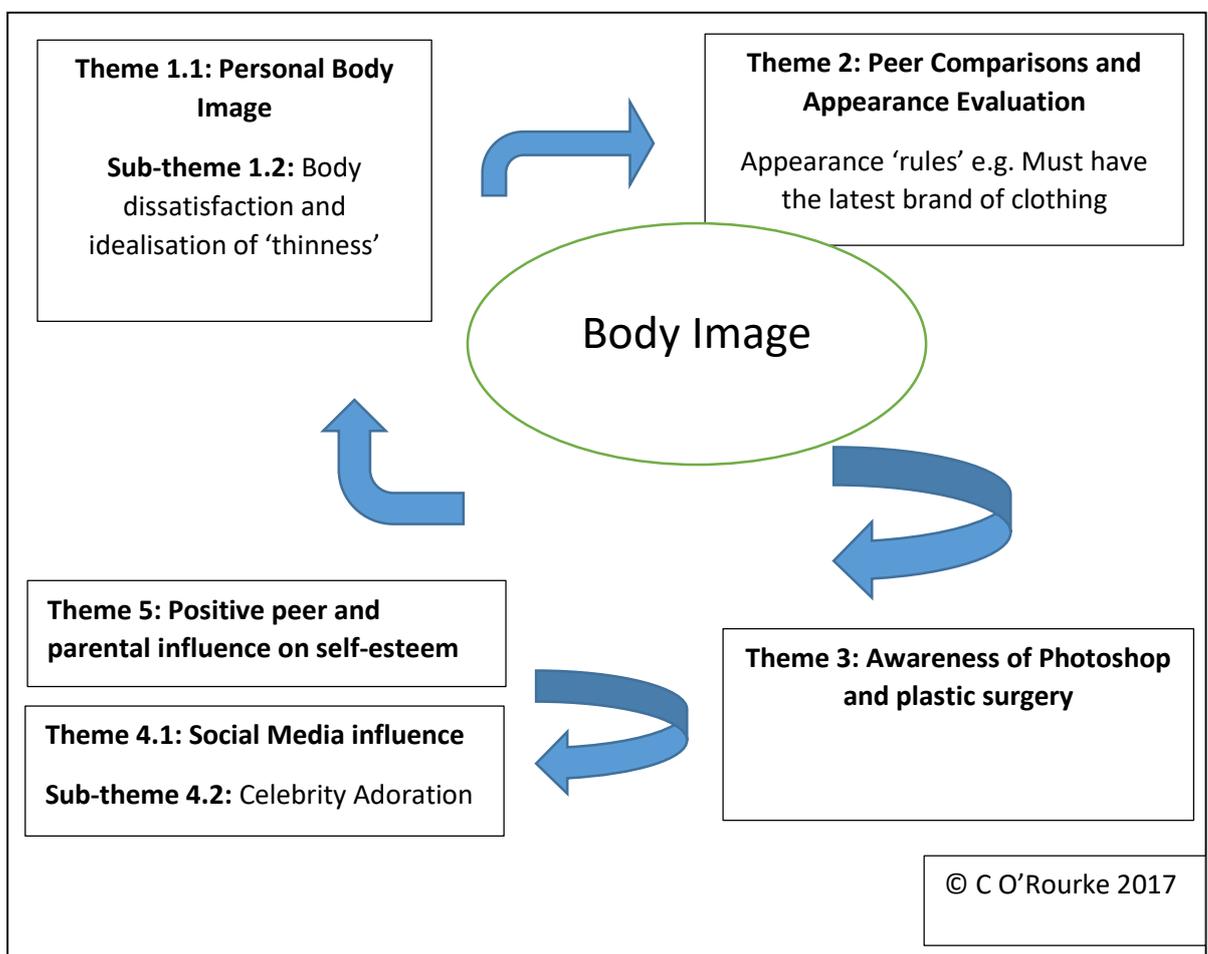
In line with the schools Child Protection Policy and adhering to the Griffith College Ethical Guidelines, the participant's names are not used in this analysis. Instead, the 3<sup>rd</sup> class children are named as Child A, B, C, D and E, while the 5<sup>th</sup> class students are named by the first letter of their name: L, B, C, A, AN and J.

## Thematic Map

According to Braun & Clarke, thematic analysis 'is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis.' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 78)

The thematic map devised to outline the main themes and sub-themes from both focus group data sets is illustrated below in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1 Thematic Map**



**Table 4.2****Codes used to inform the themes**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Face	Any facial features (eyes, eyebrows, lips, chin, eyelashes)
Pret	References to being pretty/pretty celebrities
PShop	Photoshop pictures, elements of Photoshop
P	Plastic surgery
Int	Internet & social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat)
Cel	References to celebrities and well-known YouTubers or bloggers
MU	Make-up
WTB	Weight/Thin/Big references to body shapes
BC	Bad comments or references to celebrities facing 'bad feedback' from fans
Fake	Fake/'not real' quotes on appearance/body shape
Skin	References to spots, bad skin, acne in celebrities
Feel	Feeling sad/horrible
Bull	References to bullying/being bullied
Peers	References to peers/classmates/boys versus girls
PPR	Positive peer references

## Results of focus group interviews: 3<sup>rd</sup> Class and 5<sup>th</sup> class

This section outlines the main themes and sub-themes that were formed from the transcribed discussions, as illustrated in Table 4.1.

### Category 1

#### Main Theme 1.1                      Personal Body Image

##### 3<sup>rd</sup> Class:

The girls in the 3<sup>rd</sup> class focus group discussed how they often think about the way that they look. They also made references to being 'thin' or 'bigger,' and how weight is sometimes an issue, which is discussed in Sub-Theme 1.2 (body dissatisfaction and idealisation of thinness) below. In addition to this, it was evident that the girls are very much aware of the 'ideal' appearance culture and repeatedly mentioned the words 'make-up,' 'pretty,' 'face,' 'eyebrows/eyelashes/lips/chin/hair' when reacting to the powerpoint presentation.

Although many participants voiced the opinion that 'looks don't really matter,' there was an equally strong feeling that being 'pretty' did matter, so that they would be accepted by their peers and resemble idolised celebrities such as Ariana Grande and YouTuber Zoella. This is similar to Kierans and Swords (2016, p. 679), who state that 'significant others in the proximal environment and perceptions of the appearance culture clearly suggested the importance of appearance and body image for social success.'

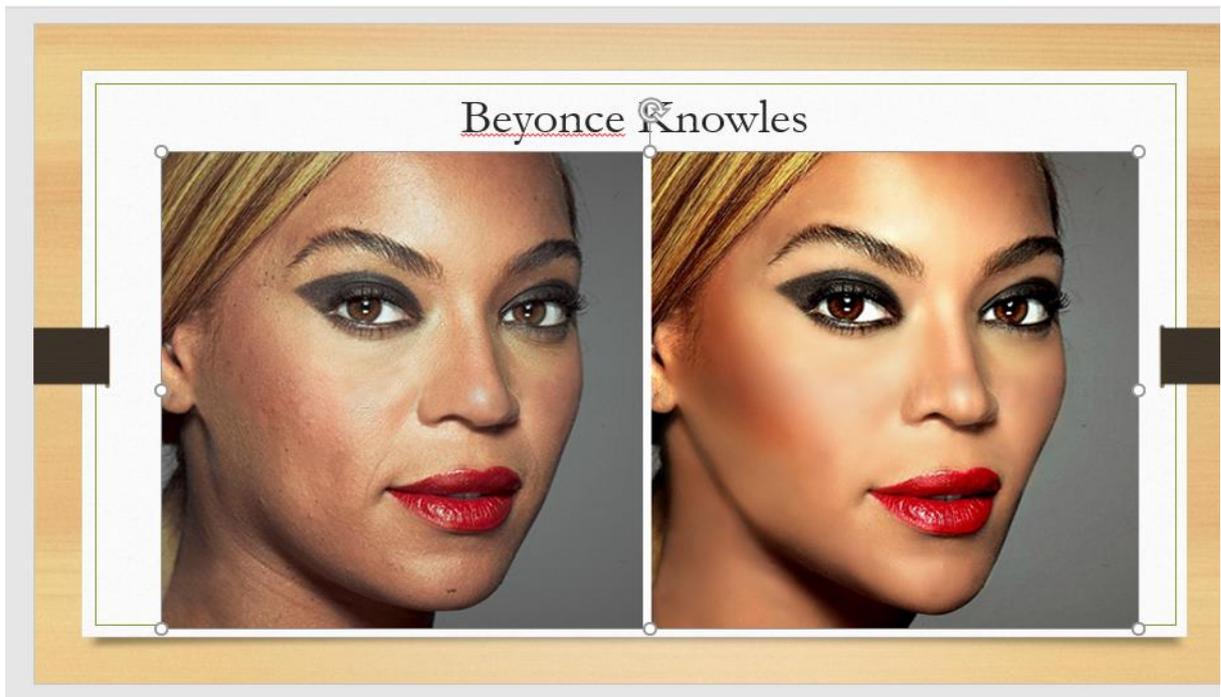
When asked by the researcher what do you like about yourself, the girls responded that they like to use filters on Snapchat to alter their appearance in pictures:

Child B: *'my favourite would be the face swap coz you can look pretty all the time.'*

Child A: *'yeah it makes you look different.'*

Child D: *'I never use it... but there's loads of people that use it if like their make-up is gone or something... or if they done their make-up and it goes bad, they always like... fix the make-up up.'*

Child C: *'commenting on photo 1 (Beyoncé) 'Yeah...I don't think that's good...coz it's not the real her...she has smoother skin.'*



