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Criminology MRes Dissertation

Exploring consumer culture and girlhood:

A step towards understanding young woman's acquisitive offending.

Acknowledgments

*Thank you to the young women who made this possible,
and who helped me to understand...*

Table of Contents

Abstract:	1
Definitions:	2
Chapter One	
<u>Introduction: Crime – What's Girlhood go to do with it?</u>	3
1.1 Background and context	3
1.2 Aims and approach	5
1.3 Layout of dissertation	6
Chapter Two	
<u>Literature Review: Criminology and Girlhood</u>	7
2.1 Introduction	7
2.2 Where are the women in criminology?	7
2.3 Significant lessons from feminist criminology	8
2.4 Introducing consumer culture to offending	9
2.5 The meeting place of feminist criminology and girlhood	14
2.6 Conclusion	16
Chapter Three	
<u>Methodology: A Qualitative Approach</u>	18
3.1 Introduction	18
3.2 Qualitative research strategy	18
3.3 Focus group discussion	20
3.4 Sample selection and research process	22
3.5 Analysis of data	24
3.6 Conclusion	25
Chapter Four	
<u>Findings: Analysis and Presentation</u>	26
4.1 Introduction	26
4.2 Findings from empirical data	26
(i) Media consumption and consumer experience	26
(ii) Social media and celebrity following	32
(iii) School environment and academic achievement	36
4.3 Conclusion of findings	38
4.4 Consideration of findings for future criminological study	39
Chapter Five	
<u>Conclusion: An Informed Beginning</u>	43
Appendices	45
Bibliography	57

Abstract

This dissertation - which is presented as a step towards a larger PhD project on young women, consumer culture and crime – explores the role of consumer culture in the everyday lives of young women. The broad research emphasis on ‘ordinary’ young women, as opposed to young women who offend, permits a more general exploration into the features of contemporary ‘girl culture’ (Driscoll, 2002) and ‘growing up girl’ (Walkerdine et al., 2001) in times that are influenced by postfeminist and neoliberal discourses (McRobbie, 2008; Gill 2007). The research adopts a qualitative methodology and works from a feminist perspective, foregrounding the views and experiences of seven young women who took part in a focus group discussion. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that young women have a complex relationship with consumer culture, a relationship that is at times discrete and can be performed via dominant modes of identity construction such as friendship groups/peer group interaction both online, through social media, and offline through consumer experiences and school participation. Notably, the role that consumer culture plays in young women’s lives cannot be understood in isolation from more ‘localised’ (MacDonald, 2016) social, material and gendered experiences of their everyday lives (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014). These findings have key implications for the researcher’s future enquiry into young women, consumer culture and crime. By acknowledging that the role of consumer culture is intertwined within the particular circumstances of a young women’s life and can be performed through online and offline friendship groups/peer interactions, the researcher can seek to understand the lives of young women who commit acquisitive offences through these specific frames of reference. This insight will place her in a more informed position to examine the relevance and/or influence of consumer culture (or otherwise) on young women’s acquisitive offending.

Definitions

There are a few key words/terms used within this dissertation that are specifically important to this research. For clarity, I outline what these words/terms mean in the context of my work.

Acquisitive offending: Within this dissertation, acquisitive offending is defined as: an offence where the offender derives 'material gain' from the crime¹. Examples *can* include: shoplifting, burglary, theft and robbery. The main type of acquisitive offending I focus on within this research is shoplifting. Please note, the Scottish Government (2016) refers to acquisitive crimes as 'crimes of dishonesty'.

Young women and girls: I use the terms 'young women' and 'girls' interchangeably throughout this dissertation - both when referring to the female participants who took part in the focus group discussion and when referring to wider academic work and discourses. The interchangeability of these terms is common in academic work about young women (see Mitchell & Rentschler, 2016).

Gender: I used the word 'gender', as defined by Davies (2011: 192), as 'a cultural concept relating to the social classification of masculine and feminine'. It refers to the differences between men and women that are socially constructed.

Consumer culture: Defined by a universal desire to consume goods, experiences, success and status (Hayward, 2004). Within this dissertation, the term consumer culture also includes the mass-media's attention towards 'celebrities', those who are 'well known for their knowness' (Boorstin, 1972:57), and who subsequently form part of the consumer culture framework. For ease of reference, and to demonstrated their inseparability, I use 'consumer culture' as an all-inclusive term for consumer and celebrity culture.

¹ Adapted from a definition from West Yorkshire Police. See <https://www.westyorkshire-pcc.gov.uk/media/82972/glossary.pdf> [Accessed on 12th September 2017]

Chapter One

Introduction: Crime – What's Girlhood got to do with it?

1.1 Background and context

The topic of this dissertation relates to my future PhD research on young women who commit acquisitive offences. This wider study is premised on the assumption that we cannot make sense of young women's offending without paying sufficient attention to the contexts of their lives (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014). Therefore, the current dissertation seeks to explore this context by means of qualitative data collection with a group of 'ordinary' young women about their everyday lives, the issues that are important to them, and their engagement (or otherwise) with consumer culture.

Despite growing interest in the relationship between acquisitive crimes and consumer culture in contemporary criminological enquiry (e.g. Hall et al. 2008; Hayward, 2004), there has been little attention paid to the influence of consumer culture on female offending. This is despite (i) official crime statistics showing that a large majority of crimes committed by women are acquisitive in nature (see Scottish Government, 2016²; Davies 2003); and (ii) girlhood scholarship emphasising that twenty-first century young women have emerged as a hyper-visible and prominent consumer group (McRobbie, 2008; Harris, 2004; Harris 2004b).

Instead, a predominate focus of academic enquiry and media attention on young women's offending has centralised on the 'problem' of violence by this group. News headlines such as: *'The dark side of female empowerment: The rise of Britain's 'gangster girls' running gangs'* (Peacock, 2014) have been common place in newspaper and magazine publications; focusing on the erosion of the 'good girl norm' that showcase young women – and feminism – as urgent problems that required solution. This depiction is, however, not an accurate reflection of young women's offending (Batchelor, 2001). In actuality, violent acts by this group are 'relatively rare' (Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Sharpe, 2012) and cannot/should not be attributed to

² I am aware of the criticisms of relying on Official Crime Statistics (see Coleman & Moynihan, 1996) and although published statistics may not be able to comprehensively assist in an understanding acquisitive offending rates they nevertheless offer a useful starting point for academic enquiry.

feminist gains (Carrington, 2006; Campbell, 1981; Smart, 1977). Nevertheless, repetitive media narratives of 'bad girls', 'mean girls' and 'girl gangs' influence a collective cultural dialogue and construct 'moral panics' (Cohen, 1972; Hall et al., 1978) around girls, their empowerment, friendships and violent crime. This is problematic for several reasons. It displaces academic attention away from more common crimes committed by this groups (such as acquisitive crimes) and thus dilutes understandings surrounding these types of crimes. But, more worryingly, it re-directs political focus and consequently affects the development of youth justice/criminal justice policy and agendas - resulting in increased social control over an already highly-surveilled group (Gelsthorpe & Worrall, 2009; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006).

In direct contrast to the sensationalised media's narratives of the violent female offender, and of particular importance to this research, young women are increasingly confronted with, or constructed within, influential images and messages of consumer culture and celebrity status (McRobbie, 2004). Through various medias outlets, including many social media platforms that individually tailor advertising to match users' search histories and future desires, young women's dreams and aspirations are structured in terms of celebrity-like success and material gains. This creates a 'narrow model of femininity' that is exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, for young women to emulate and recreate (Lerner, 2016: 178). The pressures to be glamorous and to 'have it all' – or at least to look like one does – is increasingly being marketed to teenage girls (Sharpe, 2012: 91; McRobbie, 2015).

Young women within contemporary society are, as both offenders and non-offenders, more visible than ever before (Kearney, 2015; Chesney-Lind & Eliason, 2006; Harris, 2004). According to Harris (2004), the visibility of such young women is categorised within the neoliberal ideology as either the '*can do*' girl or the '*at risk*' girl. The '*can do*' girls, similar to McRobbie's (2009) description of '*top girls*', are viewed as models for ideal citizenship, identified by 'their commitment to exceptional careers/career planning, their belief in their capacity to invent themselves and succeed, and their *display of a consumer lifestyle*'. The '*at risk*' girls are, on the other hand, identified by their 'misaligned occupational ambitions, a lack of sense of power or opportunity, and *inappropriate consumption behaviours*' (Harris, 2004: 14, emphasis added). If young women do not achieve the 'can do' successes, they are 'more emphatically condemned for their lack of status and other failings' (McRobbie, 2008: 7). The

postfeminist and neoliberal repackaging of 'choice' and 'empowerment' only intensifies these identity categorisations because young women who have 'failed' have only themselves to blame (McRobbie, 2009; Gill & Scharff, 2011).

What does all of this mean for young women, particularly those who offend, in contemporary society? How does it impact their everyday lives and identity construction? Empirical research in this area is very limited (an issue that will be explored further in *chapter two*), and as such the practical implications of such factors on the lives of young women, and those who offend, are either unknown or are underexplored. Chesney-Lind & Shelden (2014: 4), who have extensively studied young women's offending in the US, suggest that before we can begin to understand young women's offending, particularly acquisitive offending that occurs within a consumer-orientated society, 'far more needs to be understood about the lives of girls' within this society. Therefore, this dissertation bases its research focus on the lives and experiences of 'ordinary' young women in contemporary society and the role that consumer culture plays in their lives. It is a preliminary and exploratory study that is not only required for girlhood enquiry, but has much to offer to the criminological field.

1.2 Aims and approach

The aims of this dissertation are two-fold: (i) to explore the role of consumer culture in the everyday lives of a group of 'ordinary' young women; and (ii) to reflect on the significance of these findings for research on young women who commit acquisitive offences. Accordingly, the key research question for this study is: what role does consumer culture play in the everyday lives of young women? The research will address these aims/question by:

1. Critically reviewing existing criminological knowledge on young women who offend, as well as examining the broader sociological literature on girlhood, consumer culture, and identity;
2. Exploring the role of consumer culture in the everyday lives of young women via original empirical data collection (focus group discussion);
3. Considering the implications of 1 & 2 for criminological enquiry relating to young women's acquisitive offending.

1.3 Layout of dissertation

This chapter has introduced the background to and context of the research, alongside the specific objectives of the research - purposely highlighting why examining 'girlhood' and 'ordinary' young women can assist in the understanding surrounding young women's acquisitive offending. *Chapter two* details the existing literature relating to young women, consumer culture and crime, underscoring the lack of academic focus in these areas. It also analyses the overlapping and important sociological literature of girlhood, consumer culture and identity. Overall, it demonstrates that empirical enquiry, which explores the role of consumer culture within young women's contemporary lives, is required to gain a better understand of young women's acquisitive offending. *Chapter three* details the methodological process of the research, outlines the analysis strategy, and reflects on the strengths and the limitations of the data collection. *Chapter four* is divided into two parts. Part one analyses and presents the findings of the original empirical data by exploring the young women's dialogue and mapping it alongside the existing literature from *chapter two*. It identifies and examines emerging themes and subthemes to suggest that young women have a complex relationship with consumer culture, a relationship that is at times discrete and can be performed via other modes of identity construction such as friendship groups/peer group interaction (both online and offline). Part two considers the implication of these findings for future criminological study and suggests that my future PhD research be unpacked via an analysis of young offending women's friendship groups (both online and offline) and school participation/academic success (or lack thereof); as well as focusing on the use of social media in their lives. *Chapter five* brings the research to a conclusion by outlining the important contributions to criminological knowledge being made by this research, and sets the scene for my future PhD research.

