Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

2023

False Advertising and Young Girls' Self Esteem

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

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MPA, Walden University, 2021

MPA, Stephen F. Austin State University, 2020

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

Walden University

February 2023

Abstract

It is becoming impossible to recognize the level of photoshop on advertisements.
However, little is known how continuous exposure to such images can negatively impact
the short- and long-term psyche of young girls aged 6 to 14 years old. The study's
theoretical framework was Benet's polarities of democracy, emphasizing freedom and
authority and human rights and communal obligations. The research question focused on
the negative impacts false advertising has on young girls and what public policies could
assist in mitigating these short- and long-term impacts. A general qualitative design, with
semistructured interviews of seven adult participants with relevant insight on the negative
impacts to young girls, generated themes through multicycle coding. Themes included (a)
impressionable young girls, (b) deceptive advertisers, and (c) protecting women.
Congress can use these findings to inform policies supportive to protecting young girls'
self-esteem from false advertising. Such policies could assist in reducing current
behaviors of young girls from such advertisements including but not limited to eating
disorders, body dysmorphia, and depression. Implications for positive social change
include informing Congress of potential systemic issues that either hinder or democratize
young girls' rights within Congress and further supports protecting the mental health
development of young girls. Therefore, providing a tax or monetary benefit to
participating businesses proving they did not use photoshop could provide a greater
motivation in producing natural models as well as set an example for what models
actually look like for young girls.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Within the literature, it is clear that advertisers use manipulation practices in their advertisements to create unrealistic and unattainable beauty standards for young girls, causing harm to the audience's physical and mental health. My dissertation was specifically focused on manipulated/photoshopped advertisements within the beauty/cosmetic industry and the effects of the impossible beauty standards they portray. The concept of beauty and what is considered beautiful can change from person to person, neighbor to neighbor, family member to family member, and print magazine to an online blog. It can especially change based on age; what is deemed beautiful at 5 years old can vary drastically in the lens of someone who is 65 years old. However, it is what is learned in this time span that has the greatest influence on creating this very personal definition of beauty, making this research especially relevant in the pursuit of protecting young girls (Malik & Marwaha, 2021). With the impossible cultural standards of beauty to false advertising within the beauty/cosmetic industry, such as manipulating or distorting the models, it was important to understand the lack of regulations imposed on these corporations making younger generations vulnerable to its negative effects and images. This concept of false advertising within the cosmetic arena has been studied extensively; however, a gap exists in the realm of using public policy to encourage and protect self-esteem among young girls, especially through the lens of polarities of democracy.

The impact of altered images established in false advertisements can lead young girls to believe they must be thinner than the average person or sexier based on what is promoted to them on any given day. This belief can become internalized into what the young girl believes she should strive to look like if she wants to achieve owning/using the product successfully as well as display her level of perceived happiness within the advertisement (Hudson, 2018). However, it becomes problematic as the young girl is not able to live up to such standards as it can seem out of reach without looking like the photoshopped model. Encouraging policymakers to enact stricter legislation such as making it illegal without the use of disclaimers to photoshop or airbrush advertisements/sponsorships may be especially useful in terms of regulating this practice of protecting young girls' mental and physical health.

Background

Personal identity and self-esteem are characteristics that allow one to become confident in their decisions and aware of their personal attributes/features and allow them to advocate for their rights and boundaries. Self-esteem and personal identity of oneself are established as early as 3 to 6 years old (Cvencek et al., 2015). Common influences that shape sense of self include family members, friends, teachers, as well as the child's attributes such as eye color or skin tone (SMSU, 2021, p. 1). In addition to these factors forming the child's identity in a relatively controlled or regulated environment, their self-esteem is also formed through exposure to less/unregulated outlets such as television, commercials, social media, and advertisements (Simpson, 2017). The average young girl is exposed to 4,000 to 10,000 advertisements or influential media daily (Simpson, 2017).

This level of stimuli is likely to capture a child's attention at some point across each day, especially as it pertains to happy, playful, and beautiful images. Advertisements sell more than just products; they sell values, images, and concepts of success and worth, love and sexuality, and popularity and normalcy (Kilbourne, 2020). The advertisement's purpose is to tell people who they are and what they should be (Kilbourne, 2020).

Therefore, ensuring the models in the advertisements, even the child models, have not been retouched is an important effort in establishing what an average child looks like without the use of manipulation applications such as Photoshop. Studies have shown that body image concerns in young girls and women are linked to the portrayal of idealized models (i.e., models who exhibit the thin and happy ideal) in beauty advertising (de Lenne et al., 2021). In addition to the lack of self-esteem attributed to external media, advertisements targeted to young girls can present a false narrative on what is beautiful based on the child models displayed in the advertisement as a whole. In a separate study, many girls agreed that the message of advertisements typically promotes that "sexiness" comes from "feeling confident in one's skin," yet, the girls chose advertisements promoting scandalous bathing suits and clothes on photoshopped images of women as opposed to girls their age laughing or smiling when asked what is "sexier" (Lamb et al., 2016). This study provides an example of how the messaging from advertising is confused with what is being portrayed. This concept of how advertisers promote messages of self-confidence and authenticity within their audience yet choose to manipulate models within their advertisements is discussed in further detail within Chapter 2.

While this is problematic for young girls' self-esteem and identity formation, it also has a greater impact on their overall physical health in both the short- and long-term effects. As there is relatively no policy in the United States to regulate the level of manipulation allowed in a photo or video, advertisers depict individuals as being unrealistically thin as the proportions promoted are unachievable for most consumers in America (Issitt, 2018). When using the word "relatively," it should be noted that based on the Advertising Self-Regulatory Council, advertisers are seen as an independent organization and any regulation is self-imposed when it comes to advertising (Zhang, 2011). This level of deregulation and freedom among cosmetic/beauty advertising policies is problematic as it is a multibillion-dollar arena that spans not only globally but across generations.

Within the United States, there has been little done to move the needle of protection for minors against false advertising and image manipulation within advertisements. While legislation has been presented for approval in regulating these manipulation practices, none has been accepted into law; this is discussed further in Chapter 2. As young girls are the passive recipients of the messages and ideas imposed on them via external sources such as advertisements, my study was needed to better understand how current media manipulation affects young girls and the potential policy encouragement needed to protect this population. This protection via public policy could promote preserving and supporting their mental health, self-esteem, and development of self-identity by regulating the methods used in advertising practices such as manipulation or distortion.

Understanding the effects of an industry such as the cosmetics/beauty one is also key as it contributes to how many young girls believe they should strive to look or carry themselves. The beauty industry is so prominent and influential across the world, that it was projected to grow to a minimum of 750 billion dollars by 2023 (Craddock et al., 2019). This level of financial capital within the cosmetic industry highlights the significance of importance that many people place on their appearance for personal and societal acceptance. Understanding if regulation is necessary, based on the participants, is critical in potentially developing boundaries by which corporations must abide by when promoting false, altered images and advertisements.

Problem Statement

There is a lack of information regarding the perceptions of informed participants (such as educators, psychologists, counselors, and social workers) as it relates to the impact of false advertising on young girls and how it might be addressed through public policy. While psychologists have confirmed the fragility of self-esteem development in children (Malik & Marwaha, 2021), little action has been taken to regulate the practice of manipulating images in advertisements aimed at this population. This lack of initiative among policy makers today can have long-term negative effects on children who are not able to make distinctions of what is reality and what is photoshopped as they compare themselves to a falsified perception of beauty. It has further not been addressed through the lens of polarities of democracy (Benet, 2006). This is discussed further in Chapter 2.

The predominant problem for young girls is two-fold: the lack of authority regulating these corporations as well as a lack of communal obligation discouraging these

unrealistic beauty standards imposed on them stemming from false advertisements. Current research has conveyed that the negative effects of false advertisements and messaging targeted to young girls are a contributing factor to their plummeting self-esteem, ultimately leading to a rise in self-harm (Kim & Lee, 2018). Kim and Lee's (2018) research provided the foundation to guide this dissertation in that the purpose is to create positive social change for a population currently being oppressed. In addition to these effects on young girls, there is seemingly a lack accountability from advertiser's as publishing false images has left a trail of self-deprecation among girls as young as 5 years old as they do not believe society will accept them based on their outer appearance (Cvenek et al., 2016). Providing the link of a public policy approach to this systemic problem can assist in creating a positive social change for young girls in Austin, Texas, and create a better good for young girls in the community. However, before proposing a policy change, I needed to ensure that a need for such change was in demand among this population of young girls; thus, interviewing professionals in the field assisted me in understanding the short- and long-term impact false advertising can have on young girls today.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this general qualitative study was to identify, explore, and examine the perceptions of informed participants (such as educators, psychologists, counselors, and social workers) regarding the effects of the media and manipulated advertising and how it might be addressed through public policy. The central phenomenon addressed the effectiveness of manipulated advertisements and their effects

on young girls' self-esteem and formation of identity. Interviews with professionals, such as but not limited to educators, psychologists, counselors, and social workers, assisted me in analyzing the experience of young girls to fill the gap in how this population can be protected and effect positive social change.

Research Question

Research question (RQ): What are the perceptions of informed participants (such as educators, psychologists, counselors, and social workers) regarding what public policies might serve to mitigate the negative impacts of advertising and media on the development of self-esteem among young girls (6-14 years old) in Austin, Texas?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study was Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy. Benet's work drew upon Johnson's (1992) polarity management theory, which was used for the conceptual framework of my dissertation. Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) research of structural relational paradigms within democracies was helpful as the issues surrounding false advertising and its effects on young girls' self-esteem and mental health inhibit the promotion of democracy and instead encourage oppression. Benet (2013) confirmed there can be multiple explanations for the underperformance of a democracy and that democracy should be "a solution to the problem of oppression" (p. 31).

In this research, I explored whether the condition describing the problem above is oppressive. Benet's (2006) polarities of democracy framework has been applied in multiple studies wherein the tensions of the identified poles allow the researcher to

examine democratic phenomena and consider appropriate policies in the realm of public safety (McMillan, 2020), public health (Price, 2021), and the military (Hayes, 2019) as well as many other areas, but a gap remains in using this framework to assess how the promise of democracy may be fulfilled for young girls as it pertains to protecting them from false advertising.

Nature of the Study

To address the RQ in this study, the specific research design included the general qualitative methodology. This general methodological inquiry provided a flexible pathway to understanding participant responses in a manner more closely aligned with constructivism (Ravitch & Carl, 2016. Understanding the perceptions of participants is incredibly useful as they can speak on behalf of the population of young girls aged 6 to 14 years old. When addressing this topic over effects on self-esteem and identity of young girls, emotional depictions and connections are more productive in a conversational interview. This structure provided richer detail in the responses as opposed to a survey within a quantitative methodology. Within the general qualitative methodology, semistructured interviews were used to address knowledgeable participants on how the media and advertising play a significant role in young girls' development. These participants included but were not limited to psychologists, social workers, and teachers within Austin, Texas. The use of a researcher-developed responsive semistructured interview guide assisted me in tailoring the conversation based on the participant's responsiveness to various questions. Based on the participant's background,

they may have had more or less to say on any particular question within the interview. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Definitions

It is more helpful for the reader to appreciate the depth of this problem with the following key terms in mind. Understanding specific definitions and their encompassing nature are critical in further understanding the level of adversity young girls are dealing with today due to the effects of manipulated advertising.

Airbrush: To paint, treat, or alter (as to conceal imperfections) with or as if with an airbrush (Merriam-Webster, 2022). This includes any retouching done to a photo that changes the reality of the photo or video, often done through the use of Photoshop. A digital retouch skin tool can blur skin pores, erase acne and wrinkles, and alter body shapes/features;

Body dysmorphia disorder: A mental illness involving obsessive focus on a perceived flaw in appearance; a flaw that appears minor or may not be seen by others (Mayo Clinic, 2022).

Assumptions

All research is subject to underlying assumptions inherent in the research found. This allows the researcher to identify, examine, and consider how those assumptions might influence the potentiality of such research process and findings. Burkholder et al. (2016) identified three characteristics of assumptions: critical to the research, identifiable by the researcher, and not within the researcher's control. This qualitative research paradigm conforms to assumptions most often associated with general qualitative studies,

such as within this dissertation. They are ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Ontology refers to our beings as humans, what our existence means, and how we experience reality. In my research, I assumed that individuals experience different realities based on various influences. I concur with Benet's (2013) assumption that the polarities of democracy theoretical framework assumes humans must achieve sustainability to survive as a species; achieving democracy can be a means to such ends.

Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge; how one knows what they observe is reality and, therefore, their reality is a function of perception. I concur with Benet's (2013) assumption of critical theory in that regardless of perceptions, actual realities also exist outside of perception. Therefore, what exists objectively does so without the subjective perception of individuals. I assumed that interview subjects would share observed realities based on their rational and educational understanding of this population (young girls aged 6-14 years old), their ability to justify responses, and their established beliefs on how to protect such a population.

Axiology deals with values evident in the research. My positionality as the researcher forced me to acknowledge that I bring potential bias of my values into the research. I followed Benet's (2013) lead by incorporating specific values of democracy into the research that worked together as polarities, and I discuss them further in later chapters. I looked for evidence of value statements in responses of interview subjects as they could bias perceptions and/or align with the polarities of democracy theoretical framework.

My general qualitative methodology allowed me to let the data speak to me and reveal a common truth. Without measuring for objective findings, I was unrestricted in examining the interview responses from multiple vantage points, testing for themes and phenomena, as well as exploring those themes for a common truth that might have merged. An overarching assumption that underlined the philosophical construct of the research was that my interview subjects would be licensed and possess a mastery of understanding or be extremely familiar within this population based on background or profession. Specifically, the interview participant was able to speak on behalf of young girls aged 6 to 14 years old based on their understanding of this population and the effects distorted advertising has had on their short-and long-term mental health.

Scope and Delimitations

Understanding the psychological effects stemming from false advertising can vary from person to person. This is especially true as each person can perceive the alterations of advertisements images in a greater or lesser capacity to assess what is reality and what is false. Adults are more likely to recognize photoshopping while children are more likely to perceive such presentations as reality (Hedaoo & Gavaravarapu, 2020,). Additionally, adults may be more likely to recognize the short- and long-term effects when presenting airbrushed advertisements as reality as seen in participant responses across Chapter 4. For these reasons, I reduced the scope of the research through the use of one delimitation.

The delimitation within this study was the use of interviewing adult participants as opposed to young girls directly. I made this decision to not further expose young girls to falsely advertised material including the photoshopping of models. To protect this

population, adult participants were used in the interview to speak on behalf of young girls. These participants were extremely familiar with child brain development and behaviors based on their professional experience and/or educational background; this is explained further in Chapter 3.

Limitations

This qualitative research relied on responses to semistructured interviews drawn from a purposive sample of a target population of participants possessing a mastery of understanding of young girls aged 6 to 14 years old. While the participants were familiar with the population of young girls, based on their education, experience, limitations arose from a researcher perspective.

A limitation, not uncommon in qualitative research, was my familiarity with the subject matter. As someone with years of experience within the cosmetic industry, I risked allowing my inherent bias into the research. I mitigated this bias to the maximum extent possible using proven qualitative research techniques such as member checking and bracketing. This is explained in further detail in Chapter 3.

A second limitation was the inability to generalize the findings of this form of qualitative research, although I describe steps to improve trustworthiness in Chapter 3. The research incorporated an appropriate sample size and set of interview formatting, consistent with Ravitch and Carl (2016), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Rubin and Rubin (2012), as well as Seidman (2006). I discuss data saturation in more detail in Chapter 3; however, confirmation that the target sample reached saturation improves the utility of the findings in other research as it pertains to the effects of false advertising on minors.

Significance

This study is significant in that it may lead to a positive social change when it comes to improving practices for advertising that negatively impacts young girls. Congress may use this information to create additional safeguards that protect young women and girls as they are exposed to media and advertising. Cosmetics can be a major expenditure for many women; this was noted previously in assessing the several hundred-billion-dollar estimation of the industry's current worth (Djurovic, 2021). The professional application of a potential policy stemming from my dissertation could allow for genuine results of products to be highlighted rather than manipulated. Additionally, when publishing the images, it is imperative that young girls can see the real features of the models rather than a thinner or manipulated version of the person in the advertisement. The positive social change stemming from this research is the potential of promoting the protection of young girls through public policies that preserve and support their self-esteem, identity, and confidence.

Summary and Transition

Across Chapter 1, a problem was discussed wherein manipulated images within cosmetic/beauty advertisements may harm young girls' mental and physical health. This is a problem put on young girls by the adult creators with the messages of self-acceptance and greater confidence to be a part of society with their various products. While the messages within advertisements encourage personal authenticity, the final result leaves viewers with a false representation of the product's effectiveness and the model. This problem is additionally harmful to young girls as the models within the advertisements

are manipulated, such as smoothing over, enlarging, or shrinking facial and body features of the models. While adults may be able to recognize this false representation of what a person actually looks like, young girls are more likely to interpret such advertisements as reality, therefore diminishing their self-confidence and self-esteem.

I connect the problem of false advertising in the cosmetic/beauty industry to Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy theoretical framework as well as Johnson's (1992) conceptual framework. The theoretical framework provided a basis for promoting democracy among the young girls who are often oppressed by such advertisements. This qualitative study aimed at understanding the negative short- and long-term impacts that false advertising can have on children's physical and mental health. Moreover, recognizing these negative impacts may assist in encouraging policy makers to establish regulatory requirements as it pertains to manipulated advertising practices. Understanding the known limitations and delimitations further assist the reader in mitigating researcher bias as it pertains to this study and why such methods, including participant selection and population, were chosen. Chapter 2 addresses the current literature on this topic as well as review the theoretical framework used; it also confirms the gap this research sought to fill.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze the impacts of false advertising within the beauty and cosmetic industry have on young girls and how these effects may be mitigated through the use of public policy. This qualitative study was completed through the lens of participants with a background or specialization with young girls aged 6 to 14 years old. Chapter 2 frames the prior research completed within this topic so the reader can possess a better understanding of its background and how I applied it to my own study.

A summary of the literature search strategy precedes descriptions of Johnson's (1992) polarity management theory and Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) polarities of democracy theory as the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that provided a framework for this research. A detailed literature review of these effects confirmed that false advertising and the portrayal of women and girls among media outlets has some effect on the psychological development of young girls. This comprehensive review includes the brain development of young girls and how they take on complex decisions, as well as the overall effect that media messaging and images have on their short- and long-term health. Within these articles reviewed, a gap remains on how to overcome this negative messaging from advertisements via a public policy solution. An additional gap remains on reporting this topic through the lens of the polarities of democracy framework. Chapter 2 concludes by having identified the literature gap I sought to fill.

Literature Search Strategy

The keyword searches for this dissertation included *young girls*, *teenagers, media, advertising, beauty or cosmetic industry, self-esteem or self-perception, self-identity, teenagers, self-worth*, and *self-evaluation*. The research was completed through the following databases: Walden University Thoreau library, ProQuest, Public Administration Dissertations via Walden University, Body Image, SAGE Publications, Developmental Science, Journal of Consumer Culture, and the International Journal of Eating Disorders. Reference materials were sourced from peer-reviewed articles, federal/government websites, or recognized reputable online resources such as the National Eating Disorder Association and the National Center for Biotechnology Information. While my literature search attempted to remain within the prior 5 years (2017-2022), research and statistical inferences such as trends among eating disorders in adolescents preceded the 5-year window as they were the subject of relevant research that contributed to a better understanding of the phenomenon. Additionally, multiple relevant seminal works predate the 5-year window.

Theoretical Foundation

In research focusing on public policy laws, or lack thereof, enabling oppression, Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) polarities of democracy theoretical framework were used. Within this dissertation centering on the oppression of young girls, the polarities of democracy research were useful in identifying the methods of better realizing the promise of democracy for this population. This framework was also useful in highlighting how current practices fail specific populations, such as young girls. An examination of topics

has been studied using these frameworks in the realm of public safety (McMillan, 2021), public health (Price, 2021), and the military (Hayes, 2020), as well as many others, but a gap remains in the application of protecting young girl's mental and physical health from lack of regulation in manipulated beauty/cosmetic advertisements. This is crafted through 10 values organized into five polarity pairs, with the goal of providing democracy to all oppressed populations to provide a positive social change of democracy for all human beings. While I used Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) polarities of democracy framework as a whole, I focused on two of the polarity pairs: freedom and authority as well as human rights and communal obligations. Johnson's (1992) polarity management theory is discussed within the conceptual framework; an understanding of this theory is necessary for understanding Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) polarities of democracy theory within the theoretical framework.

Conceptual Framework: Johnson's Polarity Management Theory

A preliminary foundation of the theoretical framework, polarities of democracy, was built as an adaption of Johnson's (1992) polarity management theory. It was critical to gain an understanding of Johnson's theory to fully recognize the structure that is polarities of democracy. Johnson introduced the concept of polarities as a more encompassing term for trends; these trends are seen as "polarities" or dilemmas that go on forever and cannot be solved through either/or thinking but instead require a both/and approach that recognizes the positive and negative aspects of both poles. Therefore, polarities exist as a problem that is unsolvable with current resources and has more than one correct answer, each of which is independent of the other. This provides the

juxtaposition of the 10 polarity pairs working cohesively with one another, with the goal of achieving democracy through maximizing the positive aspects of all 10 poles (values).

According to Johnson (1992), using this framework is not an either/or option; however, it maximizes the benefit of both poles within a polarity. It is important to emphasize that leveraging is not equivalent to solving a singular problem (Johnson, 1992). This framework is best used across complex problems, including those problems that are continuous, rather than singular with a yes or no answer. While Johnson's (1992) conceptual framework was mentioned briefly, it is the root for which polarities of democracy was established, allowing for the foundation for this dissertation.