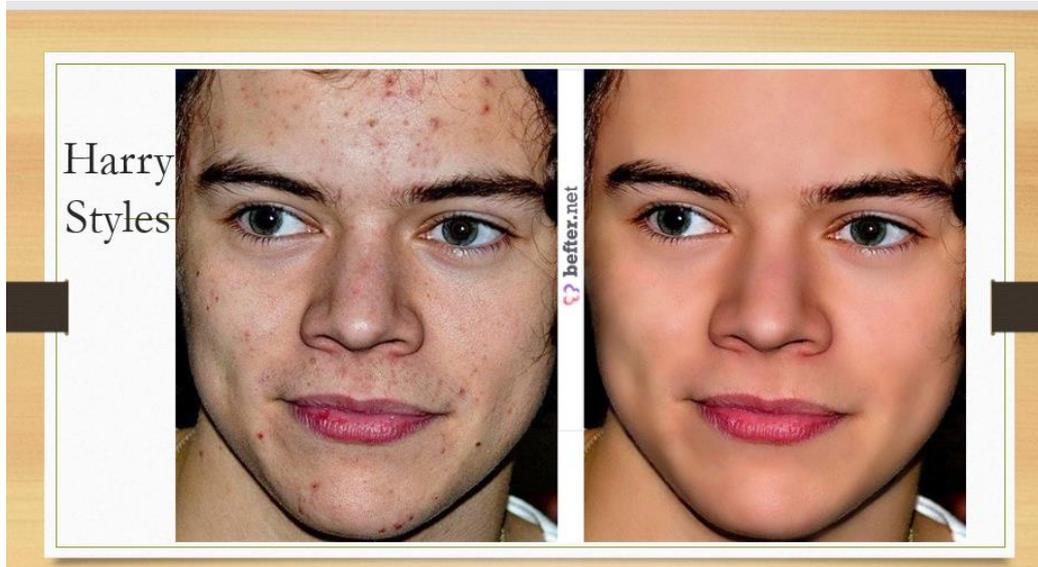
**Photo 1: American singer, Beyoncé Knowles, before and after photoshop**

Confidence and self-esteem were discussed, as the participants spoke about how the celebrities featured in the powerpoint presentation (Appendix 3) would feel in real life about their appearance.

Child D: *'This annoys me a lot...oh my god... it's just so different...what the hell.'*

Child E: *'and I saw on his (Harry Styles, photo 2) You Tube video that he was singing and he actually looked like that (pointing to the pre-Photoshopped photo 2) and then, so they forgot the part and then in the other video he was looking like that (points to the right hand side of photo 2).'*

The children felt as though they were being lied to by pictures that were altered in the media. Although some were not aware of Photoshop in photo editing, after seeing the presentation they recognised how different the pictures looked after using the photo editing software.



**Photo 2: British singer, Harry Styles, before and after Photoshop.**

The children were shocked at the pre-Photoshopped picture, as they had never seen Harry Styles in this way before. They discussed how his acne might affect the public's opinion of him, and they may see him in a negative 'ugly' light.

*Child E: 'like think of it if he comes with those spots I don't think people will really like him...he's a good singer... but he doesn't look like a singer.'*

*Renee: 'like you wouldn't really want to look like that (pre Photoshop) you would want to look like that (points to post Photoshop) coz somebody would like... when you walk past somebody and then like they start talking behind your back or something.'*

One girl (child E) in particular made numerous references to the importance of being aesthetically pleasing to her peers and, more specifically, to boys. When reacting to photo 2, she states *'if I saw him I'd be like... I need a nicer boyfriend than him.'*

The girls go so far as to begin mocking photo 2, as child A says *'does he have chicken pox in that?'* (all the group laugh).

Thus proving how negatively the girls seem to view a *'spotty'* face. They discussed how *'when we're older'* if they had spots or acne that they would not have a lot of confidence, in order to be socially accepted or liked by their peers, they would need to have *'perfect skin.'*

However, some participants such as Child C stated that they would still be confident in their own skin and commented how important it is to not focus on what others think -

Child C: *'and because if they slagged me it doesn't really matter coz it's still me and it's like them slagging themselves.'*

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Class group response:**

Interestingly, the 5<sup>th</sup> class group's discussion was similar to that of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class group. They equally felt that there is pressure from social media, especially on Instagram, to look a certain way. The 5<sup>th</sup> class group echoed a lot of the vocabulary of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class group, using terms such as *'make-up,' 'pretty,' 'face,' 'eyebrows/eyelashes/lips/chin/hair'* when they discussed the powerpoint presentation and their own feelings on personal body image.

They discussed how too much make-up would be unappealing, however if they had spots or *'acne'* they mentioned how this would be unattractive to boys. They spoke about photo 1 (Beyoncé) and how her face is unrecognisable due to too much make-up:

C: *'I think she would feel horrible coz it's too much make-up she's wearing.'*

A: *'You can see all the imperfections on her face.'*

Again, they discuss how embarrassed they would be if they had a 'spotty face' like Harry Styles in photo 2:

B: *'If I was him I'd die!'*

A: *'Oh I don't wanna know what he thinks of himself... uh-uh.'* One participant expressed empathy as she imagines herself in his situation and how he might *'feel really upset.'*

A: *'Maybe he thinks of even... with his acne... he's like you know handsome or something... yeah like you can't say he's not...but he could feel really upset.'*

Furthermore, the 5<sup>th</sup> class participants compare their own looks to celebrities, commenting on photo 4(a) A: *'sometimes I'd want to look like her but... it could make you feel insecure... it depends on your opinion on her.'* A: *'some people who are like really insecure would try and do that.'*

This mirrors Kierans and Swords (2016 p. 680) finding that people engage 'in behaviors against their judgment to conform to the peer group.'

A: *'if you see a picture of Kylie Jenner and you see the way she looks and her body and everything... I feel like you would probably try and change your body as well... not just your face but your body as well... to try and look like her... or whatever your idol is.'*

An: *'everybody does want to be her though.'*

They mention that they would not want to be over-confident to be like Kylie Jenner:

J: *'well I like when she was younger better coz she could've been more nice then!'*

L: *'yeah instead of like all over herself.'* B: *'yeah they could be like oh well she's nice and I'm not... and they could get upset.'*

## Sub-Theme 1.2

## Body dissatisfaction and idealisation of thinness

Ultimately, the children are aware of what is 'skinny' or 'fat,' but due to their age (8 to 9 years old) they were not too concerned with their own weight. However, they did identify that some celebrities are 'too thin' and said that celebrities do not want to be 'slagged' or get 'bad comments' due to their looks or body shape.

Child E: *'There's these things on the internet that's like on magazines where there's like photoshops and it points out like loads of people like maybe make their legs skinnier or make their arms really skinny.'*

Child E: *'yeah...umm I mean I watched a video before where there was a woman that was...umm that was like bigger than other people (opens both hands wide) and then the Photoshop they made her like really skin...umm like thin I mean...and then it was like 5 seconds getting fit, and then in a few seconds she was thin.'*

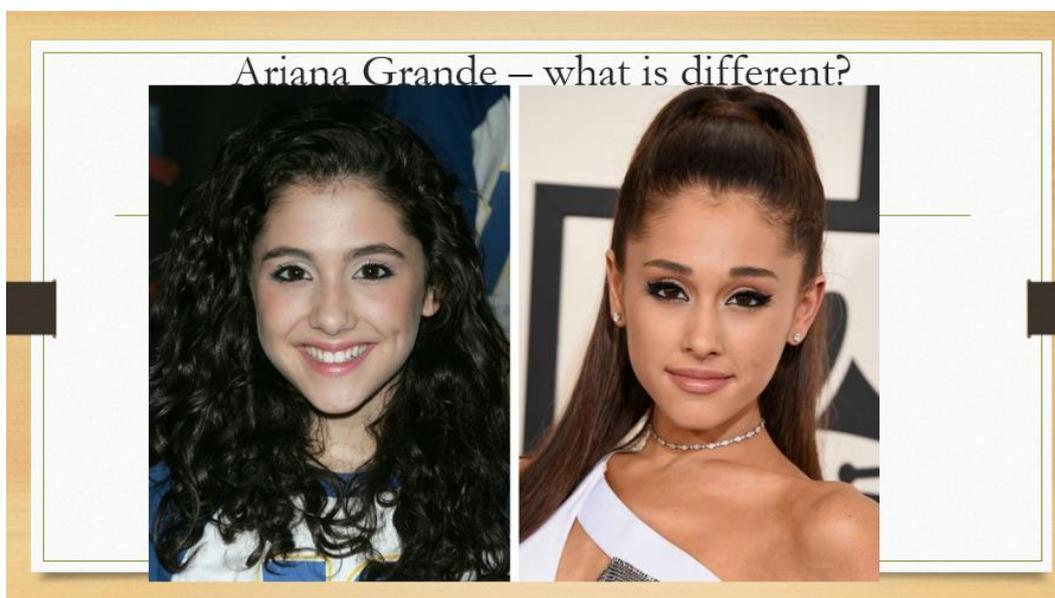


Photo 3: American singer, Ariana Grande

Whereas Child B reacts to the picture of singer Ariana Grande (photo 3):

*'For me I think...she wasn't happy about that coz probably she liked her normal weight like when she's bigger and she likes herself without anything.'* The 5<sup>th</sup> class participants referred to Ariana Grande (above) as being 'up herself' and 'in love with herself.' They commented on how much she has changed since being a Disney star:

L: *'when she was 15 she didn't care what she looked like but now since she's like loads of fans so she cares what she looks like.'*

C: *'you know when she was in Victorious and all them shows and she was all sweet and innocent... I goes I bet ya she's gonna be the one that turns out and she's wearing slut clothes and everything.'*

The children found it extraordinary that all of these celebrities have changed so much and they discussed how they should not have changed themselves to fit in with societal ideals,

C: *'why can't she just be herself?'*

B: *'her eyes kinda changed... they were like down and now they're like up.'*

An: *'what happened her chin?'*

The 5<sup>th</sup> class participants were attempting to decide if the picture was Photoshopped and felt sympathy for the celebrity: *'this is really sad.'*

L: *'it's not Photoshopped... it's just she changed herself.'*

B: *'it's just really her make-up that has changed... coz she's older now.'*

Child B: *'she just put make up on they didn't Photoshop her.'*

Child A: *'wait I can tell you a lot of things... like her eyebrows are smaller, her eyes have gone like upwards, her nose is more thinner... and her lips has gone all poofier or something...but Amy does not think it is Photoshopped!'* (Pointing to her classmate)

Child B: *'look at her eyes... you can't change your eyeballs upwards!'* (girls laugh)

The children discuss Ariana's facial features and body shape, with one child stating:

Child D: *'I'd want to look like Ariana Grande coz she's nice and skinny...she has nice skin even without the Photoshop.'*

Therefore, the idealisation of thinness is evident in this discussion, however the 3<sup>rd</sup> class children are more preoccupied with the facial features they see, such as nice skin or eyes, rather than body type or shape.

