The Representation of Disabled Women in Anglo-American Advertising: Examining how cultural disability tropes impact on the subjective wellbeing of disabled women

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Abstract

This thesis critically analyses the representation of disabled women in a small sample of Anglo-American advertisements (produced post-2000), from a feminist disability studies perspective. From my application of textual and discourse analyses to nine advertisements featuring women with mobility impairment, mental health issues or visual impairment and gathering of data on how a sample of women with impairments respond to advertising representations of disability, I extend existing knowledge on the extent to which the makers of advertisements are representing disabled women in positive and empowering ways. Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of 'inclusionism' and Davis' (2013) critique of 'diversity' in mainstream contexts particularly inform my argument that the makers of ads often *presume* to be empowering disabled women and promoting human diversity, whereas, the opinions of women with impairments frequently suggest otherwise.

My findings indicate that individual responses to advertisements are inextricably linked with individual subjectivities and embodied realities. I argue that problematic advertising representations of disabled women do not automatically cause women with impairments to experience lowered levels of subjective wellbeing. Rather, many women with impairments use oppressive portrayals and cultural tropes surrounding disability and gender as an opportunity to reassert their affirmative identities as disabled women.

I intend for the conclusions of my thesis to be used by the makers of advertisements who aim to promote authentic, rather than tokenistic, representations of diversity in their advertisements. In addition, my research adds to existing knowledge in the field by

critically highlighting how tokenistic approaches to 'diversity' in advertisements constitutes 'inclusionism'.

Declaration

I, Ella Houston, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as a result of my own original research.

Signed: *Ella Houston*

Date: 30.08.2017

Acknowledgements

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1   Chapter One: Introduction

1.1   Introduction

This thesis focuses on the representation of disabled women in Anglo-American advertising, post-2000. Specifically, advertising portrayals of women with mobility, visual impairments and mental health issues are critically analysed from a feminist disability studies perspective. Importantly, this thesis identifies how 'positive' and 'negative' appraisals of disability and gender portrayals in ads are inadequate in capturing the complexity of representing marginalised identity groups, i.e. disabled women, in mainstream spaces. Through discussing analyses of ads from a feminist disability studies perspective and examining the responses to advertising representations by disabled women, this thesis adds to the existing research and understanding of the misrepresentation of disabled women in advertising.

Advertising, as a part of popular culture, is significant when considering representations of disabled women and how dominant societal attitudes towards disabled women are influenced. The chief purpose of advertising is to disseminate messages surrounding products, brands or phenomena on a large scale. Writing in renowned American business magazine, *Forbes*, international health researcher Bruce Lee (2016) compares the advertising world's recognition of women as a new consumer market, during the 1990s, to the growing recognition of disabled people as an untouched consumer market in recent years. In a similar vein, media and disability studies researcher, Beth Haller (2010), points to the recognition of disabled people as potential consumers as the core reason behind the growth of disability representation in advertising.

However, existing research in the field of disability and gender representation in advertising demonstrates that the growing amount of disabled women included in ads is not without problems. A significant problem surrounds the largely uncritical ways in which normative beauty standards are adhered to (Heiss, 2011; Bolt, 2014). This thesis aims to explore the extent to which advertising representations offer realistic and responsible messages surrounding the disabled and female body. I also seek the views of disabled women in order to examine whether and how advertising messages resonate with the real-life experiences and self-images of a small sample of disabled women. Moreover, this thesis focuses on important themes – identified in Chapter Three - arising within advertising portrayals of disabled women, for example, sexuality, constructs of beauty and gendered roles.