Chapter Two

Literature Review: Criminology and Girlhood

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically reviews existing knowledge on young women who offend, focusing particularly on the existing research on young women, consumer culture and crime. It also examines the broader sociological literature on girlhood, consumer culture, and identity. It recognises that there is a gap in the criminological literature (both feminist and mainstream) surrounding the relevance of consumer culture on acquisitive offending by young women. As a result, the chapter emphasises the academic worth of this, and future studies, to build knowledge in this area. The chapter argues that before we can begin to gain a better understanding of young women's acquisitive offending, and whether a hyper-visible feminine consumer culture has implications for this, firstly we need to gain understandings of girlhood and how young women construct their identities within a contemporary consuming society. Ultimately, this chapter creates the foundations upon which the qualitative research is carried out (see *chapter three*), analysed and presented (see *chapter four*).

2.2 Where are the women in criminology?

It is only in the last 50 years, of criminology's 200-year-plus history, that the study of women and crime became a legitimate and recognised area of focus (Heidensohn, 2012; Campbell, 1981). Before the 1960/70s, and pre-dating the pioneering works of Heidensohn (1968) and Smart (1977), women as offenders and victims were either 'ignored, trivialised or denied' (Chesney-Lind & Okamoto, 2001: 3) or were 'vilified, stigmatized, medicalized and pathologized' (Burman & Gelsthorpe, 2017: 220). Criminology, like many academic fields at that time, was male-centred. Thus, the study of crime, and theories of crime, exclusively reflected 'a male social reality' (Naffine, 1987: 127). Gender was not considered or addressed in the analysis of criminal behaviour despite the fact that, as described by Davies (2011: 180), crime is a 'gendered phenomenon'. With the development of a feminist criminology³, that

³ Feminist Criminology – 'It's a convenient rubric, but only as long as criminologists appreciate its multiple meanings' (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988: 507; also see Burman & Gelsthorpe, 2017: 214).

emerged alongside the second wave of feminism, female offenders (and victims) began to gain visibility, and gender was placed on the criminological agenda (Gelsthorpe & Morris, 1988).

2.3 Significant lessons from feminist criminology

One of the first concepts developed to explain female offending was the 'liberation/emancipation' concept. Developed by Adler (1975), and to a lesser extent Simon (1975), it looked at the criminogenic consequences of women's liberation (Applin & Messner, 2015: 42). It was suggested that women's 'equal' opportunities would place them more prominently within the public sphere and, as such, their participation in criminal activity would increase and begin to resemble male offending. Feminist academics discredited (and continue to discredit) this line of thought because not only was there no empirical evidence to support it (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014; Abbott et al., 2005; Campbell, 1981), it linked women's crime to feminist gains. The liberation/emancipation thesis (and versions of it), are – although academically unsound - crucial to contemporary feminist critiques because such explanations continually emerge as media tools to 'explain' women's crime (see *chapter one* regarding 'mean girl' violence). Linking women's offending to women's liberation is an 'easy way out' (Chesney-Lind and Pasko, 2013) because it ignores social and cultural factors that may impact offending women's lives, at the same time, tactically disguising structural inequalities with traditional feminist language of 'choice and 'empowerment' (an issue to be further discussed in *section 2.5* below)

Arguably one of the most crucial contributions of feminist criminology has been the recognition of the gendered nature of crime regarding male violence towards women (Daly & Chesney-Lind, 1988). Although victimisation is not a feature of this dissertation (for further discussion on this area see Belknap, 2015; Davies, 2011) it is important to acknowledge its contribution to understanding women's offending. The visibility of women as victims steered feminist criminologists to make a connection between victimisation and subsequent female offending and the concept of 'blurred boundaries' of victimisation and criminalisation emerged (see Daly, 1992; 1994). Although it is important to recognise that not all female offenders are victims and not all female victims are offenders, the 'blurred boundaries' concept gave valuable insight into the 'gendered pathways to crime', placing focus on offending women's backgrounds. For example, acknowledging women's positions of economic marginalisation,

also known as 'feminisation of poverty', (see Carlen, 1988; Chesney-Lind, 1986); circumstances of poor health (both physical and mental) and addiction problems (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013).

Despite offering important contributions towards the understanding of female offending, such developments were criticised for being essentialist on two grounds: (i) in framing gender as a unitary category of analysis and; (ii) in labelling women as eternal victims and denying their rational choice. These criticisms, directed at feminist criminology and wider feminist theory, developed into positive contributions to the disciplines. Emerging from the concept of 'intersectionality', gender was mediated not as one category, but through the intersection of race, class, sexualities and other forms of marginality (Crenshaw, 1989; Madhok & Evans, 2014). Viewing gender through an intersectional lens has created a deeper and more intricate understandings of female offending (see Maher, 1997) and developed a new direction for empirical enquiry (Burgess-Proctor, 2006; Daly, 2010). Regarding the 'women as victim' narrative, new generations of feminist criminological scholars have been shifting from this limited focus: 'producing empirically informed critical analyses of women's power, agency and choice' (Burman and Gelsthorpe, 2017: 220). Recognition of intersectionality and observation of differing power dynamics within the structure and agency dichotomy brings important aspects of women's lives to the forefront of academic enquiry, aspects that may otherwise have been overlooked.

2.4 Introducing consumer culture to offending

'Consumerism is what defines our age'

(Flavin, 2004: xvii).

Characteristics of late-modernity: the shift from an industrial to a consumer-based economy; the centrality of individualism; the oversaturation of mass-media; and the decline of traditional forms of identity and solidarity (Giddens 1991) have profoundly impacted the lives, identities and cultural practices of our society, especially young people. Consumerism is everywhere, as contended by Winlow & Hall (2017), something that is firmly interwoven within the very framework of our culture (Hayward & Young 2004). Running parallel to our consuming society is the fascination with, and consumption of, the celebrity world (Penfold-Mounce,

2009). The 'seductive images of global media' (Hall & Winlow, 2005: 32) propel consumer and celebrity 'ideals' which are characterised as the 'norm' but, in reality, are unattainable to the average person through economic marginalisation (White & Cunneen, 2006). Not being able to consume has been said to create an exclusion from society (Bauman, 1998; Young, 2003) that can 'cultivate tendencies', especially among young people, to seek inclusion by an expression of acquisitive criminal behaviour (Hayward, 2001:14).

Both Hall et al. (2008) and Hayward (2004) have produced interesting works that, via slightly different perspectives, conclude that consumer culture deserves prominent attention in contemporary criminological theory. The most recent texts by these academics (see Winlow & Hall, 2017 and Hayward & Smith, 2017) re-emphasise their firm stance; urging criminological enquiry not to ignore the relationship between consumer culture and crime. I argue that these works are correct to focus on the association between consumer culture and crime, particularly in current times where consumer culture is under rapid expansion. However, what is peculiar about their 'consumer-crime-nexus' research is that these academics fail to acknowledge gender implications, despite the fact that feminist criminology has continually highlighted the importance of gender in understanding crime. This is both unfortunate and disappointing, especially, as highlighted in *chapter one*, acquisitive crimes 'outstrip' all other female crimes (Sharpe, 2012: 90) and young women are increasingly visible within consumer culture (Harris, 2004). Ironically, Winlow & Hall (2017) use a gendered example to showcase the potential influence of consumer culture within their works, asking readers, '*would you desire a Chanel handbag if others do not?*'. There is frustration here, because, in one sense the contributions from Hall and Hayward are critical to understanding the criminogenic consequences of consumer culture but, at the same time, they have (deliberate)⁴ indifference to questions of gender, suggesting that 'little has changed since the earlier feminist critiques' (Heidensohn, 2012: 127).

Returning to feminist criminology and what it can tell us about young women, consumer culture and acquisitive crimes - as feminist scholars have not been completely silent on this front. Campbell (1981); Carlen (1985; 1992); Davies (2011), Sharpe (2012) and Chesney-Lind

⁴ Hayward (2016: 307) acknowledges feminist critiques that he, and cultural criminology, fail to consider gender dynamics yet he states he 'has no interest in making either the sex of the researcher or the researcher's subjects a special virtue'.

& Sheldon (2014) have all made reference to the wider motivations of young women to commit acquisitive offences and although consumer culture did not form a central focus of their research, their works nevertheless offer a valuable contribution to this research.

Anne Campbell, an early feminist criminologist, was one of the first academics to position women's acquisitive offending within a social, cultural and political sphere. Her work is insightful and, one could argue, that it was before its time, as the 'contemporary' features of her book, *Delinquent Girls*, resonate with current concerns. For example, Campbell (1981: 125) makes reference to 'the enormous machinery of advertising' that impacts upon young women's lives; terminology that is only now featuring in wider discussions of consumer culture (see Ditmar, 2007). The most fundamental point to acknowledge from Campbell's work is that she brings recognition to the fact that, 'women *in particular* are vulnerable to a consumer fetishism that drives them to lawbreaking' (Campbell, 1981: 117; emphasies added). Her use of the word 'vulnerable' suggests a victim focus, which, as detailed above is a deep criticism of feminist works. But, if we can look beyond the victim language, it is clear that Campbell wanted readers to consider the extent to which, for girls in particular, self-representation and appearance are actually reinforced by media messages (1981: 120). Her work outlines what many contemporary academics suggest now: that consumerism is both gendered and informs identity creation.

Ancillary to the focus on consumer culture, Campbell (1981: 34) provides valuable insight into a young women's relationship with her peer groups, suggesting that the attitudes, values and behaviour of friendship groups can 'profoundly' affect their lives. Although vastly informative, Campbell's work is let down by an unclear methodology. As such, readers are unaware whether Campbell's assertions about acquisitive crimes are based on original empirical evidence or examination of secondary sources. Nevertheless, Campbell ends her chapter on acquisitive crimes with a powerful statement to encourage wider study in this area, she contends that: 'when the temptations are all weighed up and the chances of detection calculated, it is remarkable that so few girls do it [shoplift]' (1981: 131).

Turning next to the highly influential work by criminologist, Pat Carlen (1985, 1992). Carlen, although she did not make specific reference to consumer culture, identified from her works

with female offenders that woman can commit crime for *material gain*, and it is not always related to issues of poverty or difficult backgrounds. In other words, Carlen recognised that women can committing crimes for 'greed' and it is not always a result of poverty's 'need'. Pamela Davies developed Carlen's concept, and it has formed important parts of her work for more than a decade (1999; 2003; 2011). The main issue, from Davies' point of view, was that feminist scholars were failing to give adequate account of the motives for women's acquisitive offending; not considering that these crimes 'might be solutions to women's ambitions to achieve' (2011: 94). Davies (2011: 96) believes that there is an alternative 'gendered pathways to crime' to be developed here, a pathway that features a women's choice for a lifestyle is that is both 'lucrative and successful'. Although Davies, like Carlen, does not specifically mention consumer culture, she clearly recognises a gap in the existing literature and calls for further research on women's active motivations, not passive reasons, to commit acquisitive crimes. After Davies publication, Caputo & King (2011/2015) added to this conversation. They found, from their detailed accounts of drug-addicted women in US that shoplifting crimes were understood by these women as 'crime for income as an occupation'.