The 5<sup>th</sup> class spoke about weight and being 'thin' or 'skinny' in depth. They felt that they would be more attractive to boys and their peers if they had a skinny body, similar to Ariana Grande in photo 3: L: *'I think she got skinnier... and she's so pretty now.'*

B: *'yeah I'd like to change my hair... well I've always really wanted to change my hair like her like dye it... like permanent.'* One 5<sup>th</sup> class participant revealed that she idolised Grande when she was younger, and how she aspired to be 'skinny' like the celebrity and have a similar hairstyle.

A: *'when I was like probably 8 or 9 I used to have an obsession with Ariana Grande... like you know the other hairstyle... I tried to be like her and wear a skinny skirt and this little top... and then I went like this [pouts lips out] coz I thought this was duck face.'*

The 5<sup>th</sup> class participants were far more aware of weight issues and concerns in comparison to the 3<sup>rd</sup> class group. They spoke at length about how they lose weight if they feel 'fat' sometimes. Although they discuss methods to control their weight, most of these comments were practical and did not show any extreme or distorted eating behaviours - C: *'even if you did eat salads some salads aren't even that good for you... you have to be careful when you're eating healthy food... you should never put sauce on anything.'*

C: *'if I wanted to get skinny, I'll tell you what's good... you see either chicken fillets, eggs or like rice and stuff... because like it's good for you and plus you're getting like energy and all... and you feel fuller when you eat stuff like that.'*

This highlights how the 5<sup>th</sup> class students are aware of healthy eating habits but still admire celebrities that are 'thin' or 'skinny.'

## Category two:

These themes cover sociocultural factors that influence the participants, in particular this focuses on the influence of the media.

### Main Theme 2: Peer comparisons and appearance evaluation

#### 3<sup>rd</sup> Class responses:

In both focus groups, there was a strong desire to be similar to their peers in school or online. The girls spoke about how they strive to get 'more likes' on social media platforms, thus highlighting how they are self-conscious about how they look. This emphasises the girls longing to continually increase their social desirability.

Child E: *'coz see the way I think they wanna get more likes... so they post loads of photos in there.'* The general consensus in the group was that they would need to wear make-up when they are older in order to fit in - *'Like if I saw Amy without make-up when she's older... I be like what's wrong with that picture...that she has no make-up on.'*

The children were also aware of how their body looks physically, and stated that in photo 3 the celebrity looked *'too muscly and like a boy.'*

Child A: *'look at her shoulder... it looks like she has muscles all over her body... no that's Photoshopped.'*

The children in 3<sup>rd</sup> class expressed very interesting views on how they should look, and stated what was incorrect about photo 3's appearance - Child E: *'look at her when she's a kid... here she's like really white... like she needs to pluck her eyebrows... but she's tanned here.'*

The expectation to look a certain way is clear here, as the same child commented that she needed to fix her own eyebrows. Thus proving that the children are attempting to show peer similarity, or are modelling themselves on their peers.

The children often waited for another participant to react first to the pictures in the powerpoint presentation. The girls shared a similar view that the boys in their class might laugh at them if they had something 'wrong' with their face. The participants were conscious of how the boys would react if they had any flaws. This mirrors Kierans and Swords observation – 'the girls explicitly stated that boys are more interested in their looks than their personality, placing increased pressure on them.' (Kierans and Swords, 2016, p. 681)

Child B: *'Amy doesn't think she's Photoshopped...but Amy look at her eyebrows... you can't explain this... look how up her eye is...the boys in our class would definitely laugh so much.'*

However, some pointed out how important it is to not change yourself for others - Child A: *'I don't like that picture...because it's not herself.'*

Child B: *'but like she's really pretty but like she just has like loads and loads of make-up on...so they might think it's actually real... so they wanna look like her...'*

In addition to this, the participants felt that they might get bullied if they did not have a certain 'look' or if they were not aesthetically pleasing. Bullying was frequently referred to -

Child A: *'it's just weird...then she put her chin longer there.'*

Child B: *'maybe there's a photo somewhere where she might get bullied or something.'*

The girls seemed very aware of how bullying can upset people, thus making them want to change something about their appearance.

Child E: *'someone might say to her oh my god you have such a long chin you look like a witch... then she be really sad about that... so she wanted to change that.'*

Child B: *'I think that like she would get bullied in school or something.'*

Child A was certain that even bullies would not be able to upset her - *'I wouldn't change who I am... I don't care if I get bullied... I don't care if I get punched to change myself... I just wouldn't.'* Child B agreed with this and said that bullies weren't nice people - *'it's not their opinion to change you, it's your opinion.'*

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Class group response:**

The 5<sup>th</sup> class participants had similar responses to the 3<sup>rd</sup> class group. They spoke about the 'ideal look' or typically 'good-looking' person.

C: *'like it would be cool if you had blonde hair and blue eyes.'*

L: *'some people get slagged about what they wear like from Penney's and all...'*

J: *'yeah the boys are only slagging us coz they have no nice boy's clothes there but they have nice boys stuff.'* Interestingly, the 5<sup>th</sup> class group referred to the boy's opinions and how they would not like to 'get slagged' by the boys in their class.

This reinforces peer teasing again and how this often has negative consequences, including low self-esteem or low confidence levels. Similarly, in Kierans and Swords study, they found that direct and indirect appearance-related peer rejection contributed to a negative body image: 'Both boys and girls discussed teasing and bullying over appearance extensively and it was generally felt that hurtful comments about one's appearance triggered related concerns and behaviors.' (2016, p. 681)

Examples of sibling influence was apparent - L: *'yeah but like even when your sister has make-up and you're looking through stuff... and they're showing you like how to do it and all... and it turns out wrong and then you're like ... ugh'*

An: *'I get inspired by them but I don't wanna change myself because of them.'*

L: *'or like my friend has an i phone 6 and I wanna have that as well.'* Peer pressure to have the latest gadget or brand of clothing is prominent in their lives.

C: *'why does she have to change herself because her sisters are like that... coz she's probably prettier than every single one of them... why does she have to change herself?'*

The participants noted how influenced their friends can be when attempting to imitate their peers - An: *'well my friend... this dress that Ariana Grande wore... it was black and it had the cat thing, and she bought it and then she wore it and she was like her!'*

Some disagreed and highlighted how important it is to not change yourself due to peer pressure - C: *'I think you should look the way you want to look.'*

A: *'people try to make you look like something that they would want you to look like.'*

L: *'she should've just left herself the way she was.'*

This continues into the next theme of how the children are aware or unaware of digitally enhanced photographs, or 'Photoshopped' pictures, along with plastic surgery.

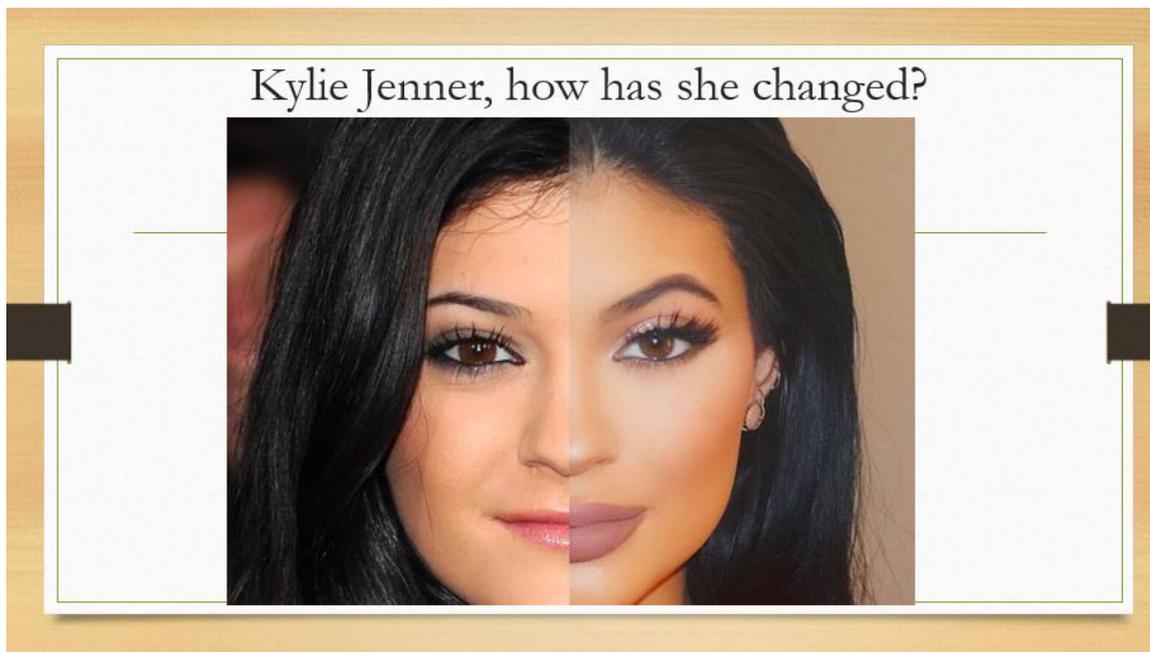
**Main Theme 3:**

**Awareness of Photoshopped pictures and plastic surgery**

**3<sup>rd</sup> Class group response:**

Although three out of the five (60%) 3<sup>rd</sup> class children were aware of Photoshop, two out of five (40%) of the children had no awareness of it.

Child E: *'I would think like... that she has like... I don't know something in her hand that she always can do perfect make-up, that she always can dress nice that she always can make her hair nice... and that would be like she is amazing but then when I saw the other picture... I was like so... which picture is she real?'*



**Photo 4(a): Kylie Jenner**

Child A: *'No...no...but I would know who she is but I would kinda know that it's Photoshopped because everything's darker...yeah and like her make-up is darker in that one... and it's like shinier and all.'*

The children could see that there was a clear difference between the left and right side of the picture, while also commenting on Kylie Jenner's (photo) apparent plastic surgery.