Theoretical Framework: Benet's Polarities of Democracy Theory

The theoretical framework, polarities of democracy, developed by Benet (2006, 2012, 2013), was used as the framework for this dissertation as it promotes the idealism of realizing the promise of democracy. Through the use of 10 interconnected values essential to make the promise of democracy a reality, the 10 poles exist as five polarity pairs, and each of the pairs is interrelated with the other pairs. Polarities of democracy can assist in addressing the dilemma facing young girls today. It is the responsibility of policymakers to create stricter laws regarding false advertising, or advertisers should portray genuine results on humans without the use of photoshop to protect young girls plummeting self-esteem. To overcome this within modern capitalism, it is necessary to disrupt the culture of what is perceived as beauty, such as slender, tall, and White skin, as well as address how products are marketed to consumers, establishing this impossible standard for any audience, especially young girls. The oppressed population within this

dissertation was noted as young girls and their subjugation to impossible and unrealistic standards of beauty. Through recognizing this oppression, and more specifically the type of oppression via the polarity pairs, a policy may be necessary to protect this population and promote overall positive social change.

Polarities of democracy (Benet, 2006) was developed to recognize how society understands the concept of democracy. A solution to the problem of oppression requires a both/and approach to fully sustaining democracy (Benet, 2021). Understanding this both/and approach highlights the complex collaborative approach at hand for what is required of change. Few people are aware of this conceptual process presented from this framework to overcome oppression via structural and systemic change. This lack of awareness makes a pathway for change relatively impossible to eliminate the conditions creating the oppression (Benet, 2013). Establishing this pathway requires a multifaceted approach; policymakers are searching for a simple yes or no answer over a gray area such as self-esteem, which may exist. However, it is also probable that assisting this population can only be done in addition to creating a policy holding advertisers accountable, therefore making it an interconnected complex problem. The polarities of democracy theory is best represented as it offers multiple necessary solutions in an ongoing manner (Johnson, 1992). Below are the five pairs of polarities of democracy:

- freedom and authority;
- human rights and communal obligation;
- participation and representation;
- diversity and equality;

- justice and due process.

As mentioned previously, while I used the full theory, I focused on the polarity pairs of freedom/authority as well as human rights/communal obligations. However, to understand the concept of this theoretical framework, all pairs are discussed as they each pertain to protecting young girls by way of encouraging stricter public policy against false advertising in the beauty industry coupled with an overall cultural change of representation.

Freedom and Authority

Within the polarities of democracy, freedom and authority are conceptually noted as polarity pairs representing the ability to choose (freedom) and the legitimate constraints on an individual's freedom so that they do not abuse the freedom of others (authority). A simple example of this pair is how people cannot be totally free to hurt others or cause harm/malice, yet humans cannot live in a world with overbearing strict controls over every decision of their lives. The leverage among these pairs uses both poles to ensure people are relatively free in the bounds of some level of authority. An example of this in the modern world is seen within the First Amendment (freedom of speech); while some speech is limited, such as yelling "bomb" in an airport, other aspects are less bound, such as the freedom to speak on opinions in relatively any setting even if it challenges an authority figure.

Human Rights and Communal Obligations

The function of the polarity pair human rights and communal obligations is to foster a sense of belonging within a community as opposed to oppression promoted

through greed or indifference. Within this subset, the lack of communal obligations falls on the image manipulators, large organizations, and channels through which these standards of beauty are promoted; the human rights of these young girls are put at risk as they are presented with a false representation of societal standards. While these organizations are not directly inflicting or causing physical pain within the audience, this obligation to encourage human rights is imperative in "sustain[ing] human evolution," such as the self-esteem and identity development of young girls (Benet, 2006, p. 211). While such large corporations can promote genuine authenticity within oneself, it has not been the traditional route of marketing cosmetic products as they intend to fix or provide a solution to the user.

Participation and Representation

Among the functionality of the polarities, representation is a requirement when promoting participation; this partnership is a necessary means to enable the flourishing of participation within a given community (Benet, 2012). This pair is best understood as the first pole, participation, is seen as citizens positively continue the pursuit of democratic ideals within their community. The opposite pole, representation, is seen as elected officials effectively represent the needs of its citizens. However, within the realm of falsified advertising, there is a lack of participation from citizens as well as representatives who represent the needs of the privileged and powerful rather than rights of its citizens. Effectively leveraging these two poles would allow for everyone to be represented as well as citizens ensuring they are participating in the pursuit of democracy for their community.

Diversity and Equality

The relationship managed between diversity and equality is a necessary condition of human evolution (Benet, 2006). Researchers have suggested that the earliest civilizations were built upon both of these principles within the polarity pair, suggesting that inequality associated with gender, race, and class is an element of modern societies focusing on the selfish aspects of human nature rather than the altruistic aspects. As a narrow lens of beauty is portrayed across advertisements with processes such as photoshop, the unique features of models are erased, therefore diminishing the diversity represented.

Justice and Due Process

The final polarity pair discussed, justice and due process, is also necessary for providing democracy to young girls. Without this pair, aspects of privilege and reckoning are encouraged rather than protection and restoration. The functional upside of stronger policies through the justice polarity includes identifying the relationship between the justice ideal and reality, as well as serving as a measuring stick to determine whether new approaches are moving toward stronger democratization (Benet, 2006). This is coupled with the due process polarity encouraging human agencies to create processes that address identified barriers to the attainment of justice as well as create new methods to ensure more democratization is enabled rather than less (Benet, 2006).

This polarity pair is seen across this topic as little to no policy currently exists in regard to restricting false advertising in advertisements, and more specifically on airbrushing or photoshopping practices. This lack of legitimate due process favors

corporations' rights over humans, which leads to a lack of justice than those of young girls and women. This would require justice in setting boundaries on what is presented to mass citizens and the due process required of organizations creating advertisements to promote realistic standards of beauty to their communities.

<div align="center">**Literature Review**</div>

Brain Development in Young Girls

To fully grasp the gravity of how deeply harmful advertisers' false depictions of women are, it is imperative to understand the mental development of young girls with an emphasis on those aged 6 to 14 years old. Piaget was an early pioneer in discovering the progressive stages within children's cognitive development. Through observational studies and a series of tests, he was able to separate the formation of cognitive processes into various stages based on the age of the infant, child, preadolescent, and teenager (McLeod, 2020). It is based on these stages of development that it is possible to recognize how children aged 7 to 11 years old can use scientific reasoning to build upon conclusions, understand multiple points of view in any given situation, as well as practice basic skills such as reading, spelling, and composition writing (Malik & Marwaha, 2021). This developmental stage also highlights how children within this age range are limited in their ability to comprehend abstract ideas and rely on logical answers. An example of this abstract idea is possessing the understanding of how a person would typically look, as compared to the false media or advertising the child surrounds themselves with. Based on this stage, in addition to this abstract idea of image manipulation remaining so prevalent in their lives, the child also lacks the logical capacity to separate reality from

distorted fiction as it is presented to them (Malik & Marwaha, 2021). Therefore, the average child under 12 years old may be more likely to interpret a manipulated advertisement as reality.

Generally, as children reach 12 years old and beyond, they enter the adolescent stage. During this stage of cognitive development, the adolescent child can exercise logic more scientifically, apply abstract thinking to algebraic problems, as well as apply multiple logics simultaneously to reach a scientific solution (Malik & Marwaha, 2021). This use of context clues and strategic thinking presents a more rigid manner in how students approach problems, especially in a school environment. Therefore, questioning their self-identity, code of conduct, or social constructs established via social media can cause anxiety, body dysmorphia, and fear as these concepts are not easily solved through a scientific solution (Hedaoo & Gavaravarapu, 2020). This understanding of the lack of mental capacity children have to interpret everyday mental struggles means that false advertising practices may cause even more harm to their mental health because they depict such image and video distortions as reality when comparing themselves to the advertisements.

An aspect of the pre-and post-adolescent brain development that Piaget did not fully account for is the continuity in reasoning or lack thereof. Based on Piaget's staircase model, it would seem a child almost forgets traumas or biases they developed in the previous stage as they graduate to the following stage. Researchers found that perceptual biases in the brain from toddler to adolescent years can remain in the brain causing "incorrect performance" during cognitive development requiring extensive executive

network therapy to overcome it (Leroux et al., 2009, p. 326). Unfortunately, many of these biases noted can also include learned behaviors such as self-deprecation or reduced self-esteem in one's identity based on the media they see; This is especially problematic if the images they compare themselves to have been altered or retouched without them being aware of such acts (Leroux et al., 2009, p. 327). As young girls engage in such negative behaviors which often lead to self-harm, it begs the question of who is responsible? Is it the media perpetuating false images as reality or the lack of boundaries and policies within the several hundred-billion-dollar industry? This plays on the aspect of freedom and authority within the polarities of democracy framework. While advertisers possess the freedom to publish what they choose, should society use its legitimate authority to ensure such messages are not harmful to the public?

Concepts presented to children through forms of false advertising may serve as a model for how they should look and act themselves and can cause deep pain or beliefs that follow the child into adulthood. When triggered within a lab setting, researchers found that the adult participant's brain waves inhibited further thought on various tasks as they became more complex or deeply emotional (Leroux et al., 2009, p. 335). Many of the memories adult participants discussed dated back to experiences at 7 years old, which is when many children are able to solve the Piaget task for cognitive development and graduate to the next stage of development (Leroux et al., 2009, p. 335). This study highlights how memories remain with adults from as young as 7 years old. Therefore, as children believe certain falsehoods, such as false advertising, they may carry this belief

into adulthood. This can cause self-doubt and self-consciousness in the adult based on beliefs they established without realizing it was false to begin with.

Establishing Piaget's development of the child's mental development shows the importance of how delicate and impressionable their thought processes are. As children under 12 years old may struggle with separating fiction or falsehood from reality, it forces them to accept such things as the reality around them. An example of this is seen as Disney characters or Kid's YouTube personalities exemplify how the main character or popular person should look or act to be most accepted or successful in their ventures. It is also seen in adolescents as they navigate social media and advertisements from the cosmetic industry as they begin to explore and develop their personal, authentic identity. Within cosmetic advertisements especially, it is not obvious which images have been retouched which can cause body dissatisfaction within young girls. This level of pervasiveness and negative effects from false advertising within the cosmetic industry has the potential to cause long-term harm mentally and/or physically to those who view their advertisements and messages. This long-term harm is seen as adults well beyond 12 years old harbor biases and learned perceptions about themselves across their lifespan, especially without assistance from therapeutic intervention (Leroux et al., 2009, p. 335).

Media and Advertising Effects on Self-Esteem

As it is important to understand the developing brain in young girls, analyzing their identity formation, how they view body satisfaction or dissatisfaction, and most importantly self-esteem, it is also significant in recognizing the impact advertisements have on their mental and physical development. Self-esteem is developed from the

stimuli around a child: their family relationships, friends, movies, tv shows, music, magazines/blogs, and social media (SMSU, 2021, p. 1). Based on the media usage a young adult is exposed to in today's digital age, there is likely a greater effect that advertisements will have on their personal identity and self-esteem as this exposure increases.

For a typical user, their advertisements are tailored based on search history, accounts followed, transactions from online shopping, and posts that are liked. For young girls, there is a larger advertisement base influencing purchases for Disney products, toys, makeup, and provocative clothes, than there would be for the average young boy (McGladrey, 2014, p. 355). The models used in these advertisements, young children and adult women, reflect the culture within America, creating an impact on what they should strive to look and act like if they are interested in such a product. Studies have shown that body image concerns in young girls and women are often directly linked to the portrayal of such idealized models (i.e., models who exhibit the thin and happy ideal) in beauty advertising (de Lenne, Vandenbosch, Smits, & Eggermont, 2021, p. 255). Beauty organizations utilizing this manipulated methodology in promoting products may harm the "self-actualization" (Benet, 2006, p. 212) within the consumer's human rights. This lack of regulations among this multi-hundred-billion-dollar industry as it pertains to advertising can be crippling to its users.

When viewing these advertisements across social media, the polarity pairs of freedom and authority are prevalent in understanding the limitations or lack thereof among such digital applications. Items such as filters within the application used to

promote a product are used on the user and often manipulate (smooth over, widen eyes) facial and body features (Wang et al., 2020, p. 1129). This idea of subliminally encouraging cosmetic surgery via a filter to promote a product remains legal on many social media applications as it is a self-regulated private market and ultimately contributes to the demise in self-esteem for its users (Wang et al., 2017, p. 276). In the lens of polarities of democracy, advertisers have the freedom to make these changes in advertisements as there is no legitimate due process establishing boundaries or rulings to protect its consumers, such as young girls, further contributing to their lack of self-worth and decreased self-esteem.

This is in addition to promoting products via photoshopped or manipulated advertisements among the application in a typical homepage for the user. While self-fulfillment is promoted with this sense of liberty and freedom regarding the First Amendment, private businesses such as magazine editors and social media controllers are destroying the self-esteem of their young users by promoting such undetectable photoshopped images and videos (Hudson, 2018). Effectively leveraging the polarity pair freedom and authority may provide regulations to the image manipulation while allowing advertising the product as the corporation chooses.

This influence of false advertising over young girls is problematic as it distorts the standards of beauty from typically relatable to impossible. In a study completed with 112 adolescents, it was found that body dysmorphia or body discontentment was present in 58.75 % of participants, and 54 % of participants were identified as underweight (Hedaoo & Gavaravarapu, 2020, p. 413). The heaviest influences identified on how the students

developed their body image and perception were through self-perception and judgments by others, behaviors related to self-fixation, social influences, unsafe dietary practices such as eating disorders, and comparison to models and actors (Hedaoo & Gavaravarapu, 2020, p. 413). Many girls within the study discussed how their exposure to media, and more specifically from cosmetic advertisements and beauty accounts/pages, was a leading cause in how they formed the idea of what the perfect version of themselves should strive for (Hedaoo & Gavaravarapu, 2020, p. 413). Lamb et al. (2016) conducted a similar study with girls aged 13-17 focusing on the media-saturated landscape within this moment in time of the digital age (p. 533). It was found that the girl's initial perception of sexy was described unanimously as "confident in one's skin" as opposed to "slutty" or "desperate" (Lamb et al., 2016, p. 533). However, when viewing advertisements of women using various cosmetics, posing in bathing suits and minimal clothing, they described the models as confident based on their looks in the images; therefore, the models "deserved to be confident because they looked good" even if image distorting had taken place (Lamb et al., 2016, p. 534). With this type of perception by young girls, it is easier to understand how it is predominantly females who report significantly higher levels of self-consciousness and body dysmorphia than their male counterparts across the woman's lifetime (Black, Sussman, Unger, Pokhrel, & Sun, 2010, p. 2). Therefore, as these altered advertisements are aimed at women appearing skinnier than they actually are, it can have an impact on young girl's self-esteem who also believe they should be skinnier themselves; this is comparative to the lack of thinning out body parts in a male focused advertisement.

Photoshopping can have a much heavier impact as it is virtually undetectable. Adolescent girls were also leading in the use of software applications to correct the body shape and appearance of their self-taken images and videos (Hedaoo & Gavaravarapu, 2020, p. 413). As girls believe they do not look like the standard of beauty in real-life, they turn to software applications like Photoshop to create these features on themselves. This can include widening their eyes, straightening and/or whitening their teeth, slimming their cheeks to appear more chiseled, or shrinking their forehead; this only describes facial features being manipulated, let alone the model's body composition that is also often manipulated (Bennett, 2008).

With the increased adaption of social media, the reach of an audience is also higher and easier than ever based on the user's screen time and targeted algorithm within the applications. Researchers found that media exposure and media engagement within participants aged 11-15 years old had an overvaluation of shape and weight, body dissatisfaction, dietary restraint, and internalization of the "thin ideal" (McLean, Paxton, Wetheim, & Masters, 2015, p. 1137). This overvaluation of one's body image is seen as girls believe their size and shape are larger than what is actual; therefore, body dysmorphia was reported in all participants at varying levels who regularly use social media (McLean, Paxton, Wetheim, & Masters, 2015, p. 1137). This study is comparable to de Lenne, Vandenbosch, Smits, and Eggermont (2021) as the participants possess a similar lack of awareness of how their actual body shape and measurements are based on their perception of what is portrayed in advertisements across their lifetime. This influence of obtaining a "picture-perfect" (via the advertisement) portrayal of oneself is

predominantly associated with greater body-related and eating concerns due to the internalization of the thin ideal for young girls (McLean, Paxton, Wetheim, & Masters, 2015, p. 1132). As young girls feel more insecure with how they look in reality, they will manipulate themselves in photos to appear thinner. This can contribute to disordered eating behavior as they try to achieve the perfect figure being created digitally.

Body dissatisfaction within young girls, and most notably within their body shape or weight, has been a continual problem for western countries and is mostly attributed to sociocultural factors with an emphasis on mass media including but not limited to social media and advertising (Tiggermann, 2011, p. 14). Additionally, digital and print media routinely retouch blemishes, pores, and alter body composition in an effort to create flawless, younger, and thinner models than what was originally captured in reality (Bennett, 2008). While those in such manipulative/retouching positions are not directly stating one's body composition is more superior or desirable than another, it is implied via their final publishing on such advertisements. Bennett (2008) noted, "retouchers today are increasingly asked by advertisers and editors to enlarge eyes, trim ears, fill in hairlines, straighten and whiten teeth and lengthen the already narrow necks, waists, and legs of 18-year-old beauties." This is contrary to the photoshopping and retouching performed on men's advertisements where "thickening" their bicep and quadricep muscles is done to make the male appear larger (Bennett, 2008). Bennet's (2008) research touched on aspects found within the polarities of democracy (2013) framework: human rights and communal obligations. As beauty organizations utilize this manipulated methodology in promoting products, it harms the "self-actualization" (Benet, 2006, p.

212) within the consumer's human rights (Bennet, 2008). As young girls are becoming

aware of themselves, such as their talents, physical characteristics, and potentialities, they

are met with a false, yet impossible standard of what society will be most accepting of.

By failing to focus on the human rights of these young girls, the negative aspect of

communal obligation is heightened as their self-esteem and self-worth are exploited by

advertisers. In the lens of polarities of democracy, if the girls were getting positive

aspects from both communal obligation and human rights, they would feel a sense of

common good and belonging.

Many of these big-box companies are rendering images to be so perfect, the final

look is becoming less and less realistic yet seemingly more attainable for the typical girl

and woman. This is a large influence contributing to the rise in eating disorders,

specifically anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa in young girls. The American

Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry noted on average 10 of 100 young girls

suffer from either anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa as teenagers (2018). This rise in

eating disorders and body dissatisfaction can also be attributed to how young girls

perceive those who "embody" this idealism of beauty and the level of "social acceptance"

they believe the models or celebrities have based on their outward appearance

(McGladrey, 2014, p. 354). In addition to the perceived social acceptance seen with

celebrities who fit in with the "just-right ideal" body type, they are embodying the

attributes of someone who is "curvaceously thin" (McGladrey, 2014, p. 354). This

"curvaceously thin" persona personifies an "ideal woman" whose physical measurements

are relative to that of a life-like Barbie or Disney princess; "36-inch bust, a 24-inch waist,

and 36-inch hips while wearing a size 4 (hips), size 2 (waist), and a size 10 (bust)" (McGladrey, 2014, p. 354). These measurements play on the ideal of an almost impossibly natural physique of the everyday woman as well as the models.

Noted previously within the polarities of democracy framework, human rights are linked to self-actualization and discovering the potentialities within oneself; it also incorporates freedom, equality, and justice (Benet, 2006, p. 237). The communal obligation to uphold and protect the individual rights of their consumers, especially young girls, falls on those who create the marketing messages and advertisements distributed to the masses and often internationally. This utilization from big corporations with such great reach can unintentionally promote a narrow standard of what is acceptable in public while leaving their audience feeling "alone," "insignifican[t]," and "powerless" to such messages (Fromm, 1941/1965, as cited by Benet, 2006, p. 239). Many advertisements among first-world countries are targeted around the "central identity-formation [that] fashioning a beautiful appearance [coupled with an] appropriately slender body" portrays what the girls believe society will be the most accepting of (McGladrey, 2014, p. 354). Many of these advertisements that have been retouched, altered, or manipulated are done so during these girls' prime identity formation years; this encourages the belief that greater self-worth and happiness are directly related to one's outer appearance.

As there are few regulations in place to protect this vulnerable population of girls, many of these advertisements can fall under the notion of governmentality. Governmentality is defined as the training of citizens through informal cultural

pedagogies such as commercial media to consider themselves in the third person so that they might control, govern, and discipline themselves to relieve the government of the burden of doing so (McGladrey, 2014, p. 354). An example of this is seen as advertisements promote a specific ideal woman or girl without explicitly stating it is doing so; this is typically seen as a blonde, skinny, White woman or girl, airbrushed skin, etc. A further example of this governmentality practice is done through the use of targeted language such as "Tween" when advertising (McGladrey, 2014, p. 355). When creating words that describe not yet adult, but no longer child, advertisements can better focus on such populations as they are now becoming more specific in their attempt to legally market various products to children. However, as "Tweens" are encouraged to experiment with their outer appearance such as with beauty products, it allows retailers to groom a group of new consumers who are responsible for billions of dollars in purchases per year in a growing multi-billion-dollar industry (McGladrey, 2014, p. 355). The absence of regulations within the cosmetic industry surrounding advertisement regulations provides additional context to the struggle of finding the balance between regulation among large beauty corporations advertisements and the freedom of the user to access such platforms (social media, print magazine, etc.) and the company's ability to promote such images/videos. Understanding this motivation of big box stores and media giants to slowly infiltrate the priorities of young girls show their interest in establishing new consumers rather than encouraging any form of genuine self-esteem intrinsically. The lack of regulations around this practice highlights the failure of the government to

impose regulations within advertising practices further greenlights this act of image manipulation which further hinders the rights of young girls.

