Living against the norm: young women talk about role models

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Metadata Record: https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/13472

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Please note that fines are charged on ALL overdue items.
To the women
who have provided me
with
a never ending lifeline:

Je, Phillis, Jane & Anne Marie
'Living against the norm': Young women talk about role models

by

Meredith M. Cohen

A Masters Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of

Masters of Philosophy

Department of Social Sciences of Loughborough University

April 2000

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Abstract

References to role models have become common within both academic and lay literature, and claims appear repeatedly regarding the 'need' for 'strong' role models for today's youth and specifically for young women (Basow & Howe, 1980; Defour, & Paludi, 1995; Fine & Asch, 1985; O'Connell & Russo, 1980). In addition, several agencies such as the British Government Women's Unit have identified particular individuals (mainly celebrities) as role models for young women to 'look up to'. Although it appears as if theorists have extrapolated and combined concepts from role theory (see Biddle, 1986) and social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) to create an implied meaning, a formal definition for the term 'role model' does not exist within psychological literature. As a result, it appears as if this is more of a 'buzzword' than an actual psychological concept, yet it is used by both feminist and mainstream psychologists repeatedly to make claims and prescriptions for young women. In addition, little if any literature exists regarding how young women perceive and understand the term role model or how role models have (or have not) been a part of their lives. This study uses a feminist qualitative methodological approach, specifically a feminist standpoint approach (Harding, 1989, 1991; Hartstock, 1987; Stanley & Wise, 1990), to explore how young women make sense of role models in regard to their own experience.

Data were collected through nine focus groups with 30 participants in total. Participants were primarily undergraduate students opportunistically recruited while studying at Loughborough University. The focus groups ran for approximately one hour and during this time, I asked the group a series of questions to facilitate conversation about role models including who has been influential in their lives thus far, whether celebrities have been influential figures and whether controversial individuals can be influential.
Data were analyzed through a combined content and thematic analysis and results of this study provide three conclusions in regard to young women's perceptions of role models that have implications for both feminist and mainstream psychology. First, the ambiguity behind term 'role model' despite its frequent use, is supported by the difficulty participants had defining and applying it to their own experience. Second, despite their inevitable presence, in most cases celebrities are not the most influential figures in young women's lives. Rather, it is individuals whom these young women have been exposed to within their own environments such as home, school and within recreational environments (i.e. sports teams) that have been most influential. Finally, those individuals who are influential to these young women vary according to personal experience and circumstances and therefore prescribing a set of role models, specifically celebrity role models, cannot adequately represent and reflect their diverse experience.

I will review the implications of these findings in relation to both feminist and mainstream psychology as I question whether the idea of a role model is actually counterintuitive for women, and specifically young women overall based on participants' depictions of their own experience.
Acknowledgements

Constructing this thesis has been incredibly challenging yet stimulating experience, and this has been due to the help and influence of a variety of individuals whom I have encountered within the academic setting and beyond.

First, I must thank my family and friends from ‘home’ whose support I have relied on throughout this process. In particular, I thank Father for infallible support and encouragement through everything I have done or have ever thought of doing.

Those individuals whom I have been lucky enough to meet and who have privileged me with their friendship while in Loughborough have also been the providers of sustenance and most of all, sanity. Thanks to all of you for the chats, debates, coffees, laughs, circuitous discussions, dances, pub experiences, holidays and of course, the ‘girly nights’. You have reminded me about the importance of balance and I cannot express how much I will miss you all. I look forward to visits on my turf in the future as well as to visiting you all in your respective homelands.

I believe the distractions that have surfaced have been as important as the structured time I have spent on this project. Weekly diversions within the Women's Research Group and the Discourse and Rhetoric Group reaffirmed my belief that one cannot truly believe in something until she critically analyzes it. Now that I am concluding this process, I believe intellectual distractions such as these are responsible for the rejuvenation of my dedication to feminism and psychology, specifically to work with young women.

Finally, I thank Sue Wilkinson for her diligence, tolerance, support and encouragement. Your thorough feedback, and the example you set through your own academic endeavors has helped me with my struggle against mediocrity and has propelled me to strive to produce critically acceptable work. Thank you.
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Chapter One
What is Feminist Psychology?

1.1 Introduction

Exploring the meaning of feminist psychology presents a substantial challenge. Given the breadth and diversity of the field, it is perhaps more useful and appropriate to approach both 'feminism' and 'psychology' as multiple rather than single entities (i.e. to speak of feminisms rather than of feminism (Unger, 1996); as well as psychologies rather than of psychology).

In broad terms, feminism is a perspective, both historical and modern, that recognizes the past and present oppression of women and attempts to counteract its perpetuation through a call for widespread social action. This general perspective also serves as an umbrella for various theoretical positions, which often contradict or even oppose one another, regarding how and why women have been oppressed, as well as specific prescriptions for social change. These feminisms can usefully be divided into three broad categories: liberal, cultural, and radical; and numerous texts have been devoted to explaining the fundamental differences between them (Banks, 1981; Bryson, 1999; Jackson & Jones, 1998; Ruth, 1996; Unger & Crawford, 1996).

Also in broad terms, psychology is the study of mind and behavior. As with feminism, there are numerous theoretical perspectives regarding the specific way in which the study of human beings is undertaken. These perspectives can usefully be divided into three categories that comprise psychoanalytic (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, Freud, 1900, 1923, 1940; Kohut, 1977;), cognitive-behavioral (Watson, 1917, Skinner, 1966; Beck, 1976) and social theories (Adler, 1938; Bandura, 1977, 1986). Also as with
feminism, lively and often fervent debates occur between and across categories regarding the origins and applications of theory.

Combining ‘feminism’ and ‘psychology’ (despite their individual pluralistic meanings) results in the description of feminist psychology as the study of the mind and behavior of human beings with the intent of promoting the welfare of women. This is encompassed in Corinne Squire’s definition of feminist psychology as:

A diverse category, encompassing a full range of psychological methods and theories. Described variously as a psychology by, about or for women, devoted to understanding gender relations or to improving women’s condition. (Squire, 1996 p 145)

The manner in which a particular feminist psychologist works to ‘understand gender relations’ and ‘improve women’s condition’ is dependent upon the type of feminism and the psychology to which she ascribes. I will address key theoretical differences within feminist psychology later in this chapter, yet it is important to acknowledge that while differences exist among feminist psychologists that reflect positions in regard to feminism and psychology, they are not necessarily salient at all times, and may shift depending on the matter in question.

The following sections of this chapter address the additional issues of: where feminist psychologists can be found; the origins of feminist psychology; key theoretical approaches; how feminist psychologists address the notion of sex difference research; the notion of parameters within feminist psychology; and the future of feminist psychology in regard to various positions within the field and specifically in regard to this study.
1.2 Where are Feminist Psychologists?

Feminist psychologists work in the conventional world of academia, clinical or counseling psychology and within various research institutions, all of which remain dominated by white males who adhere to mainstream theories (Fine, 1992; Stanley, 1990; Wilkinson, 1999b). In these atmospheres, feminists often find that they work a 'double shift' while attempting to gain obligatory funding and acceptance while also trying to work toward the goals of the feminist movement itself (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; Maynard & Purvis, 1991; Wilkinson, 1986). In addition, feminist psychologists engage in a constant 'political struggle to dismantle [the] oppressive accounts of women and to generate emancipatory alternatives' (Kitzinger, 1991 p 49). Since this 'struggle' is inherently political, feminist psychology is not always welcomed with open arms in a field that claims to be objectively scientific in its methods, approaches and applications.

Although feminist representation is not as sparse as it once was within mainstream psychological journals, it remains relatively rare to find an article from a feminist psychologist within mainstream, specifically North American journals (Fine & Gordon, 1987). As a result, feminist psychologists have created their own journals such as *Feminism & Psychology*, as well as *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, which represent and emphasize a diversity of methods within feminist psychology with the intent of highlighting relevant progression within the discipline (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995). Chapter Two explores various feminist research methodologies in detail.
1.3 Origins of Feminist Psychology

Recognition of the bias against women in psychology dates back to the turn of the twentieth century with work of female psychologists such as Helen Thompson Wooley and Mary Calkins, who 'critically exposed bias in sex-difference research' (Unger & Crawford, 1996 p 10) and repeatedly criticized existing theories and hypotheses concerning women's inferior intellectual abilities (Furumoto, 1980; Thompson, 1903; Wooley, 1910). Inspired by Wooley and Calkins, Leta S. Hollingworth completed doctoral research at Columbia University concerning whether women suffer while performing multiple tasks during menstruation, and found no evidence for the detrimental claim, despite the opposing positions by other powerful researchers in the field such as Thorndike (Shields, 1975 cited in Sherif, 1979). In addition, Mary Putnam Jacobi contested the ones indicating a decline in multiple task performance in women during menstruation — work for which she won the Boylston Prize from Harvard University in 1876 (Sherif, 1979).

The work of these pioneers within the field in the United States coincided with first wave feminism and the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 'which explicitly rejected the doctrine of female inferiority then taught by academics and clergy' (Unger and Crawford, 1996 p 3). These women questioned theories and experimental methods that disparaged women and in turn, created their own studies which produced results that opposed existing bad science and resulting theory. This paved the proverbial way for feminist psychologists later emerging during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. For example, Betty Friedan's classic feminist work, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) served as an impetus for other feminists to voice objections to oppressive patriarchal
forces as they applied both to both psychology and society overall. In 1968, Naomi Weisstein addressed these issues with a description of how experimental psychology:

has nothing to say about what women are really like, what they need and what they want, especially because psychology does not know. (p 197)

Weisstein's comments served as a springboard for feminist psychologists to begin their quest for adequate psychological methods that would provide the field with information regarding what women are really like, what they need and what they want.

One important step in creating this sort of social change has been through intellectual advancement (Wilkinson, 1994) and as a result, feminist psychologists have contested numerous notorious psychological theories in regard to how they fail to apply to women or how they deprecate women's perceived psychological position. Examples of these critiques include Nancy Chodorow (1982) and Florence Rush's (1977) evaluation of Freud and psychoanalysis; Paula Caplan's (1991) creation of applicable DSM-IV (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) categories to describe men's socialization as pathological; Erica Burman's (1994) critical accounts of developmental psychology; Carol Gilligan's (1982) reformation of Lawrence Kohlberg's cognitive moral reasoning model; as well as Carol Tavris (1992) and Jane Ussher's (1989) reconstruction of theory regarding the female body. Feminist psychologists have also offered a critical analysis of psychology's lack of theory or explanation to issues relevant to women such as sexual desire (Hollway, 1984; Fine, 1988) as well as psychology's general inability to recognize sexual orientations apart from heterosexuality (Kitzinger, 1987; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1993)
1.4 Key Theoretical Traditions

In order to begin to address approaches utilized by feminist researchers in regard to theory and practice, it is useful to examine the meanings of key terms that shape both mainstream and feminist psychology: method, methodology and epistemology. Sandra Harding (1987) differentiates between these key terms:

Whereas method refers to techniques for gathering research material, methodology provides both theory and analysis of the research process. Epistemology is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are possible and how we can ensure that they are both adequate and legitimate. (P 10)

Although Harding contends that the term 'method' is often used to refer to all three of these elements of research (Maynard, 1994 p 10), it is epistemology that is the key source of differences among feminist psychologists. Harding (1989) also identifies three epistemological categories that outline similarities and differences between research traditions in feminist psychology: feminist empiricism, experiential feminism (also known as feminist standpoint theory); and feminist postmodernism (also associated with social constructionism, and discursive psychology). While theoretical approaches divide into these three categories, they are not necessarily conceptually distinct entities and overlap can and does exist across categories. Also, the work of feminist psychologists who seem to ‘fit’ within one category may overlap with others who seem to ‘fit’ within another.

1.4.1 Feminist Empiricism

Feminist empiricists utilize mainstream empirical research methods or the ‘master’s tools’ (Unger, 1996) to counteract ‘bad science’ or psychological theory that has been created and generalized to explain women’s behavior based on experiments with male participants designed by male researchers. While ‘traditional empiricism’ holds that its methods are objective so social biases are not a concern, feminist empiricism
argues that an androcentric picture of nature and social life emerges from the testing by men only of hypothesis generated by what men find problematic in the world around them' (Harding, 1991 p 184). Feminist empiricists do adhere to traditional methods in their portrayals of individuals in terms of attributes that are internal, continuous and generally separate from outside contexts (Bchan, 1993). However, they believe that their approaches allow for the identification and acknowledgement of androcentric biases (Harding, 1991) as they ‘self consciously try to create new, but rigorous, research practices to give their new findings credibility’ (Oleson, 1994 p 163) or as they ‘conduct their own, better, scientific studies in pursuit of feminist goals’ (Wilkinson, 1999b). Early work within the field fits within feminist empiricism and a large amount of feminist psychology in North America continues with this tradition (Unger, 1996, Wilkinson, 1999a).

1.4.2 Experiential Approaches

Feminists who utilize experiential approaches focus on studying women’s depiction of their own experience since this has traditionally been excluded within existing psychological approaches and resulting theory (Gilligan, 1982; Gilligan, Rogers & Tolman, 1991; Miller, 1986). These approaches stem from feminist standpoint theory, which centers on how women’s position in an oppressive patriarchal society creates a unique perspective or standpoint (Harding, 1989, 1991; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1997; Oleson, 1994; Smith, 1972; 1992; Stanley & Wise, 1990).

With origins in Marxist political science (Hartstock 1983, 1985), forerunners of standpoint research sought to emphasize ‘research starting from women’s actual experience in everyday life’ (Stanley & Wise, 1990 p 34). The emphasis on labor production and social reproduction in Marxist feminist work and resulting structural social inequalities lead Sandra Harding (1987) to emphasize the lack of research that
begins from women's own accounts of their experience. Instead, she recognizes that most existing theories originate from the 'partial and perverse understanding' that theories devised by men create and 'women's subjugated position' provides a 'more complete and less perverse understanding' (p 4) of women's position thereby enabling the development of more complete psychological theories.

Sociologist Dorothy Smith, whose work also served as point of origin for standpoint theory, identified the everyday world as problematic in regard to women's overall experience and the sexual division of labor (1988). She highlights 'particular historical forms of social relations that determine' (p 49) women's experience including employment, its relation to domestic labor and caring work, as well as the complete range of women's 'service' activities within patriarchal capitalism. According to Smith, the feminist standpoint is an epistemological position that:

at the outset of inquiry, creates the space for an absent subject, and an absent experience that is to be filled with the presence and spoken experience of actual women speaking of and in the actualities of their everyday worlds. (p 107)

Sandra Harding also describes feminist standpoint theory as a 'successor science' because it accepts the existence of 'true reality' (like feminist empiricism), and the realities expressed through women's experiences 'provide scientifically preferable starting points for generating and testing scientific hypotheses compared with the lives of men in the dominant groups, which have conventionally though unofficially been used to generate scientific problems and against which knowledge claims have disproportionately been tested' (Ussher, 1999 p 167).

Even though standpoint theory is referred to as satisfying some scientific requirements, contemporary feminist standpoint researchers also recognize and emphasize the need to explore 'woman' as a category that is 'socially and politically constructed' and is 'based on a common experience of oppression, although for
different women always constructed from multiple and differing material circumstances’ (Stanley and Wise, 1990 p 22). While oppression is a commonly shared experience, standpoint researchers recognize the way in which it is experienced is not identical for all women (Crawford, 1987; Griffin, 1995; Smith, 1988; Ussher 1999). For example, the heterosexual white middle class feminist might experience oppression differently from the black or lesbian feminist (Cannon, Higgenbotham & Leung, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Consequently, standpoint research has evolved to respond to the challenge of identifying and acknowledging multiple standpoints, and even 'hyphenated feminisms' such as 'black-lesbian or older-working-class women's perspectives' (Crawford, 1987 p 137). By providing the field with glimpses of women's experience provided by women themselves, standpoint theorists believe they offer opportunity to explore the realities of women's lives, something which mainstream psychology and its prefabricated notions of reality originally created for, by and with men has generally not achieved (Smith, 1988). Since feminist standpoint research focuses on the diverse experience of women, while recognizing that they share a common historical oppressive societal position, it has the feeling of meeting and representing women's needs (Ussher, 1999).

1.4.3 Feminist Postmodernists

Feminist postmodernism, also associated with social constructionism as well as discursive psychology (Wilkinson, 1999b), regards ‘truth’, ‘reality’ and ‘experience’ as ‘destructive illusion[s]’. Feminist postmodernists are concerned with the difficulties of ever producing more than a partial story of women’s lives in oppressive contexts’ (Oleson, 1994 p 164). Rather than truth(s) or realit(ies) feminist postmodernists refer to constructs, or variable processes ‘by which people come to describe, explain or otherwise account for the world’ (Gergen, 1985 p 266). Individuals provide ‘accounts’ of these constructs within various forms of text (i.e. interviews and conversations) and
of these constructs within various forms of text (i.e. interviews and conversations) and according to feminist postmodernists, there is a vague distinction between text and reality. The various constructs that surface within these accounts are the means by which feminist postmodernists 'deconstruct' existing essentialist theories (Burman and Parker, 1993). In addition, feminist postmodernists tend to emphasize language and how it indicates an individual's position in terms of thought, activity and action; all of which they also refer to as discourses. In addition, feminist postmodernists attempt to expand upon these constructs and discourses as they presently exist within contemporary social climates and also review potential constructs emerging from the past and the impact of language on the future.

1.5 Feminist Psychology and Sex Difference Research: A Contradiction in Terms?

One key issue within the development of feminist psychology has been the study of sex differences, and whether this type of research promotes or belittles women's position within psychology. I will look briefly at sex differences research as a way of addressing the development and evolution of feminist psychology.

The search for sex differences has historically been associated with male theorists' fascination with 'woman's nature' (Hollway, 1994 p 539) and 'then, as now, men served as the unmarked reference group' since 'male behavior was the norm or standard of comparison' (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994 p 531). The drive to find 'scientific proof' of sex differences as part of the mainstream psychometric tradition remains within the work of contemporary researchers. However, as previously stated, feminist psychologists have worked to dispel the existence of inherent differences between men and women since the first wave of feminism. Others, however have taken
the position that sex differences should not be studied because they believe time and acknowledgement devoted to this sort of research only threatens to continue to perpetuate women's oppression (Eagly, 1997; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994; Hollway, 1994).

Sex and gender as semantic units are also tied with nature and nurture respectively (Unger & Crawford, 1992); and as one of the most fundamental debates within psychology, the nature-nurture dichotomy infiltrates the notion and study of sex differences. There is also a direct relationship between the public's never ending quest for sex difference 'proof' and available funding for these studies. Hyde (1994) identifies a publication bias within mainstream journals toward sex difference research, such that significant findings reflecting results are readily published yet null findings which may occur more often are ignored, since 'sex differences sell'. In addition, studies that document difference are incredibly difficult to replicate, and it is rare that researchers report and document effect sizes. Reported differences have the tendency to be associated with women's deficits (Bem, 1994, 1996) and as Bernice Lott (1997) states, 'Cataloguing sameness and difference serves a primarily political function as it rationalizes and perpetuates differences in power' (Lott, 1997 p 19).

Feminist psychologists' positions in regard to sex difference research can be separated according to the epistemological divisions of feminist empiricism, the feminist standpoint approach and feminist postmodernism. I will address each of these in turn below. Again, there is potential overlap between feminist psychologists who categorize themselves within one of these approaches, yet this is a useful way of describing philosophies in regard to sex difference research.
15.1 The Feminist Empiricist Position

Some feminist empiricists are advocates of sex difference research because these studies provide opportunity to dispute mainstream beliefs regarding inherent differences between the sexes (Eagly, 1994, 1997; Hyde, 1994). Contemporary Psychology of Women courses are often affiliated with the study of sex differences, and as Diane Halpern (1994) states, the ‘notion of sex differences is at the heart of these courses because if there were no differences then there would be no need for a psychology of women’ (p 527). Halpern also identifies the ‘overwhelming body of evidence’ that supports the existence of particular sex differences such as the difference between boys and girls on the North American Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in mathematics (AAUW, 1992; Orenstein, 1994). When empirical tools are strictly adhered to with recognition for and avoidance of potential bias, sex difference research, can assist in possibly retracting reported difference to oppressive societal practices (Lott, 1997, West & Fenstermaker, 1997) rather than inherent deficits among women.

15.2 The Feminist Standpoint Position

A body of feminist literature recognizes how women differ from men as a result of their position within society, and as a result, this literature further emphasizes women’s strengths rather than their faults or limitations (Brown & Gilligan, 1993; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1976). Jean Baker Miller’s Toward a New Psychology of Women (1976) served as a pioneer work in which she worked to ‘begin a description of women’s strengths and to account for the reasons that they went unrecognized’ and ‘out of this can follow a new framework for understanding women – and men’ (p x). Baker Miller cites the recognition of violence against women and the subsequent
An additional key focus of Baker Miller's is the male model of the 'normal' individual and how it 'overlooks the fact that women's development is proceeding, but on another basis.' (p 83) Here, the difference between men and women has to do with relationships versus autonomy. The 'normal' (i.e. existing mainstream models) of development highlight autonomy and independence as a goal of successful development. According to her theory, which has developed into what is known as relational theory, women develop and remain within relationships from birth throughout their lives and do not strive for this sense of independence. Miller argues that this is a sex difference, and it is not one that should be used to pathologize women. This theory has been expanded by feminist psychologists such as Carol Gilligan (1982, 1993), Lyn Mikel Brown (1992) and Mary Belenky et al (1986) who introduced the idea of women's 'voice,' and women's 'different' knowledge or relational knowledge and its relation to development. In the 1990s, Miller and her adversaries have further developed relational theory to address women's experience concerning dysfunctional families, self esteem, depression, suicide, cultural identity, sexuality, and the psychotherapeutic experience (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991).

1.5.3 The Feminist Postmodernist Position

Other feminist psychologists find the terms 'women's psychology' or 'women's ways of knowing' to be misleading. This group believes that these terms suggest that 'women (as a unitary group) have a shared psychology (an array of inner qualities, traits and capacities, either innate or learned) that presumably produce behavior' (Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1994 p 532). In addition, feminist psychologists who identify with the postmodern position believe focusing on difference will 'naturalize power asymmetries' (Fine & Gordon, 1991; p 21) and shift the focus from social explanations for differences,
Specifically patriarchal oppression to the search for something inherent and individualized.

Postmodern feminist psychologists suggest that the focus should be not on how men and women are different but how and why they are constructed that way, or to move beyond the biological debate of ingrained sex differences and the search for truths of what men and women are 'really like' (Hare-Mustin and Marecek, 1994). Instead, their suggested alternative involves the investigation of social effects upon gender and how they present themselves in different forms contextually as an explanation for both group and individual behavior (Hollway, 1989, 1994; Olesen, 1994). Thus, rather than focusing on universal man or woman postmodern feminist psychologists such as Wendy Hollway (1989, 1994) focus on how the social world produces differences. This is often done through a discursive approach, or through the study of how individuals use language to illustrate difference or social positions (Burman & Parker, 1993; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1995).

Janis Bohan (1993) extends these ideas by stating, 'In particular contexts, people do feminine and in others, they do masculine' (p. 12); or one does not have gender one does gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) based on construction of societal norms and expectations. For these reasons, many if not most postmodern feminist psychologists feel that the continuation of sex difference research only hinders progress within the field.
1.6 Contemporary Feminist Psychology and its Future Possibilities

While feminist psychologists emerging in the field during second wave feminism worked to study and develop theory exclusively concerning women's experience, and wrote 'mostly for non-feminist readers — attacking the theories and implicit commitments of mainstream psychology' (her emphasis; Wilkinson, 1999b p 22), contemporary feminist psychologists have expanded their research domains to 'interpret human experience in light of feminist frameworks' (Peplau & Conrad, 1989 p 397). Michelle Fine and Susan Merle Gordon (1991) expand on this.

