

## **Powerful and pervasive, or personal and positive? Views of young girls, parents and educators about media**

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There are concerns regarding the use and impact of media in relation to adolescent girls and young women, but there is relatively little research focusing on the experiences and perspectives of young girls. This paper reports on a key finding from a research study in a small Australian school. Interviews with educators (n=5), parents (n=7) and young girls aged 7-13 (n=14) were analysed using a feminist phenomenological approach to elicit the essence of the girls' lived experiences with media. Common and contrasting perspectives were then identified. Adults felt that media were powerful and pervasive but also expressed some reservations about the proliferation of media. The girls showed strong personal emotional engagement with a variety of media. While further research is needed to examine children's views, the findings point to some important recommendations for parents and educators.

### **Introduction**

Media are nowadays one of the most powerful forces in contemporary society (Buysse & Embser-Herbert, 2004). Media are regarded as a principal social agent (López-Guimerà, Levine, Sánchez-carracedo & Fauquet, 2010) and a key cultural and political institution (Havens & Lotz, 2012). According to Logan (2010), media are expansive and include traditional mediums, or 'old media', such as radio and print newspapers, and 'new media', which are recently developed, digitally interactive types of media such as apps. This article employs the plural form of 'media' in order to convey its inherent diversity.

Given the overt and enduring presence of media, and their potential to inform and influence, it is essential to understand how children relate to media. The relationships forged between children and media have been examined from many angles and with many different emphases. One prevalent focus area is the representations of girls and women in media, which are deemed to be problematic (e.g. Baker, Brown & Ragonese, 2016; Puvia & Vaes, 2012). These problematic portrayals are often linked to hazardous health consequences (e.g. Zurbriggen, Ramsey & Jaworski, 2011; Tiggemann & Miller, 2010). The research to date provides insight into children's media access and use, the nature of media representations, and the potential risks associated with engaging with problematic media. That said, there is limited research in this area that engages in child-centric inquiry. Research where children are afforded voice and choice is necessary to evolve our understanding of children's experiences and ways of being (Smith, Taylor & Gollop, 2000) – such as how children relate to media and the role it plays in their lives. Thus, a research project was developed with the aim to establish experiential insight by engaging young girls in a child-centric and participatory project (Dobson, 2016). This paper reports on a major finding of that

project regarding the perspectives and experiences of a group of young girls aged 7-13, their parents and their teachers, about the girls' relationships with media.

## Background

There is a strong consensus that media are unprecedentedly powerful and pervasive (Christakis & Zimmerman, 2009; Croteau & Hoynes, 2007; Daniels, 2009; Derenne & Beresin, 2006; Fuller & Goffey, 2012; McHale, Dotterer & Kim, 2009; Moyer-Gusé & Riddle, 2009; Strasburger, Wilson & Jordan, 2009; Talbot, 2007). The increasing proliferation and accessibility of media are evident (Comstock & Scharrer, 2007; Jhally, 2002; Semali, 2003; Weisner, 2014), and research has shown the potential for media to influence our social realities, self-perceptions, ideas, values, norms, and attitudes (Choma, Foster & Radford, 2007; Gerbner, 1998; Lopez-Guimera et al., 2010).

The relationships between children and media have received considerable attention in academic literature and public discourse. Children have unprecedentedly high access to media for various purposes (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2010; Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010; Strasburger et al., 2009). Numerous authors identify internalisation as an issue and contend that children internalise media messages which can impact on their views, beliefs, and behaviours (Anand & Krosnick, 2005; Kjaersgaard, 2005; Robinson, Callister, Magoffin & Moore, 2006; Strasburger, Jordan & Donnerstein, 2010; Zuckerman & Dubowitz, 2005). There are concerns about the impact of media on girls, due to the ways in which girls and women are represented in media. These concerns include stereotyping, idealisation, objectification, and sexualisation. In terms of stereotyping, boys and men tend to be portrayed as dominant, aggressive, and/or outgoing (Berns, 2012; Hust & Brown, 2008), while girls and women are typically docile and domestic (Hust & Brown, 2008; Puvia & Vaes, 2012). The thin ideal for girls and women, which is considered dangerous and deceptive (Borau & Nepomuceno, 2016), is rampant (Davalos, Davalos & Layton, 2007; Park, 2005; Sypeck, Gray & Ahrens, 2003). Objectification is also common (Goldman, 2013; Ward, 2003; Zurbriggen et al., 2011), as is sexualisation which is identified as routine (Daniels, 2009), pervasive (Baker et al., 2016), and increasing (Hatton & Trautner, 2011; Mager & Helgeson, 2010).