Within McGladery's (2014) study, young girls aged 9 through 11 created picture collages of what they believed represented beautiful and a separate collage on what they considered ugly. As a general observer, the "pretty" collages showed thin women and children; this is contrasted to the "ugly" collages showing morbidly obese women laying down, eating, and dancing alone (McGladrey, 2014, p. 362). While many of the girls put together images of more natural-looking women wearing little to no makeup, a majority of their pictures came from beauty advertisements as opposed to family or yearbook-like pictures (McGladrey, 2014, p. 362). In a separate study, women presented collages of images they found "beautiful" specifically crafted from social/digital media and print media advertisements; the images had been completed by professional makeup artists, photoshopped with overly smoothed skin or smaller waists, as well as couples embracing each other in a loving manner (McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, & Fabri, 2020, p. 666). In both studies, it was clear the participants opted for the retouched and airbrushed photos over everyday models with noticeable pores, crooked or stained teeth, and average-sized bodies.

The formation of what the girls believe beauty is comprised of is largely based on the media they are consuming and the amount of it. Forms of this media included music from their "idols" including Taylor Swift, Selena Gomez, and Miley Cyrus, to the visual/digital media including social media applications and television shows/movies and game systems (McGladrey, 2014, p. 358). As they view the digital media on shows such

as Disney, they are consuming the idea that the uniformly popular girl typically aligns with the sociocultural views on what is conventionally beautiful; therefore, if the girls dress, act, and look like these characters, they believe they will increase their likelihood of living a similar life (McGladrey, 2014, p. 359). Additionally, as the girls view the celebrities such as Cyrus, Gomez, and Swift, they form an almost parasocial relationship with them claiming they know them as they "pretty much grew up together" (McGladrey, 2014, p. 360). The girls use these celebrities to describe the "perfect girl" and then beg for clothing and beauty products based on each celebrity or actor's line with little to no additional confirmation that the celebrity regularly uses the product (McGladrey, 2014, p. 360). This is important as it highlights how the girls look to pop culture, such as main characters within tv shows and music videos, on how to dress and act like the celebrity, in addition to internalizing altered or airbrushed images when forming their autonomous view on what is beautiful.

    McGladrey's (2014) study highlights the limited perception of what girls believe is beautiful based on their chosen media which can be narrow and fabricated based on any given advertisement within it. The girls expressed their fantasies of how they daydream or pretend to be such celebrities in an effort to personify such personalities in their everyday life. Unfortunately, this idealization of the models, artists, and actresses seen in photoshopped advertisements can lead to increased body dissatisfaction and body dysmorphia as young girls carry such distorted perceptions well into adulthood.

The "Authentic" Self

Why do women even want to be beautiful? This is a concept asked by Kim and Lee (2018) across their qualitative study using the Human Beauty Value matrix. This exploratory study focused on understanding the core reasons women feel the need to continually strive for beauty. While beauty is only "skin deep," the perceived absence of beauty can lead to deeper emotional distress in someone causing psychological harm or malice (Kim & Lee, 2018, p. 1). Compared to men, women may suffer from deeper emotional pressure, social anxiety, prejudice, and inequality simply based on their outer appearance at any given moment (Strahan, Wilson, Cressman, & Buote, 2006, p. 211). When speaking with participants, Kim and Lee (2018) identified four core themes noted as especially important when considering "beauty" within the group: superiority, self-development, individuality, and authenticity (p. 9). Understanding this study and the desire to feel beautiful is imperative in understanding how advertisers target language to consumers on feeling more confident in their individuality while promoting the same product to each person. The study found that women felt more comfortable being their "authentic" self when they believed their outer appearance matched what was culturally acceptable or depicted from advertisements (Kim & Lee, 2018, p. 11). Considering this idea of sexiness and becoming more desirable as a marketing technique within advertisements is difficult to grasp as an adult, let alone a child with not yet fully formed brains. The girls being affected by such influences may not realize how impossible achieving such standards of outer beauty are. This impossibility of standards is also seen in the rise of cosmetic or plastic surgery in adult women by 24 % since 2020 (ASPS,

2022). It was noted by Kim and Lee (2012) that the participants admittedly felt more comfortable to be themselves only after undergoing cosmetic surgery; researchers found this assessment was encouraged by a "hypercompetitive environment" surrounding society, media, and global cultural influences (p. 12). An example of this hypercompetitive-ness among individuals can be seen in media as women are compared to one another, advertisements claiming their one product can make you beautiful, or before and after photos praising what you should be striving for in the after photo.

In an attempt to further answer Kim and Lee's question on the purpose of wanting to be desired, it was also found in Lamb et al.'s (2016) research on the advantages and disadvantages of being sexy in comments made by adolescent girls. The girls responded that an advantage to being sexy is the level of popularity someone has; the girls further noted that "everyone wants to be around you [and] they want to be your friend" (Lamb et al., 2016, p. 536). Being the object of jealousy from other girls affirms the "positive performance" of sexy embodies (Lamb et al., 2016, p. 536). This underlying sense of jealousy is further attributed to the hypercompetitive-ness found by Kim and Lee (2018) as girls are continually competing with one another to be more desirable, even within their friend groups. This competition almost reinforces what the girls believe is a successful measure of sexiness within their social circles; this can be further attributed to the perceived desirability of models in any current advertisement.

This act of yearning for popularity by the young girls is becoming somewhat of a learned behavior brought on by the cosmetic industry; the models pose in effortless, laughing, smiling positions, and are often surrounded by others in groups who feel the

same way, or so it appears. This pressure of what a "model" female should strive to be and look like highlights an inequality for women that is dormant in men's media (McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, & Fabri, 2020, p. 656). In addition to the admiration of peers, many cosmetic corporations focus their campaign on attracting a partner, or their gaze, with the assistance of utilizing their product in the advertisement. McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, and Fabri (2020) noted how cosmetic advertising continuously destabilizes women's perceptions of beauty with unrealistic standards of external beauty coupled with messages of intrinsic confidence and self-esteem (p. 672). This is problematic as it represents how the consumer may only feel these positive intrinsic emotions if they look like the model that has been photoshopped within the advertisement.

The researchers found that women experiment with makeup products in an effort to solidify the boundaries that their authentic-self has created to naturalize a cosmetically enhanced body. The respondents from McCabe, de Waal Malefyt, and Fabri's (2020) study admitted they wear makeup more often than not; the women described a "sense of being incomplete, not fully put together, self-conscious, and embarrassed" about their untouched, natural physical appearance (p. 670). While this promotes the polarity of freedom of a woman's right to choose how she enters public, it is paired with the lack of authority for the standards they have been given on what is acceptable within the society. While both law and freedom exist as opposite pairs, effectively leveraging the positive aspects of both may create greater democracy for young girls, the consumers (Benet, 2006, p. 135). One 22-year-old woman in the study insisted, "the media has been telling me all my life [starting in adolescent years] that I need to wear makeup'' (McCabe, de

Waal Malefyt, & Fabri, 2020, p. 670). This previously mentioned study is useful to my own in that it highlights how the media encourages ritualistic practices to use their products daily before leaving the home and entering the public to be found more acceptable to the general public.

In addition to the products marketed, the advertisements interfere with the self-esteem of women as they become more extrinsically motivated to apply it based on what the advertisement deems is more acceptable to society. Recognizing the media's influence on the women surveyed shows a need for stronger regulations to protect future generations from succumbing to such influences brought on by advertisers and their practices of promoting "authenticity" on the same advertisement that has been photoshopped or altered (Kim & Lee, 2018). This lack of internal motivation to apply makeup every day that the women display shows how many of their cosmetic practices are completed to overcome the feeling of external inadequacy they feel with no makeup on when longing to feel part of society; in short, they apply makeup not because they like it, but rather their belief that society will better accept them when they have it on.

A Rise in Self-Harm for Young Girls

It can be argued that the need for continually promoting beauty products contributes to the financial gain of cosmetic corporations. However, as these advertisements are setting increasingly impossible standards of beauty, it seems that corporations are more focused on profitability of their campaigns rather than the mental or physical health of its consumers. Women and girls continue to buy into this impossible standard of beauty with the belief that the product marketed will allow them to look like

the model, even though the model has been retouched in some way (Greenfield, 2018, p. 8). This is why there is such a presence from the 511-billion-dollar industry that is endlessly growing each day (Djurovic, 2021). Recent studies have demonstrated how physical attractiveness is guided by modern sociocultural standards and is associated with a higher level of psychological well-being, health, social ease, assertiveness, and confidence (Danylova, 2020, p. 38). It was not until 1985 that the prevalence of eating disorders in the United States was ranked as the top "issue" facing adolescent girls (Issitt, 2018). Comparatively, anorexia nervosa is now the third most common chronic illness for teenagers; 95 % of adolescents within this category are directly diagnosed or experience behaviors related to an eating disorder at the ages of 12 to 15 (Boyce, 2014, p. 1). Additionally, 50 % of girls between the ages of 11 and 13 see themselves as overweight and 80 % of 13-year-old girls have attempted to lose weight at least once in their life (Boyce, 2014, p. 1). During these formative years of developing self-identity and awareness of their autonomy, kids may require protection from doctored images now more than ever. This is especially concerning as eating disorders in adolescents were a top issue in 1985 but are now classified more officially as a chronic illness. Danylova's (2020) research found that advertising had a tremendous impact on women and adolescent girls, causing an increased risk of distorted body image or body dysmorphia, as well as social anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, depression, eating disorders, psychological distress, low self-esteem, self-harm, and suicidal feelings (p. 38). Danylova's (2020) research is important to my study as it

highlights how receptive women are to what is published to the masses as a means to conform their own appearance to even if it destroys them mentally and physically.

While advertisers insist they are retouching images as a means to accentuate a product or improve "minor" cosmetic flaws in the models, these practices are contributing to the rise in eating disorders in young adults (Issitt, 2018). The harm that young women and girls put themselves through to maintain society's ideal of beauty is an important realization of how women "restrict themselves" from "forward movement" causing them to become the "object of manipulation" in their community and by partners (Danylova, 2020, p. 38). As women believe they are externally inadequate based on the media's impossible beauty standards, they are more likely to internalize how others perceive them and be manipulated as they yearn for such wide social acceptance.

Cultural and Ethnic Disparities

Within the United States, the racial disparity among media and its portrayal of White more so than Black women is felt among many. In a study done with Black adolescent girls aged 12-17, Muhammad and McArthur (2015) found that 64 % of participants felt negatively impacted by the overall negative tone in Black girlhood representation within the media (p. 136). The girls in this study noted how media outlets and television shows perceived Black women as being judged harshly by their physical attributes and behaviors such as their hair or skin tone, as well as being angry, loud, violent; they also felt Black girls are hyper-sexualized or objectified when present in mainstream media (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015, p. 136). The girls felt that when portrayed in media, Black women are exaggeratedly "thick" with enlarged breasts or

bums making them more vulnerable to mistreatment or assault from others (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015, p. 138). This is a stark contrast from the aforementioned typical display of what other adolescent girls perceive to be beautiful such as a slender White female with blue eyes (Dionisio, 2016, p. 46). Many of the Black girl participants felt this most notably from the music industry and its portrayal of women in music videos where women are dependent on their physical appearance to obtain material goods, respect, or attention (Muhammad & McArthur, 2015, p. 138).

Tran, Rosales, and Copes (2020) also discussed how media is the main driver of change, however, the lens is too narrow on mainstream media as it currently stands to make a real difference in cultural barriers. Within their study, Black female YouTube beauty influencers discussed the pressure they felt to live up to White cultural standards. It was found that overall, "women of color may be more extrinsically motivated to use makeup due to hegemonic beauty standards, as Black beauty influencers reported industry disparities in pay/salary, sponsorships, and subscriber count compared with young, White influencers" (Tran, Rosales, & Copes, 2020, p. 1). This extrinsic motivation is derived from the feeling of external pressure to use makeup as a tool for societal acceptance as opposed to White participants using makeup intrinsically as a form of self-care for themselves (Tran, Rosales, & Copes, 2020, p. 9; McGladrey, 2014, p. 362). As cosmetic advertisers include all types of people, especially without airbrush, their audience can identify more strongly with the community of that brand and fellow users. In the lens of polarities of democracy, leveraging the positive aspects of the values representation and participation, young girls can feel more accepting of their own natural

features along with other girls who feel the same as modern advertisements present realistic portrayals of beauty. However, Tran, Rosales, and Copes (2020) highlight the portrayal of what the media and beauty industry depict as the everyday woman and its lack of inclusiveness within American advertising. Additionally, while those images portrayed are typically photoshopped or airbrushed, there is an even more impossible standard that women of color believe they need to achieve for society to be more accepting of them on a regular basis.

As mentioned previously, within the United States and other first world countries, the media casts large campaigns to promote a variety of products to assist in blurring various skin tones or textures (acne, wrinkles, pores, etc.), however, there is typically perfected type of person posing within such advertisements with little to no blemishes. Dionisio (2016) studied the effects of objectified media exploiting women based purely on external features and its impact on Filipino women. Many Filipino-born women from Dionisio's (2016) study revealed they rely on American media and advertisements to mirror how they should look and act (p. 45). American media had such a stronghold over a small percentage of the Filipino-born female participants that they admitted it took years to accept they were beautiful without blonde hair, blue eyes, and a taller, slender frame (Dionisio, 2016, p. 46). In an enlightening divergence, the majority of Filipino-born women interviewed felt comfortable with their body image and self-esteem; they believe it was due to their lack of resources such as no television or magazines available to them for most of their lives (Dionisio, 2016, p. 46). As for the American-born Filipino women, the majority of participants felt a need to copy the products used on White

models in an effort to have the same effect on their external look (Dionisio, 2016, p. 47). While a majority of the Filipino-born women believed intrinsic qualities such as positive energy were more important than outer appearances, few of the Filipino-born participants noted struggles with either body dysmorphia or low self-esteem when exposed to the Western ideal of thin and pretty women specifically from images in advertisements (Dionisio, 2016, p. 52). Dionisio's (2016) study highlights the entirely different outlooks on life the participants possess based on their level of exposure to American media across the participant's childhood.

As there is little influence on beauty culture within the Philippines predominantly due to lack of resources, the beauty industry within China is rapidly rising. According to the Chemical Inspection and Regulation Service (CIRS) the total volume of retail sales of cosmetics has continued to show rapid growth in China from 162.5 billion yuan (26-billion-dollars (U.S.) in 2013 to 222.2 billion yuan (35-billion-dollars U.S.) in 2016 (CIRS, 2017). China has also surpassed Japan becoming the world's second-largest market in the total consumption of cosmetics products following the United States as the largest (CIRS, 2017). This statistic highlights the prominent inconsistency in first-world countries as compared to third-world countries in terms of lack of resources and ability to become influenced via advertisements or cosmetic industry propaganda. Along with this lack of resources, an inconsistency of standards for the average woman is also present. While the Filipino-born women were very secure with their external appearance, 86% of Chinese women within Jung's (2018) study relied on online fashion magazines and blogs to shape their standards of what is beautiful (p. 67; Dionisio, 2016, p. 66). One participant

noted that shops often have models or actors more beautiful than "themselves" so that others will understand the standard of beauty being advertised more so than the clothes; the participants also noted behaviors of overexercising, undereating, and plastic surgery to achieve this level of a wider-spread acceptance/desirability from their social groups and general society (Jung, 2018, p. 66). This is comparative to the American-born Filipino women who noted that if procedures or products were more economically priced they would "put more stock" into what advertisements recommended (Dionisio, 2016, p. 46). Lastly, when Jung (2018) asked if the participants felt pressure from their peers or partners to look like those in magazines or television shows, they predominantly agreed they do not; however, they did mostly agree that pressure comes from within themselves in an ability to look "the best" in their friend groups (p. 67). This hyper-competitive environment created among young women was present within Jung's (2018) study over Chinese women, as well as Kim and Lee (2018) and Lamb et al. (2016) who focused on American school children.

Modern Approaches of Public Policy Protection

The Federal Trade Commission is a regulatory body responsible for protecting consumers within America. The federal states that advertisements must be truthful, not misleading, and where appropriate backed by scientific evidence; this protection from the Federal Trade Commission, FTC, is seen through regulating these standards of advertising (FTC, 2022). Yet, with this responsibility from the FTC, we continue to see a rise a self-harm in young adults and especially among young girls, and as noted previously, this can be linked to social media consumption and advertisement exposure

(Boyce, 2014, p. 1). In 2016, the Truth in Advertising bill was presented to Congress by Florida House Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen with the intention of forcing the FTC to submit a report that many advertisements created do in fact cause harm to consumers; especially those advertisements that have been altered to change the appearance and physical characteristics of the individuals in the ad (GovTrack, 2016). More importantly, this bill would force the FTC to establish guidelines for acceptable use cases of manipulations within advertisements with the intention of recognizing and preventing deception for consumers (GovTrack, 2016). This bill was introduced to the House of Representatives in 2016 and ultimately denied by the majority vote. While the reasoning for denial is relatively unclear, in both instances it can be noted that bills presented such as this one continually fail to use specific language leaving the guidelines for what is "too far" seemingly vague and interpretative to the user (Navamanikkam, 2017, p. 1). Where is the line for personal users utilizing their freedom of speech and government overstep into their protected freedoms? Is there an argument that it only pertains to those seeking a profit from advertising? Is there a clear line when altering models to have a minimum waist appearance? These are questions that remain unanswered in bills with nonspecific, interpretative language that could protect personal use photo manipulation while regulating professional use of photo manipulating.

This 2016 Truth in Advertising bill is similar to a previously submitted version by Arizona State Representative Katie Hobbs who proposed a similar bill to the Arizona House of Representatives (H.B. 2793) in 2012 that would require advertisers to notify the public, through a disclaimer, whenever airbrushing was used in postproduction while

preparing advertisements for print (Issitt, 2018). It did not pass the House of

Representatives; therefore, no regulation was implemented for advertisers (LegiScan,

2022). However, organizations like CVS Pharmacy have taken it upon themselves to

implement the "CVS Beauty Mark" initiative in 2018; this is a watermark that appears on

all advertisements within the organization to clearly identify which advertisements have

been digitally altered or are considered "Beauty Unaltered" or free from retouching

applications (CVS Health, 2022).This Fortune 500 company establishing such an

initiative provides a pathway for other large retailers who are actively manipulating

images, especially those aimed at children, to also establish self-regulated initiatives with

the intent of safeguarding young girls and women's self-esteem. Along with the

previously mentioned CVS Pharmacy initiative, other executives within the beauty

industry have also started to disrupt the status quo by taking actions that can be seen as

genuinely fostering positive body image (e.g., through representative and diverse

imagery, body acceptance messages, and inclusive product ranges) (Craddock et al.,

2019, p. 93). This provides an interesting lens on the importance of self-esteem

promotion in their consumers from the founders of several large cosmetic companies.

Many of the female executives connected a positive body image to one's own feminist

identity and core values. In recognition of this, it was found that executive-level

participants felt a sense of responsibility to at least not be complicit in thwarting the

confidence of young women and girls especially as it pertains to other organizations

promoting an "anti-ethical" belief system and an "irresponsible" approach to modern

beauty as seen in advertisements published by large corporations such as previous

Victoria's Secret marketing (Craddock et al., 2019, p. 98). This self-regulation is in line with the self-regulatory practices that organizations voluntarily impose to present more ethical marketing material to consumers. Additionally, it shows how some executives within the industry are pushing towards preserving and encouraging self-esteem within its audience.

Considering this is currently a self-regulated market, there have been some improvements as organizations and legislators promote the idea of banning airbrush practices on advertisements, especially if it alters the result of products being marketed. In 2011 the American Medical Association adopted a new policy to discourage advertisers from altering bodies and faces of physicians or healthcare professionals "on the basis that this manipulation has served to create unrealistic standards of beauty and fitness that may be harmful to American consumers, especially adolescents" (Issitt, 2018). This was done with the intention of working more specifically with health and welfare organizations to ensure healthy body images were promoted. However, while American advertisements pertaining to the medical field now have some level of protection, those pertaining to cosmetics and fashion are deemed the Wild West as relatively no regulatory practices exist.

On an international landscape, in 2011 Member of British Parliament (MP) Jo Swinson led a campaign that resulted in two advertisements being banned in Britain for "false advertising" as the photo retouching used altered the actual effect of the products being advertised (Issitt, 2018). These were campaigns advertising a cosmetic product; the image had been so manipulated MP Swinson stated, "airbrushing models to make them

appear more "beautiful" in advertisements aimed at children should be banned"

(Guardian, 2009). Following this in 2017, Article R2133-6 was passed into law asserting

that every advertisement within France appended the label "photographie retouchée"

(retouched photograph) to commercial photographs that have been altered to refine the

weight or shape of the model (Danthinne & Rodgers, 2020). While many advertisers do

add a small notice to images that have been retouched, there is still inconsistency in those

published advertisements that do or don't have this watermark and is admittedly difficult

to regulate. Not only is there no auditing process for these advertisements, it is also

difficult for regulatory bodies to judge whether the model may or may not look like what

is presented and what could be effects or shapes produced from posing, lighting, and

makeup (Danthinne & Rodgers, 2020). As of January 12, 2022, MP Dr. Luke Evans

submitted the "Body Image Bill" to parliament to tackle not only traditional forms of

advertising such as commercials or images, but newer forms on social media including

"influencers" and sponsored posting from personal platforms on the applications (Evans,

2022). This bill would require a disclaimer included in any advertisement, personal or

professional, where an image has been airbrushed or manipulated for publication. This

does not include personal platforms for everyday users unless they are publishing a post

with the intention of accepting profits from sales or sponsorships. While similar to the

France Article R2133-6, this bill would include the United Kingdom as a whole. The

Knesset, a unicameral supreme state body of Israel, adopted the "Photoshop Law" in

2013; this law requires adult models to have a body mass index of at least 18.5 and for

advertisers to add a disclosure if photoshopping or body/feature manipulation occurred

on any models (CIE, 2012). This law was introduced as an adult female model died in

2007 at 60 pounds after suffering from anorexia imposed on her via fashion industry

leaders (CIE, 2012). It is apparent that not only does the impossible standards of beauty

established by advertisers span the globe, but it also affects those models and audience

members both physically and mentally.