A project of feminist psychology can be reconstituted as the excavation of the stuff that fills women's (and men's) minds, bodies and relationships; the stuff that feels so personal, breathes so political, and is almost never articulated between the two. Feminist psychologists can do our best work in the space between 'personal' and 'political' - to understand how women (and men) position and are positioned in ways that inscribe the social as deeply personal and private moments. And then we must learn to string these seemingly personal moments together into collective and disruptive moments of feminist politics, braided with ribbons of feminist theory, research and practice. (p 25)

It has been stated that anyone who works from a perspective in which consciousness has been raised and who works to raise feminist issues with others can be referred to as a feminist researcher (Wilkinson, 1986); as the principles and applications of feminist psychology have been identified as essential for all researchers, meaning both women and men. Some feminist psychologists have focused on the study of men's experience and the meanings behind masculinity (Chesler, 1978; Griffin & Wetherell, 1991, 1992; Willott, 1998; Willott & Griffin, 1997) despite the ongoing question regarding whether men can be considered as feminists or as feminist psychologists (Edley & Wetherell, 1995, Griffin & Wetherell, 1992, Lott, 1990, McLean, Carrey & White, 1996; Porter, 1995; Segal, 1990; Silverstein, 1996).
In addition, feminist psychology has been described as more of an approach than a field (Squire, 1994), thus feminist psychology could be characterized as an approach to studying the social world, particularly issues that have not been explored previously, that are politically charged, both 'personal and private' and relevant to everyone. This creates a picture of an approach that is not especially narrow or specialized, but one that encompasses issues that apply across genders, cultures, sexualities and ways of being.

In order to continue as a transforming and challenging discipline, feminist psychologists must constantly evaluate their position to determine whether they are upholding the principles of the feminist movement within this shifting contemporary society. The founding editors of *Feminism & Psychology* illustrate this within the premier issue of the journal:

> When we think about the impact of feminist research on psychology, however, its purpose cannot rest with the transformation of the discipline; we must constantly evaluate its effectiveness in dismantling social inequalities and transforming women's lives. (Wilkinson, Condor, Griffin, Wetherell & Williams, 1991 p 9)

An example of this is within critical descriptions of feminism, including psychology, as a white western middle class and heterosexual movement. These claims resonate especially from those feminist psychologists who feel devising a 'new psychology of women' or 'giving women voice' created an elitist assumption that all women share the same voice. Critics of these approaches identify the lack of inclusion of women who are of 'other' backgrounds such as those who are working class, lesbian, and who are not of white European ancestry (Contratto, 1994; Gremmen, 1994; Kitzinger, 1994b; Lykes, 1994; Rich, 1979; Walkerdine 1985,1996). Generalizations made on the basis of one theory for all women have been repeatedly contested (see Brabeck & Larned, 1997). However, these sorts of critiques among feminist psychologists have enabled further
growth within the field, and many contemporary feminist psychologists work against making these sorts of detrimental generalizations within their research and practice whether they identify with an empiricist, standpoint, or postmodern theoretical perspective.

1.6.1 Situating Myself within Contemporary Feminist Psychology

My own position lies within the tradition of Feminist Standpoint theory. My preferred theoretical stance is based on a belief that promoting women's position and experience through their own depictions and descriptions is a vital way of developing critical accounts that challenge and counteract existing psychological theory or lack thereof. Along with prominent standpoint theorist Sandra Harding (cited in Fine & Gordon, 1991) I believe feminist psychology should position itself with the following a priori understandings:

1. that power asymmetries structure gender relations
2. that gender always intersects with social class, race/ethnicity, age, disability (or not) and sexual orientation, as well as social context, to produce socially and historically constituted subjectivities
3. that the meanings of a social experience as articulated by women must be unravelled if that experience is to be fully analyzed
4. that contextualized research is necessary to unearth women's psychologies as they reflect, reproduce, resist and transform social contexts, ideologies and relationships; and
5. that the research relationship is loaded with questions of power and betrayal, and with possibilities for collaboration and activism.

Thus for the standpoint theorist, it is crucial that prior to making any sort of statement in regard to women's experience, one must explore, examine and discuss it with women themselves. This must be done with knowledge of individual and social context, continuous recognition of experience in relation to patriarchal oppression, and with constant awareness of the potential powerful position that a researcher has in terms of interpreting these descriptions, or in the resulting need to collaborate with women when developing written accounts of their verbal descriptions.
Chapter One: What is Feminist Psychology?

My own study, which will be described and analyzed in detail within the following chapters, explores young women's experience with role models in their own lives. The participants in this study are primarily British university students. I believe the experiences expressed by these women are vital to feminist psychology since existing theory and literature has not previously explored their views on this topic. I have explored their perceptions of the meaning of this term since it is not clearly defined nor is it consistently used within mainstream nor feminist literature despite frequent use of the term by psychologists, theorists and laypersons (see Chapter 2); their responses to way the term is used as a societal prescription for young women based on perceived 'needs'; and the relevance (if any) of role models to their own lives (see Chapters 4 and 5). I will explore contextual issues in terms of my own position, demographic backgrounds of the participants, and the contributions of the results of this study to feminist psychology as well as mainstream psychology in Chapter 6.

1.6.2 Conclusion and Summary

Feminist psychology is a critical approach within a field that has a history of misrepresenting women, within a discipline that has been arguably misogynist in its practices and applications. Attempting to invoke challenge and transformation within any dominant paradigm represents an uphill battle, yet not an impossible operation. The presence that feminist psychologists maintain within institutional settings (i.e. universities and hospitals) as well as less formal settings (i.e. private clinics and practices) and their commitment to the execution of feminist principles within their research (see chapter 3) and practice, is the first way in which challenge begins. The manifestations of these challenges include reconstructions of existing theory and specifically of sex difference research which dates back to the turn of the twentieth century and continues within contemporary feminist psychology.
While it has been said that when 'psychology and feminism mate, feminism seems to bear only recessive genes' (Fine & Gordon, 1989 p 153), the development of feminist approaches within psychology in terms of theory and application indicates that its future is more positive than negative. The growth of feminist psychology since its inception during the first wave of feminism, through its rebirth during the second wave in the 1960s, through its development of varying epistemological positions is an indication of how its presence continues to build and develop. Also, researchers and practitioners from a variety of backgrounds (male and female) have begun to uphold feminist traditions, which are perceived as ethical and applicable to most if not all psychological settings (Hyde, 1994). Finally, numerous graduate students such as myself are out there seeking to grasp and understand feminist psychology as we create our own research within the parameters of the feminist tradition.
Chapter 2
A Review of Role Model Literature

2.1 Introduction

It seems that virtually every recent article, book or book chapter regarding adolescents and young adults offers some sort of statistic regarding their doomed future and problematic existence. Within psychology, a rapid growth of studies and theories concerning adolescence and young adults has been evident within recent decades, and this growth accompanies repeating reports of declining well being. Reportedly, adolescent morbidity rates have increased (Hamburg, 1992); adolescent suicide is on the rise (Garland & Zigler, 1993); as are statistics regarding depression (Petersen et al 1993), violence and death due to violence (Earls et al 1993; Gibbs, 1988; Hammond & Yung 1993; Select Committee on Children, Youth and Families, 1989), unplanned pregnancy (Brooks-Gunn & Paikoff 1993; Edelman, 1987), substance abuse (Gay, 1981; Leventhal & Keeshan, 1993; Okwumabua, Okwumabua & Winston, 1989), and sexually transmitted diseases (Brooks-Gunn & Paikoff, 1993; Edelman, 1987). Other longitudinal research studies indicate that rates of emotional and behavioral problems of adolescents (and children) have increased over the past ten years (Achenbach & Howell, 1993; Powers & Eckenrode, 1988; cited in Compas, Hinden & Gerhardt, 1995).

Girls, female adolescents and young women are repeatedly identified and associated with ominous statistics. For example, higher levels of depression are reported among female adolescents (Allgood-Merten, Lewinsohn & Hops, 1990; Petersen, Sarigiani & Kennedy, 1991), and the prevalence of eating disorders among women female adolescents in the United States is 5-19% as opposed to 0-4% of
adolescent boys and men (Hesse-Baber, 1989). Female sexual assault victims have been identified as the largest single group of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) sufferers (Foa, Olasov & Skeketee, 1987; cited in Unger & Crawford, 1996); and it is reported that 27% of women are victims of childhood sexual abuse (Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1990). As Rhoda Unger and Mary Crawford (1996) illustrate, depending on which measure of aggression one uses, rates of heterosexual courtship violence range from a low of 6% to a high of almost 90%; and 37-39% of women and female adolescents experience some form of physical violence. In a national sample of 2,600 college women, 35% experienced physical violence as teens (O’Keefe et al, 1986). Also, of 3,000 college women questioned in 32 institutions of higher education, 53.7% experienced some form of sexual assault and 27% labelled this as rape (Koss, 1987). It is estimated that one third of all women will be battered at some point in their life (Strauss & Gelles, 1990). It is important to note that statistics regarding such sensitive information are difficult to gather, and many believe these rates are underestimates (Unger & Crawford, 1996).

While these dismal statistics continue to grow, literature regarding adolescent resilience is also growing (Compas, Hinden, & Gerhardt, 1995). Existing studies identify and examine resilient adolescents specifically those among minority cultures who experience multiple obstacles (Lee, 1985; Nettles & Pleck, 1994; Winfield, 1995; Burton, Allison & Obeidallah, 1995; McHale, 1995) as well as children and adolescents of divorced families (Emery and Forehand, 1994); and adolescents who have lost a parent (Clark, Pynoos & Goebel, 1995). Half of the successful adolescents in most of these studies are female, and despite odds, this group is able to attain individual goals whether these include higher education, a job or a family or all of the above. The question of how it is some adolescents are able to rise above the effects of oppression
and inequality continues to baffle social scientists. Some studies recognize the influence of strong families, schools and other significant adults whereas others identify internal factors. In both cases, psychologists have started to acknowledge strengths and successes in terms of resilience, and to acknowledge ability rather than pathology (Seligman, 1996).

Adolescents and young adults are dependent upon the significant adults in their lives such as parents, teachers and other related and non related adults with whom they have regular interactions, also referred to in early literature as significant others (Blyth, Hjil, & Thiel, 1981; Galbo, 1989; Keats et al, 1983; Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1990; McCreary-Juhasz, 1989; Rhodes & Davis, 1996; Thomas & Weigert, 1971) or members of one's reference group (Hyman, 1941). This includes media figures whose influence can be positive as well as negative and who young women are exposed to on a daily basis through television, movies, magazines and other media (Wolf, 1995). The literature repeatedly recognizes adolescents' susceptibility to the influence of these adults, and attempts to explain the nature of these contextual relationships. In addition, both psychological and everyday literature call for these adults to work toward setting positive examples, to interact with adolescents in positive, growth-producing manner that equivocates with cultural and social standards. Often such behavior is referred to as role modeling or behaving as a role model.

Role model references appear in a variety of literary and academic forms, from psychological articles and texts to everyday books, newspaper and magazine articles to the World Wide Web. Internet sites like 'Role Models on the Web' (http://www.rolemodel.net/) are devoted to highlighting role models of the week, such as high profile athletes, musicians, actors, politicians and other media figures, and also provide site viewers with the opportunity to nominate and vote for upcoming 'role
models. In this technologically advanced epoch, the intent is 'to showcase outstanding role models, inspire youth to think about what they want to be, what they want to do, and how they'll contribute back to life,' because 'Our world has fabulous potential in its youth. By opening them to life's possibilities, we can help them to strengthen their values and live up to their full potential.' Other web pages cite parents as 'every child's role model' (http://www.academic.org/index.html). Similar web pages exist, specifically for educators, girls and young women with links to resources regarding 'positive' role models. The 'Role Model Project for Girls' (http://www.womenswork.org/girls/index.html), sponsored by 'Women's Work: a collaborative work among women's groups, inquisitive, feminists, women activists and others' (http://womenswork.org) has initiated a 'role model registry' with descriptions of both 'non-traditional' careers held by women such as building designer, manager, computer scientist, engineer, journalist and entrepreneur as well as email addresses for girls and young women who access the site to contact these women. The 'Woman Astronomer' (http://www.erols.com/njastro/twa/) is an additional website and magazine dedicated to 'promoting astronomy,' and 'is about the women role-models in astronomy, past and present' as well as the 'quickly changing science, and hobby' of the science. Also, Massachusetts Gender Equity Centers have established a comprehensive internet site with 'Women Role Models in Massachusetts' (http://www.genderequity.org/models.html) that also features women in non-traditional careers. The site offers a picture, brief personal and career description complete with salary for each woman as well as a telephone contact number. Also, The Gallery of Success (http://www.pcc.edu/academ/symulti/gallery/gallery.htm) identifies itself as a 'computer resource introducing women from 18 technical careers with photos and links to biographies for each featured woman. A research division within University of
Chapter Two: A Review of Role Model Literature

California at Berkeley (http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/PubEd/research/women.html) has identified 'Women Role Models for the New Millenium': an economist, photographer, ambassador, United Nations official and demographer/activist who are also alumnae of the university.

Requests for individuals to 'be role models' appear not only for parents, teachers and other non related adults but adults in general, including celebrities. Various programs originating within government, non profit and other grass roots organizations attempt to proactively assist young women with the selection of 'positive' role models. For example, on 9 November 1998 in the United Kingdom, the British Government Women's Unit announced a 'new initiative for women' with the advent of 'Government Approved Role Models' or role models promoted for girls, teens and young women. This proposal was launched as part of a program aimed at investigating 'the challenges facing teenage girls: issues such as dieting, smoking, alcohol and drug dependency'. By proposing these role models, it was the intent of the Women's Unit to focus on promoting 'self esteem', especially since 'girls out-perform boys all the way to their mid-teens, but they then fall behind and too many fail to reach their full potential' (Gauntet, 1998). Individuals proposed within this program included former Spice Girl Geri Halliwell, actress Emma Thompson, athlete Denise Lewis, therapist Susie Orbach and teen popster Billie. The proposal received mixed reviews, and Emma Thompson refused the title while other critics believed girls and young women would only resist the government's advances to direct their influences. At this time, the proposal has not transformed into a particular program, yet this exemplifies various programs that have prescribed role models for young women such as these celebrities based on their perceived (or at least assumed) needs.
Chapter Two: A Review of Role Model Literature

2.2 Toward a Definition of Role Models

Within these various proposals, internet sites and general references it seems that the meaning behind a role model is relatively straightforward, as it appears to signify one who models or exemplifies a behavior or behaviors (i.e. roles) in a positive manner. However, a formal definition does not appear within any of the proposals nor within the literature more generally.

Role models appear to be a psychological, and specifically developmental concept, yet again the concept is not clearly defined within psychological literature. Their origin could be associated with reference groups and significant others or 'persons who occupy high rank on an ‘importance’ continuum and whose opinions are considered meaningful' and who 'are also source of great influence' (Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1990 p 839). However, the significant other literature does not refer directly to role models, (Blyth, Hill & Thiel, 1982; Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1990; Juhasz, 1989; Keats, et al 1983; Power, Champion & Aris, 1988; Thomas & Weigert, 1971). Rather this literature addresses self esteem (Lackovic-Grgin & Dekovic, 1990; Power, Champion & Aris, 1988); parental vs peer influence (Keats, et al, 1983); relationships (Blyth, Hill & Thiel, 1982); and conformity (Thomas & Weigert, 1971).

In many instances, the term role model is paired with the concept of mentoring, which does make more of a significant mark within psychological literature (Flaxman, Ascher, & Harrington, 1988; Hamilton & Darling, 1996; Lunt, McKenzie & Powell, 1992); and is generally tied to adolescent development, educational aspirations as well as career paths (Philip & Hendry, 1990; Freedman, 1993; Rhodes, 1994; Dondero, 1997; Lecluse, Tollefson & Borgers, 1985). Rhoda Unger and Mary Crawford (1996) make a distinction between mentors and role models as they state that: 'Role models are
members of one’s own reference group who are visibly successful (Yoder, Adams, Grove & Prest, 1985) ... [who] may be admired from afar, while mentors are people who take a personal interest in the [individual].’ (p 446). Defour & Paludi (1995) refer to both terms collectively as they describe the importance of both ‘role models and mentors’ for ‘individual career development’ (p 34).

Within mainstream psychology, role models appear to have - at least semantic - ties to both modeling (a part of Bandura’s (1963) social learning theory) as well as to role theory, and perhaps these theories do serve as partial origins of the concept that has mysteriously developed to become a buzzword within, as well as a product of, pop psychology. I will review the ways in which both feminist and mainstream psychologists utilize the term role model below.

2.2.1 Feminist Psychological Literature

Several articles written in regard to girls and young women by feminist psychologists as well as other theorists, describe a lack of and resulting need for role models for girls, female adolescents and young women (Balassone, 1991; Brewster, 1994; Fine & Asch, 1985; Macke and Morgan; Tangri, 1982 cited in Salitel, 1985; Pipher, 1996; Wolf, 1996). Girls are depicted as ‘lacking achievement role models’ (Salitel, 1985; O’Connell, 1996) and relying on role models more than boys (Monaco & Gaier, 1992; Paludi and DeFour, 1992). Role models are deemed necessary for career development (Defour & Paludi, M.A., 1995; Basow & Howe, 1980; O’Connell & Russo, 1980), especially among female college students and graduate students (Gilbert, Galessich & Evans, 1983; Paludi and DeFour, 1992), and specifically for black students (Defour, 1990; Moses, 1988; Defour & Paludi, 1995). Role models have been cited as necessary to teach safe sex practices (Balassone, 1991) and their existence has been cited as a determining factor in regard to age at first intercourse (Brewster, 1994). There
has also been a relative lack of role models noted for girls and women with disabilities (Peterson & Pelarski 1974; Phillips, 1986; Simons, 1991; Fine & Asch, 1985). Again, role models appear to be referred to in relation to resilience, and feminist psychologists also appear to be stating that in order for girls to persevere, they are in need of strong visible figures whose behaviors they can observe and emulate.

Some studies have approached the notion of role models with young people. For example, Lee (1985) questioned black teenagers regarding personal role models and the top responses include Dr Martin Luther King, sports figures, entertainers, Superman, Coretta Scott King and Jesus Christ. At the same time, parents were at the top of these lists. Mothers (Altman & Grossman, 1977; Fneze, 1975; Tangri, 1972), sisters, teachers (Monaco & Gaier, 1992; Tiemo, 1991) and other family members (Lee, 1985) are often noted as examples of role models in additional literature with concerning both boys and girls. Also, much of the literature regarding effects of mother's employment on her children designates the working mother as a nontraditional role model (Bem, 1974; Hertsgaard & Light, 1984; Hoffman, 1974) whose children develop less stringent sex role stereotypes (Defour & Paludi, 1995), particularly daughters who appear to develop higher career and academic aspirations (Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Hoffman, 1989). Few studies (if any) have directly addressed young women's experience with role models in terms of their conceptions of their meanings and applications within their own lives beyond those mentioned above.

2.2.2 Mainstream Psychological Literature

The term and concept of a role infiltrates many schools of psychological thought including the concept of model-ling within Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and role theory. Role theory addresses development and learning, specifically in social and cognitive terms; and modelling is often a tool in describing parts of an individual's
psychological composition is also a sort of bridge between society and individual. I will briefly review the history and concepts of each, and then attempt to relate the two separate two perspectives (particularly regarding sex-typed behavior) in the following section.

2 2 3 Role Theory

The concept of a role has been referred to as 'one of the most important in social theory' (Biddle, 1986). The term repeatedly appears in sociological and social psychological research in various forms; examples include role expectation, role performance, public role, deviant role, roleless role, role reversal and role burnout (McCrae & Costa, 1990; Stryker & Statham, 1985; Myers, 1993). Role theorists have historically been sociologists and the first traces of their work appeared in the earlier portion of the twentieth century (Goffman, 1959; Mead, 1934 cited in McCrae & Costa, 1990). Biddle (1986) provides an interesting comment regarding the history of this concept:

As the term role suggests, the theory began life as a theatrical metaphor. If performances in the theater were differentiated and predictable because actors were constrained to perform 'parts' for which 'scripts' were written, then it seemed reasonable to believe that social behaviors in other contexts were also associated with parts and scripts understood by social actors. Thus, role theory may be said to concern itself with a triad of concepts: patterned and characteristic social behaviors, parts or identities that are assumed by social participants, and scripts or expectations for behavior that are understood by all and adhered to by performers. (p 68)

The ones concerning roles were developed further during the 1970s and 80s and within sociology, five separate sub-theories emerged that describe the interrelation of self and society. These include functional role theory, symbolic interaction theory, structural role theory, organizational role theory and cognitive role theory. (See Biddle, 1985 for a review) Contemporary role theorists representing each of the five realms share in
A belief that 'human beings behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on their respective social identities and the situation' (Biddle, 1985 p 69).

Additional theories concerning roles surfaced during this time within psychology and other social science literature. It appears as if the intent of each of these theories was to describe individual behavior in terms of societal norms and expectations, yet subtle differences between various theories make it difficult to ascertain the actual meaning of a role. For example, social psychologists identify multiple role-identities which mesh together to form the individual, although not necessarily in a clean, simple manner (Weigert, Teitge & Teitge, 1986). An individual may perform particular roles more often than others through choice (e.g. as a friend) or necessity (e.g. as an employee) and these particular roles create the more salient aspects of an individual's identity overall.

The study of sex differences was also at its pinnacle during the 1970s and as noted in Chapter One, research continues in this area today (Benbow & Stanley, 1980; Eagly, 1987, Hall, 1984; Halpem, 1992; Kimura, 1987; Kitzinger, 1994; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Terman & Tyler, 1953; Whiting & Pope, 1973). Consequently, theories concerning sex roles also emerged. According to sex role theory, an individual's sex determines which role (i.e. male or female) society expects him or her to ascribe to, resulting in specific gender role behavior (Eagly, 1987, 1994; Haug et al, 1993; Hesse-Biber, 1989; Rothblum, 1988). Also somewhat related to sex role theory has been the evolutionary development of social role theory. A primary focus of this theory is upon labor divisions between men and women and how expectations regarding one's occupational role become internalized so that 'women and men can be described as forming dispositions or traits that are consistent with gender roles' (Eagly, 1997; p 1381).
Sociologists, psychologists and developers of both sex role theory and social role theory have used the term role as a way to describe the interrelation of societal behaviors and expectations and their effect on individual identity. While this is a helpful description it is difficult to determine whether the term is anything more than a theatrical metaphor that was developed first in the mid 1900s and has been since used repeatedly within the literature.

2.2.4 Social Learning Theory

The basic premise of social learning theory is that 'personal and environmental factors do not function as independent determinants, rather they determine each other.' (Bandura, 1972 p 9). Bandura and his associates believe 'the capacity to learn by observation enables people to acquire large, integrated patterns of behavior without having to form them gradually by tedious trial and error' (p 12). Those whom one observes within daily interactions, serve as 'models' whose actions the individual may choose to emulate. Therefore, behavior is a result of observations of individuals or groups whom the individual encounters within her or his own social context.

Social learning theorists also recognise the power of the media and technology, and how these forces provide sources for individuals to observe and model additional behaviors, especially within recent generations, because:

…unlike their predecessors, who are limited largely to familial and subcultural sources of modeling, people today can observe and learn diverse styles of conduct within the comfort of their homes through the abundant symbolic modeling provided by the mass media. Models presented in televised forms are so effective in capturing attention that viewers learn much of what they see without requiring any special incentives to do so. (Bandura, Graser and Menton, 1966)
In contrast to behaviorism and radical behaviorism (Skinner, 1963, 1965; Watson, 1913, 1917) within social learning theory no particular reinforcements are necessary as observation serves as the greatest learning tool. Consequently, the individual may learn to emulate the model or decide not to imitate her or his behaviors based on what has been observed. A significant focus of Bandura’s modeling concepts has been in regard to children and same sex modeling. He proposes that children do model same sex individuals, and particularly cites same sex parents and teachers as primary influences in terms of gender task/identity development. However, later studies, such as landmark work by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) have demonstrated inconsistent findings in terms of same sex modeling in children and instead propose the idea of selective imitation, or imitating those behaviors and beliefs that are appealing to the young individual.