The UK *Advertising Standard's Authority* reported that, in 2016, the tenth most complained about advertisement (receiving 151 complaints) featured a woman, using a wheelchair, talking about having a spasm whilst in the middle of a sex act with her boyfriend. The television ad, produced by *Mars/Malteaser's,* focused on a woman sharing her sexual experience with two friends. Whilst sitting outside with her friends, she describes her recent experience of getting 'frisky' and letting her hands wander across her boyfriend's body. She goes on to describe that her hands started shaking due to a spasm and, rejecting her friend's concerns that the experience was embarrassing, she contrarily suggests (through shaking a bag of *Malteaser's* and letting some spill over) that it led to her boyfriend climaxing. The ad was broadcast after the watershed time in the UK (9.00 pm) and relied upon slight sexual innuendo, yet the ASA received many complaints referring to the ad's content as 'overly sexual' and 'offensive to disabled people'.

I would argue that a key reason as to why many people perceived this ad as offensive and overtly sexualised relates to the woman's disability identity. Even small hints towards disabled women as sexually active appear to cause shock and concern for large audiences. In my thesis, I am interested in the ways in which disabled women respond to advertising representations that may be considered provocative, or, as Haller (2006) suggests 'risky' in nature.

In this chapter, I provide a critical context for my research question and aims, and signpost why and how I believe my research contributes to existing knowledge in the field. Within this chapter, I also aim to provide a clear account of my research purpose and landscape.

1.2   Research aims

The primary aim of my research is critically examining representations of disabled women in a small sample of Anglo-American advertisements in the public domain (hereafter referred to as ads), that have appeared on television, in magazines and newspapers. I chose to only focus on Anglo-American ads due to the commonalities between the cultures of the United Kingdom and United States – most notably, their identity as 'Western' countries. In Chapter two, I explain how both Anglo-American societies are dominantly influenced by neoliberal ideologies. However, the research participants were all based in the UK at the time of our interviews. I chose to only use ads produced post-2000 in order to explore the extent to which the growing representation of disabled people in ads, during recent years, can be viewed as positive and empowering for people with impairments.

A key part of my research has involved interviews with a purposively selected sample of disabled women. In doing so, my core focus is to understand the complex nature of

advertising representations of disabled women. Through exploring my research participants' narratives, I also aim to measure the extent to which advertising representations of disabled women are perceived as progressive or problematic.

To reach my core research aim, I firstly explore advertising content – discourse, imagery and semiotics – through a feminist disability studies lens. This process will enable me to form critically informed interpretations of the ways in which disability and gender are constructed within the sample of ads. Then, by gathering and exploring qualitative responses to the ads from a sample of disabled women, I will track the extent to which some disabled women believe that the advertising representations are realistic, empowering and connect to their own life-stories.

As a feminist disability studies researcher with a specific interest in culture, I firmly believe that advertising representations of disabled women matter in terms of the everyday experiences and interactions within society faced by women with impairments. Disability studies researcher, Tom Shakespeare, comments that the vast majority of disability studies research into culture does not reach beyond analyses of texts. In Shakespeare's view, cultural disability studies analyses that do not explore the lived experiences and ways in which disabled people's everyday realities are impacted by cultural representations are inherently flawed and limited in their ability to enact socio-cultural change (Shakespeare, 2015). I agree with Shakespeare's point here, albeit to a certain extent. In my research, involving disabled women's responses to ads portraying women with impairments is an integral part of the process as I am focused on the ways in which cultural stereotypes and advertising representations may lodge in individual subjectivities. Therefore, by only applying textual and discourse analyses to ads, I would not have been able to meet my research aim in this respect.

Despite my belief, I still believe that disability studies research in culture that does not directly involve disabled people as participants is still worthwhile and needed in the field. As Mitchell and Snyder (2006) suggest, text-based research is arguably the only way by which research focusing on disability does not entail taking any time or effort from disabled people (an over-researched identity group) themselves – only the researcher's efforts are used. Furthermore, as cultural disability studies researcher, David Bolt suggests, cultural disability studies is a distinctly absent field of enquiry within the humanities (Bolt, 2012). I explore criticisms of foundational social model proponents– particularly their perceived reticence to engage with personal, cultural and bodily aspects of impairment – in the following chapter.