Unfortunately, young girls are the passive recipients of the messages and ideas

imposed on them. Global beauty industries contribute to the unrealistic appearance

standards through idealizing "smooth, young, and golden or fair skin" through

manufacturing and marketing of images and videos (Craddock et al., 2019, p. 94).

Additionally, fashion labels are no longer responsible as the sole contributor of these

ideals as they are ubiquitous throughout advertising, "endorsing every product

imaginable" across the beauty industry (Craddock et al., 2019, p. 94). The global beauty

industry is projected to grow to a minimum of 750-billion-dollars by 2023 (Craddock et

al., 2019, p. 94). This projection provides a financial analysis which highlights the global

impact a potential policy could have on such a huge financial market; is there more

pressure to not regulate this industry because of the rippling impact that a policy could

have across several nations?

There has been resistance from American policymakers to restrict this practice of

retouching models within advertisements; this is seen as such initiatives repeatedly fail as

they enter legislative bodies such as the House of Representatives. However, an approach

that differs from restriction in photoshopped advertisements is encouraging advertisers to

not use such tools. Unfortunately, this encouragement does not stem from the numerous

mental and physical health benefits that could impact the newest generation of young

girls, but rather tax incentives. Introduced by Massachusetts State Representative Kay

Khan, the "Realistic Advertising" bill (H.3892) would offer a $10 thousand dollar tax

credit to businesses operating with revenue of at least $100 thousand dollars, that can

prove it did not digitally alter or change the model's body shape/size, skin color, or

wrinkles in their advertisements (Bill H.3892, 2019). This method of proposing a tax

incentive to businesses is a strong method in allowing for both the consumer and business

to win. While the government's censorship is not limiting organizations to restrict what

or how they advertise, they are encouraging more authentic publications which in turn

promote authenticity in young girls and audiences alike. This is a strong example of the

type of policy that could stem from my research study. While it can seem impossible to

pass a restrictive or regulatory bill through policymakers, as we've seen it fail for almost

a decade, encouraging businesses to promote untouched advertisements through tax

incentives can assist in improving the mental and physical health of young girls.

Summary

Throughout Chapter 2, I explored the prior research pertaining to false advertising

and its effects on young girls. In doing so, connections were made among the effects of

such advertising, such as photoshopping and manipulating the images, and its impacts on

the young girl's self-esteem and self-identity. Additionally, this literature review covered

the global impact that the multi-billion-dollar business has on young girls across the

world. Identifying the values within the polarities of democracy framework provides a

foundation to consider this oppressed population and how democracy may be effectively

leveraged. This literature review exposes a gap in the research specific to a lack of public policy encouragement when publishing false-advertising content to young girls, which the perception of the participants (educators, psychologists, counselors, social workers, etc.) can help to fill. In Chapter 3, I will outline the research methodology and plan that will potentially address this gap.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

My study focused on understanding the harmful effects on young girls (aged 6-14 years old) that stem from false advertising within the cosmetic industry from a participant perspective and how public policy could assist in potentially mitigating negative effects and encourage positive outcomes for the girls. Because I focused on the effects ascribed to a social problem with a lack of public policy to protect this population of young girls, I determined that a general qualitative research approach was the most appropriate methodology for this study. In this chapter, I describe the research meaning of general qualitative inquiry and how it guided the development of the RQ. In defining the role of the researcher, I will identify potential conflicts of interest and biases, such as personal or professional relationships with participants as well as how these relationships are managed. I present a review of the study's methodology, including participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment, data collection procedures, and the data analysis plan. Finally, I discuss the issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures in terms of the intentional and unintentional conduct that influences the trustworthiness of relationships in research.

Research Design and Rationale

This study was conducted to explore and examine the perceptions of the participants (including but not limited to educators and psychologists) in regard to the effects of false advertising such as image manipulation/distortion on young girl's self-esteem and how it could be addressed through the use of public policy. Using a general

qualitative research approach, I examined the shared experiences of participants to seek explanations of their perceived experiences of young girls (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These experiences included their interpretation of how false advertising within the cosmetic industry could hinder the development of a young girl's self-esteem and confidence when viewing altered images and videos using tools such as photoshop or airbrushing. I further identified themes that represented potential factors influenced, such experiences for these young girls. Within the basis of a general qualitative approach, I employed an abbreviated version of Rubin and Rubin's (2012) semistructured interview technique. Semistructured interviews allowed participants to address how the media and advertising play a significant role in young girls' self-esteem and identity development. Further, a focus on responsive semistructured interviews provided a pathway to understanding the open-ended responses given from my participants in a manner that was more fluid than rigid or a prescriptive set of questions from a survey (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This interview protocol was devised based on one RQ: What are the perceptions of informed participants (such as educators, psychologists, counselors, and social workers) regarding what public policies might serve to mitigate the negative impacts of advertising and media on the development of self-esteem among young girls (6-14 years old) in Austin, Texas?

Among the various types of qualitative research, a general inquiry was chosen as it best reflected the open-ended nature when understanding the basis of a phenomenon or lack thereof. This qualitative study further took a purposeful constructivist approach with the intention of just that – constructing a viewpoint representative of a population from

the views of the participants within that field (Perry, n.d.). Additionally, a "basic

[general] qualitative" approach was the most appropriate option within the social field as

it allowed participants to construct their interactions within the social worlds, further

underlying the need for protections provided by stronger public policies (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). Within this type of study, the researcher is more interested in

understanding the meaning for which a particular phenomenon or stimuli has for the

perceived experience of the young girls. The participants, such as teachers, social

workers, counselors, psychologists, within the field assessed whether falsification within

media and advertisements can have the ability to implement a learned positive or

negative behavior based on what is deemed socially desirable in terms of physical beauty

and body standards. In this study, I tried to understand how such false advertisements

leave impressions on the undeveloped brain of young girls, their short/long-term effects

on their self-esteem, and how any potentially negative effect can be prevented through

the use of public policy as a tool. This constructivist concept rooted in general qualitative

research methodology allowed the participants to open-endedly explain their positive or

negative assessment of such advertisements and their impact on young girls. This

collective of participants allowed for themes to emerge, providing a further understanding

of how such advertisements and media affect young girls. Additionally, I included how

public policy leaders could be encouraged to improve the lives of such individuals and

populations within the community, including young girls in Austin, Texas via public

policy implementation.

A general qualitative inquiry was chosen over other narrower types of qualitative studies as I focused on the participant's educational background and observations/experiences with the population of young girls, with a focus on using public policy as a tool. An example of a narrower qualitative approach not chosen for the structure of this study is a case study. A qualitative case study is defined as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system through observation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The unit of measurement within a case can encompass an entire group down to a singular person. There were two main reasons chosen for not using this structure for the qualitative methodology: the use of it as an observational approach as well as the openness of potential participants and time it would have taken to interview them. The purpose of this methodology was to understand if false advertising affects young girls internally via depreciation in their self-esteem, self-confidence, and/or a contributor body dysmorphia. As case studies are defined as an observational study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), my study required the participants to speak on behalf of these potential effects rather than observe those short- and long-term effects on young girls that could be masked in day-to-day observations. Additionally, qualitative case studies must be bound; if there is "no end, actually or theoretically," to the number of participants, or a "finite time take in observations," then the study is "not bounded enough to qualify as a case" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 39). While an observational approach may exist within a general qualitative study, using observed experiences from a defined number of participants to provide a positive social change for the participant was not the goal of this general qualitative methodology and responsive structure.

Role of the Researcher

In this research, I was an observer-participant. I used the interview guide in

Appendix A comprised of thoughtful interview questions that focused on the participants'

observations while allowing a dialogue (Groeneweld, 2004) to evolve. While the

interview guide assured a general consistency in the interview structure across multiple

interview subjects, the participant's background further guided follow-up questions based

on individual responses. The key to the research was allowing for responses that

described the perceived experience of young girls and letting their assessments contribute

to my understanding of a common truth and/or phenomenon.

As someone who has only recently overcome their first-hand experience with this

subject of feeling insecure based on fake advertisements, I am admittedly close to my

research topic. I bring perspectives and biases to the research that could contaminate my

findings if not properly addressed. Additionally, as the researcher and interviewer of this

study, the inspiration for this research stemmed from my 6-year-old niece. As she was

just turning 6, she came to me with a sullen look, grabbing her stomach, and crying that

she did not look as thin as the girls playing on her Kid's YouTube channel and its

preshow advertisements. She further cried that she was not as "small" or "skinny" as

some of her friends or the princesses in various Disney movies. It was through talking

with her that I realized how children learn such life-altering insecurities at such a young

age, and how the role of social media further encouraged this line of thinking within her.

Shortly after talking with her, I realized that it was only a few years ago (when I was 26

years old) that I finally overcame similar insecurities by realizing the level of

photoshopping and airbrushing over images that existed. As an adult, I can make the distinction that what is perceived and promoted on social media and advertisements, especially within the beauty/cosmetic industry, is not reality. However, it is clear that a young 6-year-old's brain is not able to obtain a similar thought process as her brain is not yet developed enough to understand what is a falsely created or manipulated image used to represent a "real" person.

Additionally, as someone familiar with the beauty/cosmetic industry as a hair and makeup artist within Austin, Texas, I was astounded at even the adults who believe one particular product can instantly attain the features from the supermodel on the advertisement who had been airbrushed or manipulated in some way. Further, as I am shown inspiration pictures from adult clients, they are surprised as I explain how most images I am shown have been altered in some way to digitally produce poreless smooth skin, a chiseled bone structure, or luscious/voluminous hair. Even the hair is photoshopped or manipulated. This led me to recognize how someone as young as my 6-year-old niece to my adult clients can possess a similar misinterpretation when viewing images or videos of various beauty/cosmetic advertisements.

Lastly, the motivation for choosing this topic was realizing the lack of protections and regulations via public policy against such a global industry that could influence the psyche of various generations often in a single advertisement. Within the United States, there is currently no known national policy specific to preventing the photoshopping/manipulation of the models in images and videos within advertisements, only voluntary regulation by the businesses. The extent of the current policy is based on

manipulation of the product itself and its actual effects (FTC, 2022). Therefore, manipulating a model's waist to an impossibly smaller size is legal, yet darkening their eyelashes to show the effect of a mascara is illegal. There is also no disclaimer requirement from those who do manipulate images with the intention of selling consumer goods within the United States. While assessing potential disclaimers on advertisements that have photoshopped may seem insignificant to some, based on the literature, large corporations are positioning an entire generation to be more insecure than ever before, with the only solution being their product promoted.

As the researcher of this study, acknowledging my own biases and assumptions was critical in framing how the questions were asked as well as accepting participant responses with a neutral demeanor. As indicated, my biases included both my motivations within my family and my professional experience as a hair and makeup artist with clients in Austin, Texas. Observing these biases early assisted me in maintaining control of these biases as not to affect the outcome, representing a genuinely unbiased study and research process. To assist in this neutral position, it is imperative that as the researcher and interviewer, I bracketed my assumptions and internal biases.

Bracketing allows prejudices and assumptions to be "temporarily set aside" before embarking on the journey that is a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 27). While this concept has no rigid definition or guideline on the level of bracketing required in research, it was important to me to document my own researcher bias. Setting aside such personal biases can allow me as the researcher to take in what the participants say in an open and relatively naïve manner (Eddles-Hirsh, 2015), with the intention of exploring

their opinions. It is debatable as to the extent the researcher should have "no bias[es]" within research as it is their connection to the topic; however, it can be argued to bracket out personal bias within the study to ensure there is no prejudice or preconceived notion on the outcome of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One practice of bracketing across my study is seen via interviews with outside sources (see Tufford & Newman, 2010). As I did not know the interviewees personally, this assisted in removing preconceptions and assumptions based on each participant.

An additional aspect of bracketing was seen with each participant during the interview. Across the interviews, I do not intend to share any personal reasonings for my motivations in completing this study. While these motivations and biases are mentioned throughout this study, I suspended my personal biases in a manner to remain objective throughout the research process. This was done in a purposeful manner to ensure the participants felt they could speak freely to their genuine opinions rather than to my own personal motivations. My bracketing for this dissertation has been noted across the researcher bias within Chapter 3, as well as Chapter 1. This bias has been presented to the reader in a manner to show my connection to the topic with the purpose of stating my passion without fear of altered outcomes.

To further bracket my own bias, I took a neo-positivist stance as my questions pertained to the participant and young girls rather than myself with an "effort to remain neutral and possess quality, valid findings" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 112). This neutral position included open-ended questions to the participants with a notable absence of leading within the interview. This tactic of "leading" the participant can be as simple

as, "What emotional problems would a young girl suffer from when looking at this advertisement?" as compared to the nonleading question, "Tell me what a young girl might feel when looking at this advertisement?" Possessing awareness on if I was leading assisted in reducing researcher bias as my participants could feel welcome to share their own opinion and assessment of young girls. Ensuring the participants feel comfortable enough to give well-rounded answers is also a key component of the responsive semistructured interview.

Methodology

This semistructured general qualitative interview was designed to capture the lived experiences of at seven participants who were familiar with working in the population of young girls aged 6 to 14 years old; this number of participants was established as saturation was reached quickly. This will be further discussed in chapter 4. This research was conducted using a researcher-created protocol that relied on open-ended, semistructured interview questions and a modified version of Seidman's (2006) 3-stage interview technique. Blending both types of interview techniques allowed me to create a customized set of questions for the participants that assisted in easing them into deeper, more meaningful answers.

Participant Selection Logic

The population for this study was drawn from participants with a professional or educational background in the specific population of young girls aged 6 to 14 years old within Austin, Texas. Participants within this field included but were not limited to educators, psychologists, counselors, and social workers. This was intentional to

interview adults with this background rather than children directly so as not to exploit the children and further expose them to the manipulated images. By having a participant professionally familiar with this population, I was confident they could accurately depict the interpretation on the effects of mental/physical health that would be felt by the young girls. The participants within the study also assisted in filling the gap from a lack of research completed on this topic in Austin, Texas. Additionally, as it was deemed that false advertising does have an impact on young girls, I felt it could have a greater impact as the study was completed so proximally close to many lawmakers within the capitol of Texas.

The sample size for this study was purposefully smaller than the typical quantitative study as it was meant to recognize an understanding of experiences through long-form answers filled with rich detail rather than form a generalized hypothesis with no additional understanding on why participants answered as such. Saturation was noted when no new or relevant information emerged from the participants assisting in a more robust phenomenon (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Ahead of the study, there was no predetermined particular point of saturation that could imply a "single truth" existed (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) nor were the themes predetermined. To eliminate researcher bias, it was useful to allow saturation or a phenomenon to organically appear without predetermining one.

As this group of participants was limited, purposeful sampling assisted in gaining more meaningful answers with fewer participants, thus reaching saturation sooner. An example of the purposeful sampling would be how the participants were prevetted to

view their qualifications and take part in the study as opposed to larger random sampling

seen in quantitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Purposeful sampling is useful in a

qualitative study due to the rich nature in the feedback and answers from participants that

is not necessary for quantitative studies.

Instrumentation

This study was designed as a semistructured interview across three stages of

questioning for each participant. This semistructure within the interview process allowed

for a less formal structure when speaking with participants, without the presence of

rigidness or prescriptiveness in its approach (see Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It was through

this methodology that the participant could feel comfortable with the natural flow of the

conversation, and I encouraged them to speak more honestly with genuine feedback.

Along with this semistructured line of questioning, a modified version of Seidman's

(2006) interview structure was incorporated to create a three-categorical structure for the

interview. This structure allows a flow for the participants to not only reflect on their

background as a professional with this population but also qualify their perspective when

answering for the population of young girls and the impact such images may have on the

girls' self-esteem/identity. The first part of the 3-stage interview is more introductory and

relies on the professional history of the participant (Seidman, 2006). This is important as

it established the credibility of the participants answering for this population of young

girls. The second stage of this 3-stage process detailed the participants' perceived

experience of this topic for young girls. Concentrating on the perceived experience

allows the reader to take into context how young girls interpret/internalize undetectable

false advertising within the cosmetic industry (Seidman, 2006). And lastly, within the

third stage of the interview, I analyzed how the participants would perceive the

benefit/impact that public policy could have in mitigating potentially negative effects for

the girls or encouraging positive outcomes from false advertisements. The complete

interview guide in Appendix A includes a relative guide for questioning the participants,

which includes nonverbal researcher prompts as well as the scripted opening and closing

of the interview. I also had participants sign an informed consent form where they

acknowledged my intent to record and that they would have the opportunity to revise and

edit the transcript after the interview.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The participants were invited to join this study via email announcement to persons

within the Austin, Texas vicinity. This included but was not limited to intermediate-

middle schools seeking teachers of young girls in the 6-14 years old age range, as well as

child psychiatrists, social workers, and counselors. The ideal participant worked with

young girls aged 6-14 years old daily in a professional capacity; the interviews were held

with professionals rather than parents surrounded by their children. This was to ensure

the emotional bond did not overcome the psychological aspect of analyzing what was

truly best for a child in terms of establishing potential policies. Additionally, this lack of

emotional investment from participants also ensured a measurable and grounded

motivation for policy change rather than an emotionally charged initiative.

The approach in gathering participants occurred through direct reach-outs to

school counselors and teachers, as well as direct reach-outs to local social workers and

psychologists. There was no singular profession identified for this study nor minimum or maximum limit to participants from particular profession. This was based on resources and availability at the time of the study including, but not limited to when saturation was met. Ideally, participants would have varying professions and backgrounds mirroring that of a broad cross-sectional group, however, if one profession, such as social workers, is the primary resource for participants then it would have been acceptable. The email announcement included a description of the research study along with a formal Internal Review Board (IRB) approved request for potential candidates who work with or are familiar with this age group of young girls. A sample recruitment email is located within Appendix B.

To provide fuller details of the study and its intentions, the informed consent was attached to the announcement. Interested candidates who met the self-reporting requirements submitted their consent to me via my Walden University email address. Once the initial contact was made and the participant-signed informed consent has been obtained via email, a 45-minute interview appointment was be scheduled for each participant. Using Microsoft Outlook, a meeting request was sent to each participant indicating the interview date, time, and place of in-person interview. To provide the greatest level of flexibility, participants were offered the option of interviewing in person in a private space such as a private conference room at the local public library or their office or home. This closed off, private space either in a public setting or their office was necessary for safeguarding confidentiality with the participant in that it had a closed-door offering privacy during the interview. To protect each participant's identity during the

recruitment and interview scheduling, I communicated with each participant separately. The participant's information remained confidential; however, the participants were not anonymous. Their personal information, such as their name, were not used in the study and was only known to me. To the reader and participant, it seems anonymous as the participants cannot be identified. This is discussed further in the Treatment of Data section.

It is important to note that there was a contingency within the disclosure for the participants in that they agreed to be audio-recorded during the in-person interview. Also, as part of the full disclosure on the nature of the research, prior to the interview, I reviewed the informed consent process as well as the study's purpose, implications, and expectations with each participant. An explanation of research confidentiality and policies was provided in detail before the interview began. The interview, incorporating Seidman's three stages with semi-structured questioning, was roughly 30 minutes in duration, including the initial stage-one reflective questions on the participant's background. The transcription of interviews was completed using the transcription service Rev.com and manually reviewed by myself, the researcher, for errors. With high-caliber audio files, I simultaneously generated the data files for professional transcription. Rev.com was a great resource for quality transcription of the audio files. Transcripts arrived in Word format within hours of making the online request of Rev.com and were very modest in price. The Word file was easily redacted using a search and replace feature to convert the interviewee's name to a number and used thereafter in the

subsequent analysis. Protection of data files was done with use of two-factor authentication of files stored on a hard drive.

To further reconcile any discrepancies in the interview, participants were asked to review their interview transcript and provide feedback/approval within one week of receiving the transcript. This transcript was sent to participants via email using a password-protected file. All data, including signed informed consent forms, audio recordings, transcripts, participant feedback, and field notes were saved to a password-protected folder, located on an external hard drive, which itself is password-protected.

Data Analysis Plan

As a qualitative method was utilized, I studied the transcript from each participant to understand the meaning and themes behind their answers. To ensure the transcript is as closely reflected to the actual delivery across the conversation, I used a modified protocol to preserve the morphological naturalness within the transcript (McLellan et al., 2003). This naturalness refers to the forms and punctuations within the transcript to mirror the original delivery as close as possible (McLellan et al., 2003). This assisted in recognizing themes based on dialect and responsiveness to various questions.

Additionally, this study relied heavily on the coding techniques and procedures described by Saldana (2021). When reviewing the transcript, a qualitative technique known as coding was be utilized. Post-interview, coding provides the researcher the ability to filter, highlight, and focus the salient features of the qualitative data recorded for greater categories, themes, and concepts, and/or build out a theory from participant

responses (Saldana, 2021, p. 12). These codes can vary from but are not limited to, short phrases that are symbolical of similarity between answers or greater themes emerging.

As this qualitative study was descriptive and interpretive, a priori codes were not utilized. The use of a priori is the practice of determining codes before the interview; this can be through adopted or pre-established codes (Saldana, 2021, p. 39). As this is an original study with bracketed researcher bias, codes were not utilized before the interviews begin; these codes emerged organically as the transcript was reviewed post participant approval. Additionally, establishing codes post-interview allowed me to experience deeper moments within the interview and remove natural tendencies or potential leading phrasing within the questions which ensured honest answers were received for this study. Therefore, the inductive process of establishing new codes as they are received was not the best utilization of organization data for this study. This practice of establishing codes, categories, and themes as they arise is also known as emergent coding (Saldana, 2021, p. 57).