2.3 Role Model: An Integration of Social Learning Theory and Role Theory

Social Learning Theory (most specifically modeling) and Role Theory do not oppose one another as both aim to describe individual behavior in terms of social influences. Indeed, concepts from the two theories, can be combined to form the concept of a ‘role model’. A model is an individual within a reference group from which an individual learns, whether this is directly such as with a significant other (i.e. parent, sibling, friend, teacher) or indirectly (i.e. television, celebrities). According to the various role theorists, these particular models are observed in many capacities, and individuals can make the choice to emulate role-based behaviors (or not) based on these observations. One might identify a teacher as a role model, as well as a mother or a sister, based on frequent everyday observations of various behaviors. At the same time, one might observe a famous athlete, actress or musician as a role model based on this individual’s ability to succeed within her chosen field.
present. Role models are presented through the media on a daily basis. However it is rare that functional definitions are provided and young women’s actual views in regard to their supposed ‘need’ for these figures is rarely, if ever, addressed. Do young women actually feel they need guidance? Do they, themselves have role models. If so, who are they? Were there a series of role models in their lives throughout childhood and adolescence or were there only one or two? Were these family members, friends, teachers or celebrities? These are a few of the questions I hope to address with the young women in this study.
Chapter 3

Qualitative and Feminist Research Methodologies: Introducing the Present Study

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will review the characteristics of both qualitative and feminist research methodologies as a preliminary to locating my own study within this type of research. I will begin with an exploration of the various epistemological positions within both areas; and will then continue more specifically, with an investigation of collective qualitative feminist research methodologies. I will pay particular attention to feminist standpoint research and to focus group methodology, both of which characterize my own research project. I will conclude this chapter with a description of the methodology used in my own study.

3.2 Qualitative Research

With origins in sociology and anthropology, qualitative methodologies are depicted as a ‘field of inquiry in [their] own right... [that] crosscut disciplines, fields and subject matter,’ as ‘a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts and assumptions ..’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994 cited in Henwood, 1996 p 1). While no academic discipline claims ownership of this form of research, qualitative methodologies have become popular and have gained acceptance within the social sciences and specifically within psychology (Woolgar, 1996). Qualitatative psychologists as a group consist of social constructionists, post modernists, structuralists, post structuralists and feminists among others. Each sub group utilizing these methods differs in their
epistemological approaches and may choose different ways of representing data as a result. As Janesick (1998) states:

Qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse archival and phonemic analysis, even statistics. They also draw upon and realize the approaches, methods and techniques of ethnomethodology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism, rhizomatics, deconstructionism, ethnographies, interviews, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, survey research, and participant observation, among others. (p 5)

Therefore, qualitative research does not have a single epistemology nor is there a single essential qualitative method; and thus a simple explanation of the nature of qualitative research is not possible. I will address some of the complexities and applications of this type of research below.

3.2.1 Epistemologies

Described as an ‘assault to positivistic tradition’ qualitative methods have an ‘essence [that is] twofold: a commitment to some vision of the naturalistic, interpretive approach to its subject matter, and an ongoing critique of the politics and methods of positivism’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998 p 8). Qualitative psychologists generally work to discover multiple meanings in accounts from participants or within rather than aiming to establish a single ‘truth’ or ‘reality’ by using traditional scientific methods, particularly tests, scales and statistical analysis of data, to produce generalizable and replicable findings (Morgan, 1996; 1998). Furthermore, it is the belief of qualitative psychologists that multiple contextual positions including social class, gender, sexual preference and ethnicity result in a wide spectrum of behaviors and realities; and these are not always well represented through quantitative measures (Banister et al, 1994; Mischler, 1986; Woolgar, 1996).

The common distinction between hard (quantitative) and soft (qualitative) theories and methods is often made simply because of the lack of statistical or ‘scientific’ measures in most qualitative studies (Mies, 1991; Morse, 1994). However, qualitative
psychologists characterize this so-called ‘hard science’ (or ‘positivism’) as ‘essentialist’, and ‘individualistic’, and find their approaches more adequate in that they aim to mirror diverse realities and positions rather than a single account of behavior. In addition, qualitative psychologists give due regard to social situations and collective meanings.

While quantitative psychologists claim to remain objective in their research designs and methods, qualitative researchers work to maintain active awareness of their own subjectivity in research. For this reason, qualitative methods have also been defined ‘simply but loosely’ as ‘the interpretive study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made’ (Banister et al., 1994 p 2). Qualitative psychologists believe personal biases enter all forms of research and reject the ‘myth’ of objective, value free research (Griffin, 1995). Janesick (1998) illustrates this further:

...qualitative researchers accept the fact that research is ideologically driven. There is no value free or bias-free design. The qualitative researcher early on identifies his or her biases and articulates the ideology or conceptual frame for the study (p 41)

Qualitative researchers often acknowledge and address their subjectivity within a reflexive component that is part of their research reports, and may appear within a conclusion or serve as an active portion of the entire document (Banister et al., 1994; Wilkinson, 1988; Woolgar, 1988, 1996). This can include how they chose to pursue the particular research topic, their reservations about the study, the participants (Davis & Gremmen, 1998; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997) and anything else relevant to their subjective position as a researcher. I will include this sort of reflection in Chapter Six.

Therefore, it is important not to describe qualitative research just as the type of research that ‘doesn’t use numbers’ (Griffin, 1995 p 120) because this ignores a ‘whole range of epistemological issues, as well as wider ones of research practice’ (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992 p 97). Rather, qualitative psychologists strive to maintain a constant
recognition of the utilization of context, reflexivity and bias within their research (Banister et al, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

When interpreting qualitative data, researchers generally follow one of three patterns (Denzin, 1989). The data may be presented from only subject’s point of view, without interpretation by the researcher; it may rely on subject’s perspective and accounts may be written by the subject but then used for interpretive process (ie diaries, narratives); or data may be presented through strategies that ‘weave the subjects life into and through the researcher’s interpretation of that life’ (Denzin, 1989 p 59). After the researcher selects an interpretive format, decisions must be made in regard to the specifics of the analysis process, and once again, the researcher faces numerous options (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Common forms of qualitative analysis include narrative analysis (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994), content or thematic analysis (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994; Wilkinson, 1999a) and discourse analysis (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Parker, 1992; Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Content (or thematic) analysis has been identified as the most common form of qualitative data analysis (Wilkinson, 1999a). In this approach, the qualitative researcher allocates data (across subjects) into categories or themes, (which may be derived from pre-existing theory or derived from the data itself). In ‘content’ analysis, the occurrence of data within each category is sometimes quantified (Manning & Cullum-Swan, 1994; Wilkinson, 1999a). In ‘thematic’ analysis, however, illustrative quotes are used to document the different themes identified.

Due to the complexity behind qualitative analysis overall, its logistics have been described ‘mysterious to all but the qualitative researcher’ and as:

a process of piecing together data, of making invisible obvious, of recognizing the significant from the insignificant, of linking seemingly unrelated facts logically, of fitting categories one with another, and of attributing consequences to antecedents. It is a process of correction and modification, of suggestion and defense. It is a creative process of organizing data so that the analytic scheme will appear obvious. (Morse, 1994 p 24-25)
In addition, while 'piecing together' one's data, it is the qualitative researcher's attempt to relay participant responses in a manner that matches their own intentions (Merrick, 1999; Porter, 1999) rather than formulating participant responses in a way that matches what the researcher wishes to conclude. This points to the issue of reliability and validity in qualitative research.

Since qualitative methods are inherently subjective, critics raise questions regarding their validity and reliability, two defining characteristics of 'good' traditional quantitative research design. In technical terms, it is ecological validity (Banister et al, 1994) or contextual validity (Marshall, 1986) that qualitative psychologists strive to maintain, or 'calling things by the right names' (Kirk & Miller, 1992 p 21). However, adequately representing participants positions in qualitative research is not only a matter of validity, but it becomes an ethical issue as well since qualitative researchers strive to represent participants adequately within their accounts of research (Porter, 1999).

In terms of reliability, qualitative research will not produce research that is perfectly replicable; however qualitative researchers:

would argue against the notion of strict reproducibility as a standard for judging qualitative research because this notion contradicts their epistemological stance that the relationship between the researcher and those being studied is interactive and unique and that all data are influenced by contextual, time-bound factors (Knaff, 1994)

This is not to say that conclusions based on data are not well documented or that qualitative researchers are exempt from the need to adhere to rigorous standards. Rather, qualitative psychologists believe their approaches are both reliable and valid, in their own terms, because they recognize a broad range of experience instead of providing narrow universally applicable theories, and they work to represent experiences accurately, according to participants communicated depictions. Thome (1994) provides a succinct summary of the various issues related to validity and reliability in qualitative research:
Thus validity and reliability are not irrelevant in interpretive research, as so many proposals claim. They are achieved through an extended, trusting, and confidential relationship between investigator and informants, rather than through the establishment of the psychometric properties of research instruments. This relationship may be difficult to explain to those who are used to eliminating or at least reducing 'observer bias.' Reviewers, however, are more likely to be persuaded by explicit acknowledgement of the investigator's integration and its importance for the study than by strategies derived from and only appropriate to quantitative paradigms. (p 286)

Therefore, qualitative research, despite its inherent subjectivity upholds standards or ethics related to interpretation, analysis, reliability, validity and representation.

3.3 Feminist Research

Feminist psychologists face the challenge of 'combining feminism - a value orientation with action implication – and the tradition of psychology as an empirical science' (Peplau & Conrad, 1989 p 381). As a result, feminist research in psychology, like qualitative research, has been reactive to mainstream positivist empiricism, and has worked toward better representation of women's experience, developing theory around this experience while also opposing and operating against bias in psychology (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; Russo, 1999; Sherif, 1979; Unger, 1996; Wilkinson, 1986, 1996).

Similar to qualitative research, a precise definition of feminist research methods is difficult due to the multiple epistemologies and methods that feminist psychologists claim and utilize (Banister et al, 1994; Bowles & Klein, 1983; Crawford & Kimmel, 1999; Kelly, Burton & Regan, 1994; Maynard, 1994; Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Peplau & Conrad, 1989; Reinhartz, 1992; Roberts, 1983; Russo, 1999; Stanley, 1990; Stanley & Wise, 1990; Wilkinson, 1986, 1996, 1999b). Feminist research can (and does) consist of quantitative methods, qualitative methods or a mixture of the two (Bowles & Klein, 1983; Maynard & Purvis, 1994; Roberts, 1983; Russo, 1999; Unger, 1982 cited in Crawford &
Kimmel, 1999; Ussher, 1999; Wilkinson, 1986). In addition, feminist psychologists represent each of the epistemological positions discussed in Chapter One (see below). However, the intent that most feminist psychologists share within their research is to work toward the goals of the feminist movement and apply them to increase the breadth and depth of feminist psychology, and to improve the conditions of women's lives.

The manner in which feminist psychologists conduct research depends upon their varying epistemologies. Below, I look at the different kinds of feminist research originating in empiricist, standpoint and postmodern epistemologies.

3.3.1 Epistemologies

The epistemological approaches which underpin the study of women's experience vary broadly. Most feminist psychologists collectively work to acknowledge their own position and potential for bias within their research, (Fine, 1994; Haraway, 1988 cited in Bhavnani, 1993); recognize the mismeasure of women within existing psychological theory (Tavris, 1993; Wilkinson, 1999b); and aim to create social change in the name of feminism within psychology by creating research that adequately addresses women's position and experience (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999). However, as noted in Chapter One, most feminist psychologists recognize that there are multiple ways to achieve feminist goals within research and as a result have moved from the 'reactive' stance of the feminist critique of social science, and into the realms of exploring what 'feminist knowledge' could conceivably look like' (Stanley & Wise, 1990 p 37; Harding, 1991). In Chapter One, I also addressed three main epistemological positions within feminist psychology (i.e. feminist empiricism, the feminist standpoint approach, and feminist postmodernism). In this section I will review the implications of these epistemologies in regard to research methodology, focusing particularly on the standpoint approach to feminist research, since this is the epistemological foundation of my own study.
Feminist empiricists often use the 'master's tools' (Unger, 1996), or traditional empirical methods to contest studies that make claims which are methodologically flawed or biased against women. Feminist empiricists object to such 'bad science' and 'argue that sexist and androcentric biases are eliminable by stricter adherence to existing methodological norms of scientific inquiry' (Harding, 1987 p 182). This more typically involves quantitative than qualitative research methods.

Postmodern feminist psychologists in contrast, do not believe in a single, measurable 'reality' rather, they recognize multiple and shifting realities resulting in and from multiple subjectivities and contexts (Bohan, 1993; Burman & Parker, 1993). Feminist postmodernists often utilize qualitative techniques (e.g. discourse analysis) in order to focus on and acknowledge the researcher's position in the construction of knowledge (Gavey, 1989) and the shifting and contingent nature of 'knowledge' itself.

Feminist Standpoint theory has sometimes been 'precariously' set between feminist empiricism and feminist postmodernism (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995), and feminist standpoint researchers have been said to:

assume that knowledge is grounded in social reality, reject methodological naturalism emphasize the importance of lay knowledge; the emphasis is on observation and prediction, and the separation of facts from values (Ussher, 1999 p 47)

Standpoint researchers seek to emphasize 'research starting from women's actual experience in everyday life' (Stanley & Wise, 1990 p 34). The focus on experience within feminist standpoint theory in psychology surfaced in reaction to the 'overwhelming focus of most psychological research on the behavior of male participants within experimental contexts' (Griffin, 1995 p 120). This approach enables feminist researchers to 'arrive at empirically and theoretically more adequate descriptions and explanations - at least less partial and distorting ones' (Harding, 1991 p 48 cited in Ussher, 1999).
As stated in Chapter One, standpoint researchers recognize that while oppression is a commonly shared experience among women, the way in which it is experienced is not identical for all women (Crawford, 1987; Griffin, 1995; Ussher, 1999). For example, the heterosexual white middle class feminist might experience oppression differently from the working class, black or lesbian feminist (Cannon, Higgenbotham & Leung, 1991; Stanley & Wise, 1990). Thus, feminist standpoint researchers also recognize and emphasize the need to explore ‘woman’ as a category that is ‘socially and politically constructed’ and is ‘based on a common experience of oppression, although for different women always constructed from multiple and differing material circumstances’ (Stanley and Wise, 1990 p 22). This is usually done through qualitative methods in which women’s experiences can be shared, analyzed and interpreted.

3.4 Qualitative Feminist Research Methods

Qualitative psychologists and feminist psychologists share many similarities within their approach to research, and many feminist psychologists also identify as qualitative psychologists. Feminist psychologists use a broad range of methods within their research including questionnaires, surveys and other quantitative methods (Reinharz, 1992), diaries (Jackson, 1997; Graham, 1984), narratives (Lykes, 1983; Mischler, 1986), case studies (Weston & Roefel, 1984; Raymond, 1982; Stake, 1998), photography, focus groups (Frith, 1998; Milward, 1995; Wilkinson, 1999a), group and individual interviews (Andre, 1981; Breakwell, 1995; Reinharz, 1992, Scully, 1988), stories (Reinharz, 1992) as well as participant action research (Gergen, Chrisler & LoCicero, 1999). Many believe that in order to create effective research, ‘feminism should borrow, steal, change, modify and use for its own purposes any and everything from anywhere that looks of interest and of use to it, but that we must do this critically’
(Stanley & Wise 1983 p 202). In particular, feminist research is often associated with qualitative methodologies and epistemologies due to its emphasis on reflexivity, subjectivity and the particular standpoints of the researcher and researched.

3.4.1 Focus Groups as a Qualitative, Feminist Method

One key qualitative method frequently used by feminist researchers is the focus group. Focus groups are focused conversations on a research topic intended to provide participants with an opportunity to discuss a particular topic in as close as a naturalistic manner as possible. They are not 'freewheeling conversation[s] among group members' but have a 'clearly identifiable agenda' (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990 p 18) which is to focus on and discuss a particular topic. Focus groups also minimize power differentials between researcher and participants due to their interactive nature and their design promotes quasi-naturalistic conditions which makes them an ideal qualitative method for feminist research.

Focus groups originated in the distinctly non-feminist context of market research (Basch, 1987; Bogardus, 1926 cited in Milward, 1995) and re-emerged prior to World War II as a radio research technique (Merton & Kendall, 1946; Merton, Fiske & Kendall, 1956) with emphasis on group dynamics, persuasive communication and the effects of mass media (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). The technique surfaced once again in the 1970s and has evolved as 'a set of procedures for the collection and analysis of qualitative data that may help us gain an enlarged sociological and psychological understanding in whatever sphere of human experience' (Merton, 1987 p 565). Focus groups are now a major part of research in the social sciences, including media and communications and are part of the noticeable move toward qualitative methods in the social sciences (Lunt, 1996). Within psychology they have achieved 'substantial foothold since 1988' and are 'especially popular within applied psychology, particularly health psychology' (Milward, 1995 p 275)
There are many advantages of using focus groups within research. They are helpful for exploratory research when little is known of a topic (Brodigan, 1993, Hisrich & Peters, 1982 cited in Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996) and serve as a useful starting point for designing quantitative survey questionnaires (see O’Brien, 1993). They can also be used as confirmation tools (Wolff, Knodel & Sittitrai, 1993) and are instrumental to examine aspects of a particular marketing program prior to its release, while it is in use or after it has been completed (Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). Focus groups are specifically useful in that they allow the researcher to investigate participants’ own meanings around a given topic (Kitzinger, 1994a; Mikel Brown, 1997; Wilkinson, 1999a).

The recommended number of participants for focus groups ranges from 4 to 12; (Kitzinger, 1994a; Krueger, 1998; Millward, 1995; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Wilkinson, 1999a) with an ideal range identified between 7 and 10 participants (Kitzinger, 1994a). A ‘moderator’ or ‘facilitator’, usually the researcher or another individual familiar to the participants (Mikel Brown, 1997) ideally trained in group dynamics (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), asks questions which facilitate conversation. A focus group schedule is developed by the researcher and/or moderator as a guide for group discussion. This consists of a list of questions that often appear ‘deceptively simple’ (Krueger, 1988 p 21) and is carefully calculated and designed by researchers as an open ended tool that will hopefully promote self disclosure.

Depending on the nature of the research, the moderator may work diligently to direct conversation, or she or he may allow the group control the discussion as long as they continue to discuss the topic. Less control within focus groups allows group members to challenge one another, which often leads to participants reframing their own ideas and helps to create more naturalistic interaction (Kitzinger, 1994a; Krueguer, 1988). Most researchers work to maintain a balance between what is important to group members and what is important to them (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Some
Chapter Three: Qualitative and Feminist Research Methodologies

Researchers argue that focus group participants should not previously know one another as this could impede disclosure (Milward, 1994, Krueger, 1998). At the same time, others believe familiarity among participants fosters naturalistic interaction (Kitzinger, 1994a) that provides a 'psychological loosening effect' which enables participants to discuss topics candidly (Durger, 1986 cited in Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996) and promotes disclosure around sensitive topics that might not occur within an individual interview (Lee, 1993, Ward, 1991 cited in Lunt, 1996).

Focus groups are most often audio-taped and then transcribed for data analysis, which can be a painstaking process (Milward, 1994). A typical focus group lasting 60 to 90 minutes and can result in up to 50 typed pages of transcribed data. Studies using only focus groups may run up to 10-15 groups or more resulting in large amounts of typed text to analyze. Using content and/or thematic analysis with focus group data adds to the complexity of the analysis process because this method is incredibly time consuming and few published guidelines exist.

There are appropriate and inappropriate times to use focus groups when designing a qualitative study and while they have many positive aspects, focus groups also have their disadvantages. It is important to take advantage of the group process in addition to content when presenting findings, rather than presenting data as a one to one interview (Wilkinson, 1999a). Also, focus groups require skill to moderate and facilitate and such training is not always available for researchers as it is, 'not routinely [included] in graduate school' curriculum (Krueger & Morgan, 1993). In addition, participants may experience pressure to conform to views expressed within the group, and may not feel comfortable speaking out in a group setting (Jaffee et al, 1999). Finally, it is not necessarily easy to create a natural, comfortable setting to run the group (Frey & Fontana, 1993).
Like all qualitative research methods, focus groups do have their own inevitable validity and reliability issues. Exact focus group settings cannot be reproduced and this negates the possibility of producing replicable findings therefore raising question of reliability. However, due to their relatively naturalistic and conversational format, most researchers who use focus groups believe they make up in validity for what they lack in reliability.

I will now review my own use of focus groups in the present research project.

3.5 The Present Study

I conducted a qualitative feminist research project concerning young women's perceptions of role models and how they do or do not apply to their own experience. I used focus groups to gather data and then conducted a combined content and thematic analysis. The details of participants, materials, procedure and analysis are provided below. The analysis is then presented in Chapters 4 and 5 and reviewed and discussed in Chapter 6, along with my conclusions.

3.5.1 Framework

I chose focus groups to explore young women's own perceptions and meanings of role models for several reasons. First, it was my hope that they would enable me to become acquainted with the phraseology and concepts used by this population of respondents (Millward, 1995 p 278), especially since I was an American researcher working with British participants. Second, the minimal power differentiation between researcher and participant appealed to me as a budding feminist researcher. Third, few studies (if any) have explored young women's experience with role models, and therefore I thought focus groups would provide an ideal opportunity to explore this topic in a semi naturalistic setting, and to create a setting for participants to challenge and
bounce ideas off one another while contemplating, interpreting and examining their ideas concerning the meaning of the term 'role model' and how it has or has not applied to their lives.

3.5.2 Participants

Thirty participants took part in this study: 15 female undergraduate students and 15 female postgraduate students. Participants were mostly British university students completing their studies at Loughborough University. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 29 and were recruited opportunistically through the Social Science Department at Loughborough University. Participants were at various stages in their university career, and were recruited in lectures and seminars, as well as through personal correspondence in the case of the participating postgraduates. All participants took part in this study voluntarily and were provided with an informed consent form at the beginning of each group that explained the basic nature of the research, the research supervisor and expectations concerning confidentiality for both the researcher as well as for the group (see Appendix C).

3.5.3 Materials

A focus group schedule was developed consisting of nine questions addressing influential people in participants' lives; the extent of influence of famous persons and media figures; important characteristics of role models; the idea of outside agencies proposing role models for girls and young women; and how and in what way an individual actually emulates a role model (see Appendix A). The focus group schedule was piloted in a separate group that has not been included within this data set.

In order to address this issue on a micro level without introducing my actual research question too early, I first asked participants who has been influential in their lives thus far, and explained that by this I meant who they respect or admire (Question 1).
To foster conversation concerning extent of influence of famous individuals, participants were given a page of pictures of famous individuals who could be considered influential. These leaders represent a wide range of disciplines including literature, science, music, theater, civil rights, fashion, feminism, athletics, religion and business (i.e. Virginia Wolf, Madame Curie, Geri Hallwell, John Lennon, Cate Blanchett, Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Donna Karan, Naomi Woolf, Denise Lewis, Mother Teresa and Richard Branson respectively) (see Appendix B). and were selected because it was expected that participants would have previously encountered them through the British media or at some point within their secondary or university education (Question 2).

In order to investigate participant opinions regarding outside agencies identifying their 'nee'd for role models, I inquired about a recent proposal by the British Government Women's Unit in which in 'Government Approved Role Models' were promoted in an attempt to highlight particular female celebrities for their accomplishments with the hope of positively impacting young girls, teens and young adults (Question 3). These included Geri Halliwell, Emma Thompson and Denise Lewis. I specifically asked participants what they thought of this idea and whether these individuals seemed like good choices for a proposal such as this as well as who they might suggest as alternatives (Question 4).