Media influence has been examined in terms of girls' body image (Bell & Dittmar, 2011), body size stereotyping (Harriger, Calogero, Witherington & Ellen Smith, 2010), and anxiety, dieting, and lowered body-esteem (Grabe & Hyde, 2009), as well as adult women's self-objectification (Breines, Crocker & Garcia, 2008; Zurbriggen et al., 2011) and disordered eating practices (Kim & Lennon, 2007; Krahe & Krause, 2010). These are certainly significant issues which merit our attention and further investigation. Nevertheless, the bulk of research in this area is adult-centric and quantitative, with relatively little experiential inquiry. Children's voices are lacking, and furthermore, conceptualisations of children and childhood require reconsideration.

For instance, polarised views of both children and media are commonplace, but media are not simply positive or negative, nor are children wholly resilient or entirely fragile (Qvarsell, 2000). Furthermore, there seems to be a tendency to focus on detrimental impacts (Lerum & Dworkin, 2009) which are not necessarily guaranteed nor universally applicable (Ward, Day & Epstein, 2006). A more nuanced and child-centric approach is needed (Thompson, 2010), and in particular, one which speaks *with* girls rather than *for* girls (McGladrey, 2015).

Thus, focus in this study was placed on eliciting the voices of young girls about their relationships with media and sought to answer the question: “What are the individual and collective lived experiences of girls aged 7-13 in their personal media contexts?” The overarching objective was to engage in a holistic examination of the relationship forged between young girls and their preferred media by speaking with the girls and their parents and educators. By exploring the girls’ preferred media, the study was personalised and could afford the girls optimal voice and choice throughout the research process.

## **Conceptual framework**

A conceptual framework which blended Bronfenbrennian theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and feminist theory (Adams St. Pierre, 2000; Gines, 2011; Lykke, 2010; Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2016) underpinned this study. This emerged from a participatory worldview, which focuses on empowering participants to share their voices and engage equitably in research (Nind, 2011), and a poststructural feminist theoretical lens, which critically examines social constructions such as identity and inequalities (Adams St. Pierre, 2000; Robinson & Jones-Diaz, 2016). As such, girls were placed at the heart of the research, and their social contexts including their school and home environments were explored. Central to the conceptual framework was the notion of “divided consciousness” as put forth by Bartky (1990, p. 16), where feminist consciousness is described as “both consciousness of weakness and consciousness of strength”. Within the context of this study, this meant acknowledging that girls are potentially vulnerable to media influence, but that they also have the capacity for agency and resilience. Hence, the study was emphatically child-centric in its conceptualisation and further held a strong and competent image of children.

## **Method**

### **Research design**

A qualitative approach was adopted involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews with educators, parents, and girls. The participants were asked about their experiences with media and their perspectives regarding its purpose and significance. This paper reports on this interview data with an aim to compare and contrast the perspectives of the girls and their parents and educators.

## Context and participants

The study took place in a Western Australian coastal town. The central setting for the research was a small private primary school with a religious emphasis, with a cohort of 140 students. At the time of the study, the school spanned Years 1 (with students around six years of age) through Year 7 (with students around twelve years of age) plus a pre-primary class. While the school did espouse Christian values, there was religious, cultural, and socio-economic diversity within their cohort. When the study commenced, the school had an increasing emphasis on media including teaching *about* media and teaching *with* media, including a one-to-one *iPad* program.

The overall sample comprised five educators, including the school principal and four classroom teachers from Years 2, 3/4, 5, and 6/7 (see Table 1; all names are pseudonyms), fourteen girls (aged 7 to 13), and their parent/s (see Table 2).