Thirty years after Campbell (1981) called for further research on consumer culture and crime, Gilly Sharpe's (2012) work on offending girls made specific reference to the influence of consumer culture in young women's shoplifting. Sharpe's work with young offending women, and the practitioners who work with them, is exemplary. She has a robust methodology (something that Campbell lacked), speaking to 52 young women about their backgrounds and offending experiences. Although consumer culture did not form a central theme of her qualitative study, she contributed key pointers to the academic conversation:

- She acknowledges that since the beginnings of feminist criminology in the 1960/70s, 'enormous' social changes have taken place and consumer culture has become increasingly significant in young people's identity construction (Sharpe, 2012: 40).
- She highlights that 'for young women, far more than for young men, consumption is embodied' (Sharpe, 2012: 95).
- Overall her argument relating to consumer culture and crime is that 'the rise of consumer culture in contemporary society plays a *central role* in girls' lawbreaking' (2012: 95; emphases added).

Sharpe included within her 2012 publication edits of her conversations with the young offending women. For Zoe, a young woman who Sharpe interviewed, her shoplifting was not for 'sneaky thrills' or 'acts of rebellion' but was motivated 'above all' by the desire to consume and acquire a constant supply of new clothes, shoes, make-up hair-straighteners' (2012: 95). As Zoe said, herself: 'stuff I really want'. This is in stark contrast to the 'feminisation of poverty' concept that suggests women steal in order to survive. Nevertheless, for these girls, having such items was a way of survival in *their* everyday lives.

Sharpe, like Campbell, made reference to girls' peer groups and emphasised the young women's school involvement (or lack thereof) in impacting offending activity (2012: 75). Sharpe (2012: 64) observed that the school involvement and educational backgrounds of the young women in her study contrasted decidedly with the '*can do*' girl discourse of educational achievements, success and ambition (Harris, 2004). Bottrell's (2000) research has similarities to Sharpe's, as she identified that girls who do not succeed at school and who do not fit within official discourses of success can create ways of 'success' by offending means. Notably absent from wider feminist criminological enquiry is any mention of social media used and its use by young women. This is strange considering the prevalence of social media in young people's everyday lives. Sharpe (2017) in her most recent publication does make brief reference to the use of social media sites such as *Facebook* observing that there is 'the considerable fluidity between digitized and offline identities for young people' (2017; 238). This is an important issue that requires academic attention.

Chesney-Lind & Shelden (2014: 36), have also contributed to the consumer culture and crime conversation. They acknowledged from their work with offending girls in the US, that shoplifting girls may be 'inordinately sensitive to the consumer culture', stealing things they feel they need, or indeed may actually need, or cannot afford. Like Campbell and Sharpe, they strongly argue that acquisitive crimes are likely to be influenced by consumer culture, particularly for girls from more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds: 'if a young woman cannot afford participation [in consumer culture], she is likely to steal her way in' (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014: 36).

Each of these scholars have different foci to their works, take altered positions on the structure and agency dichotomy, and have varying uptakes of the concept of intersectionality. But there are three key issues to be drawn from these scholars: (i) that consumer culture is playing an increasingly significant role in young women's lives and identity construction; (ii) that the consideration of consumer culture on young women's acquisitive offending is a legitimate area of study that requires scholarly attention; and (iii) empirical enquiry has to begin with a focus on girls' lives and the social, material and gendered circumstances within which they make choices and decisions.

2.5 The meeting place of feminist criminology and girlhood

We know more about female offending than ever before; however, as shown above, feminist criminology is *still* a relatively young area of study and there are *still* considerable gaps in its knowledge. In developing (and continuing to develop) feminist criminology, scholars tend to start outside its field and ask questions about women (in this case, young women), rather than initial questions about crime (Daly & Maher, 1998). Therefore, following Daly & Maher's guide, before concluding this literature review on young women's acquisitive offending and the impacts of consumer culture, it is necessary to look towards girlhood studies. This will strengthen the foundational knowledge for empirical research.

The study of young women, the role of consumer culture in their lives and the construction of their identities has received much academic focus; giving rich insight into what it means to 'grow up girl' (see Walkerdine, 2001; Driscoll, 2002; Harris, 2004; 2004b; Aapola et al, 2005; McRobbie, 2009). The key feature to draw from these central (yet slightly outdated) works on girlhood is that 'girlhood identity' and 'consumer culture' seem to be intertwined. As Harris (2004b: 91) contends, the most pervasive image of girlhood is 'the girl consumer'. Friendship groups and school participation/academic success are also mentioned within these texts as important factors in young women lives and identity constructions - albeit, these areas have not received as much critical focus as the role of consumer culture. Aapola et al. (2005: 130), however, urge researchers not to overlook the significance of girls' friendship groups, advising that 'friendships' warrant deeper exploration in changing cultural times. This view is consistent with Lawler's sociological perspectives on identity; she claims that identity is understood 'not as belonging within the individual person, but as produced between persons and within social

relations' (2014: 19). Regarding education and academic achievement, Harris (2004: 106) contends that 'intellectual superiority' at school is a base measure of the female student body, if a young woman does not succeed upon the academic stage then she is seen as 'inadequate' and 'out of the ordinary' and therefore excluded from this discourse (and consumer culture). Being academically successful is, therefore, a 'seductive narrative' for young women (Ringrose, 2007: 427).

Academic enquiry into the lives of young women is important to help us understand how girls makes sense of themselves and the world around them, which in turn helps to develop more appropriate (and area specific) services and policies for this group. However, those who contribute to girlhood studies also run the risk of constructing new restrictions upon this already highly regulated group (Morrison, 2016). Through both critical evaluation and academic discussion, young women seem to be continually categorised in 'either/or' academic discourses, identified as successes or failures. The '*can do*' and '*at risk*' girls and the '*good*' and '*bad*' girls as described in *chapter one*; the '*Ophelia's*' and '*girlpower*' girls as detailed by Aapola et al., (2005); the '*rebel/activist*' girl discussed by Taft (2011); and the '*successful*' and '*super girl*' as examined by Ringrose & Walkerdine (2008) and Pomerantz et al., (2013). Young women are having to negotiate an understanding of their lives and their identities through the eyes and analyses of others; as well as negotiating their place '*par excellence*' within a contemporary consumer society (Campbell, 1981) a place where they have - or are seen to have - endless (consumer) 'choice' (Harris, 2004). Gill (2016: 620), who has observed such complexity of the girlhood terrain, has suggested that in order to being to understand the difficulties and competing forces of contemporary culture we should look at the concept of postfeminist sensibility. Postfeminist sensibility offers a way of critically engaging with the some of the 'distinct gendered features' of contemporary (consumer) society while at the same time responding to the ways in which women's 'freedom', 'empowerment' and 'choice' have been repackaged as consumer marketing tools to embody new mechanism of regulation and control. The importance of Gill's work in this area, I argue, is critical to the understanding young women's lives (both 'ordinary' young women and those who offend) in contemporary society. Disguising structural 'control' through the voice of feminist 'choice' completely muddies the waters of structure/agency/victimisation, especially in feminist criminological enquiry where there is an important characterisation of active participation and free choice (Maher, 1997).

Sharpe (2016: 12) in her recent works has observed this dilemma. She advises that there is now an urgent need to investigate what constitutes 'girlhood agency, choice and empowerment or, conversely, exploitation or victimisation'. From a sociological and girlhood perspective, Harris & Dobson (2015) share Sharpe's concerns.

In addition to (but not necessarily in line with) these contemporary developments in girlhood and sociological literature, recent academic work that focuses on the lived experiences and everyday realities of young women suggest that in current times consumer culture plays a less direct role in young women's everyday lives. Taft, who has written much about young women and consumer culture (see Taft, 2004), and who has previously argued that consumerism was a dominant way in which young women's identity work was accomplished, now contends that a young women's identity is not always linked to consumer culture and consumption. Instead, her qualitative study with US teenage girls, showed that girls lives are 'fashion[ed] in conversation with one another through friendships and peer groups' (2011: 180). This is consistent with the recent works by MacDonald (2016: 170) who suggested that girls have lack of overt engagement with consumer culture, instead their consumption activities are deeply intertwined with their desire to belong within their (local) social worlds. Aapola et al., (2005:1) in the beginning of their book *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power and Social Change* underscored the vital point that: 'what it means to be a girl is constantly changing'. This point, along with the new information emerging from recent girlhood texts, emphasises the necessity of conducting *current* empirical research to not only understand young women's lives within contemporary society but to understand the role that consumer culture plays (or does not play) within their lives.

2.6 Conclusion

The existing criminological and sociological literature surrounding young women, consumer culture, identity and crime provides vital insight and grounding for the current study. The criminological literature supports the argument that a wider study of young women, consumer culture and acquisitive crime is a legitimate area that requires scholarly attention. Additionally, the literature identifies that in order to begin to understand young women's acquisitive crimes, such crimes must be placed within the context of young women's lives - lives that operate within a consumer-orientated society (Chesney-Lind & Sheldon, 2014). The existing

sociological literature offers differing understandings of young women's relationship to consumer culture and describes, in varying degrees, the significance that consumer culture has in their everyday lives. Accordingly, the key research question to lead the empirical enquiry of this research is: what role does consumer culture play in the everyday lives of young women?

Chapter Three

Methodology: A Qualitative Approach

3.1 Introduction

The empirical data upon which this research is based is a focus group discussion with seven young women aged between 14 and 15 years old. This chapter details the reasons for selecting a qualitative research strategy; outlines the sample selection; describes the wider research process and considers the analysis of the data. Throughout this chapter the practical and ethical issues of the research process, as well as the strengths and limitations of the data collection, are discussed.

3.2 Qualitative research strategy

'Qualitative research is very important as when someone speaks of their life and their experiences a human face is suddenly superimposed over mind-numbing figures'.

(Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013: 9)

As described in *chapter one*, the main purposes of this research are: (i) to explore the role of consumer culture in the everyday lives of a group of 'ordinary' young women; and (ii) to reflect on the significance of these findings for research on young women who commit acquisitive offences. Central to these research objectives is understanding the experiences of young women living within a contemporary (consumer) culture, the views of 'real women' and how they are positioned within broader discourses (Daly & Maher, 1998). In alignment with this focus, a qualitative research strategy was selected. To explore and understand the experiences of research participants is a vital component of qualitative research (Mason, 2002: 1). Traditionally in criminological enquiry, quantitative research (which is closely linked to the epistemological and ontological orientations positivism and objectivism) was 'privileged in the academy' (Anderson, 1995:50). The Chicago School's ethnographic studies brought visibility and validity to qualitative research for criminological enquiry (Maguire, 2009: 267), thus helping criminologists to understand the context within which offending behaviour takes place and 'the meaning of events to people who experience them' (King & Wincup, 2009: 23).

This research is also significantly influenced and shaped by a feminist research approach⁵. Feminist researchers, according to Chesney-Lind & Morash (2013: 293-294), understand and believe that:

- the individuals (women or men) participating in the research contribute vital information surrounding their own experiences;
- the participants' understandings of their experiences are important and should be considered by the researcher; and
- the researcher recognises the need to consider the 'power differentials between the researched and the researcher, and how these differentials affect the production of knowledge' (see also Ramazanoglu 1989).

A key way of breaking down the power relationship in feminist research, is through the process of reflexivity (Mason & Stubbs, 2012). Reflexivity, which is described by Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 210) as 'the process of reflecting critically on the self as the researcher', means that the researcher should be located within the research process; acknowledging the ways in which his/her 'knowledge, experience, values and identity' influence and affect the entire process (Burman & Gelsthorpe, 2017: 226). A reflexive approach means that there is a dismissal of the objective orientation that positions the researcher as neutral and value-free; instead, there is an acceptance that the researcher is a 'subjective resource within the research' (*ibid*). In the words of Harding (1987), the researcher and the researched operate on the same critical plane (see also, Walklate, 2009: 321).