Since the term 'role model' was introduced in the last question, I used the opportunity to ask who else has served as role models for participants and I offered prompts such as teachers, parents, and other family members or adults (Question 5). Following this question, I was interested in what is important in a role model for participants and whether role models are someone these young women want to emulate or 'be like', or if they are something individuals think they could be like or if role models are individuals participants merely admire but do not to wish be like at all (Question 6).
I was also interested in whether individuals who are often seen as controversial could also be seen as role models or as individuals that these young women would want to be like and I used Madonna and David Beckham as examples (Question 7). In addition, I was interested in whether individuals whom participants might not agree with due to their unpopular or controversial views could still be seen as influential. I used British feminist Germaine Greer as an example (Question 8).

Finally, I asked participants whether there was anything additional that they would like to add to the conversation or if there were any aspects we did not cover regarding influence and role models within our discussion (Question 9).

3.5.4 Procedure.

Nine focus groups took place and the number of participants within each group varied between two and five (see Appendix D). Focus groups took part during term time and were generally held between lectures on campus in medium sized department classrooms in which participants sat in a circular formation. Informed consent was obtained at the beginning of each group through an informed consent form describing logistics of the study, as well as ethical considerations regarding confidentiality. Participants were also briefed on the structure of the group and my overall interest in this research (i.e. young women's perceptions of influential people) at this time.

Refreshments were also provided for participants in order to help to create a friendly atmosphere.

The focus groups ran for approximately one hour each and during this time, I used the focus group schedule flexibly to moderate and facilitate discussion in a manner that allowed participants to include feedback that was relevant, while also controlling the discussion so that each question within the focus group schedule was adequately addressed. Focus groups were individually audio taped with a single voice tape recorder. Participants were thanked and debriefed at the end of each group regarding
my specific research interests (perceptions of role models and treatment of the
term/concept by outside agencies) and they were given an opportunity to ask any
questions regarding the study.

3.5.5 Transcription & Analysis

The audio-tape of each focus group was orthographically transcribed in its
entirety. The data were analyzed through a mix of content and thematic analysis.

In order to execute a content analysis on this data, I tabulated responses to
Question 1 (Who has been influential in your life?), Question 2 (Reactions to prompt
sheet in regard to influential celebrities), Question 4 (The notion of a government
approved role model) and Question 5 (Who else has been influential?). These
responses are represented in Tables A-E, along with further detailed explanation in
Chapter Four.

I chose to analyze most of the data through a thematic analysis. I repeatedly
read and re-read the data transcripts in order to identify key themes which recurred both
within and across questions, but, crucially across participants and across focus groups.
Participants' responses were then organized under these themes, and quotations
selected to illustrate and substantiate the themes identified. The results of the content
and thematic analyses are presented Chapters 4 and 5 and then reflected upon in terms
of their implications to mainstream and feminist psychology within Chapter 6.
Chapter 4
Data Analysis I

4.1 Introduction

In the next two chapters, I will review the analysis process that I followed within this study. First, I did a content analysis (reported in section 4.2) in which I tabulated participant responses to focus group questions regarding: a) who has been influential in participants' lives; b) whether particular celebrity figures 'could' be seen as influential; c) suggestions of celebrities not on prompt sheet who have been influential; d) responses to the idea of government approved role models; e) suggestions of other possibilities for this sort of program and f) any other individuals who have been influential that were mentioned later in focus group discussions. Findings for each of these tabulations are represented respectively in tables A-F.

Second, I did a thematic analysis (reported in section 4.3 and continued in chapter 5) in which I have identified three major themes and five supporting minor themes within the data set and across questions. In this chapter, I will discuss the first major theme and two minor themes. In Chapter Five, I will discuss the remaining major and minor themes.
### Table A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Person Named</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family Members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandparents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Figures</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Supervisors</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madonna</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A reflects responses to the first question within the focus groups, "Who has been influential in your life? Participant responses are grouped into three categories: family, educational figures and other individuals. 'Influential' figures were most frequently family members.

In the family category, participants most frequently named their mothers as the most influential (n=19) followed by both parents (n=8), sisters (n=4), family overall (n=4), aunt (n=2), and brother.

In the educational figure category, teachers were named most frequently (n=8) followed by academic supervisors (n=1).

Within the final category, one participant named a partner, one named friends and one named Madonna as influential.
### Table B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celebrity</th>
<th>General Influence (Response Frequency)</th>
<th>Direct Influence (Response Frequency)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Richard Branson</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mane Cune.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geri Halliwell</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahatma Gandhi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna Karan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Lennon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Teresa</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi Wolf</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia Woolf</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table B reflects responses from question 2 within the focus group schedule. Responses were divided into mentions of individuals who ‘could be’ seen as influential (general influence) and those who ‘have been’ influential (direct influence). No participant mentioned any individual more than four times and some were not mentioned at all.
**Table C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Germaine Greer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson-Mandela</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Supervisors</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Reeve</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita-Ruddick</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diana</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princess-Anne</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terri Waite</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Feminists</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Composers</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women Who Fought For the Vote</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table C reflects responses from Question 3, in which participants were asked for suggestions of individuals not included on the photo sheet who have also been influential. Seven specific people were mentioned and four categories of individuals (e.g., feminists, politicians). No person in any category was mentioned by more than 2 people.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Rejecting Denise Lewis acknowledged as + then, idea rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Rejecting idea but choices ok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rejects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Rejects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Rejects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Idea is 'naïve' but it is a 'start'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rejects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Not entirely negative, but idea collectively rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table D reflects participants' reactions to the idea of a Government Approved Role Model. Two of the nine focus groups described some positive aspects of the idea, and one described it as 'naive but a start.' Even though these two groups were able to see some positive aspects of the idea, in the end they were against it.
Table E

Question 4: Alternative Choices For Government Approved Role Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Well Known Individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helen Fielding...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Princess Anne...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin Luther King Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gandhi...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Winslett...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Thatcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darcy Bussell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mira Sile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson Mandela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita Roddick</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individuals Who Are...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletes...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writers...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McMillan Nurses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those in performing arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Who Work against oppression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blank Spaces Fitting the individual...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
* Blank Spaces on a sheet of paper in which each person fills in an image of 'my teacher', 'my coach', 'my mother' or other personal titles.

Table E outlines participant responses in regard to possible alternative individuals who might qualify as a Government Approved Role Model. Eleven specific individuals were mentioned; 2 of which participants had previously seen on the photo sheet in question two. Seven similar categories emerged, (e.g. athletes, academics) and one participant suggested providing a blank sheet of paper for everyone with subtitles of 'my mother' or 'my coach' to enable everyone to choose individuals that have personal meaning.
### Table F

**Question 5 – Other Influential People**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person Mentioned</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Members</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Figures</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals With Whom Participants Have Personal Relationships</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table F illustrates participant feedback in regard to other suggestions of influential people in their own lives. Responses were divided into 4 categories: family members, educational figures, individuals with whom participants have personal relationships with other than family or teachers and individuals who participants have no relationship with or "Others". Educational figures (i.e. teachers and lecturers) and 'others' (i.e. politicians, musicians, fictional characters) were most common.
4.2 Content Analysis

When asked who has been influential in their lives thus far (Question 1), the first response all but one focus group was ‘my mother’ or ‘my mum’. Other responses (in order of frequency) include other family members (i.e. sisters and grandparents), educational figures (teachers, lecturers and academic supervisors), and others (partner, friend and Madonna). Other suggestions of influential people (Question 5) were divided into 4 categories: family members, educational figures, individuals with whom participants have personal relationships with other than family or teachers and individuals who participants have no relationship with or “Others”. Educational figures (i.e. teachers and lecturers) and ‘others’ (i.e. politicians, musicians, fictional characters) were most common. (collapse this?)

When asked whether celebrities presented ‘could’ be considered influential or whether they had been influential for these participants (Question 2), no participant mentioned any individual more than four times and some were not mentioned at all.

Individuals not included on the photo sheet who were also seen as influential included seven specific individuals (Germaine Greer, Nelson Mandella, Christopher Reeve, Anita Ruddock, Princess Diana, Princess Anne and Terri Waite) and four categories of individuals (academics, artists, feminists, and politicians). No person was mentioned by more than 2 participants.

When asked about the overall idea of a Government Approved Role Model (Question 3), participants in seven of the nine focus groups rejected the idea. Participants in two of the nine focus groups described some positive aspects of the idea, and one of the two described it as ‘naive but a start.’

Eleven specific alternatives for Government Approved Role Models, were mentioned (Question 4); 2 of which participants had previously seen on the photo sheet.
in question two (Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi). Seven types or categories of individuals were mentioned: academics, athletes, artists, charity workers, individuals working against philanthropists, writers, and individuals specific to everyone such as teachers, parents and one participant suggested providing a blank sheet of paper for everyone with subtitles of 'my mother' or 'my coach' to enable everyone to choose individuals that have personal meaning.

4.3 Thematic Analysis

Three main themes were identified within the data set and across questions. These themes were 1) The meaning of influence; 2) Influential traits as opposed to whole individuals and 3) The idea of proposed role models as patronizing. The following supportive minor themes were also identified: 1) Variations in types of influence 2) Specific individuals who have been influential; 3) Commitment as a specific influential trait; 4) The 'need to be yourself' as opposed to emulating another individual entirely and 5) The notion that 'role models are people too' or are not without their imperfections. Major themes occupy most of the discussion and came up frequently within discussion. Minor themes are less extensive and were not raised as frequently within discussion. This chapter focuses on the first main theme: the meaning of influence, and the first two minor themes. Chapter Five focuses on the remaining major and minor themes.

4.4 Theme 1: The Meaning of Influence

The first main theme concerns participants' perceptions of the meaning of influence. Participants repeatedly began speaking of role models and/or influential people by exploring the meaning of influence. They did this by a) attempting to
determine whether influence is synonymous with ‘admiration’, ‘respect’ and the desire to ‘emulate’ someone; and b) by attempting to figure out whether influence changes over time and across life circumstances.

4.4.1 Influence Vs Admiration, Respect and Emulation

While they were discussing the meaning of influence, participants compared it with ‘respect’, ‘admiration’ and the desire to ‘emulate’ another individual. Within their contrasts, participants discussed influence as something they have experienced as having more of an effect than ‘respect’ and ‘admiration’. Kathy provides an example of the difference identified between respect and influence:

Kathy: I think there’s a difference between who I respect and who I find influential in my life.

M.C.: Mmm.

Kathy: There’s lots of people I have respect for and some of the people that are influential in my life I don’t actually have a lot of respect for.

M.C.: Mmm.

Kathy: They may have a lot of influence over my life.

M.C.: Hmm.

Kathy: Um, so those are kind of, to me kind of different things. You know, I think I would probably say that someone like my mother I would respect and she would have a great deal of influence over me. But I think that my old boss probably had a lot of influence over me as well and it wasn’t necessarily in good ways. Um, although I guess I have some respect for him but that’s based on other things.

FG 7 Q1 P2

To Kathy, respect and influence are not interchangeable terms. She respects ‘lots of’ people, yet there are some individuals who have been influential that she doesn’t ‘actually have a lot of respect for’. In addition, the way in which she refers to individuals as having influence ‘over’ her indicates that those who are influential have more of an effect that those she respects. She continues to untangle the difference between respect and influence below:
Kathy: No that's exactly what I was just thinking because I mean I was thinking about the thing that uh, OK, of colleagues, who would I say is influential and who would I say I have respect for? Well, I would say probably most of them. Um, but that's a difference between, but there's to me somehow a difference to me between that and them actually having any power to change my life direction. Which

Liz: Mmm.

Kathy: seems to me to be a much

Liz: Mmm.

Kathy: bigger thing. So I can respect and be influenced by lots of different people and I can be influenced on a minute by minute basis as well because I am pretty wishy-washy. Um, but to actually have my the course of my life changed by somebody or for to for something to have enough influence to make me change the way I do my day to day things, or for me to respect a person that can make me change the way I think and act. In my immediate life I can only think of one person who's done that.

FG 7 Q1 P3

Here, she emphasizes that an individual who has 'the power to change' [her] life direction and who 'has' enough influence to make [her] change her daily life events has an effect that is 'much bigger' than one she has 'respect for'. It appears that to her, influence is associated with this 'power to change', whereas respect is not.

Anne and Christine also discuss the 'difference' between 'respect' and 'influence':

Anne: or just people you respect you know, there's a big difference isn't there? Between people who have an actual influence on your life like our grandparents and whatever whereas these people you kind of respect and they don't have a like massive influence

M.C.: Right.

Christine: on the way you live your live.

M.C.: Right. They're not an everyday sort of influence.

FG 3 Q2 P9

Anne's description of the 'big difference' between respect and influence is similar to Kathy's above. She speaks of people 'like your grandparents' having 'an actual
influence on' her life (my emphasis), also suggesting a greater effect associated with influence than with respect.

Nancy and Rachel also discuss the 'difference' between 'admiring someone' and 'them actively influencing your life':

Nancy. There's a difference between actually admiring somebody and them actively influencing your life. I mean, somebody who you admire may not influence your life.

M.C.: Right.

Rachel: Mmm. I guess it's a bit like Gen Spice or sort of ex-spice. You look at her and you think, wow, she's made it on her own after this absolutely amazing multi-millionaire group that she was in. But, I wouldn't ever say that she's influenced anything I would do.

FG 5 Q2 P3

Here admiration and influence are not seen as interchangeable terms for Nancy because 'somebody you admire may not influence your life'. Nancy's description of someone 'actively influencing your life' also suggests once again that influence appears to have an effect that in this case, admiration does not share.

In the following extract, Susan speaks of the differences between both admiration and respect in contrast to influence:

Susan: I mean I often think that hundreds of people sort of say, oh yeah, you know Lady Diana and Martin Luther King and whoever it is, you know yes, they were they were such a wonderful person. Um, there is sort of a difference between admiring someone, respecting what they're doing and really, you know, being influenced by someone. I mean, you know, you can sort of just say, sort of, you know off the top of your head, yeah so and so influences me but it can really look at what they did and what you've did and haven't really sort of been influenced by them as such.

FG 5 Q2 P2

Susan presents a similar argument as the other participants above in that she speaks of 'really being influenced by someone' (my emphasis) as opposed to 'admiring someone' and 'respecting what they're doing'.
Participants also spoke of their desire to emulate or 'be like' an individual repeatedly while considering the meaning of influence. In many instances, the strength of the desire to emulate an individual was used as a gauge of whether an individual could be seen as influential. For example, in the following extract, Anne and Christine speak of their admiration of certain celebrities and discuss whether they would want to 'be exactly like' these people:

Anne: I mean I wouldn't want to be exactly like Richard Branson, but I admire what he's achieved.

M.C.: Mmm.

Anne: And uh you know, Geri Halliwell and her lifestyle that I think for an individual she's achieved what she wants to and that's what I admire, not so much that she actually did it.

Christine: Yeah, I think it is possible not for them to be like someone but to be

Anne: I certainly wouldn't want to be like Germaine Greer, but I admire what she's done.

Christine: Yeah.

M.C.: Mmm. Mmm. Yeah actually that's

Anne: I wouldn't like to live in the middle of nowhere.

M.C: Right

Anne: (inaudible) but you know, what she's done is amazing and fantastic and she's revoltingly intelligent and she's written so many books and her mind is just absolutely brilliant but you know, I wouldn't want her lifestyle.

M.C.: Mmm.

Christine: No.

FG 3 Q6 P20-21

Although Anne 'admires' what these celebrities have 'achieved' she does not wish to be 'exactly like' these celebrities. Anne does not state that she wishes to strive to 'be like' or emulate these celebrities, instead she 'admires' them, and according to the parameters set forth by participants, it does not follow that she finds these celebrities influential.
The previous extracts indicate that participants were able to distinguish between respect, admiration and influence although these distinctions were not necessarily clear nor were they made without difficulty. Kathy and Liz illustrate this further:

Kathy: I'm quite interested to know. Ok, if you want to put it that way, are there other people who's life who you'd like to model your life after. I think that is different than saying who's influential and who you have respect for.

Liz: Yeah, I mean that that's the question of role model then isn't it? I mean (inaudible)

M.C.· Mmm Hmm.

FG 7 Q1 P5

Kathy and Liz's discussion summarizes how the 'question of [a] role model' is polemical in terms of its fundamental meaning. While semantic comparisons with 'influence', 'respect' 'admiration' and 'emulation' provided grounds to explore meaning prior to making an attempt to apply the concept to their own experience, clear conclusions were not readily available. These initial discussions also set the metaphorical stage for remaining difficulty with the concept of a role model overall.

4.4.2 Influence Over Time

Participants rarely described influence in terms of a single encounter that has remained over the course of their life thus far; and few identified single role models or influential individuals. Rather, they stated influence was something that changed for them over time, meaning different people have been influential for them depending on their stage of life and immediate interests. Carrie and Jane discuss this below:

Carrie: I'd say whatever is important to you at a stage in your life. For me it's been different people at different times. And I have taken different sorts of influence depending on the maybe depending on what sort of issues they've made at a particular time to me or whatever I've been dealing with or whatever.

M. Mmm Hmm. Mmm Hmm. (pause) What's relevant at the time.
Chapter Four: Data Analysis I

Carrie: Yeah.

Jane: Mmm. Yeah I mean I think the things that are important to me when I was kind of 10 or 11 or 12 or 14 are obviously vastly different to what is important to me now.

FG 7 Q5 P28

The identification of influence and influential individuals as dependent on ‘whatever is important to you at a stage in your life’ further illustrates how both have the tendency to shift based on the ‘sort of issues’ one is ‘dealing with.’ Jane validates by stating that people who were ‘important’ to her at an earlier age ‘are obviously vastly different to what is important to [her] now.’

Michelle, Julie and Jennifer also discuss the difference between who they ‘looked up to’ at a younger age as opposed to this point in their lives:

Michelle: (pause) I was trying to think who I looked up to when I was younger and I think it was probably like pop stars and things that were on the telly

Julie: Now it’s probably (inaudible)

Jennifer: Oh god, look at him now. (laughter)

Michelle: I think that’s what you do when you’re younger rather than look toward like real people. I know they’re real people but you know you just wow I want to be famous like them

FG 4 Q5 P10-11

Michelle ‘looked up’ to ‘pop stars’ and ‘things that were on the telly’ because ‘when you’re younger’ there is a tendency to ‘want to be famous like them’. This mirrors the comments of Jane and Carrie above, suggesting that who one finds influential shifts with age and corresponding interests.

Mary speaks of a role model she had when she was younger and how she perceives this woman at the present time:

Mary: (cuts) the other day, I was thinking of another role model, when I was little um, um my dad was gone and my mum was working. I had a nanny, and she was like five years looking after me and my sister. And she had really long blond hair and she was great, she used to sing when she was doing the cleaning and stuff like that and she made fish ‘n chips which my mom would never let us eat. And like, get us lollies that we weren’t allowed to have and just was generally
really cool and I was like, oh its so great she had the moped and I thought, moped! (laughter) and like, she-she lives in my village and uh- we haven't moved away and its what, ten years since she, well more than ten years since she looked after me. And I saw her about six months ago and she was just like a 40 year old woman who cleans houses and has a moped and (laughter) and like, she's great she is really funny and she's got nice hair, but you know. You just change what you're looking for (inaudible) She's a really lovely woman, but uh it's it's weird sort of like to see someone who was so important just be in a really normal context now.

Mary's descriptions of why her nanny was 'great' do not match her impressions of this woman presently and her account of these past and present perceptions illustrate how influence changes with age and interests, especially since it is 'weird' for Mary to 'see someone who was so important just be in a really normal context now.'

Alison also describes someone who she 'used to think was the best thing in the world' but who she does not 'look up to' any longer:

Alison: Yeah, it is definitely. We've got a friend like that at home, an American friend but she's lived here for however long, and when I was younger I used to think she was the best thing in the world and she used to give us the best Christmas presents and stuff. And now, she is going through a divorce with her husband and she's very proud and so she hasn't been in contact with our family for about two years, and that's I find that a real shame but I used to look up to her and now I just think that she is being weak because she she can't phone and say you know yeah, Neill and I are getting divorced but you know, I don't want to lose all of my friends. So now, I don't look up to her, I think, well, you've handled that badly and I will handle it better and I'm only younger.

FG 2 Q5 P11-12

Even though the circumstances behind why Alison believes this former 'best thing in the world' to be 'weak' and no longer 'look[s] up to her' are not a direct result of age, they are a result of changing life circumstances and provide an additional example of how influence can change over time. Mary, Alison and Amy also collectively discuss the changing nature of influence in relation to their own lives:

Mary: It changes all the time, doesn't it?

Alison: Yeah, it definitely does
Mary. One of my professors, the other day I was like, wow she is great.

Alison: Yeah

Amy: And people who can express their views really well like the lecturers that I attend who think, wow, are the ones who are um

Mary: (cuts in) Passionate

Amy: passionate about their subjects and articulate and you think, yeah.

Alison: Yeah I definitely think that is right. I mean, only the other day I went into the tutorial with Jackie thinking that um what was it, biology doesn't, I thought biology did affect our personality, and Jackie's argument was

Mary: Yeah (laughs)

Alison: maybe it doesn't. So then I get all completely you know, at least 50-50 if not more towards her way of thinking. So that's definitely straight away a massive influence in the way I think about and that was only one hour so

M.C: Mmm

Mary: I think that's, in a way, I think that's really nice about being our age and being really like, malleable still. And like, I can talk to my parents and they can they can can like, well my stepdad's a really right wing man I can really believe what he says and then I'll go and talk to someone else and I'll really like, and I don't I don't find it a problem to be swayed so easily, but I know that my parents I can go back and argue something with them and they just will set entirely set in what they believe now. Actually, you know, I think influential people are more influential when you're our age. Because you are not quite so set in what you believe.

Alison: Yeah you haven't been round as long to formulate.

FG.2 Q3 P10

Mary continues to illustrate changing influence in her own life as she describes a recent, professor who was 'amazing' and at the same time, she 'can really believe' what her stepfather says but then speak to 'someone else' of an opposing opinion and find this person influential. Her description of 'influential people' as actually 'more influential' at 'our age' because young women remain 'malleable' also suggests that perceptions of influence and influential people remain fluid with the potential for additional change presently and in the immediate future.
4.4.3 Minor Theme 1: Subtle Influence

The first minor theme which I have called, 'Subtle Influence', reflects how participants compared and distinguished between different types of influence while discussing the meaning of influence. A particular comparison was drawn between influence that is momentary or subtle (e.g. that 'can last for five minutes') as opposed to influence that is 'ongoing' and long lasting. While participants acknowledged both types of influence within their own experiences, they repeatedly emphasized the importance of subtle or momentary influence.

Jane and Liz make various comparisons of types of influence and introduce the argument that 'tiny thing[s]' can be influential:

Jane: But influence can be, influential people can influence kind of minor things like introduce something new or different into your life and make you think about something in a different way. It can be a tiny thing or it could be a profound kind of ongoing influence.

Liz: Hmm.

Jane: (Inaudible)

Liz: And it could be good or bad.

M.C.: Mmm Hmm.

FG 7 P2 Q1

Here, Susan provides of examples of how influential individuals can 'influence' things that are seemingly 'minor' such as encouraging 'you [to] think about something in a different way', yet as Susan discusses below, the overall effect of this type of influence is not necessarily minimal or unimportant. Rather, Susan provides an example of the 'least' or the 'little' things that have been most influential for her:

Susan: I think the the interesting thing about like when you really think about moments when you have been influenced, it it's the least (?) the least (?) the little things that someone's done or said or you know, just been honest about or coped with or whatever that really surprised you and you thought well, if they can
have that attitude, you know so should I. Or just little things like that that you wouldn’t even remember. You know, but somehow it’s still there inside you.