Child B: *'she must have got like surgery on her lips coz they're just so small there... and then they're just like real poofy there...'*

Child D: *'Like for Photoshop they can puff out your lips and make your eyes bigger.'*

Child B: *'and sometimes if they're really bad Photoshop like some people are really good at it but if you're really bad at it...you can like notice that they're after photoshopping it.'*

Child B: *'yeah it wouldn't look Photoshopped if you blocked it out.'* (pointing to the post Photoshopped photo 4a)



**Photo 4(b): Kylie Jenner**

When the children were presented with photo 4 (b), they all agreed that it was Photoshopped. Child B: *'that doesn't look like her...'* while child A said *'yeah that's not her coz her hair is brown and that hairs is black...it's like they stuck her head onto her neck... and look it's like a black top and then nothing there... it's like her neck is floating.'*

Interestingly, most of the children were familiar with the terms 'plastic surgery' or 'lip injections.' Child A: *'like ya know Kim Kardashian out of the Kardashians? Yeah she has loads of like plastic surgery...like in some videos she's like normal and then in the next video she's all like skinny... and puffed up.'*

Child B: *'yeah they're all so fake.'*

Child A: *'Like she goes to make up artists every day...'*

As the children were exposed to more pictures, they seemed to gain a good understanding of what is Photoshopped and what is not.

They were able to identify edited parts of the picture after discussing what Photoshop can do, child C: *'I think in the right... the way her hair is smoother, her lips and all are different... her eyebrows and her eyelashes and her nose and all.'*

Child B: *'they Photoshop it and all... they would like make them look bigger... or like...you can do a lot of things with Photoshop.'*

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Class group response:**

When discussing both photo 4 (a) and 4 (b), the 5<sup>th</sup> class girls noticed plastic surgery first:

An: *'she had like a lip injection thing... that's why her lips look em bigger.'*

Although most participants recognised that the celebrity has had plastic surgery on her face and body, some defended her decision to have work done - L: *'yeah but she's nice any way she is.'* They commented on how she lied to her fans about her surgery, thus calling her misleading actions unfair - A: *'the problem I have with her is she doesn't admit what she's gotten done to herself!'* J: *'yeah like she lied to her fans... but they finally realised.'*

A: *'she definitely got like Botox or something!'*

L: *'one time in this video this girl got plastic surgery and her face went all hard... she tried to look like one of the Kardashians...and then he said who would you rather... her normal face or that face... and everybody picked the plastic face.'*

The 5<sup>th</sup> class group discussed how celebrities change their appearance but also change their personality. Unlike the 3<sup>rd</sup> class response, the 5<sup>th</sup> class participants added more points here, saying that nobody should change their appearance and their personality to be liked or accepted. J: *'well she changed her personality and her image.'*

C: *'she's stunning in that picture anyway before so I don't know why she had to change herself.'*

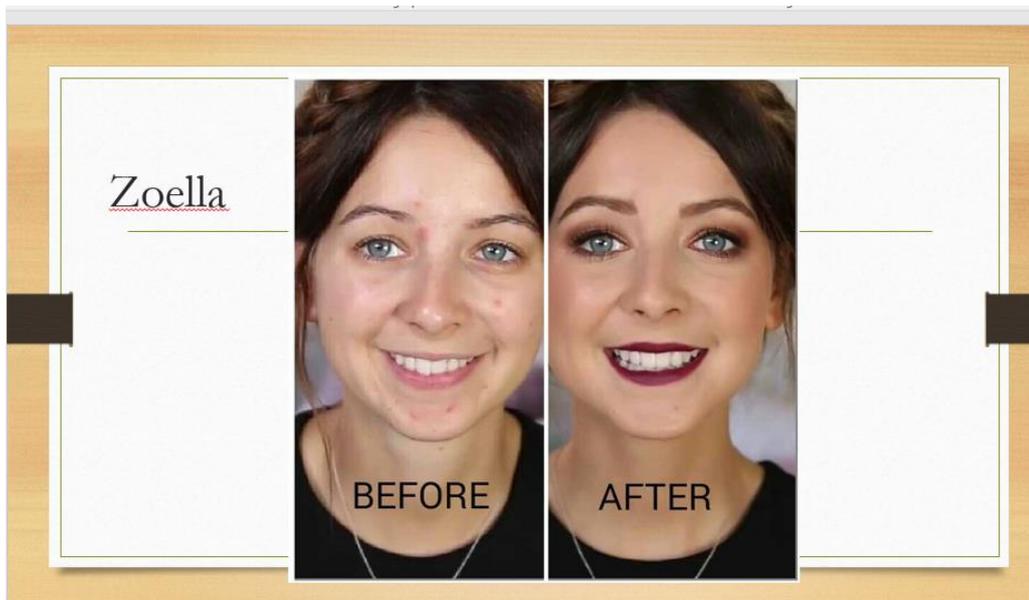
L: *'she changed a lot by her hair... like her make-up and all because in that she wears like just a bit of blush and lipstick but in that she has a cake face... she has MAC lipstick, she has loads of foundation... yeah she has fake eyelashes and eyebrows and all... and she dyed her hair!'*

They referring heavily to Kylie Jenner and the Kardashian family here: A: *'if you didn't see that picture of her, most people wouldn't even know who that person is.'*

C: *'well she looks happy in herself there but when she's in that she's like (pouts out her lips to resemble K.J after surgery) and it just looks dangerous.'*

A: *'Well I kinda do like this one... yeah but she should be like herself... coz under all that she really looks like that and she can't change it.'*

An: *'Kylie would feel weird and guilty maybe for changing herself.'*



**Photo 5: YouTube star, Zoella (Zoe Elizabeth Sugg)**

The children seemed to give preference to the celebrities that they like, and began doubting that they used Photoshop – Child D: *'I don't think she Photoshopped that...coz if that was her and she Photoshopped it none of them would be there. (points out blemishes on Zoella's face).* When asked if they think people would feel upset after their pictures were edited to make them look 'prettier,' they responded with this:

Child B: *'no it wouldn't make me feel bad coz she looks really good there and also here.'*

Child A: *'I also don't think it's Photoshopped because em... they have different backgrounds so if it was Photoshopped it would be...like the exact same background... but if she just done a re-shot then it could be in a different room.'*

Child D: *'but if I didn't know about Photoshop... I would think she did something to herself... I wouldn't say anything I would just say she's not herself.'*

### **5<sup>th</sup> Class group response:**

The 5<sup>th</sup> class group responded slightly more negatively when shown photo 5 (Zoella), commenting that the celebrity looked better when she was younger, without as much make-up. C: *'I'll tell ya what she was actually quite pretty when she was like littler... but then when she became into make-up and all... like now she just looks terrible.'*

J: *'yeah coz all the make-up on her skin makes her grow spots.'*

A: *'mmm yeah a bit of a cake face.'*

L: *'yeah you can tell what's Photoshopped or not.'* Some participants did not believe that she used digital enhancements to change her face in the photo - A: *'I think... em... coz of the powder she didn't em... do the Photoshop thingy she just put powder on her face to hide the pimples... maybe that's why people might think that it's Photoshop but it's not really.'*

Again, the topic of impressing boys arose during the discussion - A: *'I mean if she likes to wear make-up it's fine but I feel like if she's not wearing it to impress someone... or if she feels like her skin is horrible then she could wear it... but if she's only doing it because she hates herself or whatever... I would completely disagree with it.'*

C: *'She wears make-up to impress her fans... and to impress her boyfriend!'*

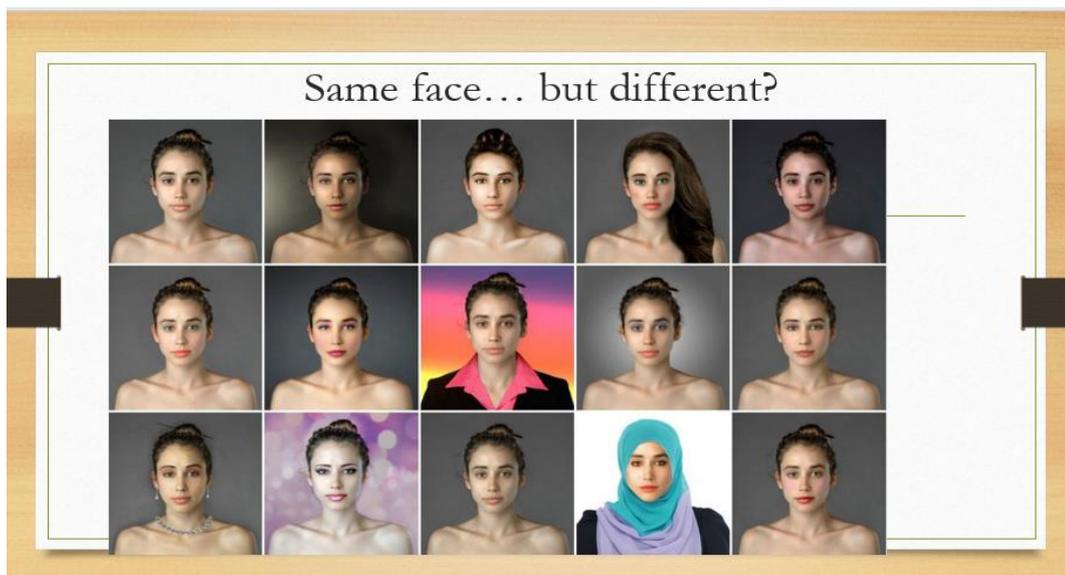
A: *'maybe to impress herself? Or like she... maybe wants to show off her make-up skills or something, I don't know.'*

With regard to the Kylie Jenner photo 4 (b), some participants noticed how her body shape looked different, despite the fact that her body was not visible in the photo I showed them.

They had seen many pictures of the same celebrity on different social media platforms during their time on the internet at home.

A: *'I saw a picture on Instagram and I was just scrolling though and it was like a picture of her and it was like the way she used to look like and what she looks like now... and the caption was... em this kind of puberty is called money!' A: 'and in the picture I talked about... in the before she had like a straight body... and now she has like curves... she has everything.'*

An: *'you see Kim Kardashian she had a plastic surgery and it all went wrong because now her like butt is all wrinkly!'* Interestingly, the girls spoke in detail about images they had seen online, with most of them recognising any image mentioned. When shown photo 6 (below), the children had mixed reactions. The original picture in the top left side, was sent by Honig to 25 different countries, to be edited according to their perception of beauty.