In line with this reflexive position, my reasons for carrying out the research are important to consider. I was originally interested in the topic area, young women and consumer culture, because looking back to my adolescence (from the vantage point of hindsight), I see that the role of consumer culture played a significant part in my life. I 'needed' to have the latest trends and style in order to feel included within my social world(s). When I was 15 years old (the age of most of the girls participating in this research) it was the year 2000. There were no smart

⁵ It is important to note that it is, according to Burman & Gelsthorpe (2017: 266) 'now generally accepted that there is not one method that makes research feminist but rather a feminist research approach, or framework, is critical'.

phones, mobile phones had just arrived in mainstream society, and there was no social media. My life, back then, is notably different to the lives of young women today. As a result, I find myself (consistently) asking the following question: 'how would I have *coped* during my adolescent years if social media and smart phones were around?'. There was an urge to find out how young women today navigate the new realities of girlhood. Skeggs (1997) advised that, at the beginnings of her research career, similar to my experiences, she was drawn to her interview participants as she saw her history, 'her story', in the lives of her participants. Skeggs negotiated these thoughts by reminding herself that she has now left the place in time where her interview participants are currently positioned. Like Skeggs, I continue to remind myself (throughout the entire research process – including analysis and writing-up) that I am no longer a teenage girl or part of the girlhood discourse; the young women participating in the focus group discussion are the experts in girlhood. As a result, it is their voices that matter and their voices that should be heard.

When adopting a qualitative research strategy, the research tends to have an 'grounded theory' inductive approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Bryman, 2016: 281). This means that research outcomes/theories are developed from analysis of the data, instead of testing a predetermined hypothesis (Silverman, 2011). This current research strategy did not adopt a *strict* grounded theory approach as the existing literature was reviewed both before and after the data collection and analysis, and themes from the literature guided the focus group discussions (see *appendix one*). However, in analysing and presenting the empirical data (see *chapter four*) I made sure to let the data speak for itself in line with the principles of grounded theory: 'reflect[ing] the uniqueness and diversity of the data and not bully[ing] the findings to fit preconceived ideas' (Spencer et al., 2014: 336).

3.3 Focus group discussion

The research method used to collect the data was a focus group discussion⁶. A focus group is defined as a method of interviewing with selected individuals about a particular topic (Bryman, 2016: 500). This method was selected for three important reasons that suit the overall research project:

⁶ Liamputtong (2011: 3) refers to the focus groups as 'focus group interviews', I prefer the term 'focus group discussion' as I believe it is a more relaxed term and therefore is a way of reducing the power imbalance between researcher and participants.

- Firstly, and most importantly, focus groups are a key method used in feminist research because of their ability to reduce the power imbalance between researcher and participants by enabling the participants to 'take over' the conversation and lead it. In focus groups, participants are not positioned face-to-face and one-on-one with an interviewer, which can be 'intimidating' or 'scary' (Madriz, 2000:364). Youth studies researchers are also more likely to adopt a focus group method to help make young people taking part in the research process feel relaxed and comfortable in familiar settings (Heath et al., 2009);
- Secondly, a focus group facilitates the delivery of rich and vast information within a relatively short period of time and with low-levels of demand on the participants (Liamputtong, 2011: 3) which is particularly important when working with young people;
- Thirdly, bringing the young women together as a friendship group created group interaction similar to a friendship circle, a more 'naturalistic' setting. This gave me the opportunity to see the ways in which they interact with one another and how they 'construct meaning' (Bryman, 2016) and collectively make sense of consumer culture and its role within their lives (Wilkinson, 1998). By using a focus group method, I could explore 'the gap' between what the young women said, compared with their behaviors and actions (Conradson, 2005: 131).

The limitations of focus group discussions are mostly practical. The 'flexible' approach of the focus group means that discussions can verge off-track very easily. It is important for the moderator of the focus group to guide the discussions back to the research focus, whilst, at the same time not directly leading the discussions or interrupting the natural 'fluidity' and 'spontaneity' of the conversation (Pucha & Potter, 2004: 28). During the focus group discussions with the young women participants, discussions did go off track (a few times). When this happened, I let the conversation flow for a couple of minutes as the divergence may have led to important findings. However, when it was clear that the topic was completely off-focus (for example, at one point of the focus group, the young women were they stopped believing in Santa Clause), I interjected and naturally guided the conversation back.

3.4 Sample selection and research process

Before beginning the research process an initial 'key informant' was identified, a family friend, a young woman aged 15 years. She informally indicated a willingness to participate in the research and to help find additional participants from within her peer group. The research was carried out in line with the following guidelines and codes: (i) Glasgow University's College of Social Sciences Research Ethics guidelines (2016); (ii) ESRC Research Ethics Framework (2015); and (iii) The British Society of Criminology Code of Ethics (2006). This meant that before the research process could begin, ethical approval was required from University of Glasgow Ethics Committee. Once ethical approval was confirmed, (see *appendix two*), I contacted the 'key informant' to begin organisation of the focus group discussion.

The key informant had a group of six friends who wished to take part in the focus group discussion. In accordance with the ethical consideration, a plain language statement (see *appendix three and four*) outlining the themes of the research and detailing issues of confidentiality was sent to each participant and her parent/carer (via the key-informant). As the young women were all under 16, they are considered 'vulnerable persons' and, therefore, stricter ethical guidelines are stipulated. In this case, two consent forms were required as part of the ethical process, one to be signed by the participant herself and another to be signed by her parent/carer (see *appendix four and five*). The consent forms informed participants (and their parents/carers) that they could 'opt-out' of the research at any time.

Seven young women took part in the focus group discussion. The girls were all aged between 14 and 15 and were from Glasgow. The 'racial' breakdown included one Scottish-Indian young woman and six White young women. The socio-economic position of the young women was not discussed, but based (loosely) on the area were they from and the school that they attended, it could be suggested that they do not come from a disadvantaged background. They were close friends, from the same social group, which created intimacy within the group and simulated a 'just as they are in real life' setting (Krueger & Casey, 2009; 7).

There are key two issues/limitations stemming from this sample of young women. Firstly, this sampling strategy was one of 'convenience' as the focus group was actioned based on the key informant and on the availability of the young women who took part. Secondly, only one focus group discussion was carried out, which meant the sample size was small. A key feature of qualitative research is small sample sizes which 'yield data that is rich in detail' (Ritchie et al.,

2014: 117). However, sample sizes can also be 'too small' in that they fail to identify 'key constituencies within the population or contain too little diversity' (ibid: 119). Feminist criminological literature detailed in *chapter two* highlights the importance of taking an intersectional approach to research which focuses on how gender intersects with other key factors within a woman's life. Furthermore, within wider criminological enquiry, class and socio-economic positioning has been a 'key lens through which delinquency and crime are understood' (Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2013: 6). Unfortunately, due to the time restraints of the of the Masters dissertation, I was unable to 'purposefully' select a sample for focus group discussions or to place as much focus as I would have liked to on the 'multiple intersecting lines of oppression and privilege' (Mitchell & Rentschler, 2016: 5). Although disappointing, it does not negate the rich data and insight gathered by the research process. As emphasised in *chapter one*, this is a preliminary and exploratory study and as a result it was never intended for the results to be generalizable. Instead, it aimed to explore the lived experiences of a small group of young women on the role of consumer culture in their everyday lives, establishing a 'baseline' foundation from which to build, and guide, future empirical enquiry.

The discussions took place at the key informant's home, where a parent was present in an adjacent room. This was a comfortable setting for the young women as it was a house they had gathered in many times before. I had also been to this house several times, therefore, safety risks of 'lone working' were minimal. In line with ethical considerations, I did, however, carry my mobile phone with me at all times and ensured that my partner and my supervisor knew about my research start and end time. The focus group lasted for 90 minutes, a discussion long enough to get the right amount of data (Yeo et al., 2014) but not too long that the participants would tire and potentially disengage from the research.

Before beginning the discussion, I introduced myself to the young women. To address the power dynamics, a key component of feminist research (Burman et al., 2001), I explained to the young women that this was my first focus group discussion and consequently I was nervous. This seemed to make me more relatable to the young women, as they were slightly nervous too. I also reminded them that they did not have to answer any question that they didn't want to and they could leave/stop at any point. I emphasised that I was there to listen to them and their experiences, as a result, there were no wrong answers. The focus group discussion centralised around the research interests and objectives: that the role and significance of

consumer culture in the lives of these young women. At the very outset of this research, in line with ethical consideration, an assessment was made regarding the potential risks and benefits to the participants as a result of the research interests and objectives. No particular sensitivities were anticipated with this research. Nevertheless, during focus group discussion, I was prepared to respond appropriately to any issues that may have arisen: for example, by acknowledging the feelings and/or behaviours exhibited and offering to pause and/or discontinue the discussion. Although no sensitive issues arose during the focus group discussions, it was evident there was much going on in the lives of these young women. Therefore, before drawing the discussions to a close there was some time for reflection on what they talked about. This was a relaxing de-brief where I discovered that the girls had deeply enjoyed their experience and felt it was very beneficial to them, one of the participants, Isla, telling me that *"I feel like I understand myself now"*. A commitment to reflexivity includes, as Burman et al., (2001: 447) note, 'a consideration of the effects of the experience of fieldwork on the researcher'. Like the young women who took part, I deeply enjoyed the fieldwork experience and felt that it was a way of better understanding myself, and my adolescence. I told the young women this, not only as a way of saying thank you but as a way of displaying reciprocity, another means of rebalancing the power dynamics of research (Golde, 1986).

3.5 Analysis of data

The flexible approach of qualitative methods means that there is not a specified set of rules of data analysis (Bryman, 2016). I adopted a 'thematic analysis' strategy. In practical terms, this means that the transcribed research data was reviewed and broken down into parts and then coded/indexed to reflect a priori themes and concepts. A priori themes included: (1) media; (2) celebrity; (3) consumerism; and (4) identity. A matrix base framework was adopted to assist and structure the analysis. The themes were later re-categorised to more accurately reflect the findings that emerged from the data, signalling the partial adoption of grounded theory, as detailed above. I considered the use of a software programme to help with the analysis process, however upon reflection and given the small sample, I decided to do this by hand. An advantage of using the manual approach to analysis is that it allowed me to become properly immersed within the empirical data and better understand the experiences of the young women taking part in the research.

Ethical issues must be located at the heart of the research process at every stage (Webster et al., 2014: 78). At the analysis stage, a researcher must respect the confidentiality of the participants in regard to 'storage, access and reporting' (Lewis & Graham, 2007). In accordance with Kuckartz (2014: 129) my data was anonymised shortly after the transcription was complete. I created suitable pseudonyms for the participants and removed all identifying characteristics from the transcriptions. This ensured that the ethical considerations were complied with and that I did not 'inadvertently' breach confidentiality by using such characteristics when writing-up this dissertation document (Webster et al., 2014).

3.6 Conclusion

According to Lewis et al. (2014: 48) a strong and robust research study is one that has a clearly defined purpose that is connected to the selected methodology and methods. It should be also be realistic with regard to practical time restrictions of what can be achieved. I argue that the methodology for this research study has succeeded in doing this and as a result has generating data that is 'rich', 'meaningful' and 'relevant'. The following chapter presents the findings of the empirical data.