**FG 5 Q5 P16**

It appears that one of the most ‘interesting’ things about this type of influence is the way in which a seemingly ‘little’ and unpredictable act can have a ‘surprising’ as well as resounding effect that remains ‘somewhere inside you’.

Similarly, Lauren raises the example of people (such as her mother) who do the ‘little things’ (my emphasis) that really ‘speak volumes’:

Lauren: There’s people that do it without you know, say your mom does something out of the ordinary and you know she’s not going to get press coverage for it, but she did it for you. I mean it’s like just the little things that really speak volumes to you because you know that person you know what it took for them to do it or just (inaudible) or something

M.C.: Mmm Hmm.

Lauren: You know,

Nancy: Yeah, you can be influenced by somebody you meet on the street for five seconds. As much as somebody you know, one of your teachers you worked with for five years.

**FG 5 Q5 P17**

Again, it is acts that do not necessarily appear to be incredibly significant that seem to have the most striking effects. In response, Nancy notes that even brief encounters with strangers can be influential.

While not necessarily discounting the presence and effects of influence that is readily apparent and ‘ongoing’, participants have provided discussion concerning the importance and prevalence of ‘minor’ or subtle influence within their lives. This further challenges the notion that everyone has or should be exposed to a single influential figure or role model throughout their lives and specifically during their developmental years.
4.4.4 Minor Theme 2: People Who

The second minor theme concerns ‘people who’ were described as influential even though it was generally particular traits or characteristics of individuals which were described as most influential. This section will investigate discussion concerning the individuals mentioned most frequently as influential: mothers, educational figures and authors.

4.4.4a Mothers

When asked who has been most influential in their lives, the most frequent response from participants was family members, and specifically mothers. Mothers were described as the ‘main one’, as ‘the only person that has shaped who and how I am in a significant way’, and as ‘number one’.

The following three extracts illustrate the immediate manner in which participants identify their mothers as influential:

M.C.: Um, what individual or individuals have been influential to you in your life? And by this I mean, individuals that you admire or respect?
Mary: (Pause) So not like as in, (inaudible) people but people who you know?
M.C.: Anyone, really.
Mary: Yeah? (pause) My mum.
Alison: Yeah.
Amy: Yeah.
Alison: Moreso than my dad, I would say.

FG 2 Q1 P2

Kathy: Well then a big influence (inaudible) it would have to be my mother.
M.C.: Hmm.
Liz: She would have to be the only person that has shaped who and how I am in a significant way.
M.C.: Hmm.
Liz: A very strong influence.

FG 7 Q1 P7

Erin: Mommy is number one to me.
Cynthia: It’s mommy, yeah definitely.

FG 8 Q1 P2

These instantaneous responses from each of these seven participants in response to the initial question regarding who has been influential in their lives indicate how ‘strong’ and ‘significant’ their mother’s ‘number one’ influence has been. Two additional participants (Jessica and Sara) also identify their mothers as having a primary influence and elaborate on this:

Jessica: When I first thought of this I thought of immediately my mother
Sara: Yeah

Jessica: I think it’s like someone, someone who has always been an influential person, on everyone, and I feel especially so for myself because um my parents divorced, so
M.C.: Mmm

Jessica: Um, for a time now it’s just me and my, um me and my sister and my mum and she is an amazing woman- influential person on my life.
M.C.: Mmm

Sara: but I suppose that’s um, that’s more like, I don’t know I feel as though now I’m more friends with like my mum

Sara: Yeah, my mum was the main one, my mum’s who I think of when I think somebody who’s influenced me the most, most definitely.

FG 1 Q1 P1-3

Jessica and Sara’s ‘immediate’ and ‘obvious’ identification of their mother as ‘someone who has always been an influential person’ not only demonstrates the depth of this
influence, but their discussion also indicates that their mother's influence has been steady, ongoing and it has evolved through various life stages. Sara's illustrates this further with her description of her mother as more of a 'friend than' a 'mum'.

Similarities also appeared within participant reasoning behind why their mother has been influential. One explanation for this had to do with proximity; their mothers have 'always been there' and as a result 'you sort of look to her' or because 'you know her' and 'look to her' since 'you're born':

Lauren: Um, I think my mum really.

M.C.: Mmm.

Lauren: I think it's you know her since you're born and just alot of looking at what she's done and you sort of look to her because they influence your life and

M.C.: Sure.

Lauren: and I admire her but cause times change and marriages change and me and my sister used to as well and you still look up to your mom as the same sex, gender whatever.

FG 5 Q1 P1-2

Again, the strength of the influence of one's mother evolves and remains regardless of 'chang[ing]' life events and circumstances. In addition, Lauren raises the issue of how her mother has provided a perspective to observe life through or 'look up to' as 'the same sex' or 'gender'. Betsy and Devon also discuss how their mother's influence has been a result of accessibility and proximity or because she has 'always been there for you':

Betsy: Um, well for the first seven years of life of my life it was only me and my mum. So, my mum's influenced me quite alot and since then we've like got really a real close bond.

M.C.: Mmm.

Betsy: So. She's like my best friend.

M.C.: Mmm.

Betsy: Obviously, she is going to influence you quite a bit.
M. Right sure.

• • •

Betsy: Yeah. (pause) My stepdad, like I ask him for advice but he's not, it's always been my mum that I always turn to.

Devon: Mmm.

**FG 6 Q1 P 1-3**

Therefore, the 'bond' that has developed between Betsy and her mother is a result of not only her mother's stable presence but it is also due to her mother's evolving influence that has lead to a 'best friend' relationship.

In addition these explanations of proximity, participants also described their mother's influence in terms of their various achievements. For example, in the following extract, Christine speaks of her mother's ability to 'overcome' her 'disability':

Christine: And my mum, she's, it's her mum I'm talking about. Um she was born with a spastic condition on one side

M.C.: Mmm.

Christine: which means she has a slight limp. But has never ever ever stopped her from doing anything

M.C.: Mmm.

Christine: in her life at all. Obviously it was more of a problem when she was a child, but she works, she drives she's got 4 kids. You know she won't have it, never stop it's never stopped her from doing anything. She's overcome so much through it. I never ever think of her as having a disability

**FG 3 Q1 P 1-3**

Her mother's ability to fulfill her various responsibilities despite her physical challenges has clearly had a resounding effect for Christine, especially since she 'never ever think[s] of her as having a disability.' Sandra also describes her mother in terms her 'strength', ability to 'balance' a career with 'bringing up' two children:

Sandra: My mother probably.

M.C.: Mmm. Anything in particular about her?
Sandra: Um, she's really strong and she's had a lot of things to sort of overcome, and she's always done it, and she's just a really strong woman. But of course this goes on even if things are affecting her a lot, she'll still be strong for us and give us advice and yeah she's great.

Sandra: With my mom, she's always been um great because like my grandma who's just died was a very authoritarian woman and um mum was the youngest and because she was a girl, she wasn't allowed to, she had to leave after her O levels in school. She wasn't allowed to do A levels and go to university. And now she's you know the last 25 years, she's been on a really good salary, she's really respected where she works and yet she's also balanced that with bringing up me and my brother. And my dad was unemployed for years and my mum had to bring all of the money in. He also doesn't do anything around the house so she used to have, you know she would leave the house at quarter of 8 in the morning and get back to house at 7 at night, which she still does now. And she would have to do all of the cleaning, look after us, pay the bills, do everything. And she's she's I mean she does grumble every now and again but I mean she's great. She's always like with me, I nearly left school at 16, well I did leave school at 16. But I had a place to do A levels if I wanted to. And she let me make my decision, (inaudible) I went back and throughout my degree we didn't get a grant so she funded me And then when I said I wanted to do a PhD, she funded me for 2 years and I couldn't have done it without her. And you know,

Justine: Girl power.

(laughter)

Sandra: She's great for that. If there's a chance and something I want to do in terms of career, I guess because she wasn't allowed to, then you know, she's great.

FG 9 Q1 P1-2

Both Sandra and Christine have mothers who 'overcame' obstacles and were also successful at what they attempted to achieve. They did not dwell on the limitations that Sandra and Christine identify and were able to support and maintain a constant presence in these young women's lives. Also, the way in which these mothers succeed with various tasks from 'bring[ing] all of the money in' and 'pay[ing] the bills' to 'working' with 'four kids' explains why they find them 'great.' The way in which Sandra's mother supported her to pursue opportunities that her mother was not able to pursue adds to the depth of her mother's influence as well. Michelle also speaks of her mother in terms of
her support and sacrifice for 'me and my brother' and how as a result she is 'still' her
'role model':

Michelle. I was just thinking about what you were saying about your dad, like
wasting, I think mum's a bit like that. Because she left school at 15 and she she
didn't stick to do her CSEs or anything and um she got a job because I think sort
of basically she didn't want to go into a job

Michelle. Yeah. She got a job, soon as she got pregnant with me she sort of left the firm.
Fifteen years to bring up me and my brother and she's, I think she's so clever and now
it's really hard getting back into the job. But you know, I still see her as my role model
cause she gave up so much just for me and my brother.

M C.: Mmm.

Michelle: I really admire her for that.

FG 4 Q1 P1-3

As these extracts illustrate, the immediate, descriptive and detailed responses from
participants concerning their mother's proximity and accessibility, their ability to succeed
in the face of adversity as well as the descriptions of their support and sacrifices provide
explanations for why mothers are 'most definitely' identified as the 'most influential
person' in these young women's lives. This influence appears to have evolved through
participant lives since they have established bonds of 'friendship' and 'respect', and this
influence appears to have played a sizable part in their success thus far.

4.4.4b Educational Figures

Participants identified educational figures as the most influential group of
individuals after family members. This group consists of secondary teachers, university
professors and tutors as well as postgraduate supervisors and they were explicitly
described as 'the world', or as individuals whom participants have 'looked up to'. Their
influence was attributed to the amount of time spent in their presence, from their direct
assistance as well as to their ability to 'inspire' participants and 'stretch' their 'mind[s]'.
Justine and Julie describe how, like mothers, educational figures are influential because of their proximity or because ‘so much of your life is spent with them’ and as a result, they have been the ‘next significant’ set of ‘adult[s]’ in their lives following family members:

Justine: I suppose as a child, the only other person on my significant people that you see apart from your parent is your teacher.

Mia: Mmm.

Justine: And that’s the next significant adult in your life.

**FG 9 Q 5 P13**

* * *

Julie: Mmm. I didn’t really think about teachers until you said that.

Michelle: Yeah.

Julie: You spend so much of your life with them.

Jennifer: Mmm.

Julie: So much of your time.

**FG 4 Q1 P2**

Since a large part of any child, teenager and young adult’s time is spent with educational figures, it seems that they would be considered an influential group. However, not every educational figure was described as influential, and some were described in discussions as ‘horrible’ and ‘disappointing.’ One of the most frequently identified distinguishing factors of those educational figures who were described as influential was their ability to encourage participants to consider new and creative ideas and therefore ‘come out with better knowledge’. This was further connected with ‘intelligence’ and an ‘articulate’ expertise in facilitating meaningful conversations ‘about absolutely anything’ as Mary and Amy as well as Susan, Lauren, and Rachel respectively illustrate in the following two interactional extracts:
Mary: Oh yeah, my (?) teacher was just like, the world, and like takes many of my ideas about politics and just like, I don't know, the bits that you give really influence how thought (inaudible) we did quite a lot of bits that had quite spiritual sort of philosophical dilemma to them. And we had these great class discussions about like the meaning of life and stuff and it's, it sounds a bit like teenage (inaudible) but it was great, he was a really really cool bloke. And he just really intelligent and articulate and we just thought, wow, to be able to express things like he did.

Amy: (cuts in) My old psychology teacher was like that. You-you didn't think you were doing much work because he just let you talk about absolutely anything and then at the end of the year you were like, oh my god, I do know so much even though you don't think he'd go right and (?) and you'd think, that is not psychology. And we were going to go off completely and you really did.

FG 2 Q1 P2

Susan: Teachers.

M.C.: Mmm.

Susan: when you started school.

Lauren: Yeah.

Rachel: Well mine would be my A level English teacher, Mr. Hammer. Cause he was just, I don't know he was just the coolest guy. You know you used to sit in class and think I am sure I am not learning anything but in fact you'd come out with better

Lauren: Yeah

Susan: Yeah

Rachel: knowledge than anything just by talking like this basically. You'd never really think that you're

Susan: I think

Rachel: learning anything.

FG 5 Q5 P11

While these educational figures propelled participants to 'come out with better knowledge' with an approach that was appropriate at the secondary level and lead participants to believe they were not 'learning anything'; other participants also describe the 'massive influence' of university level educational figures. In two additional extracts,
Liz, Mary and Amy also talk about certain lecturers' ability to 'introduce you to new ways of thinking' yet through their 'articulate' and 'passionate' lecturing style:

Liz: I've been influenced by people who I don't know sort of like lecturers at university who have inspired me and stretched my mind, not literally.

M.C.: Hmm.

Liz: But and I guess they're influential because they um introduce you to new ways of thinking, seeing the world and thinking.

FG 7 Q1 P 5

*          *          *

Mary: Mariam Fraser³, the other day I was like, wow she is great.

Alison: Yeah.

Amy: And people who can express their views really well like the lecturers that I attend who think, wow, are the ones who are um

Mary: (cuts in) Passionate

Amy: passionate about their subjects and articulate and you think, yeah.

FG 2 Q5 P10

Thus educational figures at different levels of participants' educational experience have been influential due to the innovative means by which they have been able to 'stretch' participants' minds. They have challenged participants intellectually which lead to the introduction of innovative ways of 'seeing the world and thinking.'

Participants often described a portion of their success as contingent upon previous direct assistance from certain educational figures ranging from 'help' with 'your UCAS form' to 'pushing' Jennifer through her 'exams':

Sara: But I suppose people like - like teachers as well, people who help you to get here, help you fill out your UCAS form

FG 1 Q1 P1

*          *          *          *

Alison: Yeah I had good teachers as well. That you look up to, and you want to go back and see and tell them how well you did because you want to think that they have helped you do well and they are definitely quite influential.
Jennifer: And then I had a teacher at secondary school who saw through my silliness bunking off style (laughter) Jennifer: and getting up to who knows what. And who said, even you know you might be struggling, you can still do it. You know, she she was very influential. She she pushed me through exams that really the other teachers would have written me off.

FG 4 Q1 P2

Thus, certain educational figures have ‘helped’ participants ‘get’ or succeed through the educational system thus far and now that they are university students, they identify past educational figures as ‘quite influential’. In addition, some participants attributed certain ‘amazing’, ‘phenomenal’, ‘knowledgeable’ educational figures with ‘inspiring’ them to pursue their chosen academic and professional field:

Jessica: Oh yeah, I remember my psychology teacher - A level - he was, like an inspiration. He really was.

Sara: Yeah

Jessica: He was just - he just inspired me to do psychology. He was

M.C.: mmm

Jessica: He was just an amazing man. He really was. And I think there are certain teachers that just have that (pause) way of just inspiring you to do things and stuff.

FG 1 Q1 P1-2

Justine: I can think of uh, lecturers who well one who was at Dundee University.

Mia: Yeah, I was going to say

Justine: We were both at Dundee Uni and she was just a phenomenal lecturer, Suzanne Zeedyk². And she was very knowledgeable, very intelligent. And students loved her. And I remember I used to come out of her lectures and think, if I do the profession that she’s doing, I want to be just like her.

Mia: Yeah.
Justine: I had so much respect for her. And another one who was at, when I did a Masters at Lancaster University, uh Dr. Susan Condor, who was a phenomenal woman. Again, incredibly sharp, incredibly intelligent but very popular. Very popular person. I think

Mia: Yeah.

Justine: And she kept me going as well. Kept me doing what I'm doing.

Mia: Yeah, I can remember Suzanne, because I would have never of thought of doing academic stuff at I mean I enjoyed the subject, but not thought about doing a lectureship until I got stuck with her and came out thinking, wow

Justine: Lectures can be fun.

Mia: yeah.

**FG 9 Q3 P5**

Through their example, these certain educational figures 'just have a way of inspiring' these participants to follow their example and 'be just like' them, or to pursue psychology on both the undergraduate and postgraduate level. Justine's experience with two educational figures who she wanted to 'be just like' and who 'kept [her] doing what [she's] doing' further illustrates the strength and depth of this influence. In addition to inspiring participants, they also spoke of how the influence of particular educational figures can be very powerful:

Carrie: I idolized a whole bunch of my teachers and like who had just been there for and done everything for me

**FG 7 Q1 P5**

Not only were these teachers influential, but Carrie 'idolized' them as well. She specifically identifies the powerful influence of her geography teacher below, and the effects of this educational figure were especially evident in her absence:

Carrie: If she wasn't there, then like when she wasn't around, it mattered. And I had to take it for a year in school, geography and I did really well in geography and the the following year, I was cut in a different stream and I ended up with this other geography teacher and my geography marks just like went down the tube. Cause I couldn't I couldn't get used to this new teacher and things and I really wanted taught to be taught by this person.

**FG 7 Q1 P5**
Therefore, it was this particular educational figure whom Carrie idolized that influenced her to do well in this subject, and the experience could not be duplicated with another teacher.

It is clear that participants and any young individual spends an immense amount of time with educational figures, yet this alone does not necessarily mean that every educational figure is influential, as these data extracts indicate. The 'inspiring' and creative methods that certain educational figures utilize to 'express' their views encourages participants to 'consider' new ideas which in turn facilitates their own academic and professional success. This explains why they are named as one of the most influential groups of individuals in these young women's lives.

4.4c Authors

In addition to family members and educational figures authors were also cited as a group of influential individuals who have an affect on participants as 'people who have something to say', who are 'brave to try and capture life', and who 'can change your mood'. Virginia Woolf often appears within participant discussion as well as writers who have struggled with disabilities and illness. Jessica and Sara discuss 'amazing' and 'brilliant' authors whose works have 'had an influence':

Sara: Also, reading books, you know. I-I love to read, you know, I really love like books with who-who are I don't know, who are written by I don't know, people who seem to have something to say.

M.C.: Mmmm

Jessica: Yeah, I read um Wild Swans by --

Sara: Yeah

Jessica: That was just amazing.

M.C.: Mmm

Jessica: I mean that was an influence on me. That book was just amazing.

Sara: It was brilliant.
Jessica Yeah.

Sara: Um, I have always admired people that write like uh Vir- Virginia Woolf.

MC.: Mmm

Sara: I always think it's so brave to write things down and like to try and I don't know

Sara: It must have been hard for her to speak out and mm. It always seems so - so brave to try and capture life, capture the flavor of your own life.

**FG 1 Q5 P3 & 12**

The 'brave' capabilities of these authors and the resulting effect that draws participants to their work indicates how their influence manifests itself for participants. Amy, Alison, and Mary also discuss how they are 'influenced by authors' and specific books:

Amy: I think, we are influenced by authors. And I think we realize, but I am definitely influenced by books, I mean, I think that is probably like, Virginia Woolf is probably the one on here who I would say would have had

Alison: (cuts in) Yeah, I think may be influenced, definitely affected

Amy: Mmm. (pause) You get so many ideas from them all that I don't know

Alison: (cuts in) It can change your mood. If you were miserable and you read 'Bndget Jones'

Amy: laughs

Mary: laughs

Alison: You would be like, fired up.

**FG 2 Q2 P3**

Here it is the potentially transforming nature of an author's work from which participants 'get ideas' that can 'change [their] mood' or 'fire' them 'up' that illustrates how they are 'definitely' influential and can 'deeply affect' participants. Anne and Christine also discuss how experiences communicated within certain autobiographies have 'touched' them deep[ly] and have resulted in various 'strong' feelings in relation to their own lives:
Christine: I'm actually reading a book at the moment written by, it was supposed to be a best seller a book written by Christopher Reeve

M C.: Mmm Hmm.

Christine: since his accident

Anne: Oh right

Christine: and that's touched deep. He's I think I've got I think halfway through, with my work so much I haven't got a chance to read it. But he I've got to a point where he's doing so much work for people with spinal injures. He's got uh I don't know, oh my god I'm stuck, you know he was like if you read the book you realize what an active person he was.

Christine: I'd um a book by a woman called Ruth Picardie and she was a journalist. And she'd had twin twins babies and a year later she finds out she's got breast cancer and it turns out to be terminal.

M.C.: Mmm.

Christine. And it its just a really thin book and it's just a collection of all the emails and the letters and things that that she wrote and it is really um she is so strong and yet like when she starts she only starts losing it you know mentally when she becomes very very ill. You know she's not cause all the drugs that she's taking and its just like she goes through so much and she's worried about her baby and her husband and things like that. And they're sort they're 3 when she dies and it's just it's a really really sad book. It's like so sad but it's like really like if it makes you feel sort of strong

M C.: Mmm.

Christine: Like you can do it then.

FG 3 Q3 P7

The words of these ‘amazing’ people and the depictions of their own personal hardships within their autobiographies enable Christine to momentarily become a part of their lives which provokes her to apply the feelings she experiences to her own life, resulting in her feeling ‘strong’ about herself like she ‘can do it then’.

These ‘brilliant’ and ‘amazing’ authors have an effect on these young women that leads these participants to admire their ability, to obtain ideas that result in a potential transformation and elevation of ‘mood’ and encourages them to feel positive about their own situation. It is the experiences that they communicate through both fiction and -
autobiography that 'capture' these young women and enable them to 'feel strong' and that have 'definitely' influenced them. Therefore, these extracts illustrate how authors as individuals have been identified repeatedly as a group of individuals who are influential to participants.

1. Participant names have been changed and a list of pseudonyms is included within Appendix C according to focus group.
2. Data tags (i.e. FG7 Q1 P2) reflect focus group number, question and page number of cited data extract.
3. The names of three professors (Dr. Mariam Fraser, Dr Suzanne Zeedyk and Dr. Susan Condon) who identify as professional feminist academics have not been changed in order to recognize their dedication and work in their respective corners of academia.
Chapter 5
Data Analysis II

5.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the remainder of the thematic analysis, consisting of two main themes as well as three minor themes. The second main theme within the thematic analysis, 'The parts are more influential than the whole' is supported by the third minor theme, 'Commitment' which is a trait which participants repeatedly identified as influential. The final main theme, 'Thanks but no thanks, we can select our own role models' is supported by the minor theme, 'The need to be yourself', in which participants discuss why it has not been a goal to emulate another individual entirely; as well as the final minor theme, 'Role models are people too' which illustrates participants descriptions of the fallacy behind the idea of a role model as a 'perfect person'. I will conclude with a brief summary of both data analysis chapters.

5.2 Main Theme 2: The Parts Are More Influential Than the Whole

I will now discuss the second major theme identified in the data which I have called, 'The Parts are More Influential Than The Whole' due to participants repeated identification of influential aspects or particular traits of different people as opposed to one particular individual or role model. This theme runs across questions and appeared when participants explained types of influential individuals in their lives; and this included celebrities as well as people with whom participants have some sort of relationship. Karen and Rose provide an example of this below:

Karen: We can say that uh certain characteristics of different people are uh
Rose: Good.
Karen:的好或你可能崇拜并可能想模仿。但但呃我不认为它存在，一个完美的 perso

**FG 8 Q3 P10**

Karen doubts the existence of an entire ‘perfect person’ and focuses instead on ‘certain characteristics of different people’ or parts of the individual. Similarly, in the following extract Kathy and Liz discuss the same issue:

Kathy: I'm quite interested to know. Ok, if you want to put it that way, are there other people whose life who you'd like to model your life after. I think that is different than saying who's influential and who you have respect for.

Liz: Yeah, I mean that that's the question of role model then isn't it? I mean (inaudible)

M C.: Mmm Hmm.

Liz: I mean, um no I don't want my mother's life so it's not something as direct as that, it's a less tangible thing than what you were saying.

M C.: Mmm.

Liz: But

Kathy: But are there other people then who who have lives that you would like that you would like to have a similar life to?