After the transcript had been approved by the participant, coding was done in a minimum of two cycles. This two-cycle coding began with the first cycle practice, or initial analysis, of the useful sentences to entire pages of text with a focus on emergent codes. As useful information is identified from the first cycle, the second cycle will be focused on synthesizing this text, or synthesis, to assemble specific or overarching meanings and similarities or differences among the codes (Saldana, 2021, p. 5). Saldana (2021) described coded data as one-word capitalized codes, also known as "descriptive codes," while codes developed directly from participants' own words and rooted in their

own language are placed in quotation marks; these are known as "in vivo" codes (p. 95).

As these codes developed, they were placed into overarching categories or families; these

are based on similarities in characteristics or the start of a pattern (Saldana, 2021, p. 13).

This process of categorizing or grouping was highly dependent upon the researcher's own

background and intuitive sense of issues faced by the participants within this group or

those they are speaking for during the interview such as young girls. Through

categorizing these codes into categories and families, themes emerged providing a

stronger basis to recognize any potential phenomenon from the interviews and research.

These emerging themes were seen amongst patterns, variability, and saturation of

responses given by the participants.

Within the transcript analysis, coding was completed manually in Excel and

electronically within NVivo 12, then compared for consistency as well as representation

of the data. While Saldana (2021) indicated that it is not uncommon for qualitative

researchers to summarize about one-half of the total transcribed record leaving the other

half for rigorous analysis, he also cautioned against deleting material that might contain

meaningful units of data (p. 21). Saldana recommended that the researcher focus on

collecting and coding quality data, notwithstanding the amount of data potentially

received.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To assess the quality and rigor of qualitative research, trustworthiness was

established across the research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) are considered seminal authors

within qualitative research and determined that the greater the level of trustworthiness

within a study, the greater the findings "are worth paying attention to" (p. 290). While

quantitative studies rely on reliability, saturation, and validity to evaluate or assess the

trustworthiness of a study, qualitative research uses the standards of credibility,

transferability, dependability, and confirmability to measure for "truth" (Ravitch & Carl,

2015, p. 188). The assessment below includes the four criteria for determining

trustworthiness within a given study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is deemed as the researcher's ability to deal with the complexities and

patterns within a study at any given stage of the research process. Within this aspect of

the study, it was important that the participant responses were accurately represented in

relation to the goal of the study. To assist in improving the level of credibility, I

facilitated member-checking with each participant (Ravitch & Carl, 2015, p. 188) at the

start of the interview to ensure they were familiar with this population and held

experience in a professional or educational capacity. This included questions such as

describing their experience with this population to ensure they are in fact familiar enough

to speak on behalf of young girls. Personal experience of once being a young girl did not

suffice to establish participant experience or familiarity; this was due to the ever-

changing landscape in the digital age that children are now exposed to on such a regular

basis at a young age. As previously mentioned, this credibility was seen as participants

obtained their familiarity with this population from a professional capacity. This

professionalism allowed the results to be less emotionally charged, such as when

speaking to a parent, and was more grounded in objective observational and informative analysis.

In addition to participant credibility, research credibility was also taken into consideration across my study. This is comparable to internal validity as the researcher used their tools, including transcript review to assess the patterns and complexities presented by the participants. This transcript review included manual coding by me and comparing it to the electronic coding from the NVivo software. This allowed for multiple rounds of coding to ensure themes were fully captured. In addition to this transcript review, saturation was also reviewed to ensure no new themes had emerged from the participants and further ensured the answers provided a comprehensive review of my topic. Guest, Namey, and Chen (2020) noted that a majority of themes can be noted across 6 to 7 participants to reach 80% saturation and 11-12 participants to reach 95% saturation (p. 13). This was conducive with my initial quest for a minimum of 12 participants within my study.

Transferability

Transferability, however, is more closely aligned with the external validity of the study. This external validity was seen as the ability to apply the framework of the study to broader research as it was bound in descriptive, context-relevant statements (Ravitch & Carl, 2015, p. 188). Therefore, the focus was not on creating statements for direct application in other studies, but rather the methodology and structure of the study which could be applied to broader applications. The participants within my study assisted in

establishing the baseline for a need or lack thereof for a public policy to be established to protect young girls based on their observations of young girls today.

This study was capable of taking place with an additional group of 12 counselors, teachers, psychologist, and social workers outside of my current study. Through documenting the researcher background and methodological approach including my questions used in the interviews, it allowed for other researchers to not only make their own assessments based on my findings, but to also replicate my study. Additionally, the level of descriptive information across the study allowed the reader to "assess the extent to which the findings apply outside the research" (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Dependability

The dependability is comparative to the stability of the data presented by the study over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2015, p. 189). This was seen across the study by providing context within the literature review and instrumentation on the relevancy, gap, and intention behind this general qualitative study. Through explaining the reasoning behind these choices and question formation, the reader was able to understand the rationale for such decisions. Noting this research design and the purposefulness of this methodology is the key to a dependable study (Ravitch & Carl, 2015, p. 189).

Dependability was also noted across the semi-structured interview guide. As this guide provided a baseline for each interview, the researcher was able to duplicate similar responses from these questions. The semi-structured aspect allowed for new themes to emerge based on each participant and their given direction in each response; this was useful to note when saturation did occur as it was based on a semi-structure interview

style. The dependability was also seen in participant responses as they were recorded during our semi-structured interview; this assisted in reviewing the interviews through audio and visually in the Word document to depict changes in dialect and tone from each participant. Having these transcripts also assisted in making notes of potential codes and themes along the way.

Confirmability

Lastly, confirmability within the study focuses on the practice of objectivity and neutrality, free from researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2015, p. 189). To assist in this, my biases were noted across the study from my personal and professional experience within this topic, also known as bracketing. As mentioned previously in the chapter, many steps were taken to ensure my biases are removed. Within the participant selection, I had no personal relationships with the participants being interviewed for the study. Utilizing "outside sources" (Tufford & Newman, 2010, p. 86) assisted in maintaining professionalism with each participant as well as ensuring my own biases were not mentioned to ensure I did not influence their answers or give preconceived judgement. This was comparable to interviewing a friend or relative who would feel more comfortable exploring my personal opinions on the subject. As mentioned previously, taking a "neo-positivist" stance (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 112) assisted in removing my own biases from participant interviews so that I remained neutral as the researcher. Utilizing these tools of bracketing were done with a purposeful intention of removing my personal biases for the study as well as allowing the participant to speak honestly and will

assist in uncovering the true need, or lack thereof, for a public policy to be established and further safeguard young girl's self-esteem.

Ethical Concerns and Procedures

Walden University required that researchers submit a research study protocol to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Ethical Standards in Research; this was to ensure that all Walden University research complied with the institution's ethical standards, including any federal regulations. No research took place without prior approval confirming my compliance with Walden University's IRB. The IRB is guided by concerns for the protection of human subjects, as well as adherence to high ethical standards. My participants were not considered an at-risk population and were not likely to suffer stress or harm as a direct result of interview participation. The IRB approval number for this dissertation study is 08-22-22-1047655.

The review of the research study protocol included a review of the survey instrument—in this case, the interview protocol—and verification that I would maintain the confidentiality of the study participants, as well as all email messages and letters of invitation to participants. Research subjects read and signed the informed consent form written in English that clarified the voluntary nature of the research and the scholarly purpose of the interviews. No partner organizations were used, and the identities of the participants were protected by substituting their names with a participant code after the initial interview. Procedures to ensure participant confidentiality were communicated via the announcement for recruiting participants and prior to the start of the interview. I reviewed the informed consent with each participant and offered time for them to ask

questions. Data was acquired in various methods (e.g., email for initial communication and scheduling as well as in-person interview recordings). Data such as transcripts and recordings were stored on an external hard drive in a password-protected file. Because the handling of personal data is a major concern in all types of research, this paperless approach, which includes password protection and data encryption, offered the highest level of protection. Once the study was completed, all data was maintained in an electronically secured fashion within the hard drive. After a period of 5 years, all data related to this study will be deleted from the external hard drive.

Summary

In exploring the perceived experiences of young girls via this general qualitative study, I attempted to address the perceptions of informed participants (educators, psychologists, counselors, social workers, etc.) regarding what public policies might serve to mitigate the negative impacts of falsified advertising and media as it pertained to the development of self-esteem among young girl's (6-14 years old) in Austin, Texas. Throughout Chapter 3, I have presented an overview of how I conducted the research using a semi-structured interview approach as well as a modified version of the 3-stage interviewing technique (Seidman, 2006). Beyond the issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations were recognized as important to the success of the research study; therefore, I developed an organized plan for maintaining and controlling data security and access. In Chapter 4, I will present the findings of my data analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore a gap in the research literature by focusing on the perceptions of informed participants (such as educators, psychologists, counselors, and social workers) as it relates to the impact of false advertising on young girls and how it might be addressed through public policy. The RQ focused on the participants' perceptions and observations of how false advertising affects young girls between the ages of 6 and 14 years old, and what public policies might serve to mitigate any negative impacts from the advertisements. The focus of this impact on young kids pertained to the development of their self-esteem, character/identity formation, and their overall sense of wellbeing.

I used Benet's (2006) polarities of democracy as the predominant theoretical framework and Johnson's (1992) polarity management as the conceptual framework. The research lent itself to two polarity pairs from Benet's (2013) framework: freedom and authority as well as human rights and communal obligations. I used semistructured interviews (Appendix A) to draw out perceptions/observations relevant to the RQ and developed themes from the data received. Throughout Chapter 4, I outline the results of the study and describe the relevant demographic characteristics of the participants, the research setting, and the development of themes, which resulted from the coding in both NVivo and Excel. Finally, I summarize the results before proceeding to conclusions and recommendations in Chapter 5.

Research Setting

Seven participants were interviewed in-person and audio-recorded for use of transcriptions from our conversations. Based on the interviewee's preference, the interviews took place in a vehicle, a public area, their classrooms/office, or their home. A quiet environment was necessary so the participants could focus on their responses and so that the audio recording came through clearly. All participants agreed to the IRB-approved consent form and were afforded an opportunity to review their transcript before the data analysis took place.

Interviewing the participants in-person provided both benefits and challenges. The predominant benefit of in-person interviews was the ability to read any body language presented by the participants. An example of this is how some would feel apprehensive to answer certain questions such as "Do you believe false advertising could cause young girls to harm themselves in an effort to look like the model?" Additionally, meeting in person provided a sense of comfortability as we were speaking with one another on such a relatively vulnerable topic. I believe that how I presented my own body language, such as being open with my hands on the table or in view along with agreeable nodding gestures, presented a sense of acceptance for their answers. The last benefit that presented itself when meeting in person was the ability to speak so fluidly in our conversation. When speaking over platforms such as Zoom, many words could be left out if the participant or myself were talking at the same time throughout the conversation. Therefore, the transcriptions came out very clear as we could record both of our inputs seamlessly. The main challenge of meeting with the participants in person was aligning

our schedules. I believe I could have finished the interviews weeks before I actually did if I had had another option of meeting with them via an online platform. However, the data provided rich responses to the questions, and I reached saturation quickly.

Demographics

Participants were recruited via IRB-approved recruitment methodology. Candidates qualified for this study based on three parameters:

- A background either professionally or educationally as it pertains to recognizing young girls' behaviors, development, and self-esteem influences

- Being located within the greater Austin, Texas area

- Feeling comfortable answering questions such as, "Can you describe the importance of a young girl's environment on her self-esteem and character?"

The candidates were recruited via purposive sampling from my professional network. I did not have a personal relationship with any participants and met a majority of them through my profession as a hair and makeup artist. After initial introductions, snowball sampling allowed the recruiting process to expand. All participants were residents of the greater Austin area as well as worked directly with young girls aged 6 to 14 years old. The participants were given no financial compensation for participating in the study. Table 1 below show the participant demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participants	Occupation	Participant age	Ages they work with
P-1	Teacher	29	9–10-year-olds
P-2	Teacher	25	11–14-year-olds
P-3	Inclusion coordinator	28	4–18-year-olds
P-4	Teacher	25	10–12-year-olds
P-5	Teacher	23	9–10-year-olds
P-6	Therapist	36	12–18-year-olds
P-7	Teacher	32	11–12-year-olds

Demographic information was collected at the time of study and was provided to me directly from the participants. Participants working within this age group of young girls aged 6 to 14 years old were confirmed before the interview took place. Six of the seven participants were female; attempts to include more males within the participant pool were challenging. Women typically dominate the education industry at 75 to 95% based on age of the instruction (elementary to secondary school; National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). This was seen even by my own observation when walking to

the classrooms of the teachers for interviews and observing relatively only female teachers in the halls/classrooms. This observation was based on my walk from the front office of the school directly to the classroom of the teacher being interviewed.

Five of the seven participants were teachers while one participant was employed as an inclusion coordinator and one a licensed therapist. While attempts were made to reach out to social workers in the Austin area, they predominantly worked with students aged 16 and older while child services and school counselors worked with kids aged 4 to 14 years old. While the social workers' experience did not qualify based on the age group they were most familiar with, they did recommend another counselor. The school counselor declined to interview based on the potential for identification of themselves and breach of confidentiality within their position.

The participant professional experiences within their positions varied from 9 months to 10 years. Those who had been in the industry for several years had similar observations and establishing similar inferences as those who were first-year teachers. This is discussed in further detail within the study results section. Additionally, participants who were in their early 20s were also having similar observations as those in their later 30s. Thus, no matter the experience level or age of the participant, a problem amongst the children being affected by the photoshopped ads and social media was apparent.

Data Collection

IRB approval to recruit participants and conduct the study was received on August 22, 2022, and recruiting began early September 2022. After a week of

coordination, the first interviews took place on September 9, 2022. The final interview was conducted on September 27, 2022, marking the end of data collection as saturation was met. This determination of saturation was agreed upon by myself, my chair, and methodologist, as no new data was brought forth by the participants during the interviews; this is discussed further in the chapter.

Interviews

Interviews were scheduled for in-person meetings at mutually agreed upon times and locations. From my Walden University Outlook email, a confirmation email was also sent ahead of the interview with information regarding the nature of the study/questions, the mandatory IRB consent form, and my personal contact information such as my cell phone number. Once confirmed, a 45-minute time block was allocated via a calendar invite from my Walden University Outlook calendar; this calendar invite provided the meeting time and place with a 1-hour reminder for the participant. Before starting the interviews, I ensured the participants understood the voluntary nature of the interview and that their name, company, and any identifying information would remain confidential.

The semistructured interview questions found in Appendix A served as a light script to ensure relative consistency of the data across the interviews. This relativity in the semistructured line of questioning gave me more freedom as a researcher to probe with any clarifying questions as well as explore unique experiences individual to the participant's responses. As noted across Chapter 3, a semistructured interview can allow the researcher the flexibility to probe for clarification during an interview (Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). Each interview lasted from 20 to 30 minutes; this did not include the brief introductions before the recording began. After each interview, participants seemed satisfied that they demonstrated an appropriate level of knowledge and responses on such a complex and psychological subject matter. They were genuinely interested in the subject of the study and were excited to see how it is being researched today. All interviews were recorded on my iPhone as it was placed with the recording feature on between the participant and myself.

During the interviews, I was able to capture various field notes, mostly noting the age group the participants were the most familiar with as well as the environment of the interview (if it was in their office or classroom). After the recordings had stopped, I reminded each participant they would have the opportunity to review their transcripts and make any changes they felt were necessary to their responses and would also be sent the final version of the research study once approved. I then thanked each of them in-person and via email for their support.

Once I left the interview, I made minor field notes on questions the participants were very comfortable answering and those that the participants seemed hesitant to answer; this is described in further detail later in the chapter. Some participants showed a mastery in their overarching observations, whereas some had limited knowledge of certain aspects, in particular when recommending any sort of policy change. This reflexivity following each interview allowed me to capture this dynamic across the participants. Field notes are a means of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and assisted in ensuring I remembered these unique details from each interview.

Processing of Interview and Coding Preparation

The iPhone audio files were transcribed using Rev.com. Upon return from Rev.com, typically within 3 to 12 hours, I reviewed transcripts to ensure accuracy of the transcription as well as redact any identifying details such as name and workplace if the participant happened to provide this info. Once this review was complete, transcripts were provided to the participants for their review and approval. Noted in the interview and email, they were given 7 days to make any corrections or edits to their transcripts. While only one participant requested to make edits to their age and experience/background, simply having this option provided them with ease and gave them a greater sense of comfortability when answering the questions.

Transcripts were prepared for coding using both Excel and NVivo 12 software with the predominant amount of coding taking place in Excel. The redacted Word files were named to correspond with the participant (e.g., "P-1 Transcript" to represent Participant 1) in preparation for these two coding softwares. This is described in further detail in the Data Analysis section. The following two sections describe the preparations required for coding.

Preparation for Manual Coding in Excel

Responses to the interviews were cut and pasted from the original Word transcript into the Excel file. As saturation was met so early on, it was clear to see the themes beginning to emerge before any actual coding process had begun. Additionally, the preliminary codes were easier to establish as the interviews were conducted using Seidman's (2006) 3-stage interviewing technique. The three stages used in my interview

were based on preliminary demographic information, whether the participant viewed photoshopping as a problem within the age group they were familiar with, and any sort of policy recommendation they had to ensure the young girls received protection. As part of this organization, I used the sheets in Excel to separate the questions from these sections.

Secondly, I added the questions from each section of the interview to these sheets and added the participant responses to its respective question and appropriate "P-1" type of label. Considering this was a sample size of seven, this organizational step was simple to keep it on the three excel sheets. Once the participant responses were added to the columns, I added additional organizational columns per each response, including their simplified answer of "yes/no/somewhat" as well as their occupation. This helped me quickly analyze their overarching response and the profession of the person who made such observations.

This manual coding process in Excel served two purposes. By beginning the coding process in Excel, I was able to see the data in one place and was able to identify by the fifth participant that saturation was met. Data saturation is said to occur when responses to questions cease to generate new data (Guest et al., 2006). I recognized saturation had been met by P-5, but with the recommendation from my chair, I continued with the final two interviews to confirm saturation. By the end of the interview with participant P-7, I was confident that new data were no longer being introduced. Although research has identified that 12 is a favorable minimum number of participants in qualitative research (see Guest et al., 2006), the responses and initial coding of those responses confirmed new conceptual codes were no longer appearing after P-5. I

concluded with my chair and committee member that my recognition of saturation was accurate.

The second reason for this manual coding procedure within Excel was to serve as a start for establishing codes within the NVivo 12 software. Early parent codes such as self-esteem influences, photoshopped ads, and protection, were compelling enough to begin a high-level process or organizing the data into more specific child nodes. The NVivo 12 software worked better for me when having some sort of baseline coding and understanding of the data from the manual process within Excel.

Preparation for Coding in NVivo 12

Certain data preparations were required to maximize the capabilities of the NVivo 12 software. The Word transcripts from interviews P-1 through P-7 were imported to the NVivo 12 Files domain. The P-1 through P-7 nomenclature was continued for file names in NVivo 12. To allow automated analysis features like word searches and word frequency visualizations, without capturing the words of the interviewer, the auto-coding feature was used to code each interview by speaker. Coding by speaker allowed for a specific case to be created based on each participant. Cases were similarly named P-1 through P-7 in NVivo 12.

Before coding the transcripts in NVivo 12, a coding table with some parent and child nodes needed to be prepared as a starting point for proper classification. Initial codes from the manual coding done in Excel allowed for such a starting point. Coding is described in more detail in the following section.

Data Analysis

As I familiarized myself with the data from the participants, I began searching for themes. As the participant's answers were relatively similar across the first three interviews, I began to see a few key ideas emerge: the use of photoshop in advertisements is a problem, and the predominant solution to this problem would require not only a policy change, but a shift in cultural norms entirely. By participant five, it was clear that no new themes had emerged but rather a few nuanced ideas reflected from each person. These nuances will be further discussed in the following section.

As described in Chapter 3, Saldana's (2021) two-cycle coding method was utilized across the data. Once the transcripts were approved by the participants, this two-cycle coding began with the use of emergent coding. This is the practice of establishing codes, categories, and themes as they arise from the participant responses (Saldana, 2021, p. 57). The use of the 3-stage interviewing technique helped tremendously in establishing overarching codes and organizing the data. Therefore, while I was beginning to recognize the themes with each interview as a first pass in the cyclical coding, the second cycle allowed me to get more descriptive using the participants own words. This is also known as "in vivo" codes (Saldana, 2021, p. 95). These codes will be discussed further in the following section.

Manual Coding in Excel

Using the prepared Excel spreadsheet labeled by interview sections, I added rows representing the overarching question of each section. Considering this was a semi-structured interview, all questions stemmed from a preliminary 7 questions with

additional probing questions beneath them. Therefore, adding the preliminary questions assisted in organizing their responses. Underneath the questions, I added four columns. These columns were labeled as theme, participant number, participant occupation, and descriptive response. Seeing the participant occupation and their descriptive answer assisted in triangulating the data to see if there were any phenomena between those with similar or different occupations. While manual coding is often deliberate and sometimes tedious, it did allow the me to clearly see the data and connections among the responses.

I worked on each question per interview section individually to allow for additional phrases or words to emerge from the initial codes. This use of descriptive coding assists in capturing "the basic topic of a passage" within qualitative data (Saldana, 2016). In question two, we focused on the impact a child's environment can have on their self-esteem and character development. Examples of these descriptive codes included "more followers, the greater influence" (P-6), "they take it personally" (P-3), "want to feel accepted" (P-3), "always watching" (P-2), "pick up everything" (P-2), "especially vulnerable" (P-2), and "so impressionable" (P-4). These descriptive codes are a "identification of the topic" (Saldana, 2016) to assist in establishing a greater theme. These words from the participants were color coded to allow for a more straightforward view of the themes.