Table 1: Educator participant profiles

| Educator   | Role             |
|------------|------------------|
| Ryan       | School principal |
| Elizabeth  | Year 2 teacher   |
| Meredith   | Year 3/4 teacher |
| Sarah      | Year 5 teacher   |
| Jacqueline | Year 6/7 teacher |

Table 2: Parent and child participant profiles

| Parent/guardian | Child    | Child's year level |
|-----------------|----------|--------------------|
| Patricia        | Hayley   | 2                  |
| Elisa and Alan  | Abigail  | 3                  |
| Carrie          | Summer   | 4                  |
| Helena          | Lily     | 4                  |
| Jade            | Kat      | 5                  |
| Kira            | Sam      | 5                  |
| Billie          | Roxy     | 5                  |
| Lila            | Michelle | 6                  |
| Charlotte       | Alana    | 6                  |
| Grace           | Aisha    | 6                  |
| Lee             | Rosline  | 6                  |
| Amanda          | Whippet  | 6                  |
| Hannah and Dave | Lola     | 7                  |
| Carla           | Tuscany  | 7                  |

## Data collection

The parents and educators participated in one interview each, ranging between 30 and 60 minutes in length. Questions focused on their conceptualisation of media and their

opinions about media in relation to society, their lives, and the lives of children. Set questions for parents and educators included:

- How would you define or describe media?
- What role do you feel media plays in the lives of children?
- Do you teach your children/students about media? If so, how so?

All fourteen girls participated in two interviews, and six of these girls consented to participate in a third interview during a home tour. The first interview was in-depth and aimed at thoroughly exploring the girls' perspectives and experiences regarding media. Each interview was a personalised experience with the focus on each individual girl's unique understanding of and relationship with media. Set questions included:

- What does the word 'media' mean to you?
- How do you feel about media?
- What are your favourite media? What does this media mean to you?
- What have you been learning about media at school/home?

The second interview gave the opportunity for the girls to engage in member-checking and reflect on their role in the research. A summary of their previous interview was presented, and the girls were invited to amend or add anything to the existing data, and were encouraged to share their thoughts on the process and what it meant to them.

Six girls, with their parents' consent, also agreed to participate in home tours which included interviews, where the researcher visited their home context and the girls guided them through their home, describing and explaining the presence and role of media throughout the setting for them and their family members. Here, the interview questions were highly personalised and responsive towards each girl, her relationship with media, and her home/family context.

## **Ethics**

Ethical procedures were a priority throughout this study. Ethical approval was obtained through the University's Human Research Ethics Committee and the study was conducted in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2007).

The study also embraced the feminist ethic of care, which is a practical and relational approach (Noddings, 2013) involving compassionate, considerate, and beneficent research practices (Wiles, 2013) with an aim "to enhance the human condition and create a more just and caring world" (Brabreck & Brabreck, 2009, p. 50). A rights-based research approach (Beazley, Bessell, Ennew & Waterson, 2011) was undertaken

that aligned with The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989):

Respectful and positive relationships were developed between the researcher and participants with the aim of establishing and sustaining a research environment which was safe, engaging, and productive. Accessible and appropriate language was used throughout all interactions and communications. In alignment with the study's conceptual framework, methodology, and ethics, the girls were positioned as partners in the study, as experts in their own lives, and as storytellers. Each girl chose her own pseudonym, a process which proved empowering. The girls were also encouraged to recognise the value in their views and voices. Member-checking was utilised to ensure every participant was content with the researcher's interpretation of their perspectives and experiences (O'Toole & Beckett, 2010). The member-checking process was a highly reflective one-on-one conversation between the researcher and the participants, where each participant was invited to share feedback on the researcher's write-up of their contribution to the study, and where they reflected on the research process and what it had meant to them.

### **Data analysis and trustworthiness**

The interviews and home tours were audio-recorded. These recordings were uploaded to the qualitative analysis software *NVivo10* and transcribed, after which they were reviewed, analysed, and coded. The phenomenological tradition of dwelling with data (Finlay, 2014) was central to the analysis process: the recordings were repeatedly listened to and the transcripts were re-read multiple times, thus ensuring thorough immersion and deep familiarity. Inductive analysis – that is, working from the data to establish conclusions (Schwandt, 2007) – was undertaken and involved a five-step process to coding: (1) initial coding; (2) categorisation; (3) sub-categorisation; (4) elicitation of themes; and, (5) illustration of themes with illuminative quotes.

Trustworthiness pertains to the essential confirmation of accuracy and credibility (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and is a key quality determinant (Castle, 2012). Measures of trustworthiness employed in this study included building and sustaining positive relationships, empowering the participants, and engaging in member-checking.

### **Findings**

The findings are presented in two sections: (1) Adult perspectives; and, (2) Child perspectives.