Liz It's not that I would like to have a similar life to them, but they have qualities in their lives that I would like to have in mine.

**FG 7 Q2 P5**

Liz has difficulty with the notion of modeling her life entirely after another and instead believes that influential people have ‘qualities in their lives’ that I would like to have in mine.’ (my emphasis) To her, it is aspects of individuals’ lives that are more influential than their lives as a whole. Christine comments also illustrates this theme

Christine: Yeah, I think you pick and choose parts of people.

M.C : Mmm.

Christine: You don't sort of if you wanted to be completely like someone else you wouldn't be being yourself.

M.C : Mmm. True,
Christine: You're not you, you are sort of a mixture of like you your influenced by lots of people throughout your lifetime and the people I've been influenced by could be completely different than people you've been influenced by and that has a hell of an effect on who you are.

FG 3 Q3 P6

Christine states that individuals 'pick and choose parts of people' because to be 'completely like someone else' results in a situation in which you 'wouldn't be being yourself.' Christine also points out how there is a 'mixture' of influences 'throughout your lifetime'.

In the following extract, Mary further illustrates this theme using examples of known individuals from the past and present:

Mary: With my sister it was, it was very much like uh, it was sort of, particularly during family problems and things and she was old enough to be able to cope with things and to be able to express her opinion and then be able to say right, you know you I are going out and we're leaving and we'll be cool (inaudible). And also, like, because many people are older, their lifestyle is different and, to be able to, drive and be able to like go out late and stuff. And little things like that. But now, like, I would say my boyfriend is a is a role model for me and he's like, the things that I want to, I want to emulate things from him but I also just want to be around him because of what he can do as a person for other people. Not that I want to be able to do those things necessarily but because he's great for being able to do them. But there are things about him, I want to be as calm as him, I want to be able to be really logical in situations around him (inaudible) and stuff like that.

Alison: Yeah

Mary: Most importantly, I want to like, like be with him really because he makes other people laugh.

FG 2 Q7 P11-12

Mary wants to 'be able' to 'emulate' certain characteristics of both her sister and boyfriend respectively, yet neither individual entirely. She specifically mentions her sister's ability to 'cope with things' and 'express her opinion' and that she was allowed to drive and go out late. She wants to be 'as calm' as her boyfriend and like him, 'to be able to be really logical in situations. Again, it is specific aspects of different people further how over the it is aspects of different people that are most important rather than one
entire person that are most influential, not only at the present time in these participants’
lives but over the course of one’s life as well.

In the next extract, Sara continues to illustrate this theme with a description of a
former classmate:

Sara: Yeah, in uh, over Easter, my uh friends and I, we sort of went out and got
drunk and such and we had this big debate about - about the uh, Kosovo war.
One girl was so, she was a pacifist, she didn’t agree with the war at all in any
sense, and um everybody else just gave her so much stick. But uh, because it of
course we are all kind of advocates of the war, an uh but um, she was so -
against it and she stood up firmly. She took so much flack

M.C. Mmm

Sara: It was incredible. And I thought - I mean I didn’t agree with her, but I
thought it was really pretty brave of her to just, to stick her own ground.

FG 1 Q8 P16

Sara did not agree with her classmate’s political position, but nonetheless found it
‘incredible’ that she ‘stood up firmly’ and was ‘brave’ enough to defend her position
despite the amount of ‘flack’ she took from others. It is this aspect rather than her
classmate as a whole person that Sara finds influential. Jessica provides additional
discussion with of aspects of a known individual she finds influential in the following
extract:

Jessica: I do not want to be my mum, but then again, I think my mum has got alot
to say, and alot of important things. Our-our family history as well - I think it is
important for me to learn that and to remember it and to perhaps feed off what
my mum knows and what my mum’s done and her history and such. And use
that, you know, to make myself perhaps uh, an influential person. (laughs)

M.C.: Mmm

Jessica: For my children.

M.C.: So you don’t have to necessarily be [like your role models], then

Jessica: Not exactly the same.

FG 1 Q6 P16
Jessica believes it is ‘important’ to ‘learn’ ‘remember’ and ‘feed off’ what her mother ‘knows’ and what she has ‘done’; however she does not ‘want to be [her] mum.’

In the extract below, discusses specific traits that she finds influential and shifts the discussion to include celebrity examples:

Emily: I think it’s the qualities in people that make them the role models. Like, say hard work or or good nature. Caring nature, I think that’s what rather than who they’ve actually turned into.

Yvonne: Yeah.

Devon: Yeah.

M.C. Mmm Hmm. (pause) So it’s their qualities and you can be influenced by them even though you may not want to be exactly like them.

Emily: Yeah I mean

M.C. Just that they have them

Emily: for example, I mean you could admire Denise Lewis and I’m certainly not an athlete

M.C. Mmm Hmm.

Emily: but you could say, well she’s got where she is now through hard work and determination.

FG 6 Q5 P16

For Emily it is qualities such as ‘hard work’ and a ‘caring nature’ that are most influential; she sees these traits as more important ‘than who they’ve actually turned into’ (i.e. the whole person). Denise Lewis is an example of someone who has succeeded due to her ‘hard work and determination’ and even though Emily is not an athlete she can see how one ‘could admire’ Lewis for these qualities. Thus it is these aspects of the individual which are seen as influential, whether or not one identifies with the whole individual, or despite personal athletic ability.

In the following extract, Jane identifies aspects she finds influential in Martin Luther King Jr. and contrasts them with traits she opposes:
Jane: I mean like we said about you know Martin Luther King, politically what he was doing was really important. What he represented was really important. As a figure, was really important. Um, and then there's kind of two buts, but an individual as a person he may not be particularly pleasant or nice or agreeable or I might have you know some really big issue with him. But that doesn't stop that other aspect of him being important and influential. And also I don't agree with the political position that he put forward and he represented but that doesn't mean that it isn't important or I wouldn't support him.

**FG 7 Q7 P29**

Even though as a whole person, Martin Luther King may not be 'pleasant' 'nice' or 'agreeable', one aspect of him – his work - was 'really important' (even though this participant disagreed with his politics). Therefore, even though one might disagree with particular views of an individual, or dislike certain aspects yet at the same time, find other aspects important, or influential.

Another example comes from participant responses to the question of whether or not controversial people like Madonna are influential:

Jennifer: Well I quite like the way in that um, I mean I was listening to 'Ray of Light' three o'clock this morning so (laughter) I've always liked Madonna.

Julie: I like her songs, but I don't think I could ever be like her.

Jennifer: I love the way she's outrageous.

M.C. Mmm Hmm.

Jennifer: And does things to shock

Julie: Yeah

Jennifer: I mean her conical bra was brilliant

* * *

Michelle: She came from like a difficult background as well.

Julie: Mmm.

Michelle: So that in itself, you know, it's really good.

Julie: And also the way she has changed you know, with the times. (Overlap)

Jennifer: Yeah she has. She has.

Julie: She's totally kept up with it every time she's right there and she sets trends still. It's amazing, it really is.
M.C. She sets trends.

Katie: Cause a lot of them are still kind of, way back or they've moved on or they're gone now.

Laughter.

Julie: She goes with it.

FG 4 Q7 P29

This suggests, again, that it is specific aspects of Madonna which have been influential to these participants. Julie, rather than Madonna in her entirety, 'likes her songs' and finds it 'amazing' how 'she has changed with the times' and 'kept up with it,' while Jennifer comments on how she 'loves the way she is outrageous' and shocking. Despite her controversy and the fact that (like Julie) they may not feel they will be like her in their lives, these young women admire by Madonna's success and accomplishments.

Similarly, when asked if they were influenced by feminist Germaine Greer (as an example of someone who holds and expresses often controversial and unpopular views), participants in another group said:

Betsy: I think you can be influenced by other parts of of a person's personality other than like the opinions that they hold. Like, if you're not even one bit influenced by the fact that Germaine Greer is a feminist, you could be affected by the fact that she's just getting on with it. You know, she's not making a big media explosion about it all the time.

Yvonne: Yeah.

Betsy: She's just she's living her life the way that she thinks that everyone should live theirs and that's not how everyone thinks but (inaudible) but I think you can be affected by different parts of the people's personality. And it's like

Emily: Yeah, as long as they're not complete right wing racist you know, kind of people.

Devon: Yeah.

M.C. Mmm.

Emily: You can still admire somebody for standing for what they believe in even if you don't completely believe in it.

FG 6 Q5 P16
Here it is Greer's ability to stand 'up for what she believes in' while she also 'get[s] on with it' and 'live[s] her life' without 'a big media explosion' that is most influential rather than her actual opinions. This again, suggests that participants are influenced by aspects of individuals even if they do not agree with their views or admire the 'whole' individual.

As these excerpts of discussion regarding influential people indicate, these young women believe influence stems from parts or aspects of both known individuals and celebrities rather than a single person or role model as a whole.

5.2.1 Minor Theme 3 Commitment

The third minor theme, 'Commitment', reflects participants frequent identification of commitment as a key influential characteristic when discussing characteristics and traits of various individuals. Commitment was described in several ways and examples include 'flying out' one's beliefs, 'carry[ing] out [one's] principles', 'having a strong set of ... values', and 'doing something against the odds'.

Julie describes how commitment to beliefs or 'believ[ing] in what [one] say[s]' is the 'most important thing' that displays influential 'strength of character':

Julie: Yeah, that's it yeah. They really believe in what they say.

Michelle: Yeah.

M.C.: Ok, so you might not agree with it, it's still the fact that they're doing it

Julie: Yeah, it shows their strength of character if they really believe what they say.

M.C.: Mmm

Julie: I think even though they know alot of people won't agree with them.

M.C.: Yeah.

Julie: The most important thing is they believe what they say.

FG 4 Q8 P28
Here it is the commitment to believing what one expresses that is regardless of support from others or even if one 'might not agree with it' that is most important. Sara takes this a step further and discusses commitment not only in terms of 'believing' what one says, but commitment based on also 'liv[ing] by that belief':

Sara: I think that there's - there's a difference as well between people who believe things or say that they believe things and people that actually you know, live by that belief.

M.C.: Mmm.

Sara: And, you know, carry out their own principles. I mean it-it's so easy to say that you're not racist, you know or you know or sexist. But when you actually see somebody who needs help, how prepared are you to go and you know, get involved and try and help them out? That, that to me is heroic, when you think of somebody that puts themselves out for other people.

FG 1 Q6 P14

According to Sara, influential commitment is found in individuals who 'carry out their own principles' and 'live by' their 'believ[ing]'s'. This is not 'easy' and in fact Sara perceives this sort of commitment as 'heroic'. Jane also describes commitment in regard to values and 'living them out in' one's life:

Jane: I think it's it's people's values which don't necessarily have to be the same as mine, but people having a strong set of political values, moral values, ethical values and them kind of living them out in their lives.

Jane: You know, sometimes against the odds. Being brilliant, doing something amazing. Producing a wonderful piece of writing or a wonderful piece of poetry or a wonderful piece of music. Um, sometimes in a context which is hostile to you. Um, you know things which are inspirational which are beautiful which can be enjoyed you know, which are challenging and stimulating. I think it's it's you know to do with values and politics and ethics and how you apply those in your life.

Yeah,

FG 7 Q6 P28

For Jane, it is commitment to one's values that enables her or him to 'do something amazing' or 'brilliant' that is influential and more important than actually aligning with the values that initiated the action.
Justine identifies the commitment that American tennis star Steffi Graf has to her career as a 'big influence' and discusses her ability to keep her 'strength and integrity' below:

Justine: I guess cause I was into tennis when I was I don't know, 12, 13 onwards and Steffi Graf was 14 then. She wasn't quite 15, she was a junior and then she played Wimbledon. And that, I guess because I followed her all the way throughout her career, as I did with Sampras and Agassi, like Agassi was 13 or 14. It's really nice to see that she's probably the only one, and Agassi's doing well now. But I think she's the only one that's had to overcome so much and she's kept her strength and I guess her integrity. And she still seems like a very nice person.

Mia: I think what's good about people like that is they're pushing back the age boundaries.

Justine: Because up until people like Steffi Graf, they never had to layover even, it was assumed that once you got to mid-20's, you'd had it. Your body was dead, you couldn't do that deathly tennis anymore.

Mia: Mmm. Yeah.

Justine: And the fact that these women are still going, still staying and winning.

FG 9 Q4 P11

Therefore, commitment in terms of one's ability to remain successful within one's career and 'still win' while also 'overcoming' obstacles is another way in which influential commitment manifests itself within participant feedback. Sara also speaks of individuals who have influenced her due to a commitment to 'get over' obstacles yet in a different context:

Sara: I dunno I think um I suppose it's it's more people I know that have had personal like person things to get over and stuff. I think my my best friend's mum had um cancer and such and she she handled it so well. And I always think how, you know, how brave it was of her to get through that and then my also my own grandma's death, I think how, you know, how selfless she was really and how wonderful and um, my mum too, the the way the way my mum dealt with it and. My friends as well, my friends I just think about how determined they they work to do well at school and such and one-one friend is determined to be a um a doctor, and in order to get 4 A's she works so hard.

FG 1 Q5 P12
Like Justine, Sara finds commitment to ‘get over’ obstacles and overcome an illness in this case influential. The ‘hard work’ involved in this sort of commitment is ‘brave’ and the resulting ‘determination’ have influenced her.

The subsequent effect of the commitment that participants have observed in these individuals whether it is to their beliefs, their career or to a particular goal resonates within participant descriptions. It is apparent that participants do not necessarily need to agree with the cause in which these individuals are committed nor do they express a need to emulate these individuals in regard to what they are specifically committed to. Rather, it is the manner in which they apply themselves to their beliefs, and how their commitment surfaces within their actions in a variety of situations and circumstances that appears to be most influential. All of this provides an explanation for why this trait repeatedly surfaced in description of influential traits as opposed to whole individuals.

5.3 Main Theme 3: Thanks but No Thanks: We Can Select Our Own Role Models

This third and final main theme identified in the data surfaced as a result of participants unanimous rejection of the idea of a Government Approved Role Model proposed by the British Government Women’s Unit. These young women felt that it is not the responsibility of the government (or any other agency) to choose role models for others; and they expressed the belief that role models are personal entities selected by individuals based on unique personal interests. Participants were also opposed to the celebrity choices made by the Women’s Unit (e.g. Geri Haliwell, Emma Thompson and Denise Lewis) because they said that such celebrities do not mirror their own interests. Therefore, to have an outside agency such as the Women’s Unit make a proposition
such as this was seen as unrealistic and unacceptable. The following excerpt illustrates this theme:

Mary: I am not really sure that is the government's domain, to be honest I

M.C.: Mmm.

Mary: when it comes to the stage where they're interfering too much and things like not about politics. They should be concentrating on more important things.

Amy: You can't

Alison: Yeah

Amy: you can't chose who can influence you, you have to have the government say, hey these three girls are really good. Aspire to be them, then it's a bit, bit forced upon you.

M.C.: Hmm

Amy: You know than doing it yourself.

M.C.: Mmm

FG 2 Q3 P5

Amy amplifies Mary's suggestion that proposing role models is 'interfering' and not the government's domain, by suggesting that as an individual, you should choose your own role models, rather than have models 'forced upon you'. 'Sara' and 'Jessica' also discuss the proposal of the Women's Unit in a separate extract:

Sara: But in terms of um, of creating this, the sort of model females to follow, it's a bit insulting really. Because I think if, you know, you can find your own, there are

M.C.: Mmm

Sara: Women who are out there,

Jessica: (cuts in) Yeah, why do we need them pointed out for us?

Sara: Yeah. (laughs)

FG 1 Q3 P10
Sara and Jessica agree that the idea of a Government Approved Role Model is 'insulting' since 'you can find your own' role models. Chloe, Nancy and Rachel also address the imposition of role models describing it as 'patronizing' and not like 'real life':

Chloe: it's just no one wants to be spoken to from above. You know

Nancy: Yeah.

Chloe: Cause it's

Rachel: I don't

Chloe: All that patronizing sort of

M.C.: Mmm.

Rachel: But it's not like that in real life I suppose. That you, I think it's unfair to say that we live in that kind of society. When when you know that you can speak to your mom and dad or your aunties

FG 5 Q3 P8

Together, these three extracts provide a strong illustration of how these young women find this sort of advocacy or in participants' terms, 'interference' from the government is unnecessary, and they resent anyone making these sorts of choices for them. Even though, as 'Amy' suggests above, an individual cannot necessarily 'choose' influential figures, the freedom to be influenced (or not) by individuals or aspects of individuals is something participants do not want violated.

Other participants objected to the imposition of role models because they are 'an individual thing' and are 'relative' to each person's interests. 'Anne' and 'Christine' provide an example of this discussion in the following extract:

Anne: you can't really pose people's role models can you? Because they have to have something in their personality to like attract you.

M.C. Mmm.

Anne: And uh, I mean you're playing with people's lives.

Christine: Yeah.
Anne: They're going to be influenced by different stuff. I mean if you're kind of interested in like you know, business and stuff then you'll, you know you're going to look to Richard Branson.

**FG 3 Q3 P10**

According to Anne, to pose role models for others is to 'play with people's lives.' A role model has 'something in their personality to attract you' and each individual is 'influenced by different stuff.' Anne and Christine's comments exemplify the overall feeling of invasion that participants expressed in response to the proposal regardless of the original intentions of the Women's Unit. Michelle and Julie provide an additional example of this:

Katie: Why would they actually do that?
Michelle: Yeah.
Katie: It's up to the individual to choose a role model.
Michelle: Yeah it would have to be, if you're a female it doesn't have to be you look up to a female, you could look up to a male. And that doesn't make you any better off or worse. It just depends on the individual.
M.C.: Mmm.
Michelle: And no one can put forward my these these are good role models
M.C.: Mmm.
Michelle: because you may look up to people for different reasons.
Julie: I mean just cause
Michelle: Reasons they might not have. So you can't say, oh yeah these are
Julie: I mean just cause she's good at one end doesn't mean that she's a good role model. I mean she probably is but I
M.C. Right yeah.

**FG 4 Q3 P6**

Thus, not only is it 'up to the individual to choose a role model' but 'no one' can select a role model for another because individuals look up to others 'for different reasons'.
Below, Michelle and Julie continue their conversation with Katie and illustrate how role models are ‘relative’ to the ‘individual’:

Michelle: I don’t think it’s just who they are. I suppose it’s relative when you. I mean as you say, it’s sort of what different people find influential in their lives is so different. It’s such an individual thing.

Julie: Yeah.

Michelle: It really is. You just can’t put forward oh yeah, these are because well, they might, I wouldn’t see anything um as Emma Thompson being influential.

Julie: No.

Michelle: You know, you just you can’t put forward.

Katie: But somebody else might. (?) so you can’t really comment.

M C: Mmm.

Michelle: It’s all individual.

Katie: It’s all yeah

FG 4 Q5 P9

Since individuals ‘look up to people for different reasons’ and what ‘different people find influential in their lives is so different’ it follows that role models are ‘all individual’.

Not only were participants against the idea of a Government Proposed Role Model in general, they also objected specifically to the celebrity choices. They saw these as impersonal and unrealistic especially since celebrity status is not something most individuals attain:

Sara: They don’t really stand for the right things.

M.C.: Mmm

Sara: They stand for like fame and fortune

M.C.: Mmm

Jessica: yeah

Sara: And all the things that women maybe shouldn’t encourage

FG 1 Q3 P9
Sara’s feedback demonstrates how celebrities are impersonal beings that fail to represent the everyday interests of young women beyond the world of ‘fame’ and stardom; and therefore the Women’s Unit has proposed a group of women who ‘don’t stand for the right things’. Amy, Mary, and Alison also add to this discussion:

Amy: (cuts in) It’s gotta be somebody that is more personal to you, who you can identify with, who’s done something that you want to when you’d like to

M.C. Mmm

Amy: Or something like that. Not just

Mary: (cuts in) Plus, I don’t know. If I was picking people (inaudible) I don’t think I would pick someone like Emma Thompson or Geri Hallwell. I don’t know very much about sports, but like, they don’t appear to have the qualities that necessarily

M.C. Mmm

Mary: should be promoted. (pause) Like less so for Emma Thompson, a real lovely sort of actress. And its hard to be the real person you know in the night dressing room and stuff like that.

Alison: Yeah

Mary: That’s not what people are looking for.

FG 2 Q3 P5

If Mary ‘was to pick people’ she would not select individuals ‘like’ these celebrities, because they ‘don’t appear’ to have qualities’ that ‘should be promoted’. According to Amy, a role model needs to be someone who is ‘personal to you’ who ‘has done something that you want to’ achieve. The unrealistic nature of this proposal is discussed further below:

Betsy: And to tell people that they’ve got to like, like you say Emily, it’s like completely manufactured who you should like see these people as role models

Emily: Yeah.

Betsy: it’s just not going to work for everyone.

Devon: What if you might want somebody that more in touch with you like, you might want to be more like your mum over Geri Hallwell. You might want somebody that you’re more in touch with

(Inaudible) (Laughter)
Devon: You know what I mean? Like some the boss of your company where you work or something. You might say, oh yeah, you've had a great career. I wish I could have one like him. Sort of thing whereas like we're not all going to win the Oscars, are we?

M.C.: Mmm Hmm.

Betsy: Mmm.

Devon: We want something more realistic. We're not all going to form a girl group and get to number one. We want something more that we can achieve so we can say,

Emily: Yeah

Devon: yeah we've achieved it rather than oh, that's just a far dream that we never ever going to achieve. (pause)

FG 6 Q4 P9

These participants seem to agree that young women 'want something more realistic'. A young woman 'might want to be more like [her] mum over Geri Haliwell'. Devon suggests that young women want and already have role models that stand for things they 'can achieve' rather than 'a far dream that we are never ever going to achieve.' These three extracts illustrate participants' belief that celebrities fail to mirror their own goals and aspirations because they lack the personal element that these women can relate to.

Michelle, Julie, Katie and Jennifer provide personal examples of what they prefer in role models as they 'real life' figures who have been most influential in their lives rather than 'superstars' below:

Michelle: To me, the people that are far most most in influential would be those that are close to me.

M.C: Mmm.

Julie: They don't have to be a superstar.

Michelle: I mean, as we already said, it's my parents or my granddad.

M.C: Mmm Hmm.

Katie: Yeah.

Michelle: I mean, it's those that are immediate.
M.C: Mmm Hmm.

Julie: I suppose when you're younger though you may think of more famous people.

Katie: Yeah.

Julie: I mean just your parents, they're normal and but you see these people on telly and think you think, wow. I think that changes when you do get sort of older. But I think the whole point of it is choosing your own, so I don't like that idea of the government choosing.

Jennifer: No.

Jennifer: Yeah, choosing certain people.

M.C: Mmm Hmm.

Jennifer: For the most part, it's rubbish isn't it?

FG 4 Q3 P7

Those who are 'immediate' and 'close' to these participants such as 'parents' and a 'granddad' are most influential; and it is not necessary to 'be a superstar' in order to be a role model. 'The whole point' of a role model is to 'choose your own' and therefore the idea of the government choosing a celebrity role model is 'rubbish'. Susan, Lauren and Nancy contribute further to this dialogue in a separate focus group extract below:

Susan: (pause) I don't think anybody famous has really been influential.

M.C: Hmm. Hmm.

Susan: I think they're always too sort of removed from your own like your own experiences to really have a direct sort of influence.

Lauren: Yeah.

Nancy: It's more of a fantasy really.

FG 5 Q2 P6

Susan cannot identify 'anybody famous' as influential and feels celebrities are too 'removed' from young women's experience 'to really have a direct sort of influence'. In addition, Nancy's identification of a celebrity lifestyle as 'more of a fantasy' than a reality
suggests that the lives and accomplishments of celebrities eliminates them from direct influence and role model status.