**Photo 6: Esther Honig, freelance journalist**

Interestingly, the children could not identify which photograph was the original, however upon further analysis, they realised that the original photograph of Honig was the untouched, make-up free picture.

Child D: *'it's so creepy!' A: 'it looks like they pasted her face onto someone else's.'*

Child A: *'she looks like a doll in that one.'*

Child D: *'this one's real... coz she's really tanned.'*

Despite the fact that some of the children noticed how dramatically different she looked in some of the altered photos, they still maintained that she looked the 'prettiest' in the original - Child B: *'if I was to pick I would just keep her the same coz she's pretty anyway.'*

Child A: *'this looks like a totally different person.'*

Child D: *'that looks like they cut out a cardboard picture and it's crooked.'*

Moreover, the girls found some 'perceptions of beauty' from other countries, such as India, as very different from the 'ideal body' or ideal facial features that they are used to here in Ireland, Child E: *'This one's really creepy... I would not want to look like them!'*

When the researcher asked the children if Photoshop is misleading or tricking people into thinking what they see online is real, child B said; *'I would tell her if you see somebody that you really like just don't ... before you believe... don't think it's real.'*

Although the children are now aware of how common Photoshop is used in online and print media, and even in music videos, it is interesting to note that 40% of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class girls in the focus group were not aware of Photoshop prior to the focus group discussion.

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Class group response:**

The 5<sup>th</sup> class were less empathetic towards the celebrities who have had plastic surgery,

A: *'but I feel like it's also giving people an image that make-up can make you look like that... ya know? Like it's not a real image, it's not you... it's just... it's Photoshop completely.'*

A: *'yeah this side is just so much more flawless and everything... but again it's giving you a wrong image...'*

A: *'Okay the Photoshop here is just like... on a scale... on a scale of 1 to 10 this is like a hundred!'*

The 5<sup>th</sup> class participants had similar responses to acne or 'spotty skin.' B: *'He's definitely wearing make-up or foundation... he has a lot of acne.'*

L: *'Does he have chicken-pox?!'* (group all laugh)

A: *'I don't want to know what he thinks of himself when he sees both of them... probably coz he would just compare... like feel embarrassed.'*

Some did mention that the original picture was fine and did not need to be altered. A: *'I love her naturally she looks gorgeous naturally.'*

#### **Main Theme 4.1: Social media influence**

It was clear from the 3<sup>rd</sup> class focus group, that they are consistently influenced by social media. Unfortunately, this is often in a negative manner, such as distorting their views of a healthy body weight or particular facial features. This is similar to Kierans and Swords suggestion that some participants do not recognise the link between the media and negative body images, they can view anybody's life through social media, 'where intimate details of the lifestyles of public figures are readily available and widely circulated through the media.' (2016, p. 691) Although the 3<sup>rd</sup> class group mentioned the words 'skinny' or 'thin,' the 5<sup>th</sup> class group were more affected by thin images in the media. Every day they are seeing 'thin' celebrities as the most attractive body shapes and wanting to emulate them. The girls in the 3<sup>rd</sup> class group were most influenced by well-known YouTubers, who upload daily or weekly vlogs (video blogs). This correlates with Kierans and Swords idea that 'some of the girls spoke of an ambition to follow celebrity looks predominantly to attain a strong social standing and appear attractive to potential romantic partners.' (2016, p. 683)

*Child C: 'I seen one of them [a picture online] where it was Madonna and she had loads of wrinkles coz she wasn't wearing make-up and they put on the magazine like no make-up on but on the computer they put loads of like... they put make-up on.'*

The girls referred to 'wrinkles,' 'spotty skin' or 'puffy lips' numerous times during the focus group discussion; *'They used loads of Photoshop on it...yeah and there was loads of wrinkles and like stuff on her arm... but when they Photoshopped it there was like nothing...and her skin was really clear.'*

The girls discussed photo 5 (Zoella) at length in comparison to any of the other pictures in the powerpoint presentation.

This YouTuber has almost 12 million subscribers (followers) on the social networking video site, and everyone in the group said that they watch her YouTube videos every day. When asked by the researcher how they think she looks without any make-up, they stated:

Child C: *'she walks outside like that... there was one time where like she didn't do any Photoshop or anything and it was on the news and they were like Zoella bravely went out on You Tube with no make-up on.'*

Child B: *'she's grand with wearing no make-up...'*

Child C: *'she looks really nice with no make-up.'*

Child B: *'she does wear it but she doesn't wear it ALL the time.'*

The 3<sup>rd</sup> class girls commented on Zoella's use of make-up and how she does not need make-up to look pretty; *'her eyes look bigger...'*

*'yeah I know coz she used concealer that makes you look more awake...'*

Child B: *'look at the things around here (points to Zoella's eyebrows) you can see them really good there... but you can't really see them there.'*

The participants defended Zoella's natural look and most agreed that she looks nicer with no make-up, as they were used to seeing her in YouTube videos wearing no make-up:

*'Well the left is okay...the left (no make-up) I think looks more like herself.'*

*'I'd rather her on the right (with make-up) not the left.'*

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Class group response:**

The 5<sup>th</sup> class group were aware of social media platforms and how some images can 'scare' them. B: *'I got a fright when I saw that on Instagram.'* (photo 4a)

C: *'just because of her people could like ruin their lives... and getting Botox and all.'*

One participant mentioned how Kylie Jenner was a smart business woman, she referred to her range of exclusive make-up:

A: *'yeah but I also admire her because she made out of all this drama... she ended up making like a really successful company.'*

They highlighted the importance of knowing what is real on social media, L: *'well you have to be careful on Instagram coz people like say that their name is Kylie Jenner...'*

A: *'yeah but if they have the blue verification it means they're real.'*

#### **Sub-Theme 4.2: Celebrity Adoration**

When asked by the researcher how they think the celebrities feel when they receive negative press, they realised how upsetting this may be. The children discussed how much pressure celebrities are under, as they are constantly under surveillance, possibly resembling how the participants feel when being watched by their peers.

Child B: *'and before they go out they put make up on'*

Child C: *'yeah so their fans don't like notice the bad stuff!'*

The girls realised that celebrities are like them in the way that they might get taunted or 'slagged' if they look a certain way, a way that does not fit into the appearance 'ideal.' When asked why celebrities feel that they should look a certain way, they stated: *'So that they would like her more...more because she's a celebrity...'*

*'and maybe coz she didn't wanna get bad comments or like slagged.'*

Additionally, the group discussed how difficult it would be to attain a state of perfection 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, *'but then when she goes out and all.... how is she gonna make her face look like that?'*

*'people when they see that selfie they be like oh my gosh she's so pretty I can't wait to see her that pretty...and then like when she comes out they be like...that is not it.'*

The girls referred to Harry Styles again and said that *'he would feel really sad'* if he saw his face un-touched online, with acne for the world to see, *'he wouldn't feel I don't think so comfortable with it... yeah when they're coming to the studio people and they're talking about we got a new magazine about Harry Styles...he looks like that...mmm...everybody*

*starts laughing on the television... and they be like oh my god look at him... he should go to the doctor or whatever with his skin.'*

The group spoke in depth about different celebrities they saw as role models, and compared Harry Styles (*'he probably wanted to look nice like other people but he doesn't'*) to singer Ed Sheeran. They stated that *'Ed Sheeran wouldn't wear any make-up... like he likes to be himself... like not like that (points to Harry Styles) but like himself.'*

Child B stated that *'most celebrities get their teeth whitened and all'* and discussed Kylie Jenner at length. They highlighted how her lips have had work done, *'look at her lips, they're like my finger! (compares size of her index finger to K. J's lips).'*

Worryingly, one participant defended Kylie Jenner's surgery and said *'but then like the after she's a bit prettier coz she got like surgery.'* She later stated that she would love to be like her *'when I'm older and all.'*

Child A immediately voiced her opinion and said *'no I don't like that one... like that's real people (pointing to make-up free Zoella) and that's fake' (pointing to photo 4a).*

Moreover, child B noticed that the celebrity's looks are fake but she is still 'real', *'well it's not fake it's still them but it's not like the real them...she's not herself, she doesn't look like her family and all.'* Again, Photoshop featured heavily in this discussion, as the same participant said, *'because it's like Photoshopped you think it's real coz it looks so real but it's not.'* While child C added, *'so yeah you try to be like them.'* Thus proving the vast influence certain celebrities have on these young children.

### **5<sup>th</sup> Class group response:**

Although the 5<sup>th</sup> class participants mentioned celebrities that they would like to imitate, they noticed how enhanced or Photoshopped images have a negative effect - L: *'Well I think he (Harry Styles) would feel guilty for lying to his fans.'*

An: *'Well some like famous people don't really care how they look... but they just want loads of fans that's it... that's all they care about.'*

An: *'yeah like they're trying to like lose weight and look like them... like the shape sometimes... like if you wanna look like Kylie Jenner you're gonna have to like eat less junk food and more healthy food...but sometimes if they eat healthy food they won't get skinny like me.'*

C: *'I think they think if they change themselves they'll get more fans and stuff... but I bet ya if she showed that picture (points to pre-Photoshopped picture 4 (a)) to people she'd still get as much fans.'*

C: *'you'd know Kylie Jenner and all those people wouldn't post it if they looked ugly!'*

## Main Theme 5:

## Positive peer and parental influence on self-esteem

The 3<sup>rd</sup> class children seemed to value their peer's opinions on body image and their self-confidence or self-esteem. During the discussion, it was noted that they reassured each other that it would not be practical to emulate Kylie Jenner's lips, *'and you couldn't get your lips like this'* (makes a pout with her own lips).