#### **Adult perspectives**

There was alignment between the perspectives of the educators and the parents/guardians. Their view of media was predominantly cautious. Four key themes emerged: (1) the power and pervasiveness of media; (2) the inevitability of media; (3)

media are constantly changing; and, (4) media can be positive. These themes will be explored in turn.

The power and pervasiveness of media were well-noted by the parents and educators who felt powerless in the face of all of this. Meredith described media as a “saturated market” and positioned children as “bombarded”, feeding into the construction of children as passive. Elizabeth noted that her students’ access to media was “instantaneous”, while Sarah remarked on how much is “out there” for children to access. In terms of the power of media, Ryan described media impact as “huge”, while Elizabeth recognised it as a “very important” force. The capacity for media to manipulate was pinpointed by Meredith, who formerly worked in advertising before moving to teaching. She described persuasive practices in media as highly strategic, particularly in their targeting of children, asserting: “They have very specific tactics and strategies that work. [Children should] not feel like they need to have that just because it’s someone from their favourite movie fronting that campaign”. As well as constructing media as powerful, many of the adults then constructed children as passive, ignorant, and vulnerable – for example, Elisa stated, “[Abigail] is the first person to ask to put on the TV and then she’ll just sit there. I think it’s a shame that [media] is used to entertain children”. Similarly, Patricia claimed “kids get babysat by the TV and they’re entertained” but that they “don’t understand the impact or repercussions”. Elisa also felt that this was a “battle”, with her on one side, media on the other, and her daughters caught in the middle. Amanda also worried about the impact of media on her daughter, claiming, “It’s something I can’t protect her from... it’s out of my control, I don’t feel like I’m really prepared for it”.

The second main theme was the inevitability of media which was discussed by several parents and educators. For example, Elisa stated, “We can’t take [media] away because that’s just the way the world’s going”. Patricia described it as a “necessary evil, in our days” and joked, “I don’t even think we’ll have devices in a few years’ time, we’ll just be hardwired at birth!” Meredith stated, “It’s becoming more and more hard to avoid”, and went on to describe media as a fixed aspect of life and as something “we consume every day”. Regarding the growth of media, Ryan said that institutions such as schools “can’t catch up”. Elizabeth concluded that media is “a fact of life”, which effectively summarises the thoughts shared by the adults. A sense of helplessness was often evident, and the adults again seemed to frame the girls as vulnerable in all of this. Negativity pervaded these discussions – Helena specifically described a sense of “dread”, while Patricia mused: “I have no idea what the future holds but it does freak me out. What are we in for?”

A third theme common to the adults but showing differences between parents and educators was the idea that media are constantly changing. Tied into the parents’ reflections on the inevitability of media were concerns about the unfamiliarity of media. Many parents felt estranged from media due to its continual rapid evolution and raised a number of concerns regarding their ability to understand and utilise different media. Patricia stated, “It constantly changes, so there’s always a new risk or a new threat”. She also jokingly referred to “the olden days” and “the dark ages”,

much like Kira who joked that she was “old-fashioned”. Similarly, Amanda reflected, “When you and I used to go on excursions, we were told not to bring lollies. Now it’s don’t bring *iPads* or *iPhones*, no listening to music or watching *YouTube!*” Helena, a parent who works as an educator, felt that she couldn’t use modern media “to its full capacity” and that she didn’t “have a lot of confidence there”. She also stated, “I would feel null and void if I walked into a classroom where the children knew the technology better than I did”. In contrast, this sense of unfamiliarity wasn’t expressed by the educators, who seemed relatively confident in their appreciation and application of media. Ryan did admit that the school as a whole was “a bit behind where we would like to be”, but felt positive in the school’s ability to “get a good hold”. To do this, he realised that the school would “need to work closely with our parent community”.

The final theme arising from the interviews with adults was that media can be positive. While some educators and parents acknowledged the positive potential of media, these acknowledgements were, however, few and far between. Elizabeth did say “there’s a lot of positive to come out of media” and mentioned how well-informed her students are, which was similar to Helena’s assertion that media can “[open] a lot of doors for children”. Patricia also acknowledged that media can open “unlimited possibilities”, but this was outweighed by her concerns and criticisms of media. It was far more common for the adults to speak of media with trepidation, and to position it as a powerful entity which held sway over the girls.