Even though participants collectively expressed rejection toward this proposal by the Women's Unit, individuals in two focus groups were able to identify value of this type of intervention in certain respects:

Liz: I wasn't suggesting that they should have a sort of thing coming out of the government saying that these ten people are going to be young women's role models.

Jane: You will mind! You will mind!

Liz: You will mind and you will look up to these people. But I think the idea of socially promoting, not necessarily from some governmental central source or something like that. But promoting sort of positive strong women for young women to identify with possibly or not but definitely to just to even be aware of, is a good idea.

Kathy: Sure, they can promote them. Yes, exactly exactly making strong young women more visible in the world I agree with a hundred percent. I think it's the idea that somebody can choose who those people are going to be.

FG 7 Q3 P21

Liz believes promoting 'positive strong women for young women to identify with' is acceptable, and Kathy agrees that 'making strong women more visible in the world' is agreeable, yet 'choosing who [role models] are going to be' is not. Thus, promoting and making 'strong' or successful women visible would be a favorable way for the government to reach this population. In the following extract, Mary, Alison, and Amy offer additional suggestions of ways the government could assist young women:

Mary: It depends on what their objectives were as well, really. If they were trying to make the fact that, you know, sort of anti-anorexia and sort of get out and be sporty and stuff and you know then they are good ideals behind them. I'm not sure it is the best way of doing it.

Alison: No

Amy: They would be better off giving some money to youth projects or things like, get some decent sports facilities around the country and stuff like that.
Amy: You know the thing that strikes me, is that um, if money was put into making issues of like more sort of influential things like politics and perhaps a bit more of the arts and stuff like that and it was put into promoting authors and knowledge about what was going on in the world around them in a kind of more accessible manner. To you know, young girls rather than saying look here's a pop star which is already famous and who we are going to promote even more. But to make like issues that are important sort of trendier

* * *

Amy: I just think that, like I wouldn't objected when I was you know fourteen or something for someone to come along and say, I want you to learn about the situation in the Far East or whatever. Cause, I-I think people are generally interested but it's very difficult unless you're willing to go up and sit in a library to

M.C. Mmm

Amy: learn about issues. Like I don't feel like I know enough about what's going on.

Mary: (cuts in) It's really inaccessible in the way its reported as well. It's really in isolated incidents, and it's quite technical in what they're doing and

M C. Mmm

Mary. it's not very easy to understand.

M C. Sure.

Amy: I just think it would like, like develop for most people and just, I am sounding really removed like I have been (?) and I know everything but I don't mean that. I mean, just like Geri Hallwell may have quite a lot to offer having been UN Woman and all that, but she's not particularly articulate and what she's really famous for is getting her tits out and falling over at the bricks and stuff like that and I just think, perhaps if they could not center on all of the people who are thin and wear lots of people and center on like, things that will influence people

M.C. Mmm.

Amy. and broaden knowledge of what is going on.

FG 2 Q3 P5 & 8

Rather than focusing on 'all of the people who are thin and wear lots of makeup, the government should center on 'things that will influence people.' Examples include 'decent sports facilities', 'promoting authors', and providing accessibility to information regarding what is 'going on in the world' specifically in regard to 'politics' and 'the arts'.
These data extracts clearly indicate that these young women oppose the British Government Women’s Unit or any other agency proposing role models for them. According to their feedback, it is extremely difficult to choose an individual, and especially a celebrity, who will adequately represent young women’s diverse and unique personal interests. It appears as if the British Government and other similar agencies should focus their energies on other worthwhile projects such as those outlined above.

5.3.1 Minor Theme 4: ‘The Need to Be Yourself’

The fourth minor theme surfacing within the data supports above statements rejecting the idea of outside agencies selecting role models as well as the expressed opposition opposed one influential person in life or one single role model. Participants’ feedback indicates that emulating one person entirely is not plausible because eventually, ‘you need to be yourself’, ‘be your own person’, ‘be like yourself’ or ‘go for what you believe in.’ These discussions comprise the fourth minor theme in the data which supports Susan and Lauren provide talk about this below:

Susan: I think the whole idea of having a sort of child role model from the start isn’t going to work because no one likes to admit that they’re anything but their own person. You know

M.C.: Mmm.

Susan: You like to think that your ideas are your own. You know

Lauren: Yeah.

Susan: you’re a strong person, strong minded, you go for what you believe in and that would be completely contradicted by turning around and having this you know, vision that everyone is trying to be like. No one would want to do it and you would get people sort of deliberately, you know just trying to avoid the feeling of being patronized and just completely diversifying from what people wanted them to be.

FG 5 Q5 P15

Susan suggests that the idea that everyone will have a ‘child role model’ will not ‘work’ because young women experience themselves as ‘strong minded’ people with their own
ideas. The strife for independence that going 'for what you believe in' entails is not commensurate with attempting to impersonate or entirely emulate one person. Instead, it is 'completely contradicted' by this idea. Rachel takes a similar position as she states that trying to be an 'exact replica' of a role model results in 'boredom':

Rachel: I think you can get bored of trying to be your role model as well. You can try and try and try and the more you try, I mean you're never going to be an exact replica of your role model ever.

M.C.: Mmm. Hmm.

Rachel: If you have one. But I guess after you get past a certain point, then you just give up and just, uh be like yourself then.

M.C.: Mmm.

Rachel: And it's not so much a defeat as so much a victory for yourself.

FG 5 Q8 P22-23

Thus, to Rachel, the 'victory' lies in arriving at the conclusion that 'being like yourself' supersedes repeated attempts to emulate another individual.

Within these extracts, participants discuss and illustrate that the idea of 'being yourself' outweighs the need or desire to emulate a single individual entirely. The independence associated with 'going for what you believe in' as opposed to what others expect is 'completely contradicted' by the assumption that everyone has a single individual or role model whom they work to emulate or 'be like.'

5.3.2 Minor Theme 5: Role Models are People Too

The fifth and final minor theme in the data further demonstrates participant discussion regarding the tendency to place role models 'on a pedestal', to 'build them up' and 'only look at them' as 'perfect' and in doing so 'give them a persona that might not necessarily represent them at all'. Despite the 'public image' of famous individuals who are often considered influential, participants discussed how these individuals are inevitably human with imperfect characteristics similar to 'everybody else'. Participants also discussed the 'image' versus the 'real person' in terms of known individuals as well
as celebrities, and both discussions add to the examination of idealized notions of role model is perceived to be versus how the concept applies in their own lives.

Anne and Christine discuss the 'pedestal' phenomenon in relation to celebrities:

Anne: I think the way you treat role models is you kind of only look at them as being in a positive light. So you kind of, I mean you build them up, you put them on a pedestal. You don't, I mean that's not what you imagine and how you feel about them is not necessarily what they're actually like.

Christine: Yeah

Anne: But you don't think about that, you just look at the real positive aspect that you want to kind of, especially with like famous people. You kind of give them a persona that might not necessarily represent them at all. I mean, when Geri Halliwell's off camera, she might be a complete selfish bitch. But you don't you don't think about it. Not that, you think about it as the way you want her to be.

M.C.: Right.

Christine: Yeah.

Anne: And that's the whole thing of fame and you know the things that she was talking about

M.C.: Mmm.

Anne: and um she might not necessarily you know she might hate animals and be racist or something, but you know, none of us would ever imagine people to be like that.

M.C.: Mmm.

Anne: Because you kind of make them into a perfect person.

M.C.: Mmm.

**FG 3 Q6 P19-20**

For Anne, the 'persona' that one gives to role models does not equate with someone who could be a 'selfish bitch' or 'racist'. Rather, the tendency is to envision these individuals strictly in a 'positive light' and to focus on the 'real positive aspect'. Anne suggests that this may be due to what an individual wants these people to be, but she recognizes that they are likely to have negative characteristics too even if one imagines them to be a 'perfect' person. Similarly, Jane and Kathy highlight the potential disparity between an individual's 'public image' and 'the way they treat people':
Jane: Mmm. And it's what they represent because I always think like people like that what they represent is fantastic.

Kathy: Yeah.

Jane: And their public image is fantastic. But then then as an individual, probably blah, and the way they treat people is probably

Kathy: No exactly.

Jane: probably there's hate in them.

FG 7 Q2 P14

As Jane says when someone's public image is 'fantastic', this may not truly represent them as an individual.

Princess Diana was repeatedly mentioned as an example of someone who is seen as 'the perfect ...beautiful person'. However, even as a 'charitable goddess' with a commitment to 'children with no arms and legs', they questioned whether 'she was really a nice person' or if there was a 'malicious piece that we don't really know about'. A unique aspect of Princess Diana was that she did expose some of her imperfections to the public even though as Alison stated, 'the public loved her in the first place' for her 'big naïve eyes' and her beauty, 'what she was doing' was seen as 'secondary'. Christine and Anne specifically discuss Princess Diana in relation to how she had 'bad personality characteristics' like 'everybody else in the world':

Christine: You know, you do when you're thinking about it. Certainly in a more detached way. You do just think of the more positive things.

M.C.: Mmm Mmm.

Anne: The way people looked at Diana and saw her as the perfect

M.C.: Mmm Hmm.

Christine: you know, beautiful person who went and you know, looked after loads of sick kids and stuff. But you know, in reality she was a bulimic adulterer

M.C.: Mmm Hmm.

Anne: but you know normally you don't think about that. You might comment later on it but yeah, but she would have bad personality characteristics just like everybody else in the world does.
FG 3 Q6 P10

The 'reality' of bulimia and adultery are often not thought about nor are they associated with Princess Diana, other than as a brief anecdote or 'comment' following discussion of her life and accomplishments. Nevertheless, she made these aspects of her life public thus revealing to these young women that she was human too.

Participants also described this 'pedestal' in relation to known individuals. In the example below, Mary illustrates how the discovery of imperfections in someone previously seen as a role model can be alarming and 'bizarre':

Mary: And I've got this uh uncle who's like, he is actually, (inaudible) he had TB when he was younger and he started school when he was 11 and by the time he was 18 he was at Cambridge and then he became a doctor and all the time he has been crippled by TB and he's got 3 kids and uh, this great wife who I've always (inaudible) and they're like, in their 70s now mum's like oh yeah, your uncle, your uncle Bob had 2 affairs and it was just so embarrassing and I am like oh no, he can't have affairs he's perfect and you just think, no how bizarre.

Amy: But it's good when that happens when you realize, they're not infallible, you know.

M.C.: Mmm. Yeah.

Amy: They have (pause) flaws

FG 2 Q6 P12

Amy's response to Mary's story further illustrates that this sort of realization can be positive because it reveals that previously idealized individuals are human (i.e. 'not infallible' and have 'flaws') and perhaps are therefore potentially more reachable or realistic. Anne gives a similar example from her own experience:

Anne: Um, you know, my granddad was, now he's dead and I think of him as the perfect person, but when he was alive, he could be a right bastard. And you think, oh god, you know, he's driving me up the wall. But if he then turns into a role model then they are just perfect

M.C.: Mmm.

Anne: and never possibly irritate you and you know,

Christine: Yeah.
FG 2 Q5 P21
Again, the image of a role model equates with one who is 'perfect'. While Anne holds her grandfather in high esteem, yet she is aware that he was a person with human characteristics and is therefore hesitant to 'turn' him 'into a role model' for this reason.

Mary's description of what comprises an influential person for her summarizes the sentiments expressed by participants in regard to the 'human' characteristics of influential people or role models:

Mary: They've got to be human, they've got to have like, they can't be something that's that sort of elevated above making mistakes and being swayed and that sort of thing.

FG 2.Q6 P11
Thus, influential people to these women are not perfect, rather they need 'to be human' and not 'elevated above making mistakes'. In short, as these extracts have shown, influential people to these young women are 'human' or people too.

5.4 Data Analysis: A Summary

These two data analysis chapters have illustrated participants' perceptions of the concept of a role model as well as their attempt to apply this concept to their own experience. The content analysis reflects specific responses to focus group questions illustrating who has been influential in participants' lives as well as reactions to the idea of celebrity influences and outside agencies proposing role models for young women overall, and I have attempted to further illustrate results from the content analysis in tables A-F.

Within this thematic analysis, I have attempted to provide a more in depth exploration to participant responses and reactions to role models and how they do (or do not) apply to their own lives. The three main themes ('The Meaning of Influence', 'The Parts are More Influential than the Whole' and 'Thanks but No Thanks: We Can Select
Our Own Role Models') break down the meaning of a role model as these participants experience the term and also provide a critical look at societal prescriptions versus real life stories and depictions. The five supporting minor themes ('Influence Over Time', 'Subtle Influence', 'People Who', 'Commitment' and 'Role Models are People Too') provide additional support to the main themes and also add additional glimpses at participant experience in terms of the nature of influence and types of individual who have or have not been significant in participants lives. I will address these results further within Chapter Six where I will also reflect on the experience of carrying out this piece of qualitative feminist research.
Chapter 6
Conclusions and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will summarize the conclusions of this study, consider their implications for both feminist and mainstream psychology; and I will reflexively address the process of conducting a piece of qualitative feminist research. In addition, I will reflect on the experience of completing this research project specifically in regard to designing and moderating the focus groups; my interest in this topic and why I chose to study it in this manner with this population; my position as an American feminist experiential researcher in a British primarily discursive Social Science department and an assessment of what I would change if I had the opportunity to repeat the study.

6.2 Conclusions and Implications

The results of this study provide three clear conclusions in regard to young women’s perceptions of role models, all of which have implications for both feminist and mainstream psychology. First it confirms the ambiguity behind term ‘role model’, despite its frequent use, both by its absence in psychological texts as well as by the difficulty participants had defining and applying it to their own experience. Second, it suggests that despite their inevitable presence, in most cases celebrities are not the most influential figures in young women’s lives. Rather, it is individuals whom these young women have been exposed to within their own environments such as home, school and within recreational environments (i.e. sports teams) that have been most influential. Finally, it indicates that those individuals who are influential to these young women vary
Chapter Six: Conclusions and Discussion

according to personal experience and circumstances and therefore prescribing a set of role models, specifically celebrity role models, is unlikely to adequately represent and reflect their diverse experience. I will address each of these conclusions in turn below and follow with a discussion of whether the term role model is actually useful for young women today.

6.2.1 ‘Role Model’: An Ambiguous Term

As Chapter Two suggests, a precise definition for the term role model does not exist even though it is relatively easy to extrapolate meaning by combining role theory (Biddle, 1985, 1986; Weigert, Tetge & Teitge, 1986) and the concept of modeling (Bandura, 1972). Consequently, the term seems to be more of a buzzword or pop psychological term than a concept with formal theoretical representation.

When the term role model was introduced within the focus groups, participants appeared to be familiar with the concept in terms of its implied meaning. A role model to these young women is a single person who one ‘would like to’ emulate or ‘model your life after’ (Kathy & Liz, FG7 Q1 P5). There was one repeated example of the term being used in this sense within participants’ experience and that was the repeated identification and descriptions of their mothers as a single individual who has provided ‘immediate’ influence (Jessica, FG 1 Q1 P1), and as one who has ‘always been there’ to ‘look up to’ (Lauren, FG 5 Q1 P1-2). However, participants had difficulty applying the concept of a role model as a single individual beyond the relationships with their mothers. This was evident within descriptions of ‘certain characteristics of different people’ (Karen, FG 8 Q 3 P10) (as opposed to one person) that appeal to participants and how they ‘pick and choose parts of people’ to emulate since striving to be ‘completely like someone else’ results in a situation in which you ‘wouldn’t be being yourself’ (Christine, FG 3 Q3 P6). Also, participant discussions concerning how some aspects of controversial individuals such as Martin Luther King (Jane, FG 7 Q7 P29),
Madonna (Julie, Jennifer FG 4 Q7 P29) or Germaine Greer (Betsy, FG 6 Q5 P16) can be influential, whereas others are not, indicates that one entire influential person (or a single role model) has not been relevant to their experience.

The ambiguity behind the term 'role model' was further illustrated within discussions of how individuals whom these young women find influential vary according to 'whatever is important to you at a stage in your life' and both have the tendency to shift based on the 'sort of issues' one is 'dealing with' (Carrie, FG 7 Q5 P28). Thus, who and what was 'important' to these women at an earlier age is 'obviously vastly different to what is important' to them at the present time (Jane, FG 7 Q5 P28). Some participants stated that their mothers were more influential during their formative years than at present (Jessica, FG1 Q5 P14; Mia, FG9 Q5 P19), and the identification of educational figures as well as authors are additional examples of individuals who have been influential, yet only at specific points in their lives.

The detailed descriptions of the types of influence these young women have experienced in their own lives (i.e. subtle vs momentary influence) and the 'tiny', 'least' or 'little' things that certain individuals have done (Jane, FG 7 P2 Q1; Susan, FG 5 Q5 P16) that really 'speak volumes' (Lauren, FG 5 Q5 P17) also illustrate how the idea of one clear specific role model does not apply to young women's experience. It has been the 'bits of influence' from 'different people' (Betsy FG6 Q5 P12) that have been most important in their lives and this does not equate with the conventional implied meaning that the term invokes.

Therefore, despite the familiarity associated with the implied meaning behind a role model, participant inspection and attempted dissection of the term reveals its ambiguity. This is clear within participant breakdown of the term in terms of the meaning and types of influence, influential traits (or aspects of individuals) as opposed to whole individuals.
6.2 Celebrities Need Not Apply

As stated in Chapter Two, previous studies (i.e. Lee, 1985) have identified certain celebrities who are influential in the lives of young people (i.e. children and adolescents) including Dr Martin Luther King, sports figures, entertainers, Superman, and Coretta Scott King. Similarly, some participants in this study stated that some celebrities such as ‘pop stars and things that were on the telly’ (Michelle, FG4 Q5 P10-11) were influential yet at an earlier age; or remain influential in respect to particular traits or qualities (Emily FG 6 Q5 P16).

At the same time, participant feedback mirrors studies that have identified significant others such as mothers (Altman & Grossman, 1977; Frieze, 1975, Tangri, 1972), sisters, teachers (Monaco & Gaier, 1992; Tierno, 1991) and other family members (Lee, 1985). Many of these young women were directly opposed to the idea of famous people serving as role models since they ‘don’t really stand for the right things’ because ‘they stand for [things] like fame and fortune... and all the things women maybe shouldn’t encourage’ (Sara, FG1 Q3 P9).

Participants also had difficulty with the idea of celebrities because they did not feel they are exposed to the entire person. A seemingly influential celebrity might ‘hate animals or be racist or something’ and ‘none of us would ever imagine people to be like that’ (Anne, FG 3 Q6 P19-20). The ‘public image is fantastic,’ but the ‘way they treat people could not be’ and there could be ‘hate in them’ (Jane, FG7 Q2 P14).

Rather than celebrities, it was clear (through repeated conversations within virtually every focus group) that the most influential individuals are individuals such as mothers (because ‘they are always there’ or due to their constant close proximity and immediate availability (Sara, FG1 Q1 P2)); educational figures (‘who are passionate about their subjects’ (Amy, FG2 Q5 P10)); authors (‘who have something to say’ that ‘touches deep’ (Christine FG3 Q3 P11; Alison, FG2 Q5 P15)); and others such as ‘female family...
members' (Devon, FG6 Q1 P6) that are 'definitely more' influential 'than media figures' because 'you don't really know these media people' (Sara, FG1, Q5 P14).

Thus, the lack of complete exposure one receives from a celebrity as well as the lack of actual everyday interactive exposure received from celebrities provide reasoning for why they have not been identified as the most influential individuals in participant lives. The personal nature of influence is another contributing factor, especially when celebrity role models are prescribed by outside agencies, and this will be discussed below.

6.2.3 It's Personal...

While it is understandable that mainstream psychologists, feminist psychologists and other individuals feel they need to advocate for young women and create programs and policies that will promote their well being, the discussions in this study indicate that influential individuals vary according to context and individual life circumstances, thereby making it difficult if not impossible to make such prescriptions that will be applicable to young women as a group. When specifically questioned about the concept of a prescribed or a 'government approved' role model, participants found such proposals to be 'rubbish' (Jennifer, FG4 Q4), 'engineered and manufactured' (Emily FG7 Q4) and could not 'understand why [the government and other agencies] feel that we need [specific role models]' (Sara, FG1 Q4) especially since there are 'women' and other individuals 'who are out there' so 'why do we need them pointed out for us?' (Jessica, Sara, FG1 Q4). They did not feel that this sort of selection to be 'the government's domain' (Alison, FG2 Q4) because a role model 'is so personal' (Linda, FG8 Q4) and the idea of 'someone like the government to decide who your role models are is a bit scary' (Anne, FG 3 Q 4). Also participants identified multiple influences, and identifying single role models does not reflect multiple influential aspects of different people as there are 'just so many people that influence you, you can't just put a finger on even five
people' (Rachel, FG5 Q5 P 14) and 'you may look up to people for different reasons' (Michelle FG4 Q4 P9). The entire idea of influence and influential people is 'relative' to the individual since what 'what different people find influential in their lives is so different' because influence and is 'such an individual thing (Michelle, FG4 Q5 P12).

It was also stated that proposals such as this assume that adolescents are 'not capable of making [their] own decisions' (Carrie FG7 Q4) and 'they shouldn't be saying we need a role model, it's just putting more pressure to aspire to something else'. Instead, the government and other outside agencies should be basically saying, 'you know sort of, be your own person' (Susan FG 5 Q4 P15).

Despite their disagreement with the notion of a government approved role model, participants were in favor of the idea of 'socially promoting ... sort of positive strong women for young women to identify with' (Liz, FG7 Q3 P21). It is the idea that 'somebody can choose who those people are going to be' (Kathy, FG7 Q3 P21) participants opposed. Other alternatives, specifically for the government include 'giving money to youth projects' or 'decent sports facilities' or 'making issues out of influential things... like politics... and the arts and... promoting authors and knowledge of what's going on in the world' (Amy, FG 2 Q3 P5 & 8). The idea of promoting individuals who are represent 'something more realistic' whose accomplishments and actions resemble 'something we can achieve' (Devon, FG6 Q4 P9) appeals to participants, especially since celebrities appear 'completely manufactured' (Betsy, FG 6 Q4 P9) and because the majority of young women are not 'going to win the Oscars' (Devon, FG6 Q4 P9).

The manner in which participants discussed role models, and tested their ideas of what a role model actually is against their own experience, specifically in terms of influential parts of individuals, celebrity inaccessibility and the personal nature of influence and influential role models overall lead to the question whether the concept of
'role models' is at all useful for young women today. I shall explore this in the following section while I also reflect on the experience of conducting this piece of research overall.

6.3 In Hindsight...

I will now take the opportunity to personally assess the design, execution and results of this study. I will begin with an examination of the focus groups in terms of how and why they were adequate for the goals of this piece of feminist research as well as my performance as a novice focus group moderator. Then, I will review confirmed suspicions I had in terms of the results as well as which aspects surprised me. Also, I will address my experience as an experiential or feminist standpoint researcher in a predominantly social constructionist academic department. Finally, I will reflect on the experience of conducting feminist research as well as on the experience of being an American postgraduate research student in a British university.

6.3.1 Reflections on the Focus Groups

Focus groups were a valuable choice for data collection for several reasons. First, in accordance with what the 'how to' books and articles stated, (Kreuger, 1988; Milward, 1995; Morgan, 1993; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Wilkinson, 1999a) participants were able to bounce ideas off of one another and many elaborated or reformulated their ideas and positions after listening to opinions and views expressed by other members of the group. For example, participants explored the meaning of influence as well as what they believed a role model to be while also identifying whether any such individual(s) existed in their own lives. My experience in running nine of these groups supports that of researchers such as Jenny Kitzinger (1994) who state that familiarity among focus group participants helps to promote deeper conversation. In each of the postgraduate focus groups, the students were familiar with one another and
in many cases, were very well acquainted as office mates and flat mates. It seemed that they were able to recall events in each other’s lives that enhanced the discussion, whether they were identifying contradictions in other group member’s talk identifying relevant past events.