Furthermore, they like to see themselves as individuals that look similar, but not the same, *'people are thinking about to look like Zoella...but then all those make-ups they were getting confused about it... and then they think about it, well I can't be like Zoella... she's just one person in the whole world...there couldn't be like 20 Zoella's that looks the same... but you can copy some of her.'*

One girl spoke about parental influence, and how her Mum reminds her to stay 'true to herself' and not try to be like anyone else, *'my mam says... there's a girl in her work...on Facebook she's trying to look like her [Zoella] yeah she's going all over Facebook trying to look like her.'* The participants agreed that lip injections would not be practical, with one girl stating, *'do ya know what I'm afraid of, I'm afraid to get lips like her and just go like that (bites her lip) by accident when I'm eating and then the lips just blow up!'* The participants said that they would not want to look 'silly' and that they would be more confident being themselves.

Although the girls in 3<sup>rd</sup> class are young 8 to 9 year olds, they seemed confident in their own skin, with one commenting, *'like you're perfect the way you are you don't need to like change it.'*

Furthermore, when the researcher asked why some people may be unhappy, child C referred back to Kylie Jenner to say, *'maybe she thought her lips were too small?'*

Child B kept a positive mind-set and said *'or like... or like... some people get really mad at themselves coz they think they look ugly but they're actually not,'* adding further that *'all of them are nice anyway.'* Interestingly, child B was adamant that she would not change herself to be like anyone else, adding that *'if I had to pick anyone in the world, I would pick me! Coz it's me... I wouldn't like to change myself.'*

#### **5<sup>th</sup> Class group response:**

When the researcher asked the 5<sup>th</sup> class group what they should look like, they stated A: *'I think they should just look like themselves!'* B: *'Yeah they shouldn't be embarrassed.'*

A: *'But everyone wants to look like that but it's not possible... it's not real... nobody's perfect.'*

They discussed how celebrities do have a huge influence on people and body image, but they mentioned that it is their personality and skill-set that matters the most

A: *'If someone's a good person or whatever... if someone can sing... it shouldn't be about what they look like... it should be about who they are.'*

B: *'But like we care about the famous people coz of like...their music and all not really their looks.'* L: *'it doesn't matter how nice she looks... it's about her personality and all.'*

They are concerned that social media images negatively affect young people, highlighting that young people should feel confident in their own skin. A: *'yeah it's like young girls going through acne or whatever... like they're trying to hide it all with make-up... instead of actually trying to get rid of the problem.'* B: *'Yeah because lots of people are fake and they don't really wanna show what they look like.'*

A: *'my cousins... their parents, they only dress them from like Armani, Tommy Hilfiger and they're only 3...they have no clothes from Penney's or any cheap brands.'*

Parents were mentioned as a positive peer influence, in outlining that their children do not have to conform to the latest trend -A: *'my mam and I were saying like they're young...eh... you buy them a pair of shoes and the next day it's like 2 times bigger... and you paid so much money for it.'*

After the 5<sup>th</sup> class participants viewed each photo in the powerpoint presentation, they discussed how important it is for children to be aware of images they see in the media and to be careful online. J: *'I think it's important to learn about the differences in people online like on Facebook and all.'*

A: *'not everything that you see on the internet is true... only maybe like half of it.'*

L: *'I'm disappointed now... because they lied to their fans and all... about what they looked like.'* A: *'I'm disappointed in society!'*

An: *'I'll know now that if I see like any pimples on their faces I will know that like they Photoshopped it!'* They noticed how dangerous the online world can be, with one child saying (in response to photo 6), L: *'Well I'm not judging her over her make up but she shouldn't be sending pictures like that out to strangers.'*

C: *'well I prefer that one coz that's who she is... and why should she change herself for anybody else?'*

## **Conclusion**

This concludes this chapter containing the research findings and results. These results were presented in two categories. Category One focused on the themes that were centred around the participant's personal experience of body image. Category Two includes the sociocultural factors that influence the participant's body image and self-esteem.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter endeavours to discuss the main research aims, themes and sub-themes as outlined in chapter 2 and chapter 4. This chapter highlights any implications for future research in the area of media communications and perceptions of female beauty.

This chapter will discuss any recommendations suggested to incorporate media literacy into the Irish SPHE (Social Personal Health Education) Primary School Curriculum.

### Common Themes

Common themes were identified from the raw data which correlated with Kierans and Swords 2016 study '*Exploring the Appearance Culture in Early Adolescence: A Qualitative Focus Group Approach in the Republic of Ireland (ROI)*.' In addition to this, both groups displayed evidence of negative body image, social comparison and self-objectification in the results analysis. These were found on the basis of exposure to image-focused media, including social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat) and magazine advertisements.

**Research Aim 1: To gain an insight into how Irish primary school girls aged between 8 and 12-year-olds understand the term 'body image.'**

This research aim explored how the participants from both focus groups understood the term 'body image,' which is explored in theme 1.1 personal body image (p. 47). Although the 3<sup>rd</sup> class group were not as aware of weight issues compared to the 5<sup>th</sup> class group, they were very much aware of the appearance ideal of feeling pretty. They mentioned how filters on Snapchat make them '*look pretty all the time.*' Similarly, the 5<sup>th</sup> class group discussed how social media makes them conscious of their own body image.

They commented on photo 2 (Harry Styles) and how his 'spotty face' is embarrassing – *'If I was him I'd die!'* Both groups mentioned how clothing is important in maintaining an appearance ideal and to 'look cool.' This correlates with Kenny et al's (2016) findings, where clothing emerged as an influencing factor on negative body image. This reinforces theme 2 of this study, which explores peer comparisons and appearance evaluation (p. 56).

This theme has strong roots in Festinger's Social Comparison Theory, which states that people compare themselves to others in order to validate their worth.

Furthermore, the 3<sup>rd</sup> class group spoke at length about how they would like to look like Ariana Grande (photo 3) because *'she's nice and skinny...she has nice skin even without Photoshop.'* This is in line with the 5<sup>th</sup> class group response, who comment on skinny celebrities, however they were more focused on how they would get skinny if they needed to themselves – *'If I wanted to get skinny... you see either chicken fillets, eggs or like rice and stuff.'*

This is outlined in sub-theme 1.2, body dissatisfaction and idealisation of thinness (p. 52). Although they speak about methods to lose weight and 'get skinny,' they seem to speak about this in a healthy way, rather than in a negative way. Thus proving that often the 5<sup>th</sup> class group think about their weight, but they use healthy methods to reduce their body weight. This also highlights that in order to improve their social standing and popularity among peers, that they should be a certain body shape and look 'pretty.' This mirrors Kierans and Swords findings on appealing to peers.

**Research aim 2: To explore how the media (social media, magazines, television) impacts on their self-esteem**

One of the most outstanding results from this research was the way in which the media impacted on both age groups. Although socio cultural factors apply to both age groups in the form of peers or parental influence, the most common socio cultural factor was the influence of the media. In this study it was found that 60% of 3<sup>rd</sup> class children were aware of Photoshop or plastic surgery, whereas 40% were unaware of it. Ultimately, the 3<sup>rd</sup> class girls were confident in themselves – *'If I had to pick anyone in the world, I would pick me! Coz it's me... I wouldn't like to change myself.'* This point is included in theme 5 (p. 75), under positive peer and parental influence on self-esteem. There were very aware of 'perfect' celebrities and found some of these, such as YouTuber Zoella, were honest to their fans and were often seen with no make-up. With regard to Photoshop and how it made them feel, one 3<sup>rd</sup> class participant mentioned *'they can puff out your lips and make your eyes look bigger'* and *'I'm afraid to get lips like her (Kylie Jenner, photo 4a) and just go like that (bites her lip) by accident when I'm eating and then the lips just blow up!'* The 3<sup>rd</sup> class participants sometimes considered getting plastic surgery when they are older, to be like their favourite celebrities, however the 5<sup>th</sup> class had a different response. They recognised how much pressure there is in the media to look a certain way and to be perfect, but one states *'everyone wants to look like that but it's not possible, it's not real... nobody's perfect.'* These findings are highlighted in theme 3: awareness of Photoshop and plastic surgery, but also in theme 4.1: social media influence and theme 4.2: celebrity adoration.

**Research aim 3: To develop an understanding of how children consume the media in an educational setting and if media literacy is important in the Irish Primary School**

**Curriculum**

Currently, there are no guidelines within the Irish Primary School Curriculum to teach primary school children about media literacy and sourcing correct information. Due to the fact that we live in a technology driven world, children need to be specifically taught on the importance of knowing what is real and what is fabricated online. Ultimately, the media is very image-focused, including magazine and television advertisements and social media platforms, which often has a detrimental affect among the youth.

In the 5<sup>th</sup> class group, one participant stated '*I think it's important to learn about the differences in people online like on Facebook and all.*' Before analysing the powerpoint presentation during the focus group discussion, this participant was unaware of Photoshop or plastic surgery, and said she believed everything she saw online.

Another participant noted that '*not everything you see on the internet is true... only maybe like half of it.*' Thus highlighting the need for clear media literacy objectives to be incorporated into the Irish SPHE Primary School Curriculum.

## **Recommendations for future research**

Within the field of communications, it must be noted that there is a need to embed objectives into the Irish Primary School Curriculum that explore media literacy, in particular media awareness regarding body image and maintaining positive self-esteem.

Although Primary School Teachers, including myself, make every effort to discuss children's well-being and to highlight internet safety, there must be specific guidelines in place for teachers and parents to implement these.

Specifically discussing the Irish system, Chislom says 'citizens must be supported through media literacy to realise the ways, means and importance of making educated decisions in their interpretation of the media and its messages.' (Chislom, 2013, p. 210)

She also states that Critical Media Literacy Education should be a 'fundamental human right.'

Chislom highlights the need for parents, teachers, media personnel and decision makers to 'realise their role in establishing greater critical awareness among listeners, viewers and readers.' Teaching children about communications within the media world, and how to identify what is right and wrong is an important life-skill.

O'Neill (2010) argues for a 'rights-based framework of Critical Media Literacy Education' to be established in Ireland, thus highlighting that media literacy is a human right, just as education is a human right.

Irish children are consistently exposed to online risks and factors that contribute to body dissatisfaction, and do not have the support of the Irish education system to guide them correctly. Barnes et al (2007) agree that media literacy is vital for children to be active citizens in Irish society.