### **Child perspectives**

In sharp contrast to the adults’ perspectives which were markedly cautious and critical, the girls were enthusiastic and emotive about media and its significance in their lives. The key themes emerging from their interviews were that media are powerful and positive. Although these were also themes arising from the adult interviews, the views of the girls differed.

The girls, as did the adults, saw media as powerful. Like their parents and educators, the girls recognised media as being significant. For example, Tuscany described media as “top of [her] list”, and Kat claimed she “couldn’t survive in [her] life without media”. However, unlike adults who saw media as external and out of their control, the girls saw media in a very personal way. Its significance was intimate. In another component of the study (not reported here) the girls were asked to identify their favourite media and strongly endorsed musicians such as Taylor Swift and Katy Perry, and magazines such as *Total Girl*. Irrespective of the type of media, the connections were personal. When reflecting on media’s meaning in her life, Rosline positioned it as her companion. She said, “I don’t feel alone. I have company”. About her favourite television shows, Tuscany reflected, “You feel connected to the characters. You really care about them. I’ve been with them since the start - well, not since the start, but since I was born - so you really feel for them”.

Linked to this idea of a very powerful and personal connection, the second theme arising from talking to the girls was that this connection was very positive. For instance, Whippet asserted that media “makes me feel good”. A particularly emotive statement was made by Tuscany, who shared her love of role models in media and how meaningful this was to her. Tuscany had many role models, but was particularly emphatic about Olivia Benson from *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*:

I love Olivia. She’s... comforting and nice, and she’s been through situations that most people have been through. It looks like you can talk to her. I’m happy that there’s people like Olivia. I really feel happy that there’s people like that. That, like, aren’t afraid to be themselves and love themselves, and aren’t self-conscious or anything. Cos I used to be so self-conscious, like my face and my weight and I wouldn’t go out unless my hair was perfect... now I just don’t care. You need people who are role models to say, ‘Just be yourself and don’t worry about what people think’. Don’t worry about what other people think, just be you. And if you don’t like being you, don’t change yourself. Just don’t listen to the people who tell you that you aren’t good enough or that you’re not nice or not pretty. Just be yourself.

Tuscany was not the only girl who treasured certain celebrities and/or characters as role models. The girls often spoke glowingly about their role models, with many expressing their “love”, including Tuscany, Kat (10 years old and in Year 5), Michelle (11 years old and in Year 5), and Whippet (12 years old and in Year 7). They were also inspired by these figures – for instance, Whippet spoke about the surfer Bethany Hamilton, explaining:

Bethany Hamilton is, like, my idol. I love her. She inspires me because she never gave up on something that she loves and she’s got a best friend that helped her and she made her dreams come true because she keeps trying and she never gives up.

Similarly, Lily (10 years old and in Year 4) spoke admiringly about the pop artist Katy Perry: “I want to be a singer when I get older. I look up to [Perry] because she’s really talented and I just really want to be like her when I’m older”. She was also fond of familiar characters in media: “When I watch *My Little Pony*, Rainbow Dash and Pinkie Pie always remind me of me, because Rainbow is this tomboy adventurous girl, and that’s me! And ‘PP’ is this fun, excitable, random girl, and that’s me too!” It was clear that media figures acted as positive role models and were an important part of the girls’ media worlds. They had deep emotional bonds with these figures. This indicated the significance that most of the girls attributed to media and the strong personal bonds they forged with their preferred media. Media were powerful and personal but also positive.

## **Discussion**

### **Contrasting perceptions of media**

The power of media was recognised by the parents, educators, and girls – but their perception of this differed. One key divergence was that parents and educators tended to

see media as more distal, as part of the wider world, while the girls were focused on the personal significance of media. The girls had a more personal relationship with media and engaged in meaningful interactions and dialogues with their favoured media. For example, in conveying imagery and ideas, media ‘talks’ to the girls, who ‘listen’ by paying attention, engaging, and reflecting and/or responding. This reinforces the conceptual model which underpinned the study, where contexts are viewed as interconnected and reciprocally influential (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), thus rejecting dominant discourses of child/media passivity (Wilson, 2009).