Chapter Four

Findings: Analysis and Presentation

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this dissertation, *as outlined in chapter one*, is two-fold: (i) to explore the role of consumer culture in the everyday lives of a group of 'ordinary' young women; and (ii) to reflect on the significance of these findings for research on young women who commit acquisitive offences. This chapter is, therefore, divided into two parts: (i) interpretation and presentations of the findings from the original empirical data; and (ii) consideration of these findings for future criminological enquiry.

4.2 Findings from empirical data

From the empirical data, three broad themes emerged surrounding the role of consumer culture in the everyday lives of the participating young women: (i) media consumption and consumer experience; (ii) social media and celebrity following; and (iii) school environment and academic achievement. Friendship groups and peer group interaction was the common subtheme that was visible within each of the broader themes.

(i) Media consumption and consumer experience

I began the focus group discussions by asking the young women what TV show they preferred to watch (consume). There was a consensus that watching TV was a way of escaping the pressures and complexities of their 'real lives'. Lily, the most confident and humorous girl of the group, said that she watches '*anything [on TV] that is better than my actual life*'. Lily seemed to be joking as everyone laughed and then settled more comfortably into discussions.

Dance Moms (Lifetime, 2011 – present day), a US reality TV show that features mothers who competitively guide their children into the world of dance, was a favourite among the majority of the girls. Natalie described this show as her '*guilty pleasure*'. When I asked the young women whether shows like *Dance Moms* represented aspects of real life, the young women had mixed views. Natalie instantly stated that these shows were not real, labelling them as

'forced drama' with 'loads of controversy'. Isla and Olivia, who were initially quieter girls in the group, were slightly unsure. Their doubt was evident by the questioning tone in their voices, looking to the other girls for reassurance Olivia said: '*I used to, like, idolise all of these girls*' and Isla responded, '*I used to love them, think they were so beautiful and so skinny*'. The past tense vocabulary suggests that Isla and Olivia were influenced by such TV shows, but now they are able to see that such shows are '*scripted*' and not '*real*'. Lily was firmly adamant that '*she could never relate to these [reality TV] people...I have never seen myself in those scenarios*'. It was apparent that these young women did not want to appear 'duped' by the 'scripted' shows; they wanted to be, or at least appear, in control of their lives. This confident presentation of 'self' parallels with Pomerantz et al., (2013) and their construction of '*successful girls*', who, within postfeminist times, wish to showcase their independence, an attribute (and perhaps a requirement) of successful girlhood.

Next, I asked the young women whether they have ever felt pressure from TV shows like *Dance Moms*. Natalie said that she '*did not feel pressure at all*' from any of the '*stars*' in these shows, instead she wanted to be them:

'I want to be them. It wasn't like anyone was telling me to be them, it was more like internally I want to be them'.

Natalie was adamant that she did not feel pressure from outside influences, yet she wanted to '*be*' these girls. It was her '*choice*' to want this because in her own words '*it wasn't like anyone was telling me to be them*'. Lily corroborated this with her statement: '*every decision we make is our own decision*'. Interrogating and interpreting the language of '*choice*' under the lens of postfeminist sensibility places the spotlight on the difficulties in understanding young women's agency in neoliberal times. Harris & Dobson (2015: 146) recognise this problem and recommend that when young women are, as a baseline, encouraged to see themselves as independent and '*inherently powerful*' there is a requirement for a new vocabulary to describing young women's positions within the '*structure/agency binaries*'.

Emily, like Natalie, was adamant that she did not feel pressure, in fact she said that she didn't watch any reality TV. However, she did watch non-reality TV shows, such as *Thirteen Reasons Why* (Netflix, 2017 – present day), which tells the story about a young women's reasons (13 reasons) why she ended her own life. Emily described this show and said:

'everyone is so beautiful in it and like obviously you know that like there has been so much make-up like stuff behind and it is not just, you know, they are like that big because they are pretty and all that kind of stuff. I do think that like, definitely like you do, not idolise them, but like you look up to them and think on my god they are so beautiful and like...'

Olivia quickly interjected with:

'...I am kind of the opposite, I am kind of like I want to be them, and I kind of get in this state that I am like I love these people so much that I like feel I am physically morphing into them [laughter]. I want to be these people...all these things that happen TV shows is gona happen to me, like the perfect boy is going to ohhhhh...'

Munday (2006) suggests that analysing focus group interactions alongside with individual responses can be a way of identifying a group's collective identity. The girls' collective narrative was that they were not influenced by, nor did they feel pressure from, the TV shows that they consumed or the celebrities within these shows. Suggesting that consumer culture (in this instance more particularly celebrity culture) did not play a significant role within their everyday lives. For example, Isla said: *'it's not like I will see a celebrity do something and I will be like, I wanna be like them, I wana do that'*. However, this collective position was - on occasion - contradicted by their rich and emotive descriptions of the TV shows and the celebrities within these shows. Phrases like *'oh my god they are so beautiful'*, *'I love these people'*, *'I want to be these people'*, *'I am physically morphing into them'* suggests that some of the young girls were perhaps unsure of their positions regarding media/celerity consumption and its significance within their everyday lives. This is not to say that what the young women were saying was untrue, an important principle of a feminist methodology is that 'we take other people's truths seriously' (Stanley & Wise, 1993: 113). It is to observe two points: (i) that through the dynamics of their friendship group their collective narrative, either consciously or subconsciously, seemed to displace their individual responses; and (ii) as noted by Dittmar (2007:23) people in general tend to be unaware of consumer culture's 'pervasive' role and influence on their lives.

Before the dialogue regarding media consumption ended, Isla wished to bring the conversation back to *Dance Moms*. She clarified that although she did not idolise these girls, she did compare herself to these girls. She said, in an almost embarrassed tone, *'I am one year older than you*

[the girls on Dance Moms] and you have done all of this...'. All of the girls in the focus group said 'YES', in a collective response to Isla's confession-like statement. Each of them gave their own examples of TV shows, or specific celebrities that made them feel inadequate. Olivia stressed:

'that is one thing I don't like about our culture...the fact that we are never quite satisfied with where we were'

Analysing the young women's perceived inadequacies via the lens of post-feminist sensibility highlights the subtle ways that the 'girl-self' is reinforced as a 'project' that requires constant transformation and reassessment (Gill, 2008), much like what Olivia was frustrated about. McRobbie (2015:3) in her most recent works categorises this self-project as the 'the perfect', a horizon of continual expectation, through which young girls are 'persuaded to seek self-definition' often through actions of consumption. In reference to this notion of 'perfect', Natalie, confidently asserted that:

'most TV shows have adults playing teenagers and that is why they are so perfect and why their bodies look a certain way and I don't think people actually realise that, you know?'

The other girls nodded in agreement. It was unclear whether they were nodding because they agreed with this statement by Natalie, or whether they were nodding in realisation of the fact they had never considered this before. Young (1999:47), in *The Exclusive Society*, noted that the consumer market creates a 'practical basis of comparison', bringing to the foreground the hazards of 'uncritical acceptance' of such cultures. Although it was evident that these young women were grappling with the complexities and contradictory nature of contemporary girlhood, especially within the realm of media consumption, they were not altogether 'uncritical' or 'accepting' of this culture. It is important to 'honour' such capacities (Harris, 2004; 190).

Briefly returning to criminological literature, Campbell (1981: 239) and Sharpe (2012: 91) made reference to the socio-economic pressures of young women who are more likely to shoplift as a result of consumer pressures. Chesney-Lind & Shelden (2014: 36) observe:

'[p]articipation in the teen consumer subculture is costly, and if a young woman can afford participation, she is likely to steal her way in'

As explained in *chapter three*, the young women who participated in the focus group did not seem to form part of this limited socio-economic group. This is worth noting, especially surrounding the discussions of consumer culture, as young women from different socio-economic groups may, as the literature suggests, have different outcomes.

To begin the discussions on consumer culture, I asked the young women what items they like to spend their money on. The girls all tried to answer at once, clearly excited by the topic area, but it was Olivia who raised her voice and said, with her arms in the air, '*oh my god...I don't know, it just goes*'. Natalie followed with '*I will happily spend like £80*'. Most of the girls agreed, suggesting that money was not overly restricted/limited. Lily answered my question about consumer culture via the importance of the girls' friendship group, telling me that:

'I think that something that makes us like, keeps us all in common, like something that we have all got in common is that we spend our money on anything like...out of this reality'.

Lily quickly had to clarify what she meant by 'out of this reality' as the group seemed unsure. She then said, '*spending all our money on train tickets to get us out of the city*'. Several of the girls clapped and cheered, saying '*yea, tickets*' and all of them nodded in agreement. This was clearly something that was important to the girls, and a significant part of their friendship and consumer experience. Emily agreed, confirmed Lily's assertion about their united friendship: '*we all went on adventures to places, which is literally just like getting out of here...the bad energy, you just wanna leave it*'. This stage of the conversation was lengthy and instead of focusing their discussions on consumer products (like the literature suggests and I anticipated), mostly, the girls focused on their consumer experiences. However, their experiences were markedly different to the consumer experiences described by Chesney-Lind & Shelden (2014: 35) that involved 'ordinary' US girls who spent most of their time visiting shopping 'malls'. The young women in this study did not speak about visiting shopping centres; instead they discussed escaping these very environments, escaping the '*city*' and jumping on a train or bus to find adventure and a '*break*' from their lives. This predominate focus on consumer experience, rather than consumer products, brings a couple of questions into consideration. Firstly, why are these young women not as preoccupied with consumer products as the sociological, and criminological, literature suggests? Is it because they already possess, or have

the ability to (legitimately) acquire the consumer products, therefore, already succeeding at consumption (Harris, 2004)? Or, secondly, is it because they are as Taft (2011) refers to as 'rebel girls' (Taft, 2011), refusing to conform to girlhood consuming stereotypes? McRobbie (1997: 73) recognised that the presence of consumption in a women's life is 'largely to do with [her] disposable income', which could offer explanation to the girls' complacency/silence around consumer products. However, as McRobbie (*ibid*) also critically notes, consumer culture is centralised around 'female participation and enjoyment'. The young women, although not participating in traditional consumer purchasing activities, are participating and enjoying consumer culture through their consumer experiences. This is in alignment with MacDonald (2016: 4) and her study of 'tween' girls where she recognised that young women's consumption activities in today's contemporary society 'inherently entwined' with their desire for 'freedom' and 'independence'. Freedom and independence that are 'unmistakably', yet also paradoxically, linked to belongings

After the conversation about consumer experiences came to an end, Isla, who was notably quieter than the other girls during this part of the conversation jumped to attention and said:

'What I spend most of my money on is clothes, and I don't spend loads of money, but if I had it...there is a shop called Urban Outfitters a very certain like, it is expensive, but like aesthetics and it is the very much like the sort of Instagram like...'