In this early manual coding phase, I looked for patterns across the participant's responses. The use of descriptive coding continued with a review of each participant's responses from the other questions within the semi-structured interview. The field notes were not particularly useful when analyzing these codes, but rather assisted in the day-to-

day personal briefing for myself between participant interviews. An example of my field notes included noting pauses before answering various questions, noting their body language during recall when thinking back for a particular question, as well as noting when participants would unconsciously bring up their personal experience with the topic. While my field notes were not that useful when analyzing the transcripts or themes, they greatly assisted me in seeing saturation of responses as the participants were so similar in how they carried themselves no matter their age or experience-level.

In addition to the descriptive response columns, I also identified themes from the responses. Themes are "recurrent experience[s]" to which the researcher may apply meaning (Saldana, 2016). At this point in the manual coding process, themes were established for each question before combining them into overarching themes to represent the study as a whole. An example of these smaller themes can be seen across question 4, which focused on young girl's ability to discern a digitally manipulated image from reality. Examples of these preliminary initial themes were, reality, gullible, trusting, and unattainable. The subsequent analysis would bring such similar themes together. At this early stage of manual coding, it was too soon to fully appreciate the unique subtleties reflected from participant responses and I expected NVivo to be a better tool in assisting with this data analysis.

The manual coding process was an effective way to begin the coding process in such early stages. I had planned to use NVivo as a primary use of coding but recognized given my limited experience with the software as a researcher, it would be more useful to map out the responses and coding in Excel manually before moving to the software. With

the codes, concepts, and preliminary themes identified, I began working with NVivo 12 with an objective coding reference in place.

Coding in NVivo

Once the transcripts were individually uploaded to the Files section of the NVivo 12 software, coding could begin. The software allowed for the coding of files by highlighting, dragging, and dropping into the respective parent/child nodes. This option was a little unreliable and kept unhighlighting my sections, so I used the dropdown menu to place them into the appropriate nodes. The parent nodes were decided by the section of the interviews and child nodes with more specific categories were established beneath them. An example of this is seen with the parent node "Self-Esteem Influences" with the subsequent child nodes as "Social Media," "General Environment," "Friends," and "Family." I was able to test the accuracy of the codes by clicking the Highlight option from the View section. This highlighted how the codes were recorded into the appropriate parent and child node categories. Once satisfied with my transition of the codes in NVivo, I then attempted both inductive and deductive coding.

Inductive Coding in NVivo

While the early NVivo table was primarily based on the Excel coding table and nodes from this first-pass at coding, it assisted in allowing me to work inductively with the data to establish further nodes. Allowing the details from the data to emerge through the coding process is an inductive process across the research (Saldana, 2016). When reviewing the interview transcript files, I was able to see the data in its raw form which allowed for the initial descriptive codes and phrases to present themselves. As I saw new

codes emerging that I did not already have a category for, I simply added a parent node with that topic and a child node as it became more specific. An example of this would be establishing the parent node "Photoshopped Ads" and the child nodes as "Undetectable," "Short-term impact," and "Long-term impact."

The NVivo coding process continued with my coding of interviews P-1 through P-7 over several days. The focus required balanced reading among the participant's words and then identifying appropriate codes. As saturation was so apparent and the interviews had a similar flow, keeping this straight did not prove difficult.

Deductive Coding in NVivo

When looking at how the codes might best be associated with the polarities of democracy theoretical framework, I began categorizing the codes by the two outlined polarities mentioned in Chapter 2: freedom and authority as well as human rights and communal obligation. This method of coding is consistent with Saldana's (2016) deductive methodology as it focuses on fitting the codes into defined terms. While attempting this, I realized that I had not defined what a specific facilitator or barrier was at this point in the research. Yet, I was aware that a facilitator allows something to happen while a barrier inhibits or challenges something from happening. The RQ emphasizes the perceptions of the participants as it pertains to how public policies could mitigate the negative effects of false advertising and media on the development of young girls. Understanding how some may view the potential public policy as a barrier or facilitator of improved self-esteem in young girls is discussed further in the results section.

Development of Themes

Once all seven transcripts were reviewed, then came the task of identifying themes. Understanding how these individual codes fit together as patterns or different interpretations of recurring codes is a relatively subjective process that is based solely on the researcher and their understanding of the subject matter. I initially chose overarching codes based on each section of the interview such as "Demographics," "Self-Esteem Influences," and "Public Policy" with several child nodes beneath their respective parent nodes mentioned above. While qualitative research does not rely on the quantity of codes as a measure of analysis, the frequency of these codes established some level of importance; this was further established as saturation was met and continued to be met. The examination of themes will be explored further in the Results section of this chapter.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is established across qualitative research to ensure the quality and rigor is adequate to the reliability and validity found in quantitative research. As described in Chapter 3, qualitative research uses the standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to measure for "truth" (Ravitch & Carl, 2015, p. 188). Evidence of trustworthiness from the study was satisfied and is further assessed below. The assessment below includes the four criteria for determining trustworthiness within a given study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credibility is deemed as the researcher's ability to deal with the complexities within a study at any given stage of the research process. My research conformed to the highest standards within Walden University's IRB using a research plan approved on August 22, 2022. To further mitigate these complexities, I used proven methodologies to ensure my identified potential for bias was addressed. Those methods included member checking, maintaining a reflexivity journal across the interviews, confirming the results of my literature review across Chapter 2, and triangulation of data with field notes (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Transferability

Transferability is more closely aligned with the external validity of the study. This is seen as the research findings are "generalizable to the population of interest" (Burkholder et al., 2016). The use of thick descriptions supported the transferability by requiring that I provide adequate details of the study's characteristics, such as "setting, participants, and evidence in support of findings" (Burkholder et al., 2016). The research setting and participants were addressed in Chapter 4; the evidence was analyzed in both Chapter 4 and 5. Saturation is determined when new data ceased to emerge (Laverty, 2003) and therefore, my study had reached saturation. I described my recognition of saturation in the Data Collection section, as well as how I concluded with my sample size of seven.

Dependability

Dependability is related to the stability of the study and its ability to remain consistent over time (Burkholder, 2016). The research and methodology used in this study were consistent with previously proven methods. An example of this was the semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix A), a consistent recording and transcription method, member checking with the responses, and sufficient coordination and oversight with my chair across the research process. An IRB- approved recruitment process also allowed for necessary variations of both purposeful and snowball sampling, previously described in Chapter 3. Lastly, the categorization of thematic codes and categories followed a logistical construct which could be derived by other qualitative researchers working with this subject matter.

Confirmability

Confirmability is seen within the study in its ability to remain objective and neutral with the findings, ensuring the results are free from researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2015, p. 189). Steps were taken and outlined in Chapter 3 where I used specific research tools to ensure my stance as a researcher remained objective. Providing this objectivity within the study was useful not only for the absence of influence on participant responses, but also to ensure independent researchers could draw similar findings from the same data (Burkholder et al., 2006). I provided extensive samples from the participant's responses, often citing significant passages from their responses, which was further associated with the question for which it was derived. I also provided detailed explanations regarding how data was prepared for coding and how coding decisions

resulted in the overarching themes. Lastly, the full transcripts reflect how I asked for clarification of various responses during the recording as well as subsequent member checking.

Study Results

As I completed the coding in both Excel and NVivo, I had established seven parent nodes and 22 child nodes. Understanding the importance of these codes was further established at the end of the transcribing and coding process of all seven interviews. This understanding assisted in seeing which codes were most relevant to the research and further was confirmed or denied as useful with each additional interview. An example of this was understanding the level of makeup young girls are wearing today. While a few did say one or two items the girls are wearing such as mascara and eyeliner, it was not a pertinent detail in regard to how it affected the girl's self-esteem and rather a tool for experimenting. Additionally, compared to the detail given in things that are directly affecting their self-esteem, there was more emphasis given to items like friend groups and social media. It was not until completing the coding process that I was able to rank the usefulness of the codes from the participants.

I reflected on the RQ to support the process of searching for patterns, grouping, and merging the codes while also protecting against researcher bias. The RQ and theoretical framework guided the identification of themes by providing a pathway for grouping codes into larger categories of relevance to the research instead of relying solely on my own interpretation of the codes. By categorizing the codes into larger categories of

self-esteem influences, photoshopping impacts, and public policies assisted in ensuring the categories and codes established could be aligned more solidly with the RQ.

Through categorizing and analyzing these codes, I identified themes associated with the RQ and two polarity pairs from the theoretical framework. The larger themes included impressionable, deception, and protection. The subtleties and importance of each theme is described within the subsequent sections.

Figure 1 shows that all participants responded in the same way. Using Excel to showcase the responses from the participants, this represents how no matter the age, position, age group their most familiar with or experience level, all participants noted that they believe young girls cannot tell if an advertisement has been photoshopped.

Figure 1

If Students Can Detect That an Image Has Been Digitally Manipulated

Are students able to detect if an image has been digitally manipulated?
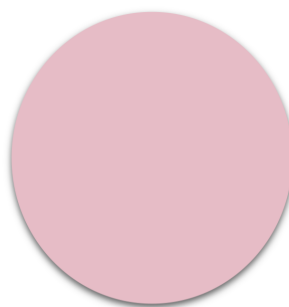
■ Can't detect - 100%

Theme 1: Impressionable

    The impressionable theme captured the participant's emphasis on how influenceable a young girl is to their environment. In Chapter 2, I identified the learning stages and the complexities of self-awareness and self-esteem of children based on their age. As I spoke with each participant, it was clear how profound, yet delicate a young girl's self-esteem can be as they develop their identity. From the participants, this identity is based on their general environment, family, and friends. Understanding how a young girl's environment and what they are exposed to at any given point can have an impact on how they view themselves and others.

    When opening the discussion of this topic, many participants had similar responses to the importance of what and who a young girl surrounds themselves with. Participant 6 noted,

> So much of societal things, what we internalize, whether it's from home, parents, from teachers or coaches, friends, especially at that age, because developmentally, we're taking in all of those things. We're forming our own thoughts and opinions, not only about self but about others, but a lot of times, we're internalizing who do I want to be? Who am I? How does all this translate into me? When we have those different experiences, a lot of times, they can become innate thoughts of what we're thinking and how we then interpret it as who we are. Yeah, environment is huge, huge, huge component in just how we process all of that and how we create that perception of self.

Participant 2 further concurred, "Children are always watching, children pick up everything. Everything that you say, everything that you do, they are so in tune to their surroundings." This importance given on how impressionable young girls are from their overall environment was useful in understanding the perception they have, even at the young age of 7 years old.

Participants also noted the significance on young girls' identity from their friends as compared to their family. Participant 3 noted,

I definitely think they get more [influence] from their friends just because it's an acceptance thing they want to feel accepted. And so then they kind of follow the trends of their friends, no matter what their parents actually say.

Participant 7 had a similar response:

I definitely think they're starting to be more social and more independent around this age. They're not as influenced by their family as they would be their peers. There's a lot of bullying that goes on in middle school. Students will say things about each other's appearance and the way they look, the way that their face is structured, or sometimes the way that they dress.

And lastly, Participant 3 added, "They hold a lot of weight in their friends and what people say to them or things that they see and that sticks with them."

On this topic of social media, several participants had a lot to say on how they see this tool impacting children in their classroom. Participant 4 said,

These girls are really influenced by TikTok, especially right now and all the TikTok trends. They're very focused on what's in and what's not in and fitting in

with their peers. So some girls will wear makeup to class and some don't care at all, but there are some that are very conscious about their appearance, and you can tell just from them talking to me or to their friends and that kind of things... I know TikTok has tons of people on there that they can see all kinds of things, but I know there's lots of beauty pages and things like that also. I know a couple of them, they've told me about, "Oh yeah, this person on TikTok has showed me video tutorials on how to do your hair," and things like that, so they'll try that. Participant 5 continued,

They talk about it pretty frequently. Like, "Oh, my TikTok got seven likes. I'm so excited." They don't realize that that's not a lot because at their age it is a lot. That's a lot to them, and they get really excited about it. Or I watched a girl delete her TikTok because it didn't have any likes, but it had views.

Participant 3 noted,

They're always worried about what they post and how other people are going to perceive them. They pick up from their friends they're going on this trend and then they feel like that's what they need to showcase on their social media and just the good parts only.

And finally, Participant 6 ended with, "The more followers you have, the greater influence that you are."

This impressionable theme is noted as the participant's perceptions in regard to how photoshopped advertisements could potentially play a role in altering how a young girl feels about themselves. This level of influence a young girl can be susceptible to is

noted across participant responses with the focus on their friends and social media

presence. I felt this was a crucial element to the study in understanding of the character

formation of young girls, especially through an observational lens like the participants

have.

Within Figure 2, participants noted if they believed their students or clients were

likely to harm themselves in some way. Examples of this harm included extreme dieting,

engaging in eating disorders, or physically harming themselves through actions such as

cutting themselves. A majority of the participants said the young girls they work with

would be likely to do it, while one participant noted their students were too young and the

second noted that some may be likely to but not all. This graph was created within Excel.

Figure 2

If Kids Are Likely to Hurt Themselves Based on False Beauty Standards

Kids likely to hurt themselves based on false beauty standards?

14%
14%
72%

■ Yes - 71.43%   ■ Somewhat - 14.29%   ■ Not Yet - 14.29%
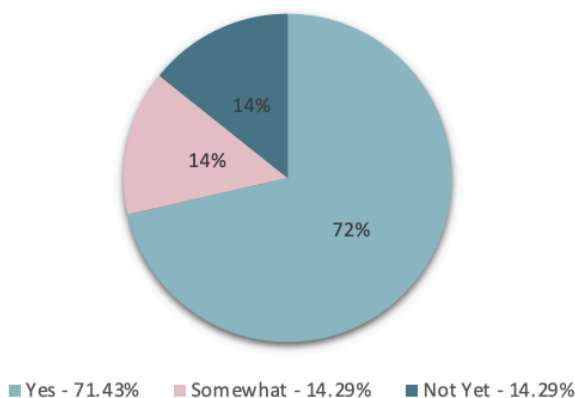
Theme 2: Deception

The theme deception is focused on young girl's inability to discern false images from the reality of what the models and influencers actually look like. This deception is presented through photoshopped manipulated images and videos, those of which the audience believes is unedited. Within question four of the interview, the use of photoshop was discussed with participants as it pertains to detecting if it has been used, short- and long-term impacts, as well as the effects of this deception on young girls viewing it.

On the topic of whether young girls can recognize an image has been photoshopped, Participant 1 said,

Honestly, I don't think the girls are able to tell the difference. I think that they think that's what girls look like, and that's the thing that scares me as an educator because I don't want them to think that that's how you have to look and that's the only way that you can be successful or be popular is if you look the certain way, because that's not true at all.

Participant 2 also responded,

Why would an adult deceive them? They, themselves, while they're old enough to know how to tell a lie. More often than not, 90% are completely trustworthy [with] any adult. So, if this lady, on this Vogue cover, for example, is presenting herself a certain way, if the magazine is presenting her a certain way, the magazine's run by adults, they'll believe it.

And lastly, in response to detecting anything too perfectly curated within an image or advertisement, Participant 7 also noted,

They are struggling to think critically, and that skill of being able to think

critically about what they're seeing is not quite there yet. If they're looking at a

picture, then it's very likely that they aren't thinking about the picture critically.

They're just seeing all those perfections and thinking, "I want my eyelashes to

look like that," because those are the ones I hear the most, eyelashes.

While it was established by the participants that the use of photoshopping within

advertisements can remain virtually undetectable, their insight into the short- and long-

term impacts that such manipulation can have, gave more clarity to the need for some sort

of protection. Instances of this impact were described by the participants below.

Many participants responded to short-term effects, especially noting how the

young girls deeply care to look like the person being shown to them in advertisements

and media. Participant 5 noted,

We did a journaling activity where the prompt was, "I wish," and almost every

single girl had, "I wish I was popular," or "I wish I was pretty," in it. Short term, I

think it can form impulsive, negative reactions or impulsive, like, "I want to look

like that," reaction.

Participant 6 further concurred,

I think it has a negative impact because when they go to try to achieve maybe that

same look and they're not able to look the same way, then that internalization of,

"Well, then I'm ugly," or, "I can't look like her," so it has a negative impact on

their self-esteem.

Participant 4 also gave a response that focused on how hyper fixated young girls are on their appearance and weight:

10-years old, they're just starting to go through puberty, and so they want to fit in. They want to be considered pretty by boys, by their friends. So they're seeing all these images of what society is telling them that they need to look like. They're like, "Oh, this is what everyone your age looks like, or wearing this makeup, doing these hairstyles, so you need to as well." We did a science experiment and we were talking about mass and weight and how, because of the gravity on earth you would weigh different here than you do on other planets. So we weighed the students individually, separately, out in the hall, but so they could enter it into a website to see how much they would weigh on Mars and Jupiter, just so they can connect those dots. I had one girl who was very concerned about it because she didn't want people to make fun of how much she weighed. So, I reassured her, I was like, "It's in the hallway, nobody's going to know. It's only for you and you don't have to do it. You can make up a number if you want." So just little things like that I think will carry over, especially with cosmetics and their looks and just really start to build up their self-esteem issues with themselves and not feel happy about what they look like or what they're wearing or stuff like that.

The last notable response to this short-term impact and how falsely curated images can harm young girl's self-esteem, Participant 7 gave one of the first responses in how she observed her students discussing the portrayal of beauty with makeup and how it can also be related to race:

If you're being exposed to things in the media about this is what beautiful looks

like or even just differences in what beauty is defined as, what skin tones, what

face structure, there's all these different definitions of what beauty could look like,

but if the media portrays one type of beauty, then it becomes the new thing. For

example, one of my students said that there was a kid who gave a girl some

foundation, and it was a lighter skin tone. She says, "Put this on so you can be

more beautiful," and the girl was of a darker complexion. So there's these

instances where beautiful becomes almost this racial issue too. Students aren't

seeing themselves portrayed in the media enough, and that can affect how other

people are interacting with them and how they perceive themselves too.

As a researcher, I felt this was a critical point at which the topic of race was seen

as one skin tone being compared to another, especially by 11–12-year-olds. Young girls

are given these types of messages through advertisements and media, to then begin

practicing such behaviors with their friends. I felt that this response was critical to note as

it could have the potential for a long-term negative impact if the media continued in its

current path.

In connecting this perception from participants on the short-term impacts as well

as the long-term ones, Participant 1 said, "I definitely think that [photoshopped images

are] going to have a greater negative impact, the farther and farther we get, because you

do start seeing more depression." Participant 5 responded to the same question:

Long term, will start to idealize that that's the way they should look and then it

could cause some issues when they don't look like that. If they're seeing

something different and idealizing that and never seeing the unattainable form of
that, it'll slowly but progressively alter the way that people view and look at
bodies and faces.

And finally, Participant 7 said,

I think a lot of what takes place in your younger years definitely has an effect on
your development. It can hurt your self-esteem. I've noticed they're just so much
more sensitive to things at this age [11-12 years old], and if they're exposed to it,
it sticks with them.

As the participants answered this question on the short- and long-term impact this
can have on young girls, a few participants noted how this behavior can lead to young
girl's hurting themselves in some form in an effort to look more like the person in the
advertisements and media. Participant 6 said,

I know for sure in working with a lot of the girls that I've worked with, even as
young as second, third grade, which that's like seven, eight... Not eating or having
already unhealthy eating habits or an unhealthy relationship with food where
they're not eating or counting calories already and I'm like, how do you even
know what a calorie is? You're six. You're seven. Because they want to look a
certain way or they have to have a flat stomach because crop tops are a big thing
now, and so, yeah, definitely. Self-harm and all of that comes with feeling less
than or like they're not good enough, don't look the part. And so yeah, it starts to
take a toll on their mental capacity of how they see themselves. That pain is

associated with it so it's like, "Oh, this will help me alleviate that pain," so then they start to self-harm.

Participant 3 noted, "They will try to eat the bare minimum, or they will... Let me see, oh, to get the perfect skin tone they would skip class. They would skip class to go tan during a certain UV ray." Participant 7 responded, "I had a student that would throw up after lunch. She was showing signs of anorexia, or bulimia, sorry, bulimia." And finally, Participant 2 noted,

And in places around the world, especially The United States, we need to treat this self-esteem, almost like an epidemic, because it does cause eating disorders. It does cause suicides. And it does cause mental illness, psychological disfunction in students, so we should treat this like an epidemic. And whatever is necessary, even if it means putting limits on what companies and social medias can [publish]. The kinds of images that they can send out. I think that that's something that should be considered.

Figure 3 represents whether the participants believed the use of a watermark would assist in recognizing edited/unedited advertisements. Many participants believed their students would not understand what was meant by photoshopping or digitally editing an image. This is comparative to the majority who did believe the use of a watermark would help in recognizing how an image was manipulated. Those who answered somewhat believe that some sort of education would need to accompany such a watermark, so the girls knew what it meant and how to look for it. This graph was created using Excel.

Figure 3

If a Watermark Would Help Students Recognize If an Ad Has Been Photoshopped

Would a watermark help students recognize if an ad has been photoshopped?