Another key difference between the adult and child perspectives was the notion of children as passive or active in relation to media. The parents and educators had a tendency to construe the girls’ relationship with media as passive. This “sender-receiver” model is arguably reductive (Talbot, 2007, p. 7) and not reflective of today’s individualised media landscape (Bennett & Inyengar, 2008). It also goes against the construction of children as active and agentic individuals (e.g. Giugni, 2006). It did not seem representative of the many different and meaningful relationships the girls had with their preferred media, whether that involved Lily’s creation of her own episodes within the *My Little Pony* universe, or whether it involved Tuscany’s adoration of her role models. There is a potential power differential between children and media – for instance, children are still developing cognitively and emotionally, and therefore may be considered susceptible to the influence of media. Nonetheless, it is still possible to recognise and appreciate the girls’ agency and their capacity to build thoughtful, responsive relationships with their favoured media.

### **Engaging girls in research**

The methodology of the study was child-centric and it is also worth noting the feedback given by girls during the member-checking process. After confirming they were content with the researcher’s account of their contributions, the girls were encouraged to reflect on their participation in the project and what it had meant to them. All of the girls reported that their experience was positive and that they had enjoyed participating. Michelle reflected, “It felt nice. I’ve never been able to talk to people about how I feel about media and what things I really like”. A similar comment was made by Kat, who explained that she was happy to have the chance to participate because she rarely gets to talk to others about media. Tuscany was also appreciative of the opportunity to speak her mind – regarding this, she explained, “It was cool to... express things. Like, for your study, for everyone to know about us. Because it is good to know”. Similarly, Sam stated, “It just means something that I can say stuff”.

The enthusiasm and appreciation articulated by the girls is further indicative of the value of child-centric research that seeks to elicit and emphasise children’s perspectives and experiences (McGladrey, 2015; Thompson, 2010). Future research ought to take this into consideration and pursue experiential insight as voiced by children themselves. Parents and educators should also be attentive to what children have to say by engaging respectfully and appreciatively in dialogue with children.

Educators in particular could embrace this as part of the life of their schools and classrooms and use the insight to guide their pedagogical practices.

### **Recommendations**

Emerging from these findings are three recommendations for parents and educators. It is recommended that:

- 1. Educators work collaboratively to develop a whole-school strategy for media education*  
The school engaged in this study did not have a whole-school strategy for media education in operation or development at the time of the study. Such a strategy would provide a sense of continuity across the school context and would distinguish media education as a priority, which all of the educators voiced support for, and which is often advocated for in the literature (e.g. Hobbs, 2011; Scheibe & Rogow, 2012).
- 2. Educators prioritise establishing and sustaining communication and collaboration between educators, parents, and children about media*  
Partnerships between school and home contexts are of great value and hinge on communication and collaboration (Bowes, Grace & Hodge, 2012). Educators are in a key position to facilitate communicative and collaborative partnerships between school and home, and by building dialogue about media into these partnerships, the awareness and responsiveness of all involved can be enhanced.
- 3. Parents be actively attentive to the experiences, perspectives, and voices of their children.*  
By tuning into and appreciating their children's perspectives and lived experiences, parents can create spaces for equitable and meaningful conversations about their children's engagement with media and the broader role, nature, and significance of media. These kinds of conversations can generate opportunities for parents to guide and support their children, and enrich the understandings of both parents and children.

### **Limitations**

This study involved a small sample of participants who were drawn from a small population. Racial and cultural diversity were lacking. Engaging with a larger sample featuring more diverse participants may have altered the study's trajectory and led to different insights. Engaging with diverse cohorts is an imperative for future research.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the relationships between young girls and media with an aim to elicit girls' voices and to understand their perspectives, as well as those of their parents and educators. While the parents and educators harboured a range of concerns, it became apparent that the girls involved shared enduring, meaningful, and interactive relationships with media. In particular, their relationships were highly

emotive. These emotional bonds with media deserve our recognition and appreciation. This insight must factor into our conversations with girls and any educational initiatives. Lastly, in terms of future research in this area, girls must be actively and meaningfully engaged in future studies with an aim to honour girls and preserve and promote their agency. Continuing forward with child-centric and participatory research can enhance and evolve our understandings of what it means for children to engage with media and how parents, educators, and the wider community can move forward in partnership with children.

This paper makes a contribution to our understanding of girls' relationships with media, different experiences and perspectives pertaining to media, and the potential gap in understanding between adults and children. It foregrounds experiential insight and gives voice to girls, who deserve a more prominent place in the literature. This starts by affording them place, choice, and voice within research projects about them and their lives, and also ensuring that their perspectives and experiences are appreciated at home and at school.

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