The other girls, although agreeing with Isla, did not speak about spending money on clothes. Isla continued to give a unique reflection on her Urban Outfitters consumer experience saying it is '*like, wow*'. She was clearly enthusiastic about this store as she smiled while describing her shopping experience: '*it makes me feel good and stuff*'. Isla was the first girl to mention how social media was linked to what she wanted to buy. She specifically highlighted that '*the Instagram look*' and '*feel*' of Urban Outfitters were reasons why she shopped at that specific store. When I asked Isla about the people she followed on Instagram, although she followed celebrities, she used Instagram as a way of connecting with her friends - friends within the focus group, those at school and within wider social circles. For Isla, it was not the celebrities who shop at Urban Outfitters (if celebrities do even shop there), but it was the shopping habits/Instagram posts of her friends and wider social circle that she admired: '*the whole thing makes you feel more connected to your friends, makes you feel more connected to the people*

you follow'. Emily agreed: *'It is genuinely like my friends like for clothes'*. Chesney-Lind and Shelden (2014: 34) have stressed the importance of considering girls' friendship groups when trying to gain an understanding of their lives; after all 'teenagers [in the US] spend more time talking with their friends than any other activity, and high school students spent more time with their friends than with their parents'. Aapola et al (2005: 108) also recognise the importance of friendship to young women's lives, a social location for young women's identity construction. Unfortunately, consumer markets are not blind to these developments, 'girls' friendships are today also more tightly connected with commercial interests than ever before' (*ibid*:130), and thus 'girl friendship' is used as either a marketing mechanism to sell goods, or as a consuming group to sell goods to.

The young women's discussions surrounding media consumption, consumer culture and consumer experiences highlight the complex, and at times discrete, relationship that young women have with wider consumer culture and girlhood discourses. It placed friendship groups and peer interaction as the most significant roles in their lives and identity construction, modes of identity construction through which consumer culture is perhaps performed (and at times amplified). This research suggests that the role of consumer culture in the lives of these young women cannot be understood independently without reference to the social, material and gendered circumstances of their lives, in particular their friendship groups.

(ii) Social media and celebrity following

The presence of social media in the girls' lives was undeniable. For example, when we had a short break from focus group discussions, all of the young women instinctively grasped their mobile phones and started scrolling through (although not necessarily posting on – see below) social media. Emily laughed as she noticed what they were doing: *'I love how like talking about this, we start going on Snapchat'*. There was a shared feeling of 'fear of missing out' with what was happening in their other social circles. Being hyper-connected seemed natural to them. The physical action of reaching for their smart phones was a visible example of how social media, via an expensive consumer product (smart phone), permeates their everyday lives. From my own experiences with social media, I suspected that the girls would use it. The available girlhood literature (and criminological literature), however, has a distinct lack of focus on the

general use of social media by young women and its impacts on their lives⁷. This is curious considering that one of the main conclusions from girlhood literature is the need to place girls' actions within the contemporary contexts of their lives (Harris, 2004; Aapola et al., 2005). There has been important work on the 'sexualisation' of young women through and by social media (see Ringrose et al., 2013), but even these studies are limited as they examine *Facebook* and *Blackberry Messenger* - social networking sites that are either outdated or that young women do not use. The participating girls were all active on social media via *Instagram* and *Snapchat*. None of the girls mentioned *Facebook* - which although the most well-known and used social media site in the world (Dunn, 2017), is generally not used by young people as their main social networking site.

When I asked the girls about social media and how they used it, they were clear that it formed a fundamental part of their lives. Yet they were unsure whether they 'enjoyed' it, or whether it was yet another pressure in their lives. Lily, in the first instance called social media her '*safe place*', a place where she felt '*that everything is good*' but minutes later she described social media as a '*prison*' because it '*entices you and then takes hold*'. This is perhaps a metaphor for contemporary girlhood and its divergent discourses and complexities. Olivia told the group that social media is clearly a '*false reality*', where you have to '*look a certain way, and have so many followers, you are just expected to be a better version of yourself*'. Posting on social media sounded like a chore to Olivia, it was not fun but necessary. Olivia's statement resembles Gill & Scharff's (2011:7) criticism of the resonance between postfeminism and neoliberalism which they argue operates to require women 'to work on and [continually] transform the self'. The '*I should be doing better than I am*' stance creates an internalised competitive ethic for young women, an ethic that is continually reinforced by other young women who are also performing the self-beratement exercise (McRobbie, 2015: 15).

Emily said that she started posting on *Instagram* when she was 10 years old (she is now 15 years old). At first, she used *Instagram* as a diary to share her life with a small number of her friends, posting simple things, for example, what she was having for dinner, what she was doing in her spare time, etc. However, when she began high school, she felt '*so self-conscious*'

⁷ There are some academic works on very specific/niche social media use by young women. For example, Rossie (2015) looks at girls who post 'Am I pretty or Ugly' videos on You-Tube and Morrison (2016) examines girls online 'Avatar' characters.

as the 'popular girls' started to follow her on *Instagram*. For Emily, attending high school meant that the social media stakes were now much higher than before. Emily no longer posted basic elements of her life; instead she posted what she thought her followers would approve. If she posted the *wrong* post, then '*they [the followers] are gona talk behind my back*'. Emily now has 500 followers on Instagram, which is a lot of people to 'please', and as such the pressures to 'perform' are high. Social media, therefore, seemed to exist as yet another form of surveillance for these young women, (Gill, 2016). Isla talked about the time and planning that went into a social media post, stating that she would not post anything on *Instagram* before she asked her older sister for approval: '*I run everything past my sister before I post, everything!*'. Isla's reasons were twofold: she didn't want people to talk behind her back, like Emily highlighted, and she also wants 'likes'. Isla described the feeling she gets when she receives a 'like': she feels '*ohhhhh yea...they must like me*'. But do 'likes' on Instagram represent *being liked* in 'real' life? The young women were unsure, but Natalie suggested that she must get between 80 and 100 'likes' to have a successful post. Isla proudly said that 150 'likes' was her highest.

Social media was obviously a guiding feature in the girls' lives; something that is very important to them and perhaps, on occasion, enjoyable. By vetting their posts and counting their 'likes', it suggests that social media was a both a method of inclusion and acceptance within their social media circles. It represented a type of friendship group, albeit an online one. But what is interesting about this online friendship group is that the girls could not (or felt they could not) express themselves 'truthfully'. To bypass this issue, they created 'phantom' or 'spam' accounts, a place where they could freely express themselves. The girls proudly explained to me that a phantom/spam account is an account where they can post anything they want, because it is either anonymous or it is only available to a restricted group of *chosen* friends. This is a complicated paradox. The girls' 'real' social media account represents a space of restriction/surveillance where they feel they can't be 'real'; but their phantom account, a fake account, is a place to be 'free'.

The *Reviving Ophelia* discourse (described in detail by Aapola et al., 2005) has been deeply criticised by girlhood scholars for focusing solely on white middle-class young women and for categorising these privileged girls as helpless victims. Placing these criticisms momentarily

aside, there are elements of this discourse that are relatable to the current study. Pipher (1994: 37), the author of *Reviving Ophelia*, observed (in pre-social media times) that girls were splitting themselves into 'true' and 'false selves; between their 'real' and the cultural 'ideal'. Pipher's description reflects elements of the 'real' and 'spam' social media accounts of the young female participants. This splitting of selves was particularly stressful for Mia, she explained: *'[when] I think about it and it really stressed me out...that no one sees me as how I see myself'*. This suggests that girls need 'breathing space' (Harris, 2004), space to live outwith the duality of true and false selves and that acknowledges, accepts and appreciates the messiness and complexities of girls' lives.

As previously described in the consumption section, the girls did not attribute their consumption choices to celebrities buying habits, but on their friends' style and activities. Nevertheless, the girls still follow 'celebrities' on social media. In fact, when the discussion moved to the area of 'celebrity' on social media, Lily told the group that she follows a lot of celebrities, a journey that to her is *'quite emotional'*. Lily expressed that the reason she followed these celebrities is because she wanted to gain insight into their lives. She described it like *'falling in love'*, it is a *'pretty intense'* experience. Olivia shared Lily's deep connection with the celebrities online. It seemed that Lily's and Olivia's connection to the celebrities was not as a result of their 'celebrity' status, but the fact that these girls could see the 'real' person behind the camera, and *'get to know them'* on a personal level. The girls had friendship-like relationships with these 'celebrities'. Natalie, who did not follow many celebrities, said that she had a deep connection with one particular celebrity who she followed. Natalie said: *'I love her, she is amazing'*. Natalie was very thankful to this particular celebrity for being open and honest about her life on the public stage, at the same time, Natalie acknowledged that this celebrity must be under a lot of pressure to continually post on social media posts to her fans. Natalie understood the pressures of social media from her own experience and therefore had empathy for this 'celebrity'. The online 'relationship' that the girls have with the 'celebrities' is not from a distant gaze; rather, the girls have invited the celebrities into their lives via their social media accounts and they actively care for them. For the girls in this group, the celebrities that they follow are more like friends (online friends) and, as Lily described, like *'family'*.

Social media networking was a key part of the young women's lives, representing a type of friendship group, albeit a larger online one. It seemed to play a paradoxical role in their lives,

being enjoyable yet equally a source of anguish/pressure; offering social inclusion with the 'correct' type of posts but exclusion for the 'wrong' posts; a method of creative expression but also hyper-surveillance. The blurring of boundaries between celebrity and friendship through social media warrants further exploration, especially since the young women's participating in this focus group discussion articulate that their consumption habits are based on their friendship groups.

(iii) School environment and academic achievement.

School, in particular attending high school, seemed to be a turning point in the lives of these young women. Not only were the social media stakes higher at high school than at primary school, physical appearance was acknowledged as an important aspect of high school life. Jess said: *'I never had the desire ever to wear make-up until I went to high school'*. Lily said that when she went to high school she was suddenly aware that *'everyone has flawless skin'*. Emily remembers that when she arrived at high school *'everyone looked so much more perfect'*, she fondly recalls being told by one of her peers *'wow, look at your eyelashes'*. But yet again, the girls spoke about such experiences in the past tense. Now that they are older and 'wiser', they don't feel the need to wear make-up or look good for other people. There was agreement within the friendship group that make-up was not needed, and also, perhaps, a sense of triumph that they did not succumb to stereotypical feminine ideals. Natalie, for example, said:

'I love make-up, it is fun, it is an art, it is expression, it is not to cover up.... I am all for being yourself and expressing yourself, but I don't really believe in the whole make-up every single day, I kinda believe in being confident without it as well because some people aren't and it sucks and it is ashame...'

The other girls agreed. There was a postfeminist and neoliberal tone to Natalie's comment; a sense of being confident in one's appearance without make-up but at the same time using it when they choose to do so. When discussing the use (or lack of use) of make-up, I asked the girls about the costs of make-up, as I know from my own experiences that purchasing make-up can be expensive. The girls nodded in agreement saying, *'yea it is expensive'* but there was no further discussion the price of make-up. Again, this silence surrounding consumer products is interesting and perhaps is a reflection of their financial position to purchase such goods, but at Bryman (2016) suggests a focus group discussions is key way for participants to speak about

matters that are most important to them, subverting what the moderator has planned to discuss. On that note, the conversation turned to education and exams.

Jess moved the conversation on to academic achievement because it was something that she was deeply concerned about. In fact, all of the girls were worrying about it. They had just commenced fourth year at school, an important year for exam performance and as a result teachers, and parents, were reminding them of the importance of doing well. Jess described the impending exams as *'being quite scary'*. Emily used similar language: *'I am scared as I dunno what I wanna do [in her career]'*. Isla described the pressures of being a *'can do'* girl: *'you have gotta be like a genius and like I am in class surrounded by people getting 100% every single test and it is really like a lot of pressure'*. Mia also felt the pressure of being a success, she said *'I feel like all of the teachers at school and stuff expect me to go and do, like university or whatever and I am not sure that I want to'*. There was a fear of not achieving their best and constantly worrying about what others (such as teachers, parents and society) would think about them. The young women did not want to fall within the categorisation of *'failure'*. Sharpe (2012: 94) in her work with offending young women highlights an interesting point about the link between *'academic performance'* and feminine identity construction. She contends that young women who do not achieve academic success (and are therefore limited by employment opportunities) represent the young women who are increasingly being urged by popular media that their *'image'* is either more important than employment, or a way of securing employment (in glamorised industries). Sharpe's analysis suggests that those *'can do'* girls who *'succeed'* at school are less likely to feel the influence of popular media and female celebrities. I agree with Sharpe to a certain extent. The young women who participated in the focus group discussions certainly seemed to be on the successful academic trajectory, examples of Harris' (2004) *'can do'* girls and as such they were perhaps less influenced by consumer culture. However, they were not immune.