■ Yes - 57.14%
■ Somewhat - 42.86%
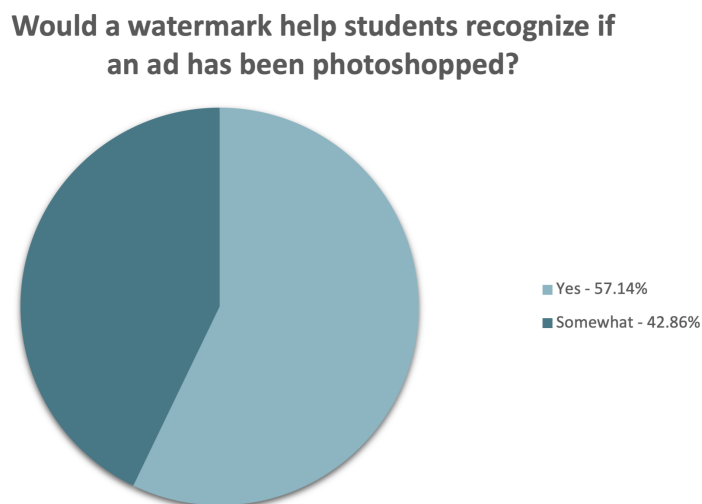
Theme 3: Protection

The theme of protection was discussed with participants as means of identifying potential policies and practices that could provide a safeguard for young girl's self-esteem. While the participants spoke mostly on the influence of self-esteem and the effects of photoshopped advertisements, this topic of potential public policies gave a majority of them the most pause. Therefore, it was easier for them to recognize a problem existed, while discussing a potential solution was more difficult. The predominant responses included providing a watermark/disclaimer, a threshold for level of photoshopping allowed, and last promoting truly natural models. The participant responses are noted below.

Participant 1 noted how the watermark/disclaimer for photoshop being used or not used could be useful for a younger audience:

I think they need to know, "This picture that you're looking at and admiring has been touched up. This is not what the person looks like." So I think that would be great if there was law or legislator saying any photoshopped pictures have to inform the reader that this has been done to it, or vice versa. If it's untouched, they should be able to promote that, but I feel like promote it proudly.

While Participant 3 concurred,

I think the watermark would be cool to just like, oh really? I didn't know that that was even Photoshop. I think it would be cool to see, but then it would also be kind of a relief to kind of know like, okay, well this is photoshopped.

Using some sort of watermark/disclaimer would also need to be accompanied with the understanding of what this message even means. Participant 7 noted, "For students, they would really have to know what that watermark meant, but I do think it might help to make them more aware of just how often it happens."

Participant 2 also recognized an understanding for what could be a public safety issue rather than a freedom to advertise:

The First Amendment, specifically, I think that images do fall under freedom of speech. This is The United States and any amount of freedoms should certainly be exercised. And I think that companies do have the freedom to be able to advertise, in any way that they want, and do whatever they want. However, when it comes to things in the name of public safety, for example, there's heavy restrictions on

cigarette advertisements. They're required to put those warnings on. The government, it's not a new concept, that the government has stepped up to the plate and said, "We're going to make these restrictions.

While the topic of a disclaimer was discussed, participants added comments demonstrating how photoshopped advertisements are such a common practice, that they would also feel comfortable with a particular limit being placed on the practice of photoshopping advertisements. Participant 5 said,

If you're going to add a little bit of mascara or a little bit of that, sure, or cover up a blemish on occasion, sure, but also, you need to say that. But if you're completely altering a person's body type or changing the way their teeth look or fixing their nose, changing those unattainable and unchangeable body features isn't okay.

On a similar note, Participant 1 noted,

Also do things like put limits on the amount of touches or things that they do to people, because ... Yeah. That would actually help, because then if you're limiting and saying, "Okay, we're not touching up her whole face, we're not making her nose slimmer, we're not making the eyebrows up higher," just having a limit of what can you do.

Finally, Participant 2 also noted,

While I don't think that we need to certainly police every Maybelline mascara advertisement, there needs to be something done regarding... There needs to be a set, set of standards, right? And each image created, disseminated, by the

company, whether it be in Times Square, on the jumbo screens, or pushed through to the social media platforms, there should be a nationally recognized set of standards.

Figure 4 shows the unanimity from all participants in that they believe social media should be promoting models with genuine features rather than photoshopped videos and images. All participants noted this would assist in improving young girls' self-esteem. This graph was created using Excel.

Figure 4

If Media Should Promote Truly Natural Models Instead of Photoshopped Ones

Should media promote truly natural models instead of photoshopped ones?
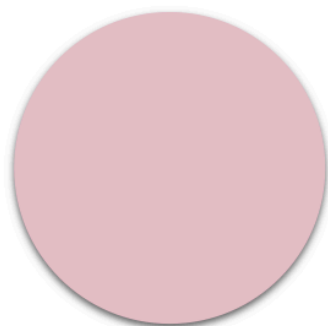
■ Yes - 100%

Along with the use of a disclaimer/watermark on photoshopped advertisements and assessing limits to the manipulation allowed, promoting untouched models was also frequently brought up with the participants. Participant 6 said, "I think it could have a great impact on being a self-esteem booster to see this is a non-edited image. This is the

real person, what they look like, so that then, they have that visual in their heads."

Participant 3 also concurred in saying,

> I think just providing maybe an alternative magazine of just all natural girls, no
> Photoshop, nothing. I feel like providing just an alternative, because you're
> always going to have the glam makeup and everything, but if you give them the
> option to have an alternative of just natural, free living, I feel like that would kind
> of benefit them too, just because it's not all about the glam. So I would probably
> say take away the Photoshop and trimming to the waist and all of that. Take away
> all of that and just everything be real and see in real life. I think makeup would
> still look great if we were able to see the flaws. So I would just say, take away the
> Photoshop completely or add the little disclaimer so that everybody knows what's
> real and what's not. I just think that's a big thing in this world today is we have to
> be real and everything is so fake and you just don't know what is real and what's
> fake.

In line with this use of promoting truly natural models, Participant 4 also stated,

> Some companies have started to try to use, not necessarily photoshopped, but
> more inclusive size models, which I think is great for young girls to see, sorry, to
> see people that look like them and different ethnicities and stuff like that. By not
> putting in that photoshopped filter and effect, I think that would be great to be
> like, "Hey, you can have blemishes on your face and still be considered
> beautiful... or stretch marks on your legs and still be a model."

The participant responses in regard to protection are analyzed through the lens of mitigating the effects of false advertising through use of public policy. In Chapter 5, I will further explore how other themes such as deception (Theme 2) and protection (Theme 3) may affect recommendations for public policy recommendations in regard to safeguarding young girl's self-esteem from current media practices.

Summary

Throughout Chapter 4, I have described my data collection process in reference to the RQ. Identification of relevant themes within the data may help identify how to mitigate the negative impacts of advertising and media on the development of young girl's self-esteem. I provided detailed descriptions of the IRB approved recruiting process, data collection, and preparation specifics, my considerations for applying thematic coding, and extensive samples of the participant responses.

My research plan and implementation took steps to ensure the trustworthiness expected of all qualitative research was described in this chapter. Participant responses provided rich detail to the themes found from deliberative coding analysis; this thematic coding analysis was completed in both Excel and NVivo. In Chapter 5, I will interpret the results, identify where the results fit into the existing body of research as described in Chapter 2, as well as suggest areas for further study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the gap in the research literature by focusing on perceptions of informed participants regarding what public policies might serve to mitigate the negative impacts of advertising and media on development of self-esteem among young girls. The findings confirmed certain perceptions of negative impacts on young girls from use of Photoshop in advertisements, more specifically from advertisements within the beauty industry. The use of such advertising practices, especially on advertisements seen by young girls aged 6 to 14 years old, can have short- and long-term impacts on their mental health and well-being. Further, I focused on the perspective of those observing and working with young girls on a daily basis either in a therapist or educational setting. This was done to assist in providing more objectivity from the participant, rather than speaking with young girls directly who may not even be aware of their behavior, or the effects false advertising has on them. The age among which young girls are exposed to these advertisements played a role in how various participants responded. While most participants working with 6- to 8-year-olds saw fewer impacts from false advertising on their student's mental health, those working with 10- to 14-year-olds had much more experience in witnessing these negative effects. The findings from this study may inform policymakers and decision makers of considerations for ongoing and future reforms of current advertising practices.

The specific conditions of the perceived negative impacts on young girl's self-esteem and potential public policy reform are interpreted in the following section. The research findings are examined through an empirical lens as well as theoretical one. This

allows a more elevated discussion on how democracy can be levied to protect young

girls, as well as generations to come. In Chapter 2, I confirmed that there is a need for

policy reform based on the large amount of data showcasing the negative effects of false

advertising and how the beauty industry advertises in general. My research represents the

first of its kind to look at this type of primary data from the perspective of public policy

reform in conjunction with the polarities of democracy framework.

In this chapter, I interpret the research findings, describe limitations of the study,

and offer recommendations for both researchers and policymakers. Further, I discuss

implications for social change as well as theoretical implications of the study. Lastly, I

conclude the chapter by identifying an opportunity for policymakers such as those in

Congress to consider how current advertising practices have harmed young girls and how

they may create change for this generation.

Interpretation of Findings

In Chapter 2, I described the complex environment in which the practice of false

advertising can have a negative impact on a younger audience. As children can begin

internalizing life-altering beliefs as young as 7 years old (Leroux et al., 2009), it is

imperative that some sort of protection is placed on advertisers' ability to "enlarge eyes,

trim ears, fill in hairlines, straighten and whiten teeth and lengthen the already narrow

necks, waists, and legs of 18-year-old beauties" (Bennett, 2008). This protection is meant

to safeguard young girls' self-esteem as they do not possess the ability to discern reality

from what is falsely presented to them in advertisements (see Figure 1). The findings of

this research further confirmed how children may be more likely to harm themselves in an effort to look more like what is presented to them.

Applying the Theoretical Framework

In Chapter 1, I described how false advertising practices within the beauty and cosmetic industry can have a negative impact on young girls. Applying Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy theoretical framework elevated the research for an examination of the underperformance of aspects of democracy. Two of Benet's five polarity pairs are specifically relevant to the condition of protecting young girls' self-esteem from false beauty standards that are digitally manufactured. The polarity pairs of freedom and authority and human rights and communal obligation are used below to further interpret Themes 1, 2, and 3.

The polarity map in Figure 5 is useful for interpreting data in the context Benet's (2013) framework, polarities of democracy. The maps used to visually represent the polarity pairs are described below by Benet (2022):

Basic Maps represent just one example of the potential positive and negative aspects of the Polarities of Democracy pairs. They should not be thought of as the only possible positive or negative aspects of the ten values that make up the five pairs of the Polarities of Democracy theory. Nor should the higher purpose and deeper fear associated with an individual pair be thought of as the only possibility. Students reading my original dissertation research, or conducting their own research, can find dozens if not hundreds of other examples of positive and

negative aspects that could be used in the appropriate quadrants along with an appropriate higher purpose and deeper fear.

This polarity map, seen in Figure 5, allows for further identification of action steps that may help gain or maintain the positives of a polarity. Alternatively, the external warning signs can reflect indicators of movement towards the negatives of a polarity. The generic polarity map can be adapted and customized for each polarity pair and is a useful tool for quickly visualizing how the polarity pair can be effectively leveraged (Johnson, 1992). The upper green bubble indicates where a greater purpose statement is written, while the lower red bubble reflects where a deeper fear is written (Benet et al., 2022).

Figure 5

Polarity Map Template
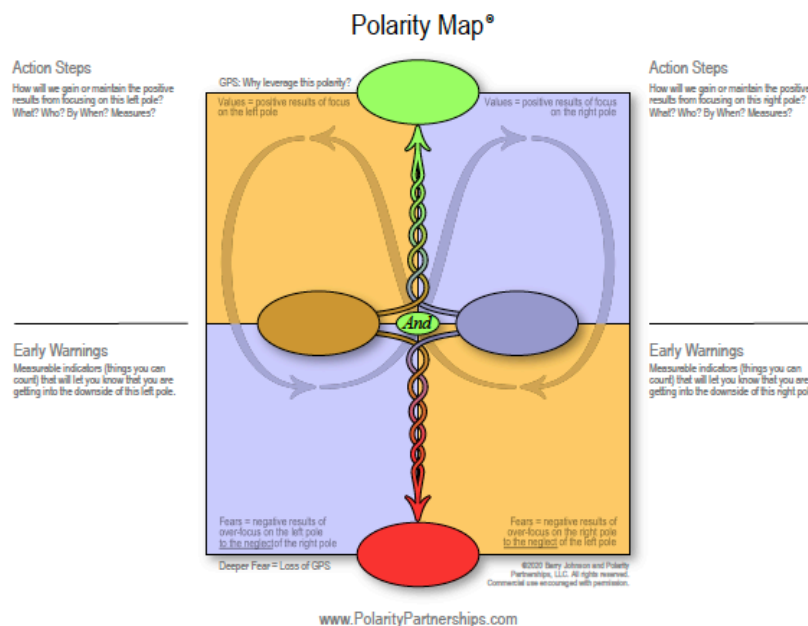
Note. Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships, LLC and the Institute for the Polarities of Democracy. See Appendix C for approval letter.

In the next sections, I describe how the polarity pairs of freedom and authority and human rights and communal obligation can populate Figure 1 consistent with Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy theory. After interpreting the themes that emerged from my research, I then suggest how each theme can influence positive or negative attributes of the respective polarity pair.

Benet's (2006, 2012, 2013) research of relational paradigms within democracies is helpful as the issues surrounding false advertising and its effects on young girls' self-esteem and mental health inhibit the promotion of democracy and instead promote oppression to this population. Benet's (2013) work confirmed there can be multiple explanations for the underperformance of a democracy and that democracy should be "a solution to the problem of oppression" (p. 31). Benet (2013) used the term "oppression" (p. 31), which is more commonly associated with issues of social justice. I used the control aspect of oppression to refer to how current photoshopping/false advertising practices fail specific populations, such as young girls.

Freedom and Authority

This polarity pair is helpful when exploring the relationship between freedom and legitimate authority (Benet, 2006, 2012b). In the case of false advertising and its impact on young girls, we can look at how advertisers have the freedom to manipulate persons within advertisements as there is relatively no legitimate authority placing restrictions on the freedoms. In turn, viewers of such advertisements, such as young girls, are not able to discern what is reality and what has been digitally manipulated. This continuous lack of unawareness among the viewers can lead to self-harm and self-esteem deprivation as the

young girls chase such standards of false beauty. Using the polarity map, Figure 6 depicts freedom and authority from the left to right poles respectively. The upper bubble indicates a greater purpose statement of the polarity as "initiative and guardianship" (Benet et al., 2022). The lower bubble indicates a deep fear of the polarity as "irresponsibility and domination" (Benet et al., 2022).

Figure 6

Polarity Map for Freedom and Authority Polarity Pair
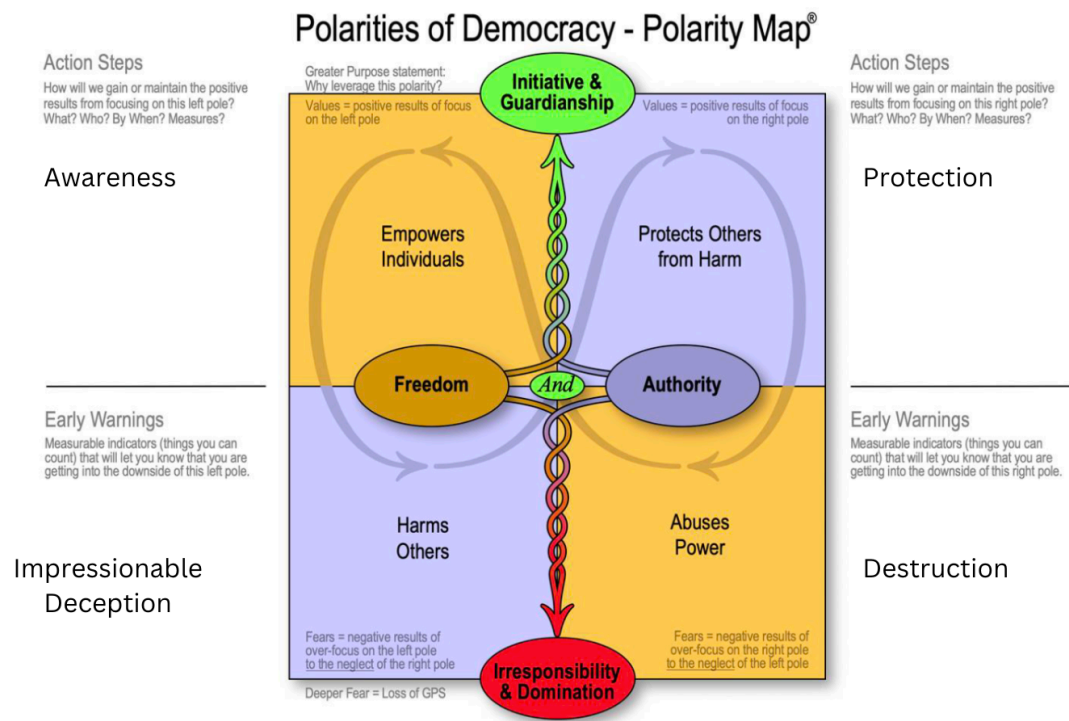
Note. Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships and the Polarities of Democracy Institute.

Awareness and protection not only empower young girls but assist in limiting the level of awareness required when interpreting manipulated advertisements. This awareness aspect can come from personal education or that from parents and educators on how manipulated advertisements can be. Greater awareness among those viewing the advertisements provides greater freedom from the psyche of false beauty standards perpetuated from advertisers. Additionally, protection from an authority standpoint can assist in policymakers establishing laws and regulations encouraging those creating the advertisements to use realistic standards when creating the advertisements, something many participants recommended. This policy regulation can also serve to encourage businesses to refrain from using photoshop within advertisements such as those in Massachusetts. Mentioned previously in Chapter 2, offering tax incentives for qualified businesses who can prove they did not partake in digitally altering and manipulating persons within their advertisements for the appropriate tax year (Bill H.3892, 2019).

Conversely, viewing the lower quadrants of each pole using deception among an impressionable audience suggests an early sign of this polarity pair, ultimately leading to the ineffective leveraging of the freedom and authority pair. Such early warning signs indicate conditions of movement away from the positives above and towards the negatives more closely associated with irresponsibility and domination. The themes are not directly inverse, but rather subjective. This makes them suitable for possible techniques wherein policies and methods stemming from the polarity can be more effectively managed.

In the effective management of this polarity pair, improving young girls' awareness to such falsely created images and media can assist in reducing their level of impressionability further reducing the ability for advertisers to cause deception. Additionally, as appropriate protections are put in place to protect young girls from digitally manufactured beauty standards, the potential for destruction of their self-esteem and future are greatly reduced. Using the upper polarity pairs can assist in establishing initiative and guardianship, while failure to improve these areas can lead to irresponsibility and domination.

Human Rights and Communal Obligations

Within this polarity pair, the focus on human rights is integral to "sustaining human evolution" (Benet, 2006, p. 211) while the communal obligations are used to promote a sense of shared commitments within a culture (Benet et al., 2022). Across Chapter 2, I highlighted the importance of this pair in its direct effort to effectively leverage democracy for young girls. An example of this is seen as the human rights of young girls are put at risk through false digital manipulation of idealized beauty images, while community obligations fall on those disrupting the cultural of self-esteem who put such images in front of these populations.

Figure 7 adapts the polarity map template that serves this polarity pair as it serves all polarity pairs; the upper quadrants are the positives and lower quadrants are the negatives. Human rights and communal obligations each reflect the left and right pole. The upper bubble indicates one highest purpose of this pair, maximizing the positive aspects of human rights and communal obligations achieves "independence and

belonging" (Benet et al., 2022). The lower bubble represents a deeper fear of the polarity pair, "greed and supremacy," where the negatives are maximized and the positives are minimized (Benet et al., 2022).

Figure 7

Polarity Map of Human Rights and Communal Obligation
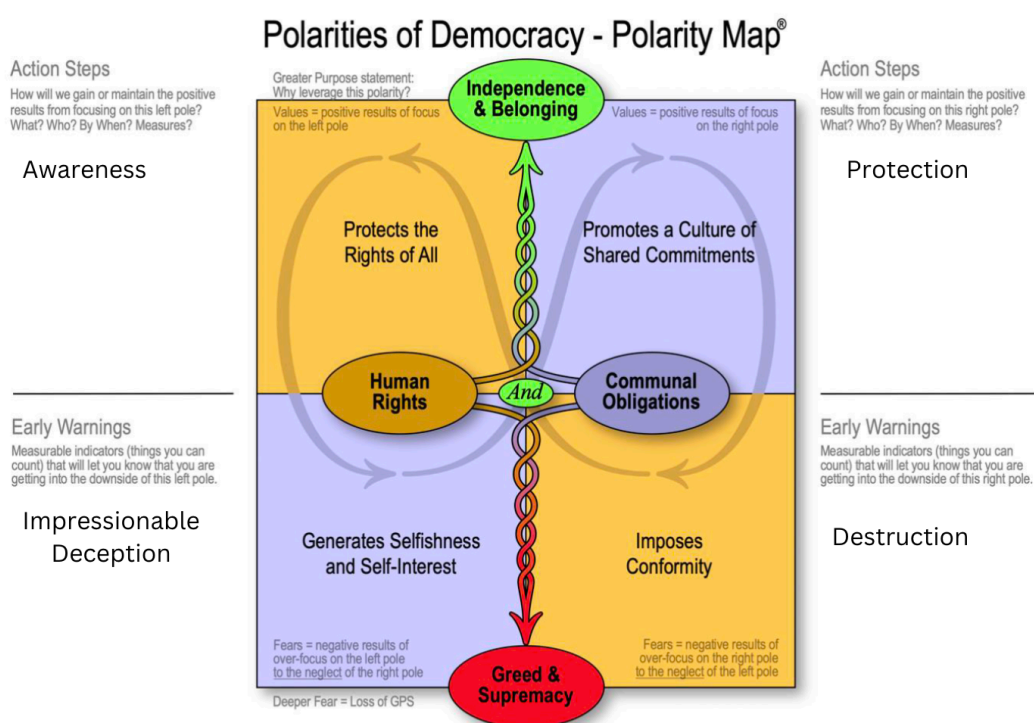
Note. Image reproduced with permission of Polarity Partnerships, LLC and the Institute for the Polarities of Democracy.