Second, focus groups allowed participants to use their own vernacular while interacting with one another and this may have not been possible within individual interviews due to the cultural difference between an American researcher and British participants. I chose to run the groups with a moderate amount of control to allow group members to challenge one another which as the literature states, often led to the reframing of ideas (Kitzinger, 1994a; Krueger, 1988). In this way, I was able to maintain a balance between what was important to group members and what my official focus group schedule dictated (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). Even though I was not an active member of the group, I often shared some of my own experiences in order to facilitate discussion and I felt this sort of open, non expert disclosure on my part assisted with minimizing power issues between the participants as ‘the researched’ and myself ‘the researcher’ (Wilkinson, 1999b).

Third, since young women’s perceptions of role models had not been explored previously, focus groups served as a good place to begin a dialogue around this topic (Brodigan, 1993, Hisrich & Peters, 1982 cited in Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996). Focus groups also provided an opportunity to conduct a thematic analysis with the intent of representing themes from participants’ perspectives, in accordance with standpoint theory (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995, 1997; Smith, 1992; Stanley, 1991). In addition, individual interviews most likely would not have provided the rich data that were a result of candid discussions between participants in these focus groups. (Durger, 1986 cited in Vaughn, Schumm & Sinagub, 1996; Lee, 1993, Ward, 1991 cited in Lunt, 1996).
Although there were numerous advantages of utilizing focus groups, it was evident upon listening to the tapes after each group that I was a novice moderator. Since my educational and employment background is in therapy and counseling, it was clear that my ‘therapy hat’ appeared while I was leading these groups because I tended to listen to the participant interactions as well as individual statements without probing for in-depth explanations. Also, I noticed that I had the tendency to summarize what participants were saying and to bring in themes heard in other groups in a manner that resembles some styles of group therapy.

There were a few technical issues that caused havoc within focus group preparation and execution. First, I was recruiting students close to the end of their spring term and also close to their exam period, which made it difficult for them to willingly volunteer and this is why I decided to include postgraduates as part of the participant pool. Several undergraduate students agreed to take part in a focus group in advance but then did not show on the actual day of the group which meant in some cases I had only two participants within a few of the groups. As a result, I had nine focus groups yet only had 30 participants (See Appendix C). Also, I ran a pilot focus group to give the first draft of my focus group schedule a trial session. During this group, the tape recorder did not record the session so although I felt satisfied with the group, I was unable to transcribe the session to share with my supervisor and to evaluate the ‘dry run’ of the focus group schedule in order to determine whether the setup and ordering of questioning met my research goals.

I recruited the postgraduates from my own department as well as from my graduate residence hall, and so therefore I had some sort of working relationship with each of them. I think this brought about a noticeable change in the dynamic of the groups in comparison to those I ran with undergraduates, most of whom I had met only once or twice. While I believe familiarity among participants was beneficial, familiarity
between myself and the participants did make things slightly uncomfortable for me (Milward, 1994, Krueger, 1998). I felt I did not want to challenge some of these postgraduates or probe further in instances where I did not feel that I had a clear grasp on what they were saying, for fear that I might damage a working or living relationship. However, I believe my acquaintance with these postgraduates helped to dispel any underlying power differentials and I do not think it inhibited their disclosure. Overall, I do not believe I endangered or jeopardized the groups and conversational flow.

There were limits to what I felt I could do and say as a focus group moderator. For instance, there were cases where I was especially interested in a description of a particular influential person but since these were not interviews, it did not seem appropriate to pursue the descriptions further. Now that I reflect on that supposed limit, I realize that perhaps I could have asked more questions in regard to their descriptions, yet I felt hindered by how I thought the groups were ‘supposed’ to run. Overall, I feel most of the drawbacks of the focus groups reflected basic mixups that occur within any study, especially for a novice focus group moderator and an inexperienced postgraduate researcher. Otherwise, I believe this method offered a valuable opportunity to collect data in a manner that was appropriate for this study, in a way that would enable me to attempt to represent young women’s experience in the most adequate manner possible.

6.3.2 Suspicions and Surprises

When I was initially contemplating the design of this study, specifically the focus group schedule and the specific issues I wanted to address with the participants, there were some suspicions I had in terms of the data and feedback participants would provide. Some of these suspicions were confirmed, and there were also some surprises reflected within unexpected themes raised within the data, and I will review both below.
Confirmed Suspicions

I suspected that participants might identify their mothers in response to the first focus group question, ‘Who has been influential in your life thus far?’ In addition, various colleagues, peers and family members stated that mothers would be identified as role models or as influential figures during conversations concerning my research. However, I was hesitant to assume that this would be an automatic response, especially since mother-daughter relationships maintain a contentious presence within feminist as well as mainstream research (Brooks-Gunn & Zahaykevich, 1989; Chodorow, 1974, 1978; Edelman, 1995; Freud, 1931; Jordan et al, 1991; Klein, 1961; Miller, 1976; Gilligan, 1982, 1993). Yet participants as a group collectively confirmed that mothers have indeed been the most influential figures in their lives thus far.

I also suspected that fathers and female family members might be identified as influential by participants in response to question one and five, yet perhaps not as frequently as mothers. In retrospect, this expectation reflects my own experience because the most influential individuals in my own life have been my father, my paternal grandmother and an aunt. My own experience seems to have been shared by these young women as well since these are the family members who were most frequently mentioned within the family member category outlined in the tables in chapter four.

When devising the prompt sheet for question two (These are some pictures of famous people who could be considered influential. What do you think of them? Have any of these people influenced you? In what way? If not, why?) I assumed that participants would not necessarily identify or directly relate to any of the individuals included but instead I was attempting to utilize this prompt sheet as a tool to discuss celebrity influence or the lack thereof. Even though participants were able to state that they admired particular traits of some of this individuals included on this sheet (i.e. Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa and Mahatma
Gandhi) they did not believe they were able to 'relate' to famous people due to the lack of a personal relationship. Although negative feedback concerning celebrity influence and celebrity role models may have been related to participants' age and stage in life, especially since many of them mentioned the appeal but not necessarily the influence of certain celebrities at an earlier age, their responses supported my suspicion.

When I initially learned of the British Government Women's Unit proposal concerning 'Government Approved Role Models', I found its authoritarian language to be incredibly presumptuous. It appeared to me that this agency was condoning girls, female teenagers and young women to look up to this narrowly selected group of individuals, and the entire proposal seemed misguided to me. I realized that perhaps this was a result of my status as a cultural outsider especially since similar proposals surface in the United States with language that belongs to liberal humanist traditions which promote self-efficacy, and which do not seem to have these authoritative connotations. However, participant descriptions of this proposal as 'patronizing' across focus groups not only validated my own reaction but lead me to believe my reaction was not necessarily culturally related.

In addition, it seemed that promoting a prescribed group of 'role models' for young women that represent a narrow range of interests was not feasible since young women have varying interests and experiences. The way in which participants discussed the personal nature of influence as well as how it changes as a result of age and life circumstances, supported the my belief that the role models the government proposed are exclusive and glamour based and do not represent the wide interests of all young women.

At the same time, I found some value in existing programs that highlight successful individuals of both genders, such as the web sites noted in Chapter Two, due to the way
in which they provide information without dictating what young women should or should not achieve. My overall career plans include involvement in prevention work with young women in mental health, or working proactively to help them explore aspects of themselves (i.e. sexuality, ethnicity, career interests, gender) and the implications of these (positive or negative) prior to the development of ailments leading to disparaging statistics. Thus, I feel websites and programs that highlight the achievements of various women are positive. Participants’ feedback supported this as they stated that there are potentially favorable ways to promote successful young women or to make certain figures ‘more visible’. Yet in doing so, it is necessary to highlight individuals that represent numerous disciplines in order to reach young women as a collective group.

Surprises

While some aspects of my findings were suspected, other aspects provided surprises, I began the focus groups by asking about influence because I wanted to start by addressing role models without any excess jargon. Thus, when asking the question, ‘Who has been influential in your life? By this I mean someone you admire or someone you respect?’ I thought I was making a clear case from which I would later prompt discussion directly concerning role models. I did not realize I would be creating a forum to discuss the meaning of influence in comparison to and contrasting with respect and admiration. In addition, I did not realize participants would compare and contrast respect, admiration and emulation. However, these discussions did provide a sound platform from which I was able to effectively identify themes within my analysis. Although I designed the focus group schedule with the intent of addressing good and bad influence as well as whether individuals could be influenced by someone or see them as a role model even if they did not share all of the same beliefs, participants seemed to discuss these topics without much prompting.
Also, although I suspected that the concept of a role model could be difficult for participants to discuss and apply to their lives, I did not expect them to discuss influence or influential people in terms of traits rather than the whole person. Few people were unable to identify an influential person and usually spoke of that person in terms of traits that she or he had were influential at one time or another. It was just often difficult for participants to identify someone who had been consistently influential throughout their lives with the exception of their mothers.

While participant discussion concerning the personal nature of influential individuals did not necessarily shock me, I had not given previous thought to the diverse possibilities of what an influential person can be, depending on personal background. This might be due to my mainstream background and training which has not necessarily emphasized multiple realities among individuals, but single classifications systems in respect to behavior overall. I acknowledge the impact of my previous training (although not without regret) on my thinking overall, and this project has given me the opportunity to seriously reconsider such mainstream approaches. I will address this further within the next section, particularly in regard to the sometimes overwhelming experience of (unknowingly) placing myself in a (comparatively) radical academic department to carry out this piece of research.

6.3.3 An Experiential Researcher in A World of Social Constructionists

After completing my masters degree, I decided it would be helpful to obtain some additional research experience and my hope was to do this within feminist psychology. Most of my experience as a therapist in training was with young women in university, hospital and clinic settings, and I developed an interest in exploring young women's self-esteem. I also wanted to go overseas to broaden my horizons on various levels and the United Kingdom seemed like a 'safe' place to embark upon this adventure since I knew
Loughborough University Social Science Department is a radical department in terms of its critical approach to the psychological and sociological mainstream, and although I was aware of this in terms of feminist psychology, I was not familiar of the structure of the remainder of the department. Originators of the term 'Discursive Psychology' (Edwards & Potter, 1992) reside within the department and other professors maintain a strong presence within the field of Discourse Analysis (Antaki, 1994; Billig, 1996; 1991; Billig et al, 1988). These ideas and approaches felt especially radical to me coming from the North American academic mainstream, since part of the foundation of discourse analysis consists of a vehement critique of mainstream psychological theory.

As a result, I felt as if all of my existing knowledge and intellectual processes were under attack in the various seminars I attended during my first few months at Loughborough. In some senses, I was correct, yet obviously I was not under attack, instead it was my training that was the center of their seemingly bombastic overtures. However, it was difficult to maintain or even develop the desire to understand these approaches since not only were they diametrically opposed to my training, but they did not seem to serve any practical purpose nor were they remotely 'person centered'. As my exposure to these approaches increased, my defenses slowly dissolved and I gradually began to take a critical look, in my spare time, at the principles of therapy and my mainstream academic background. In addition, I came to appreciate the origins, complexity and quite frankly the brilliance behind discourse analysis, discursive psychology and social constructionism. While I cannot say that I am a convert to these methods, I now appreciate and have a working knowledge of their origins and applications which I will take with me as I progress within the field of psychology.

In addition to the challenges of comprehending discourse analysis and its relation to psychology, I was faced with the challenge of grasping and positioning myself within feminist psychology while also designing a feminist research project. Throughout my first
degree in psychology as well as my masters degree in counseling psychology, psychology of women courses were offered on a token basis, and the 'feminist approach' to certain theories in counseling (i.e. family therapy and psychopathology) was introduced once or twice. When I was exposed to these approaches and when I was able to get my hands on readings in feminist psychology, I quickly aligned with explanations of women's psychology resulting from their oppressive position within patriarchal society.

Prior to my arrival in the United Kingdom, I began to read in depth about feminist psychology at an introductory level. I never imagined that it consisted of so many varying viewpoints and in depth debates concerning methodological and epistemological approaches. After meeting with my supervisor once or twice, I was assigned the task of writing an essay entitled 'What is Feminist Psychology?' and a revised and expanded version of this now appears as the first chapter of this thesis. When I first received this assignment, I remember Sue asking me how long I thought I might need to complete it. I replied that I thought two weeks was sufficient. She seemed slightly surprised and told me she was thinking about three weeks, but if I thought two was enough, then two weeks it would be. After a few days of diving into the literature and attempting to make sense of each article which had multiple references that were of interest and essential to my learning process, I began to grasp the humongous task ahead. The pile of 'to read' articles grew rapidly and consisted of what seemed like endless articles of arguments and issues I was not aware of that are associated with both feminism and psychology (i.e. the false memory debate, the study of sex differences); and I came across special editions of Feminism & Psychology consisting of reprints of 'landmark' feminist works that I was not familiar with in the first place. I was feeling overwhelmed to say the very least.
Once I began to understand the divisions within feminism and how they applied to feminist psychology, I identified the spectrum between essentialist and social constructionist research. However, I was not sure where my interests in women's experiences would fit in, and when I expressed this within supervision, Sue enlightened me with the knowledge that my expressed epistemology reflected the principles of feminist standpoint theory.

6.3.4 Intentions, Expectations and Resulting Reality

After beginning my exploration of feminist psychology and its various depths, I came to the conclusion that my proposed topic was extremely broad, and completing a coherent research project concerning the dubious construct of self esteem in relation to feminist psychology seemed to be outside the parameters of a one year MPhil. I began to consider a related and more concise research topic and also began to contemplate collecting empirical data as to broaden the scope of this research experience. I had always had an interest in those that influence young people and who have been identified as central to developing one's resilience, also often referred to as role models. This seemed important to those young women who resist the damning statistics in regard to their academic and career success and independence. I was also aware of the personal stake in this interest because after experiencing various life circumstances (the death of my mother at a young age and enduring the abuse and alcoholism of a stepmother soon after), it was the influence of several key individuals (my father, my paternal grandmother and an aunt) that helped me to believe in my own potential and pursue various avenues. I believe many girls, teenagers and older women succeed despite their personal background and despite social barriers. This is not to say patriarchy or poverty or other things that oppress women are not a part of this or are not responsible for many of us not being able to make choices we might like to make or succeed in an area we might like to pursue. However, it seems oppressive (in its own
way) to state that young women (as a cohort) are destined to fail or to be victims of eating disorders, depression, pregnancy, among other socially created conditions.

At first, I was interested in how and whether other young women had similar experiences with influential people or role models, especially those who were at university pursuing their field of choice. Then, after reviewing the literature I realized how this term was used in relation to young women, and the common understanding of it seemed incredibly erroneous. Personally, I did not relate to celebrities nor did I feel comfortable with the idea of others believing that I, as a young woman, ever ‘needed’ this type of person present in the periphery to look up to. Yet at the same time, I did appreciate some of the programs over the internet that highlighted certain influential individuals to make them more visible for other young women as well as for society overall to observe that young women can be and are successful.

Therefore, my approach came together and I decided not only to speak to young women at Loughborough University about influential figures in their own lives, but to also challenge the way in which young women’s ‘needs’ are categorized. All of a sudden, the notion of a role model was problematized, and my goal of representing young women’s experience from their own perspective remained. Thus, I became a feminist standpoint researcher.

6.3 5 Regrets, Outcomes and Disclaimers

I began my studies at Loughborough University in January 1999, one of the organized postgraduate starting dates according to the university calendar even though. most postgraduates begin their studies in October of each year. I started at this late date due to funding difficulties, and even at the last minute I was uncertain as to whether I would actually depart from the United States as scheduled. Needless to say, my departure details were unsettled upon until the last minute. In addition, funding
difficulties remained and were not settled until August 1999 which did not make financial matters easy during the first eight months in Loughborough.

Also, I had difficulties with the University accommodation office when I was initially attempting to arrange my hall accommodation in September of 1998 because they were not responsive to email, letters and telephone messages. In addition, they decided to transform the postgraduate hall I was living into an undergraduate hall as of September 1999, halfway through the completion of my studies. The accommodation office was extremely uncooperative in helping me find an alternative room. Consequently, I had to search for outside accommodation, which I found successfully, but not without time and frustration.

Since most postgraduates begin the academic year in October, there was a group of existing new postgraduate students in the department when I arrived. Although three months may not appear to be a significant amount of time to develop positions in regard to a research project, I found that it did have a bearing and I often felt behind the others intellectually. This was especially true within required seminars such as the Qualitative Research Methods seminar for first year postgraduates as well as the Discourse and Rhetoric Group (DARG) and the Women's Studies Research Group (WSRG). In addition, most of these postgraduates appeared to have a handle on and were aligning with the social constructionist and discursive position within the department, and this lead me to feel even more alienated in terms of what route I thought I would like to take within my own research. This was true with the other feminist psychological researchers in the department as well since they also tend to adopt a social constructionist position. Therefore, I often felt somewhat defensive when describing my own research especially when asked by these individuals whether I was taking a 'discoursy' approach and when I replied why I was not, enduring further interrogation in regard to my work, background and predicted future career plans.
Also, the setup of the British postgraduate research system definitely differs from the United States. There is a significant amount of structure through courses and regular meetings with supervisors in the U.S., and in Britain this is not necessarily the case. Even though I was aware of this after following the recommendation by my supervisor to read 'How to Get a Ph.D.' (Phillips & Pugh, 1998), and I was fortunate enough to have a supervisor who helped to provide structure and a semi-strict work plan. However, as Phillips and Pugh state, as a postgraduate research student:

You are under self-management; so it is no use sitting around waiting for somebody to tell you what to do next; in the postgraduate world these are opportunities, not deficiencies." (p 2)

Therefore, the process of doing research within this system can be lonely and isolating. There seemed to be incredible amounts of reading to 'get to' and each eight hour work day never seemed to be productive. It was after long periods such as three to four months that I was actually able to reflect upon my work and progress and feel as if I was beginning to progress in a positive direction. Yet this sort of revelation was not helpful on a daily basis when frustrations of 'not doing enough' would arise. After speaking to other postgraduates toward the end of the year, I realized that they all shared this same experience at the same point in their studies. It would have been helpful to voice my frustrations to others earlier to obtain some support, but perhaps I was too intimidated and caught in the trap of feeling that I was 'too stupid' which I now believe is far too common.

Also, I was the only individual in the department working toward an MPhil rather than a Ph.D. and this always required an explanation in terms of why I was not going to stay to complete the Ph.D. in Britain, especially since it is 'only' three years here as opposed to five in the United States. The reasoning behind this is that I hope and plan to prepare myself to be a licensed psychologist in the United States which means I will be
able to work within both academia and clinical settings, and a Ph.D. obtained in the UK does not meet the requirements needed for American licensure as a psychologist.

If I were to do anything different in terms of this process, I would have done more preliminary ‘homework’ in regard to feminist psychology and discourse analysis in order to know what I was entering. I believe an enormous amount of time was spent trying to understand these approaches that could have been spent on designing my study. If I had the extra time, it may have been easier to recruit students at an earlier time so that I was able to have more participants in each focus group. Also, I tended to underestimate the necessary time required to produce acceptable pieces of written work. On several occasions, I would complete a draft that was not ready for submission, yet I would give it to my supervisor for feedback and comments. Upon reading what I gave to her at a later date, I often felt surges of guilt that I had insulted her intelligence with such ‘horrible’ work. In my own defense, it is also necessary to acknowledge that all of this is part of the research learning process, specifically the qualitative research process. This was the reason why I came to Loughborough, to hone my research skills, not to obtain a second masters degree. I believe I have succeeded from this perspective while also providing myself with the opportunity to meet people from all over the world and see and travel to many new places.

If there is one key thing that I have learned while at Loughborough it is that it is necessary to critically analyze anything before you can call it your own, especially in regard to ideas and beliefs. The influence of opposing forces in a variety of respects in regard to this project have helped me to critically analyze and learn more about feminism, feminist psychology, therapy and work with young women, not to mention my own capabilities as a researcher and a person. I am now more certain than ever that I will continue to incorporate all of these areas into my future as a budding feminist psychologist.


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References


Appendix A

Focus Group Schedule

INTRODUCTION
- Welcome and thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group
- My name is Meredith Cohen.
- Postgraduate student Loughborough University within the department of Social Sciences.

- Today's session will run for approximately an hour.
- I am interested in influential individuals in young women's lives, and I will pose some questions about influential individuals in your own lives for you to discuss
- There will be no breaks in this session, and if you do need to leave for any reason, please leave quietly and then return quietly to the group.

- There are a few ground rules to cover before we begin.
- Everything that is discussed today will remain confidential.
- The session will be taped for data collection purposes, but none of your names or identities will be revealed.
- It is important that you keep what is discussed here today to yourself. There is always a possibility that sensitive material will be discussed.
- Also, please allow one another to speak and respect the opinions of others in the group whether you agree or disagree with them. Any questions? OK, let's begin.

QUESTIONS
1. What individual or individuals have been influential in your life? By influential, I mean someone you admire or respect or someone who has had an impact on your life.

2. These are some pictures of famous people who could be considered influential. What do you think of them?
   - Have any of these people influenced you?
   - In what way?
   - If not, why?
   - Do you have any other suggestions or ideas of other not on this sheet that might be considered influential?

3. Recently, the government Women's Unit proposed the idea of 'Government Approved Role Models' for young women. Among the possible suggestions of individuals were Gen Haliwell, Denise Lewis and Emma Thompson.
   - What do you think of this idea?
   - Do these individuals seem like good choices to you?

4. Who else might the government have included as ideal role models for young women today?

5. Who else has served as a role model for you?
   - Teachers?
   - Parents?
   - Other Family Members?
   - Other Adults?
6. What do you think is important in a role model?
   Someone who you want to be like?
   Someone you think you could be like?
   Someone you admire but do not want to be like at all?

7. What do you think of controversial individuals who receive large amounts of media attention for aspects of their behavior such as Madonna or David Beckham?
   Are they influential?
   Would you want to be like them?

8. Some influential people hold very unpopular or controversial views such as Feminist Germaine Greer. Could you still be influenced by someone whose views you didn’t share?
   If so, how?
   If not, why?

9. Is there anything you’d like to add to this discussion? Are there any aspects we haven’t covered?

CONCLUSION
- Thank you for your participation, this has been really helpful in my research.

- Do you have any questions about the research?

- Thank you again.
- Musician John Lennon (1940-1980)
- Author Virginia Woolf (1882-1941)
- Former Spice Girl
- Religious Humanitarian; Mother Teresa (1910-1997)
- Polish/French Physicist; Marie Curie (1867-1934)
- Peacemaker; Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)
- Civil Rights Leader; Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- Actress Cate Blanchett
- Entrepreneur and Virgin Enterprises CEO; Richard Branson
- Fashion Designer; Donna Karan
# Appendix C

**Focus Group Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group 1</th>
<th>Focus Group 6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica</td>
<td>Betsy</td>
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<td>Sara</td>
<td>Emily</td>
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<td>Devon</td>
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<td>Yvonne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Sandra</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>Justine</td>
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<td>Jennifer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
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<td>Susan</td>
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<td>Lauren</td>
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Informed Consent Form

(To be read out by researcher before the beginning of the session. Once copy of the form to be left with the respondents; one copy to be signed by the respondent and kept by the researcher.)

My name is Meredith Cohen. I am doing research on a project entitled PERCEPTIONS OF INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE. SUE WILKINSON is directing the project and can be contacted at:

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
LOUGHBOROUGH UNIVERSITY

should you have any questions.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in the project. Before we start I would like to emphasize that:

- your participation is entirely voluntary;
- you are free to refuse to answer any question;
- you are free to withdraw at any time

Although the proceedings will be tape-recorded, the data will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to members of the research team. Excerpts from the results may be made part of the final research report, but under no circumstances will your name or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

Please sign this form to show that I have read the contents to you.

__________________________ (signed)

__________________________ (printed) _

__________________________ date

(Researcher to keep a signed copy and leave unsigned copy with respondent.)