There is a criticism from the sociological and criminological literature that by focusing on the pressures and struggles of white, middle class young women suggests that these are the only young women who *'deserve'* social sympathy and concern (Aapola et al., 2005:55). But the educational struggles and pressures are very real for the young girl women participating in this research. As observed by (Bottrell, 2000) the successful path, or the conventional successful path, is also a pathway that is fraught with obstacles. This should not be underestimated or

ignored.

4.3 Conclusion of findings

The key research question to be addressed by this research was: what role does consumer culture play in the everyday lives of young women? The findings from the empirical data highlight a collective narrative between the young women that consumer culture did not play a significant role in their everyday lives, however, the girls' discussions and actions during the discussions seemed to (at times) contradict this position. The findings suggest that friendship groups and peer interaction both online, via social media networking, and offline, via their shared experiences and school participation played a more significant role in their lives and identity constructions. The data also illuminate the centrality of social media and the importance of its use in constructing young women's everyday lives; as well as shining light upon the academic pressures placed on these young women.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that young women have a complex relationship with consumer culture, a relationship that is at times discrete and can be performed via other modes of identity construction such as friendship groups/peer group interaction (both online and offline). Notably, the role that consumer culture plays in young women's lives cannot be understood in isolation from more 'localised' social, material and gendered experiences of their everyday lives. The findings also highlight that girlhood is a complex field for young women to navigate; a field that it is not so easily divided into the polarised categories created by girlhood discourses and mainstream media.

4.4 Consideration of the findings for future criminological study

'We need to tune criminology and make it more relevant and responsive to the contemporary social scene' (Jacobsen & Walklate, 2017: 206)

My empirical examination of girlhood engagement with consumer culture offers a contemporary insight into what it means to grow up as a girl in today's society, vital research that was not only missing from criminological literature but current girlhood literature also. The findings from this research study provide a crucial starting point for my PhD research,

which seeks to examine the relationship between consumer culture and young women's acquisitive crime.

Finding one: The young women participating in the focus group vocalised a collective narrative that consumer culture did not play a significant role in their everyday lives, yet at times their individual responses contradicted this position. This finding suggests that consumer culture plays a subtle role, instead of an obviously significant role, in the everyday lives of young women.

The contradictions in the girls' position about the role of consumer culture in their lives is perhaps explained by the language of girlhood discourses that emphasise girl-power and independence through 'choice' and 'empowerment', yet at the same time mutes the everyday realities of girls' lives (Pomerantz et al., 2013: 187). Sharpe (2012: 76), in her study with offending young women observed similar processes. The girls that she interviewed wished to document their 'choice' and 'responsibility' for their crimes (including, but not limited to, acquisitive crimes). This represents a marked shift from the 'women as victim' narrative initially criticised by (and within) feminist criminological literature. But as Sharpe (2012: 76) argues, the young women's 'self-blaming' language may suggest an internalisation of 'responsibility discourses'. The language of postfeminist and neoliberal times, as argued above, have dislodged the traditional interpretations and understandings of the classic structure/agency dichotomy, meaning that young women (and those studying young women) may be unable to accurately describe their positions and experiences in contemporary society. To assist my understanding of the structure/agency dichotomy within young women's lives, for my PhD research, I will review Harris & Dobson's (2015) invitation to develop and utilise new and more relevant vocabulary to understand and articulate girls' 'choices' within contemporary times. Also, as part of my PhD methodology, I intend to undertake in-depth oral history interviews with young women who have been in touch with the criminal justice system for acquisitive offending. During these interviews, I will be able to explore the role of consumer culture in their lives, to a much greater degree than I was able to do during the focus group discussions with the 'ordinary' young women. This may shine more light on the ways (subtle or otherwise) in which consumer culture may operate within the everyday lives of young women who offend.

Finding two: For the young women participating in the focus group discussions, friendship groups and peer interaction, both online and offline, played a more significant role in their lives and identity constructions than the role of consumer culture, however, elements of consumer culture were apparent within these friendship groups. This finding suggests that the role of consumer culture is, at times, performed via the key modes of young women's identity construction, in particular, online and offline friendship groups and peer interaction.

In wider criminological literature, there has been significant focus on friendship/peer influence on crime; in relation to both crime involvement and desistance (see Giordano et al., 2003 for an overview). This research, which in simplistic terms suggests that deviant peer groups encourage offending behaviour and non-deviant peer groups discourage offending behaviour, is mostly 'generic and not gendered', and tends to originate from a quantitative methodology. Research that has a gendered element has been inclined to focus on peer group relations with regard to violence (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014). There is a clear requirement for qualitative research in this area, particularly in relation to young women's acquisitive offending. The current research shows that: (i) friendship groups and peer interactions are central to young girls lives and their identity constructions; and (ii) that the role of consumer culture may at times be performed through these friendship groups/peer interactions. It is, therefore, critical for my future study of young women, consumer culture and crime to use friendship groups and peer interaction (both online and offline) as a basepoint of enquiry. A dual examination of friendship groups/peer interaction and how they connect with consumer culture *and* how friendship groups/peer interaction related to acquisitive crimes could be the key to unlocking vital knowledge and understanding within this important area of study.

Finding three: Social media was a central, yet paradoxical, element to the lives of the young woman who participated in the research. It represented a form of inclusion and acceptance, but at the same time was often a place of exclusion and disapproval; overall it was a platform where they could be intimate with friends and wider social circles. This finding suggests that for young women, social media is not only an online networking system, it represents a type of friendship group.

There has been a lack of girlhood research on the use of social media in young women's everyday lives, with even less criminological literature that focuses on this contemporary

subject area. Carrington (2015: 176) observing: 'few have grasped the impact of how this generation of young women, the first to grow up in a parallel world of cyberspace and reality, are coping with it. There is much more research for feminist criminologists to do on these issues'. I agree with Carrington as this research shows that social media is a permeating force within young women's everyday lives, therefore, it is crucial for those working with young women and writing about them to understand, explore, and address this central issue. In particular, I consider that the blurring of boundaries between celebrity and friendship through social media warrants further exploration, especially since the young women's participating in the focus group discussion suggested that their consumption habits are based on their friendship groups (online and offline). This is an important point that I will explore further in my PhD research.

Finding four: The school environment is an important place for the young women participating in the focus group discussion, yet it also represents a place of stress. Their friendship groups and wider peer interaction are formed at school but academic success is also continuously marketed to them by their teachers and the wider education system. This finding suggests that school expectations can place increased stresses and worries on young 'can do' women.

Indeed, Payne et al. (2009) suggest that academic success for young women is an important factor that inhibits offending behaviour. Being a 'can do' girl is, according to Harris, (2004: 27), a 'safeguard' to a young woman's economic future and continued consumer participation. Briefly revisiting *chapter one*, a 'can do' girl has a commitment to exceptional career planning, an ability to invent (and re-invent) herself, the display of a consumer lifestyle and the capacity to succeed. The young women in this study certainly met/meet all the 'requirements' of the 'can do' girl status. However, being a 'can do' girl does not neutralise the stresses associated with the (impossibly high) expectations of their 'success'. Equally, on the flip side, the 'at risk' girl who does not participate in school and does not succeed academically will, most likely, experience stressed associated with (low) expectations of success - as academic failure has consistently been a salient risk factor relating to young women's involvement in crime (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014: 290). Within my PhD research, I will endeavour to explore more deeply the role of school participation and academic success (or lack thereof) in the lives of young women who commit acquisitive offending.

Overall finding: This research ultimately suggests that the role and significance of consumer culture in the lives of young women cannot be properly understood without reference to more 'localised' (MacDonald, 2016) 'social, material and gendered' experiences of their everyday lives (Chesney-Lind & Shelden, 2014). Therefore, before I can even begin to explore the role/performance of consumer culture through the modes of online and offline friendship groups and peer group interactions (including school participation/expectation), I need to gain a base understanding about the everyday circumstances of the young women who have committed acquisitive offending. I have been inspired by Sharpe's (2012) research on young offending women and as a result my PhD methodology will be similar to Sharpe's. I will seek to, primarily, carry out a documentary analysis of the offending young women's case files to learn, more about their backgrounds and circumstances, such as individual characteristics and social and material conditions of their lives. Then, my in-depth oral history interviews will, in line with the current research findings, seek to pay particular attention to: (i) the participant's experiences of girlhood; (ii) the role of consumer culture in their lives and identity constructions, paying particular attention to any subtle references to consumer culture and their language of 'choice' and 'responsibility'; (iii) friendship groups and peer interactions both online and offline, with increased focus on social media use; (iv) school participation and achievement; and (v) their family networks.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: An Informed Beginning

This dissertation has given volume to the substantial academic silence that exists around the three three-ringed topic of young women, consumer culture and crime; at the same time providing valuable empirical contributions to contemporary girlhood literature. The specific findings from the empirical enquiry of this study and the implications of these findings for

future criminological research have been discussed in-depth throughout *chapter 4* (see particularly *sections 4.3* and *4.4*). Therefore, instead of re-producing what has been said succinctly above; this chapter will bring this dissertation to a close with: (i) reflections on the contributions it has made to current academic knowledge; and (ii) forecasts of the contributions that future research (particularly my PhD research) can make as a result of this strong empirical grounding.

By shining light on the role of consumer culture in the everyday lives of a group of 'ordinary' young women, this dissertation has been able to present a better and more nuanced understanding of how young women in *contemporary* society observe, negotiate, struggle with and benefit from, consumer culture. It has provided a key insight into what it means to grow up as a girl in today's society, drawing important focus to the significance of girls' online and offline friendship groups and peer group interactions. Through a feminist methodology this research has given a voice to young women in contemporary society, a group who are highly visible within this society but who we hear very little from (Maher, 1997). It has giving real insight into the (occasionally) messy and complicated world(s) of young women and, at the same time, illuminating the strengths and abilities of such young women to navigate these worlds. This research argues that 'growing-up as a girl' in today's society cannot be so easily divided into the polarised categories created by girlhood discourses and mainstream media. Such ridged views do not create sufficient space for the lived realities of young women (Rossie, 2015: 237). By unveiled the importance of concepts such as postfeminist sensibility and the centrality and paradoxical nature of social media in young women's lives - this dissertation has begun to create that space for young women.

Daly & Maher (1998: 12) advise that work in feminist criminology must move in two specific fronts: building feminist knowledge *and* challenging and correcting a non-feminist field. This dissertation has commenced this project and it is my intention for my PhD research to build on this by contributing to wider debates on gender and crime (which, as shown in *chapter one*, tend to focus on violence and victimisation) and consumer culture and crime (which, as shown in *chapter two*, tend to neglect the views and experiences of women). A key outcome of adopting a feminist methodology is 'action-orientated research' (Chesney-Lind & Morash, 2013: 288) that influences change and, more specifically in criminological enquiry, enhances the quality of criminal justice services for female offenders - a group who are not seen as a

'priority' for the criminal justice system (Batchelor & Burman, 2009: 16). My PhD seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the possible motives for acquisitive crimes (consumer culture or otherwise) which has the potential inform more appropriate and better suited policies, practices and procedures for young women within the criminal/youth justice systems.