Although the Irish Government has introduced media literacy frameworks for secondary school students, they seem to have overlooked primary school students. These frameworks are outlined by Chislom (2013):

- (1) Department of Education and Science documents: Schools IT2000, A Policy Framework for the New Millennium (1998)
- (2) A Blueprint for the Future of ICT (Information Communication Technology in Irish Education (2001)

With regard to the Primary School Curriculum, there is a need for an established programme of objectives for teachers to teach basic media literacy. For example, some of the children who participated in this study were not aware of Photoshop or enhanced photographs.

Furthermore, they were not aware of how social media and magazines can create an unrealistic body 'ideal.' This is crucial to the development of a child's media literacy skills.

When children consume media online or in print, they are constantly receiving messages through advertising, pictures and so on.

Potter (2004, p. 124) outlines The Seven Skills of Media Literacy in Figure 5.1. on the next page. Hopefully in the near future, these skills may be useful in order to be adapted for the Irish Primary School Curriculum.

**Figure 5.1 The Seven Skills of Media Literacy**

Analysis	Breaking down a message into meaningful elements.
Evaluation	Judging the value of an element by comparing it to some criterion.
Grouping	Determining which elements are alike / different in some ways
Induction	Inferring a pattern across a small set of elements then generalising the pattern to all elements in the set
Deduction	Using general principles to explain particulars
Synthesis	Assembling elements into a new structure
Abstraction	Creating a brief , clear and accurate condensed description that captures the essence of the message

## **Conclusion**

This research aligns with Irish research conducted by Kierans and Swords (2016), which highlights body image concerns in early adolescence. This research also correlates with the Tripartite Influence Model of Body Image (Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, & Tantleff-Dunn, 1999) They outline how influential peers, parents and the media affect body dissatisfaction. However further research is needed to explore this in more detail.

Based on the focus group analysis of my study, it is clear that Irish primary school girls are aware of female beauty within the media. However, this study highlights how some participants were not aware of Photoshopped images, enhanced pictures or plastic surgery among celebrities. For future research, a more in-depth study with a larger number of participants could be carried out, which could focus on the appearance ideal, perceptions of female beauty and body dissatisfaction.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Parental Consent Form

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Ciara O'Rourke and as part of my Masters research, I am conducting an all-girls focus group discussion in St. Philip's S.N.S to understand what primary school children's views are on the concept of well-being and beauty. This all-girls focus group will help your child achieve extra media literacy skills. It will be during school hours on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> 2017.

I would be grateful if you could take the time to read below.

#### **Confidentiality:**

Your child in has been invited to take part in this research. When conducting the focus groups with the girls, we will be talking in more detail about the topic of well-being and beauty. My focus group study will involve girls between the ages of 8 and 12 years old. One focus group will involve five 3<sup>rd</sup> class children (8-9 years old) and the other focus group will involve five 5<sup>th</sup> class students (age 11-12 years old.)

- In this short discussion we will be discussing how girls are influenced by women on TV and in adverts within the media. We will discuss which famous figures they look up to and admire.
- We will also discuss the children's awareness around edited images within adverts to enhance how a celebrity looks. I will show the children a powerpoint presentation of various images of female celebrities to discuss their views on pre and post photo shopped photographs and advertisements.
- I will audio record their answers using a dictaphone, to ensure that their thoughts and views are recorded accurately.
- What the children say will remain confidential, as well as ensuring that their names will not be used in any way to identify any personal details, their school or age.

After I carry out the all-girls focus group, I will write what I have learnt and what the children have shared with me. The tapes and transcripts will then be destroyed.

This dissertation research focus group project has been approved by the Griffith College Research Ethics Committee at Griffith College Dublin.

***Please turn over.***

**Would you like to find out more about this research?**

If you have any further questions that were not addressed in this information sheet, please feel free to contact me on:

- Ciara O'Rourke:  
Phone: 01-8216101
- Barry Finnegan, Programme Director and Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Journalism and Media Communications:  
Email: barry.finnegan@griffith.ie  
Phone: 01-4163389
- Conor Kostick, Dissertation Supervisor:  
Email: conor.kostick@griffith.ie

**Thank you very much for taking the time to consider this research.**

**If you are happy for your child to take part in the focus group session, please complete and sign the following:**

<b>Please read:</b>	<b>Please ✓ or X</b>
I have read this letter and am aware of what participation will involve.	
I understand that my child's responses will be audio-taped and that they will not be identifiable in the research.	
I understand that my child's participation in this research is voluntary and that he/she can withdraw participation at any time.	
I know I can contact Ciara via email or phone if I have any questions.	

**Parent/Guardian name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent/Guardian signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Yours sincerely,**

**Ciara O'Rourke** \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2: Information Sheet for Participants**

Title of Research Study:

“How does the portrayal of female beauty by the media influence Irish female children?  
Between 8 and 12 years-old”

### **INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS**

Dear interviewee,

You, on behalf of your 8 and 12-year-old child are invited to take part in a research study to examine how the portrayal of female beauty by the media influences Irish female children. I am conducting a girl only focus group discussion to understand what primary school children’s views are on the concept of beauty and how the media portrays this.

I would like to interview your child as a participant in the focus group to ask about her experiences of how girls are influenced by women on TV and in adverts within the media. My focus group study will involve girls between the ages of 8 and 12 years old. One focus group will involve five 4<sup>th</sup> class children (8-9 years old) and the other focus group will involve five 6<sup>th</sup> class students (age 11-12 years old.)

We will discuss which famous figures they look up to and admire. This focus group will help your child achieve extra media literacy skills. This research is part of a Master’s thesis in Journalism and Media Communications for Griffith College, Dublin.

Before you decide whether your child will take part in the study it is important that you and your child understand what the research is for and what your child will be asked to do. It is up to you and your child to decide whether or not to take part. You will also be asked to sign the attached consent form.

You or your child can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without giving a reason.

The purpose of the research study is to examine girls’ thoughts about their awareness around edited images within adverts to enhance how a celebrity looks. I will show the girls a powerpoint presentation of various images of female celebrities to discuss their views on pre and post photo shopped photographs and advertisements.

If you give parental approval for your child, the all-girls focus group discussion will last approximately 45 minutes and will be arranged during school hours on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2017. Information from the interview will be used to assess the impact that the media has on girls’ perception of beauty today.

The interview will be audio recorded only and transcribed. Each of the interviewees will be assigned a number and the key to real names and organisations will be kept in a password-protected folder. Please do not hesitate to contact myself, my dissertation supervisor or course director below if you need further information.

Yours sincerely,

Ciara O'Rourke

- Ciara O'Rourke:

Email: [ciara.orourke9@mail.dcu.ie](mailto:ciara.orourke9@mail.dcu.ie)

Phone: 01-8216101

- Barry Finnegan, Programme Director and Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Journalism and Media Communications:

Email: [barry.finnegan@griffith.ie](mailto:barry.finnegan@griffith.ie)

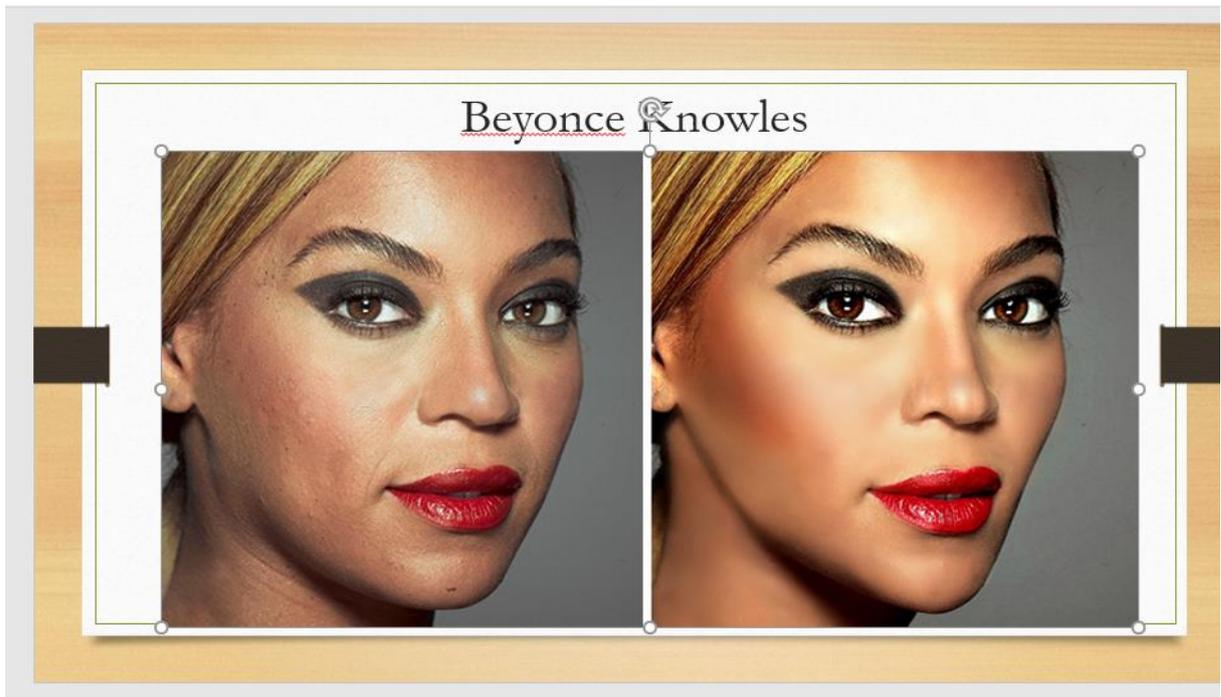
Phone: 01-4163389

- Conor Kostick, Dissertation Supervisor:

Email: [conor.kostick@griffith.ie](mailto:conor.kostick@griffith.ie)