My research indicated varying degrees to which false advertising affects young girls. Participant responses supported the observation that young girls do not have the capability to discern a falsely produced image from reality. Further, and consistent with

the communal obligations upper quadrant in Figure 7, having protection within the culture fostered belonging no matter who and how someone is depicted on an advertisement. An example of this positive aspect can be the community of advertisers choosing not retouch models features, which encourages a greater sense of belonging for their audience and further encourages confidence in young girls to feel like they belong.

Conversely, when viewing the lower quadrants of each pole, deception among an impressionable audience is used to generate self-interest and greed among advertising companies. This is seen as companies use photoshopped advertisements to portray an ideal woman with problems solved by a particular product, with the underlying message often meaning, this is what women should strive to look like, and this product will give women this. Additionally, when looking at the lower quadrant of communal obligations, this conformity perpetrates creative and individual destruction as the young girls strive to look more alike rather than celebrate their differences. Such early warning signs indicate conditions of movement away from the positives above and towards the negatives more closely associated with greed and supremacy.

Themes

The themes that emerged from the data in Chapter 4 represented the perceptions from individuals working directly with young girls aged 6 to 14 years old. They included therapists, inclusion coordinators, and teachers; they varied in age, ages they worked with, as well as in levels/years of experience. The use of semistructured interviews based on the questions in Appendix A allowed the data to emerge without asking the RQ directly of the participants. In doing so, the questions elicited responses that revealed the

participant's insight into what they were observing directly. In reviewing the themes, I describe how each one was identified as well as perceptions on how to mitigate the negative impact from it. Later, I apply the theoretical lens of the polarities of democracy polarity pairs, freedom and authority and human rights and communal obligation, to the same data. In doing so, I identify ways in which those polarity pairs might be effectively leveraged in support of democratic ideals on which protecting young girl's self-esteem within our democracy is prioritized.

Theme 1: Impressionable

My analysis of the results generated by my study indicated that young girls are impressionable and vulnerable to messages and behaviors they are exposed to. As described in Chapter 2, how the young girl should look can be coupled with learned behaviors of self-deprecation and reduced self-esteem and are predominantly based on the media they see and influence from friends. This process of comparing themselves to what the media is publishing as a standard of beautiful is especially problematic if the images they compare themselves to have been altered or retouched without them being aware of such acts (Leroux et al., 2009). My study has further confirmed that young girls are not capable of automatically detecting the use of photoshop within advertisements.

Additionally, the use of social media within the classroom was also noted across the majority of the interviews. This plays a role in how impressionable young girls are as they are using their free time in classes to try various trending hairstyles or makeup looks from the digital platforms. As the users interact on the platforms, the home page is continuously tailoring what each user sees based on the videos they are watching most.

For young girls, there is a larger advertisement base influencing purchases for Disney products, toys, makeup, and provocative clothes, than there would be for the average young boy (McGladrey, 2014). Therefore, young girls are continuously being exposed to advertisements and videos showcasing what advertisers define is most beautiful through unattainable artificially enhanced images that falsely portray that beauty. Therefore, my research can assist in further extending how false advertising is not only a problem for consumers but detrimental for the mental health of young girls especially if they are exposed to it daily.

Theme 2: Deception

The theme of deception is noted as advertiser's publish images as if they were not photoshopped; therefore, the audience and especially young girls are more likely to believe the image presented to them is reality. A common response to this question from participants were along the lines of what P-2 shared: "Why would an adult deceive them?... More often than not, 90% [of students] are completely trustworthy [with] any adult." As the girls are flooded with images and videos of the "standard" of beauty, the perceived absence of beauty can lead to deep emotional distress in someone causing psychological harm or malice (Kim & Lee, 2018). Further, the use of such body-positive messages on false advertisements can lead to further disconnect with young girls as they internalize feeling guilty for not having higher self-esteem. This is consistent with McCabe et al.'s (2020) findings in that current beauty advertising practices destabilize women's perceptions of beauty with unrealistic expectations via photoshop coupled with messages of greater self-love and confidence. As this confusing advertising methodology

challenges what young girls should strive to look like, they turn to methods of self-harm and restrictions in an effort to meet such impossible standards. My study concurred with Hedaoo and Gavaravarapu (2020) in that that body dysmorphia or body discontentment was present in 58.75% of participants (p. 413); my study showed at least 71% of participants believed young girls are currently or likely to harm themselves (see Figure 2) in an effort to meet the perceived beauty standard.

An note that was also relatively confirmed from my study and the research literature, is the emphasis young girls place on being popular. Lamb et al. (2016) noted how young girls affirm their self-esteem and appearance based on positive affirmations from peers; being the object of jealousy or greater acceptance in a peer group correlates to a "positive performance" of sexy (p. 536). My study showed that 4 of the 7 participants said they believe young girls in their classrooms may "feel a need to be popular at any cost" (Question 2, Appendix A). Some participants further elaborated that they saw a transformation from a student after being introduced to social media; the student started dressing and acting different and eventually "dropped" her initial friend to be part of a more popular crowd (Participant 1). I believe this aspect of belonging could be further explored as well as the measures young girls may put themselves through to obtain such belonging.

Theme 3: Protection

While it's been noted across the study how young girls can be so receptive to the messaging they're exposed to, there was the most hesitancy from participants in discussing how to protect this population. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the beauty and

cosmetic industry is worth several hundred billion and only expected to continuously grow. The stronghold from this industry coupled with a lack of regulations on best practices and preserving young girl's self-esteem is leading to a deep sense of life-altering insecurities in girls as young 6-years-old. As young girls are brought up with images depicting what a product will "fix" on them, they begin to buy into the products without realizing how photoshopped an advertisement actually is (Greenfield, 2018, p. 8). As there is no auditing process for mental health impact of this level of photoshop in existence on daily advertisements, 57% of participants recommended that a watermark might be helpful in displaying disclaimers such as this ad has or has not been photoshopped/retouched. The other 43% of participants felt their students would not really understand what was meant by this watermark. Danthinne and Rodgers (2020) noted how ambiguous it would be to start policing such advertisements for several reasons: how would officials in this position know if something had been retouched, how would they retroactively enforce this, and what would breaking this law of watermark display entail? Implications for solution alternatives will be discussed further later in the chapter.

Protection was also developed as a theme as a means to protect young girls from self-harm. While internal behaviors such as disordered eating and beliefs including body dysmorphia were discussed in Theme 2, the physical aspects of kids harming themselves further calls for a need of protection. I believe my research correlated with previous research in how skin color is represented in the media and its effects on the audience. An example of this was seen by Participant 7, "there was a kid who gave a girl some

foundation, and it was a lighter skin tone. She says, "Put this on so you can be more beautiful," and the girl was of a darker complexion. So, there's these instances where beautiful becomes almost this racial issue too." This interaction is consistent with Muhammad and McArthur (2015) who found that Black adolescent girls felt negatively in how they were underrepresented in the media (p. 136). Additionally, Dionisio's (2016) study provided insight into the Filipino population in how American advertisements are the standard of beauty for women in the Philippines; this is seen as they longed for blue eyes, blonde hair, and a tall, slender frame (p. 46). I believe this is imperative to add within this interpretation of the findings as young girls could risk harming themselves in an effort to appear more like the models within advertisements.

Limitations of the Study

In Chapter 1, I outlined potential limitations of study, each of which I attempted to mitigate. I'll describe how researcher bias and the use of participants positively influenced the research.

My bias as a hair and makeup artist within the industry is addressed to the extent of established and well-organized tools within qualitative research. This included member checking, a reflexivity journal, stating this bias within the dissertation, and through ongoing dialogue with my dissertation Chair. It is through my experience as a hair and makeup artist that led me to explore the impact from the beauty industry on children, as well as to recognize what are current practices posing a threat to their mental health and self-esteem development. I believe my experience within the industry may

have helped contribute to the academic literature by bringing forth the problem examined.

The second limitation noted in Chapter 1 was the inability to generalize findings and prove trustworthiness. Not only was member-checking completed before each interview, I ensured with my Chair and Committee Member that saturation was met at five participants and completed an additional two interviews to further ensure it was met. Lastly, my interview style and questions were based on previous research within the qualitative field to ensure some level of consistency was maintained within the interviews. This similarity among the interviews, not same, was consistent with a semi-structured interview style. I believe that if this study were replicated, researchers would possess similar findings based on my style of interview.

Interview Questions

Drawing out participant knowledge requires carefully and delicately considered semi-structured interviews. Understanding the participant's hesitancy to speak on things they've seen or heard within their position gave some participants pause to answer honestly. I believe the RQ was narrowly focused enough that participants were able to get a solid understanding on what we would be discussing in our 30-or-so-minute interviews. Further, having the reflexivity of a semi-structured interview assisted in tailoring the interviews to each participant's background and age group they were most familiar with. Relevant information to include in future research could focus more on the participant's background. Identifying their years in the industry versus years in their current position could assist in drawing further phenomena from the potential crossovers in their

experience and insight. Further, restructuring the method of how I brought up the policy questions within the third section of the interview could also have been done more smoothly. While participants were very open and spoke most to the effects of false advertising and media on young girls, very few participants had any immediate answers on potential public policy measures that could mitigate these negative impacts. With a few participants I had to offer examples such as the watermark before they were able to consider this as an option. I believe speaking more openly on "why do you/don't you believe a public policy could assist in mitigating the negative effects" would be more useful than my current question of "*what* type of policy could assist..." (Question 6). The participants serve as observers who could influence a policy, rather than as policymakers creating it. Having this in mind, this is the only thing I would change to my current set of questions.

Recommendations

In Chapter 2 I described how prior research described either the challenges to young girl's self-esteem or the challenges to offering protection via public policy. It seemed that there were little to no studies utilized such as mine using both persons who interact with children daily and their opinions on what a "magic wand" policy might look like. My research explored this arena, and exposed related areas that might benefit from further study. The significance of deception described in Chapter 4 and interpreted in Chapter 5 was a theme that nearly overwhelmed the data in my study. Its importance in this research could be readily associated with multiple additional themes that also

emerged and had both positive and negative implications that could further influence policymakers.

The Experience of Young Boys

While my study provided extensive detail into the psyche of young girl's self-esteem development, there is far less research done on the self-esteem development of young boys. One participant (P-2) was the only one who recommended a similar study be done to assess the societal pressures and media portrayal of the standards for boys, especially as it pertains to photoshopping. While women's bodies are often slimmed, men's bodies are typically enhanced to create exaggerated definition in muscle tone. Understanding how photoshopped advertisements also affect young boys could identify the need for additional policy reformations in regard to current advertising practices.

Extending Participant Reach Further

As my study focused on the perceived negative impact on young girls, it could be useful to explore this topic with more participants of varying backgrounds as well as young girls themselves. This perception was seen through teachers, therapists, and inclusion coordinators, and could be explored further with school counselors and social works for deeper observations in the young girl's day-to-day life. Additionally, there could be the option of interviewing the girls directly. While my study did not include this in an effort to safeguard young girls from further exposure to such images and ideas, it could be beneficial for policymakers to see how it directly affects them and their inability to discern reality from photoshopped images.

Applying the Theoretical Framework Further

The polarities of democracy theoretical framework proved both durable and flexible within my research. In prior academic research, the polarities of democracy theory was more often associated with issues of social justice (Benet, 2013; Hayes, 2019; McMillan, 2020). Its use enabled an examination to view the responsibilities of both the community and those creating the false images for publication. Further, the theory allowed the research methodology to examine this practice and its lack of democracy extended to young girls. My theory confirms the utility of the theory for the additional qualitative studies suggested earlier in the chapter.

My study focused on two of the five polarity pairs identified in Benet's (2013) polarities of democracy theory. In retrospect my bias as a hair and makeup artist may have obscured my initial selection of polarity pairs of interest. Working with the polarity maps at the conclusion of the study assisted in opening my understanding of the implications of actions and early warning signs in the effective management of a polarity pair. Future research should consider the additional polarity pairs such as justice and due process, participation and representation, or diversity and equality when examining the effects of false advertising on young girls.

<div align="center">

Implications

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By shedding light on how to leverage the promise of democracy more effectively, my study has the potential to influence positive social change. The research findings can be used to inform policy makers to potential systemic issues that can hinder fuller participation in the democratic process. Findings of this research helped demonstrate that

conditions exist among falsely influencing young girls which can further inhibit a healthy relationship with themselves in building their self-esteem and stronger character.

Implications for Practice

In Chapter 2, I identified multiple studies confirming decades-long implications of how false advertising and media are detrimental to a young girl's health if presented falsely – such as promoting photoshopped images. There was no evidence to suggest such practices were affecting girls within Austin, TX very deeply, especially through the lens of polarities of democracy. The research findings support the need to better identify and set conditions at a minimum for such advertising practices. Such improvements to stronger regulations as it pertains to photoshopping in advertisements can improve young girls' self-esteem, their relationship with their bodies, and further promote confidence in seeing unfiltered images. Congress and policymakers should consider incorporating these findings into practical policies that might encourage improved behavioral relationships for young girls in Texas. While a complete cultural shift to advertiser natural, untouched models is ideal, the advertising industry has made little strides towards this change. As advertisers continue to perpetuate such false images for profit, highlights why a policy change is so necessary for the future of young girls.

Congress at the national and state level are well positioned to set conditions, such as those in Massachusetts, that allow for more effective management of the polarity pairs that will allow greater democratization and move closer to fulfillment of the promise of democracy. An example of this could include providing a tax break to organizations who meet a minimum requirement of revenue and could prove they did not partake in

photoshopping model's appearances. It has been witnessed overseas in the United

Kingdom that simply making the production of these images' illegal showed little to no

change in advertisers still using these practices. This is partially due to a weak

enforcement agency now being required to take on the job of sifting through thousands of

images to give a simple fine. To have a greater success in ensuring businesses cease such

practices, it must be mutually beneficial for them. Therefore, providing a tax or monetary

benefit to participating businesses could provide a greater motivation in producing

natural models as well as set an example for what models *actually* look like for young

girls.

Conclusion

My study presented an extension of current research and provided a further

understanding into the negative impacts of false advertising on young girl's and their

self-esteem. This is seen through the perspective of professionals in the industry working

with young girls directly: teachers, counselors, and inclusion coordinators. This criterion

includes young girls aged 6-14 years old and geographically specific to Austin, Texas.

Themes described in Chapter 4 and interpreted in Chapter 5 suggest there is a need for

strengthening and establishing Photoshop regulations within American policy.

The inter-relationships of how impressionable young girls are, the level of

deception placed in front of them from their media, and finally the lack of regulations

were evident throughout the interviews. Closer examination of specific aspects of each

theme was enhanced by the literature and can be used to inform policy makers. Education

within schools on how to detect false advertising could assist in bringing greater

awareness to young girls, but this is merely a mitigation step from the constant flood of photoshopped images.

What is presented to young girls as beautiful from media companies is inter-related with how they view themselves and their self-worth, ultimately impacting their self-esteem. This is further crucial in understanding the level of democracy young girls are deprived of based on the false images presented to them. The research attempted to look at the effects of false advertising on young girls within Austin, Texas, and how such practices cause short-and long-term harm on their self-esteem and character development. Understanding how policies could offer protection to young girls faced with such floods of false images could provide greater mental health impacts and democracy for this population.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview Guide with Researcher Prompts Italicized for Clarity

Welcome and rapport building before diving in to establish a common ground to enable the interview subject's comfort and readiness to begin (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Opening script. This will demonstrate my preparation, professionalism, and respect for the interviewee. Elements of the script will be general housekeeping such as allotted time, location of a restroom, offering water, and confirming general agreement on how the interview will proceed. I will discuss the consent form, my intent to record, and that the interview subject will have the opportunity to review and edit the transcript (Patton, 2015; Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

"Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. I will ask you several questions to which there are no right or wrong answers. The questions focus on your background and perceptions of young girls based on the ages you are most familiar with. The interview will take about 30 minutes or so, but don't feel constrained by that time limit if you'd like more time. I have your consent form and you acknowledge this is a voluntary interview for research purposes. I'll be recording our conversation and will make the transcript available to you for review as soon as it is available. If you would like to amend any responses after reviewing the transcript, you'll have the opportunity to do so. Are you ready to begin? Comfortable? Ok, here we go."

Research questions are reminders for the researcher, not to be expressed to the interview subjects:

RQ-1 What are the perceptions of informed participants (educators, psychologists,

counselors, social workers, etc.) regarding what public policies might serve to mitigate

the negative impacts of advertising and media on the development of self-esteem among

young girl's (6-14 years old) in Austin, Texas?

Stage 1 Questions – General Background

- Can you tell me about yourself? Perhaps your current job and what drove you to work with children?
    - o Probe Question 1: Childhood experience? College decision? Family member?
    - o Probe Question 2: How long have you worked or been a part of this industry?

o Probe Question 3: What is the age group you are most familiar with?
o Probe Question 4: Do you hold any licenses, certificates, or degrees as it pertains to working with or studying child development?

Stage 2 Questions – Your Perceptions of Young Girls

- Describe how important the environment is on the development of young girls (things they see, hear, read, etc.)?
  o Probe Question 1: Do they have a greater influence from friends' vs family?
  o Probe Question 2: Is there a greater influence stemmed from their online presence/followers from social media accounts? Please explain.
  o Probe Question 3: Do they feel a need to be popular at any cost? Please explain.

- Do you believe the use of cosmetic, or beauty advertisements can impact young girls' self-esteem or self-worth? If so, how?
  o Probe Question 1: Does this positive or negative impact stem from potentially undetectable photoshopping in cosmetic ads?
  o Probe Question 2: Can you explain the type of makeup being worn, if any, on the young girls?

- In what ways do you believe photoshopping models among advertisements has a short or long-term impact on the girls viewing the ads, if any?
  o Probe Question 1: Do you believe the girls can recognize what has been altered in the ad (smaller pores, straighter/whiter teeth, slimmer frames/faces, etc.)?
  o Probe Question 2: Will young girls harm themselves (such as through an eating disorder or drugs) in an effort to look like the person on advertisements?

Stage 3 – Public Policy Perception & Protection

- Do have thoughts on how a policy could assist in creating a greater level of self-esteem for these girls? Please explain.
  o Probe Question 1: Do you believe it will make a difference on their self-esteem and image seeing non-edited images being promoted?
  o Probe Question 2: Do you believe the use of a watermark or small disclaimer in altered advertisements would be as effective, more effective, or least effective in promoting young girls' self-esteem when compared to banning manipulation practices all together?

- If you were able to craft a policy along the lines of offering young girls protection through prevention of false advertising, what would you ensure is part of the policy?
    - Probe Question 1: Can you explain regulations you would like to see imposed on advertisers?
    - Probe Question 2: What barriers come to mind when considering this dream policy?

- Before we conclude, is there anything I should have asked, but didn't? Or anything you would like to add?

"Thank you for making the time to answer each question so thoughtfully. Your responses will help me in this research project. As promised, the transcript will be available for your review. When the project is complete, you will be able to review it in its entirety. Also, as indicated on the consent form, your participation is completely confidential, and your name and company name will not appear in the final report. Do you have any additional questions of comments for me?"

Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Hello XX,

I hope this note finds you well.

I am a Ph.D. candidate at Walden University pursuing a degree in Public Policy and Administration. I am conducting research to understand the need for policy change as it pertains to false advertising and its effects on young girl's (6-14 years old) self-esteem. My research focus is on the short-term and long-term effects that photoshopped cosmetic advertisements may have on young girls' self-esteem and formation of identity. The purpose of this research is to assess the demand for stronger legislation that can safeguard young girl's self-esteem, but first, I need to gather this need from participants in my study!

I am looking for participants who are familiar with 6–14-year-old girls. This familiarity can be through a professional or educational background in studying or working with young girls. Would you support my research by participating in a completely confidential, semi-structured interview focused on your assessment of photoshopped images and how they might affect young girls?

The interview would include the completion of an Informed Consent statement (I'll e-mail this to you for your approval); allowing me to interview you in-person. Strict protocols to protect you and your company's identity will be put in place. The entire interview process should take no more than 30 minutes of your time, and likely much less time. You will have the opportunity to review the interview transcript and make desired edits to assure your words are your own and will have access to the final research conclusion as I'll send it you personally!

If you know of other qualified participants, please share this request within your professional network.

Please let me know if you would like to participate by contacting me by call or text, XXX-XXX-XXXX, or email, XXX@waldenu.edu, if you have any questions.

Thank you for considering assisting me with this task.

Sincerely,

Caitlin Bohannon

Appendix C: Approval Letter

January 25, 2023

Dr. Caitlin Bohannon

Re: **Permission for use of Polarities of Democracy graphics in your PhD. Dissertation**

Dear Dr. Bohannon

The Institute for Polarities of Democracy seeks to protect the intellectual knowledge of the Polarities of Democracy theory as described below:

- **Purpose:** Ensure proper acknowledgement of the source of the Polarities of Democracy© Map contents developed by Dr. William J. Benet & the Institute for Polarities of Democracy.
    - o It is sufficient when sharing content to include the following sentence in a legible format on the Polarity Map® (either in the Polarity Map® graphic or bottom of a page where the Polarity Map® is portrayed):

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In addition, Polarity Partnerships, LLC, a strategic partner of the Institute, has licensed the Institute for Polarities of Democracy to use the Polarity Map®, principles, the Polarity Assessment™, the 5-Step S.M.A.L.L.™ process and miscellaneous tools and resources commercially. We realize the term "licensing" means different things to different people and seek to clarify what "licensing" means to Polarity Partnerships. The guidelines and underlying purpose associated with our licensing model are described below:

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For the purposes of your dissertation, you may use the Polarities of Democracy© Maps and the *Polarity Maps*® with the following statement:

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Sincerely,

Nicole B. Hayes

Nicole B. Hayes, PhD.
President, Board of Directors
The Institute for Polarities of Democracy