This dissertation, which explored the role of consumer culture in the everyday lives of a group of 'ordinary' young women; and reflected on the significance of these findings for research on young women who commit acquisitive offences, has built an 'inspired' (Jacobsen & Walklate, 2017) platform from which to propel original empirical examination of the relevance/influence of consumer culture on young women's acquisitive offending. It has, therefore, set the stage to push feminist (and mainstream) criminology in new directions.

Appendices

Appendix One



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Outline of themes for focus groups

Title of research study: Young women, the media and consumer culture.

Researcher: Donna MacLellan **Research Supervisor:** Dr Susan Batchelor

There will be three main themes of the focus groups: (1) the media and celebrity; (2) leisure and consumer practices; and (3) young women's aspirations and identities.

Media and Celebrity

Firstly, the researcher wishes to gain an understanding of the media and celebrity news/images viewed by the young women. Therefore, she will begin with a discussion surrounding preferred media outlets/sources, how media outlets are used and what celebrities, if any, are followed. Questions may include:

- What do you like to watch on television? Movies? Boxsets? Reality TV shows?
- Do you watch TV online?
- Do have a favourite TV character or actor/actress?
- Do you use social media? If so, what type of social media?
- Do you follow any celebrities on social media? If so, which celebrities and why?

Leisure and Consumer Practices

Questions may include:

- What other sorts of things do you do in your spare time?
 - o Probe: Shopping and other commercial forms of leisure
- What items/services do you like to spend your money on?
- What items/services do you save your money for?
- Do you buy items/services that celebrities wear or advertise?
 - o Probe: Clothing/fashion, beauty products/services

Identities and Aspirations

Questions may include:

- Can you give me three words to describe yourself?

- What words would others use to describe you?
 - What are your hopes for the future?
 - o Probe: Do participants connect/link their identities/aspirations to the items/goods that they buy (including clothing), or the celebrities that they follow and/or admire?
-

The researcher will encourage free flowing discussion in all topic areas. After all the research themes have been covered, there will be time for reflection on the topics/themes.

Reflective questions may include:

- How did you find this discussion?
- Is there anything that you would like to add or discuss further?

If relevant, the researcher will distribute potential sources of support for young women, for example, contact details for ChildLine.

Appendix Two



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Application Type: Resubmission

Application Number: SPS/2017/Social Science/877

Applicant's Name: Donna Mclellan

Project Title: Young women, the media and consumer culture

Resubmission Date Application Reviewed: 20/07/2017

**Ethics Committee for Non Clinical Research Involving Human Subjects
NOTIFICATION OF ETHICS APPLICATION OUTCOME – UG and PGT
Applications**

APPLICATION OUTCOME

- . **(A) Fully Approved *Start Date of Approval: 20/7/17 End Date of Approval: 31/12/17***
- . **(B) Approved subject to amendments** If the applicant has been given **approval subject to amendments** this means they can proceed with their data collection with effect from the date of approval, however they should note the following applies to their application:

Approved Subject to Amendments without the need to submit amendments to the Supervisor

Approved Subject to Amendments made to the satisfaction of the applicant's Supervisor

The College Ethics Committee expects the applicant to act responsibly in addressing the recommended amendments.

(C) Application is Not Approved at this Time Subject to Amendments made to the satisfaction of the School Ethics Forum (SEF) Complete resubmission required. Discuss the application with supervisor before resubmitting.

Please note the comments in the section below and provide further information where requested.

If you have been asked to resubmit your application in full, send it to your supervisor who will forward it to your local School Ethics Forum admin support staff.

Where resubmissions only need to be submitted to an applicant's supervisor.

This will apply to essential items that an applicant must address prior to ethics approval being granted. As the associated research ethics risks are considered to be low, the applicant's response need only be reviewed and cleared by the applicant's supervisor before the research can properly begin. For any application processed under this outcome, it is the Supervisor's responsibility to email socpol-pgt-ethics@glasgow.ac.uk with confirmation of their approval of the re-submitted application.

APPLICATION COMMENTS

Major Recommendations:

Please ensure the guidance given by Terri Hume is strictly adhered to e.g. that the parent is in the adjacent room whilst interviews are being conducted.

Minor Recommendations:

Please retain this notification for future reference. If you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact your School Ethics forum admin support staff.

University of Glasgow College of Social Sciences Research Office Florentine House, 53 Hillhead Street. Glasgow G12 8QF The University of Glasgow, charity number SC004401

CSS/REV/V2/MAY13

Appendix Three



College of Social
Sciences

Young women, the media and consumer culture

Participant Information Sheet (Young women)

Tell me what you think!

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether you would like to or not, it is important to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything you do not understand, just ask me!

Who am I?

My name is Donna MacLellan and I am a student at the University of Glasgow.

What am I doing?

As part of my Masters degree I have chosen to do a dissertation on young women, the media and consumer culture. As part of my dissertation, I would like to speak with young women, aged 14 to 17 years, to find out about the types of media they engage with and whether they think this shapes their views and experiences. This could include the social media platforms you use, the television series you watch, or the celebrities you follow.

What will you have to do?

I would like you to take part in a focus group discussion with four to eight of your friends. The focus group will take place at XX's house at 2pm on XX July and last for a maximum of 90 minutes. I will bring along some questions that I would like to ask you but the discussion will also be guided by your interests and concerns.

What will I ask you about?

I am interested in:

- What media you use and why
- What activities you do in your spare time

- What you spend your money on
- Your expectations and hopes for the future
- How you see yourself and how you think others see you

What will happen to your answers?

If you agree, I will audio record the discussions and type them up later. I will keep all recordings and notes in a safe place, and will change all the names in my dissertation so that no one knows who said what.

Important points

- Participation in the focus group is voluntary; you do not have to take part if you do not want to.
- I will ask you to sign a consent form so that I know you agree to take part, but you can change your mind at any point.
- If you want to take part and you are aged under 16, one of your parents or carers will need to sign a consent form also.
- I am not looking for right or wrong answers; only for what everyone thinks.
- If there is a question you are not comfortable about answering, that is completely fine. You can say 'I don't want to answer that' and I will move onto the next question.

Confidentiality

The focus group discussion is confidential, which means that it should be kept private and not shared with anyone outside the group. The only instance where I might have to tell someone else what you say is if I think that you (or another child or young person) is at risk of harm. I cannot guarantee that the other participants will keep what they hear confidential, but I will encourage them to do so.

Research Funding

This research has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of a 1(+3) PhD award.

Questions and Contact Information

This research has been approved by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow.

If you have any questions about the research, please e-mail me at: d.maclellan.1@research.gla.ac.uk
--

Alternatively, you can contact my research supervisor, Dr Susan Batchelor, as follows:

Dr. Susan A. Batchelor (Senior Lecturer)
School of Social and Political Sciences
University of Glasgow
Ivy Lodge, 63 Gibson Street, Glasgow G12 8LR
Tel: +44 (0)141-330 6167
Email: susan.batchelor@glasgow.ac.uk

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research, please contact Dr Muir Houston, College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer:

Dr Muir Houston (Senior Lecturer)
School of Education
University of Glasgow
St Andrew's Building, 11 Eldon Street, Glasgow G3 6NH
Tel: +44 (0)141-330 4699
Email: muir.houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Appendix Four



College of Social
Sciences

Young women, the media and consumer culture

Participant Information Sheet (Parents/Carers)

Your daughter has been invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to agree to her involvement, it is important to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If there is anything you do not understand, please ask.

Who am I?

My name is Donna MacLellan and I am a student at the University of Glasgow.

What am I doing?

As part of my Masters degree I have chosen to do a dissertation on young women, the media and consumer culture. As part of my dissertation, I would like to speak with young women, aged 14 to 17 years, to find out about the types of media they engage with and whether they think this shapes their views and experiences. This could include the social media platforms they use, the television series they watch, or the celebrities they follow.

What will your daughter have to do?

If you decide to allow your daughter to participate in this study, she will be asked to take part in a focus group discussion with four to eight of her friends. The focus group will take place at XX at 2pm on XX July and last for a maximum of 90 minutes.

What will I ask about?

I am interested in:

- What media young women use and why
- What activities young women do in their spare time
- What young women spend their money on
- Young women's expectations and hopes for the future
- Young women's sense of identity

What will happen to the answers?

With your permission, and the permission of your daughter, I will audio record the discussions and type them up later. I will keep all recordings and notes in a safe place, and will change all the names in my dissertation so that no one knows who said what.

Important points

- Participation in the focus group is voluntary; young women do not have to take part if they do not want to.
- I will ask all young women to sign a consent form so that I know that they agree to take part, but they can change their mind at any point.
- If young women want to take part and are aged under 16, one of their parents or carers will also need to sign a consent form.
- Young women do not have to answer any questions that they do not want to.

Confidentiality

The focus group discussion is confidential, which means that it should be kept private and not shared with anyone outside the group. The only instance where I might have to tell someone else what young women say is if I think that they (or another child or young person) is at risk of harm. I cannot guarantee that the other participants will keep what they hear confidential, but I will encourage them to do so.

Research Funding

This research has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of a 1(+3) PhD award.

Questions and Contact Information

This research has been approved by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow.

If you have any questions about the research, please e-mail me at: d.maclellan.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Alternatively, you can contact my research supervisor, Dr Susan Batchelor, as follows:

Dr. Susan A. Batchelor (Senior Lecturer)
School of Social and Political Sciences
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Ivy Lodge, 63 Gibson Street, Glasgow G12 8LR
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Email: susan.batchelor@glasgow.ac.uk

If you have any concerns regarding the conduct of the research, please contact Dr Muir Houston, College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer:

Dr Muir Houston (Senior Lecturer)

0608946

Criminology MRes Dissertation

Exploring consumer culture and girlhood: A step towards understanding young women's acquisitive offending

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Appendix Five



Consent Form: **for young person to participate in focus group**

Title of research study: Young women, the media and consumer culture.

Researcher: Donna MacLellan **Research Supervisor:** Dr Susan Batchelor

Please tick as appropriate:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any point, without giving a reason.
- I understand that the focus group will be audio recorded and that these recordings will be transcribed.
- I understand that my words may feature in the final dissertation report, but that real names will not be used.
- I understand that all personal data collected in this research will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- I understand that anonymised research data (e.g. the focus group transcripts) may be retained in secure storage by the researcher for use in her future PhD thesis
- I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to take part in this study

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix Six



College of Social
Sciences

Parents/Carers Consent Form: **for young person to participate in focus group**

Title of research study: Young women, the media and consumer culture.

Researcher: Donna MacLellan **Research Supervisor:** Dr Susan Batchelor

Please tick as appropriate:

- I confirm that I have read and understood the Parents/Carers Information Sheet for the above study and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.
- I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that the young person for whom I am responsible is free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.
- I understand that the focus group will be audio recorded and that these recordings will be transcribed and then anonymised.
- I understand that my child's words may feature in the final dissertation report, but that real names will not be used.
- I understand that all personal data collected in this research will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.
- I understand that anonymised research data (e.g. the focus group transcripts) may be retained in secure storage by the researcher for use in her future PhD thesis
- I agree / do not agree (delete as applicable) to the young person for whom I am responsible taking part in this study

Name of participant

Name of parent/carer giving consent

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

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Criminology MRes Dissertation

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