**Appendix 3: Powerpoint Presentation 'Perceptions of Beauty.'**

**Photo 1 - American singer, Beyoncé Knowles, before and after photoshop**



**Photo 2 - British singer, Harry Styles, before and after Photoshop**

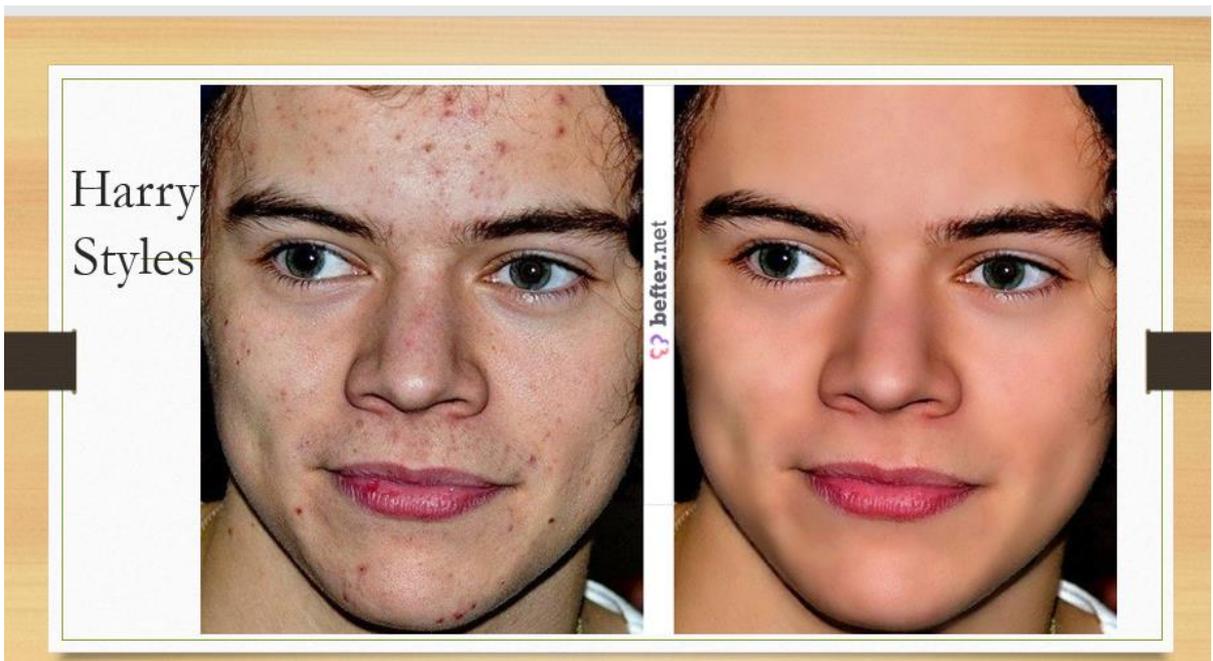


Photo 3 - American singer, Ariana Grande



Photo 4 (a) - Kylie Jenner



Photo 4 (b) - Kylie Jenner



Photo 5 – YouTuber Zoella (Zoe Elizabeth Sugg)

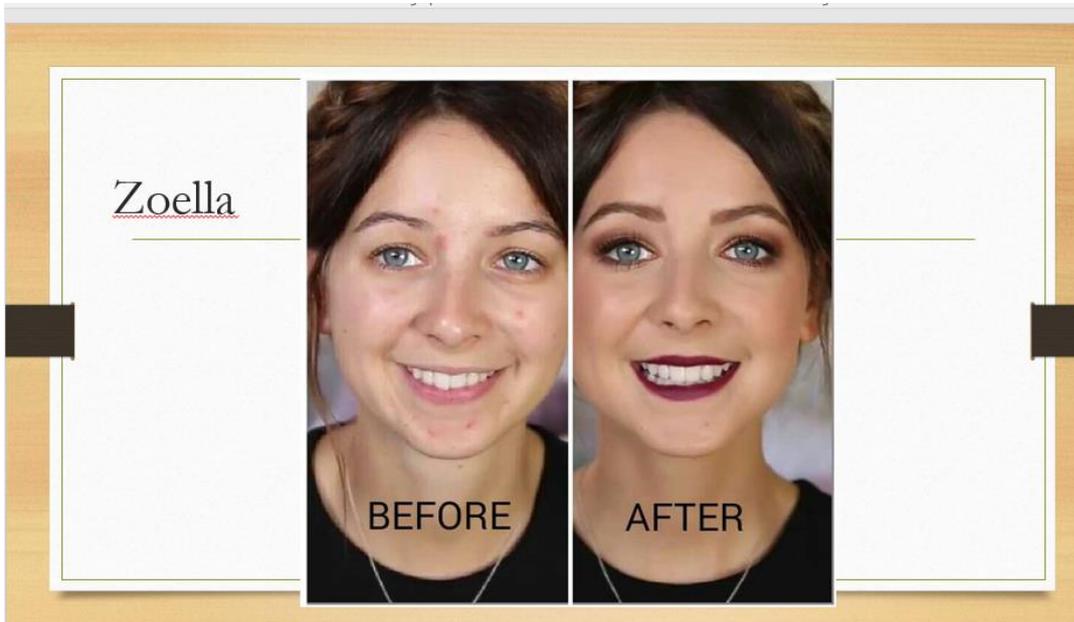
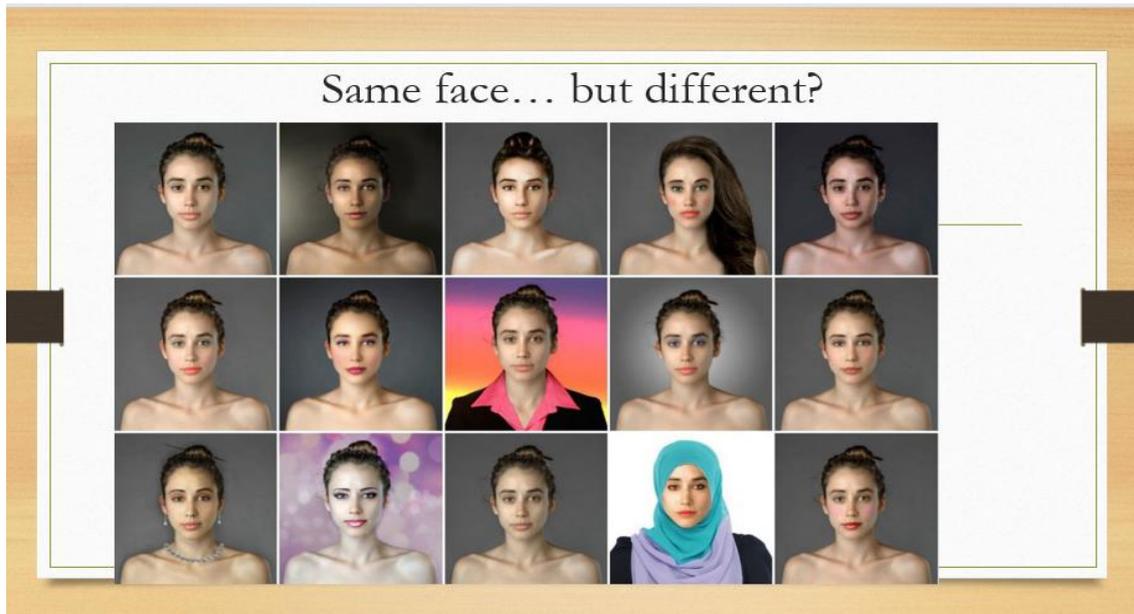


Photo 6: Esther Honig, freelance journalist



**Appendix 4: Griffith College Ethics Approval Form**



**Griffith College**

**Griffith College Research Ethics Approval Form**

This form should be completed by the researcher (with the advice of the research supervisor where relevant), for all research which involves human participants.

<b>Research Title</b>	How the portrayal of female beauty by the media influences Irish female children.
<b>Researcher(s)/Student</b>	Ciara O'Rourke
<b>Supervisor (where relevant)</b>	Conor Kostick
<b>Programme of Study (where relevant)</b>	MA Journalism and Media Communications

**Checklist:**

*Please attach to all forms:*

- ✓ Summary of Project Proposal
- ✓ Participant Information Sheet
- ✓ Consent Form

**Part One**

		Yes	No	N/A
1	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants?	✓		
2	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	✓		
3	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	✓		
4	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?			✓
5	Is the right to freely withdraw from the research at any time made explicit to participants?	✓		
6	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	✓		
7	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation?	✓		
8	Will your research involve discussion of topics which the participants might find sensitive?	✓		

9	Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses or compensation for time) be offered to participants?			√
10	Will your project involve deliberately misleading participants in any way?		√	
11	Is there any realistic risk of any participants experiencing either physical or psychological distress or discomfort?		√	
12	Does your research involve participants who are particularly vulnerable or who may feel unable to give informed consent e.g. prisoners; children; people for whom English is not their first language; learners in a programme you teach on?	√		
13	Will any non-anonymised and/personalised data be generated and/stored?		√	

**If you answered YES to any of questions 8 to 13 please complete Part Two of this form. If there are any other ethical issues that you think the Committee should consider, please explain them in Part Two of this form. It is the researcher's obligation to bring to the attention of the Committee any ethical issues not covered on this form.**

***Part Two***

For each question 9 to 15 that you answered YES, please give a summary of the issue and action to be taken to address it (no more than 300 words in total):

Q8: My focus group study will involve children between the ages of 8 and 12 years old. One focus group will involve 4<sup>th</sup> class children (8-9 years old) and the other focus group will involve 6<sup>th</sup> class students (age 11-12 years old.)

Children will be asked open ended questions about their thoughts on beauty and well-being and how they perceive beauty in women accorded a celebrity status by the media. I will explore with the children the extent to which they are aware that such images are very often edited to conform to certain notions of beauty.

Q12: My research involves children, who are categorised as a vulnerable group.

Before conducting any research, I will obtain parental consent for each child willing to participate.

I had considered mentioning body image in the title. In the light of a discussion with my supervisor about the sensitivity of this topic, I have decided instead to focus on the concept of beauty and the extent to which young people are influenced by the media in the formation of their ideals of female beauty.

The focus group will enable the participants to have a positive experience while accessing and developing their critical skills through the use of techniques such as realising that photographs are often edited before publication. I will show the children a powerpoint containing 'before and after' photo shopped images of female celebrities and discuss how these images are doctored.

To be completed by the supervisor (in the case of a student application).

**PLEASE TICK ONLY ONE:**

As the supervisor of this research project, I confirm my belief that all relevant ethical issues relating to the research have been conveyed to the student in accordance with College policy on research ethics.

The issues require the attention of, and approval from, the College Research Ethics Committee.

Comments:



Signed (Supervisor):

Date: 19 April 2017