Bolt (2012:293) challenges the pervading lack of engagement with cultural disability studies by highlighting the importance and prevalence of cultural factors when considering disability:

> … the study of culture does indeed enrich our understanding of disability. Whichever models we invoke, be they tragic, charitable, religious, individual, medical, social or affirmative, cultural factors cannot be ignored. However we choose to approach disability, the fact remains that people who have impairments… are frequently keyed to a metanarrative by which all is supposedly explained.

Bolt's articulation of cultural disability studies underpins my own defence of the relevance of culture representation within disability studies and other disciplines. As Bolt argues, I believe that cultural values, beliefs and ideologies always impact on perspectives towards disability and the treatment of disabled people, within social, political or economic structures. The socio-political and economic injustices

experienced by disabled people cannot be disconnected from the cultural contexts in which they exist. Later on in this chapter, I explore how aspects of social constructivism impact on my ontological and epistemological positions. I also describe how I am influenced, to a certain extent, by some critical realist beliefs, i.e. that bodily impairment and biological sex exist independently of socially constructed ideologies.

Through analysing cultural representations in a critically informed manner, common meanings and shared beliefs in society can be effectively highlighted and disentangled. I have chosen to focus on advertising as a significant channel in the dissemination of mainstream social messages and values. Ads play a key role in 'pervasive communication' within society (Sheenan, 2013:61). In everyday life, individuals commonly encounter multiple forms of advertising: television, print, radio, internet and multi-media. Through subliminal and manipulative communication techniques, ads are a very effective form of disseminating ideologies on a large scale (Dyer, 2008). Often by using symbolic imagery and messages, the makers of ads have the potential to create, sustain or challenge societal desires and values on a large scale (Schudson, 2013).

I use a theoretical approach when undertaking a review of the existing literature in my field. In order to track past and present development of core concepts in the literature surrounding portrayals of disabled women in advertising, cultural and feminist disability studies and subjective wellbeing, I dominantly use a theme-centric approach when organising both of my literature reviews – found in Chapters two and three. This means that my literature reviews are largely structured according to key and emerging themes in the relevant literature. As a result of this approach, my literature reviews demonstrate patterns and trends in the development of critical awareness surrounding representations of disabled women in advertising (Webster and Watson, 2002).

Furthermore, I employ an author-centric approach when analysing how the work of various researchers has developed knowledge and understanding in relation to core themes.

1.3   Research aim, questions and objectives

Aim:

The primary aim of the research is to critically examine the representations of disability in Anglo-American advertising from a feminist disability studies perspective, and to explore the impact that these have on the wellbeing of disabled women.

Research Questions:

Do representations of disabled women in advertising impact, positively or negatively, on the wellbeing of those whom they are meant to represent? What are the cultural tropes in play in such advertisements?

Objectives:

1. I select nine Anglo-American advertisements containing representations of disabled women who are shown to have either physical/mobility, visual or mental health impairments. Three advertisements belong in each category.

2. TA is applied to the advertisements to identify disability identities and tropes.

3. Through undertaking critical discourse analysis I outline disability and gender discourses that construct representations of disabled women. The data is organised in tables and engages with dominant discourse themes connecting the advertisements. Multimodal discourse analysis extends this method of data collection through critiquing the text layout, style, font and colour scheme.

4. Semi-structured interviews are held with a purposively selected sample of disabled women (n=15) who identify with the impairments represented. Participants are asked to discuss each advertisement, outlining the meaning these have for them, and how the advertisements make then 'feel'. Their own stories concerning disability, impairment and public representations are encouraged and discussed. I use the method of narrative analysis to interpret interview data.

5. Data collected from the textual and discourse analyses, and the interviews is analysed and compared. Findings are critically connected with the existing literature on wellbeing and the representations of disabled women in advertising.

6. Conclusions and recommendations for future research and advertising practice are created through collating the literature review and data sets.

As well as being interested in the potential for advertising representations to impact upon wide-scale societal beliefs, I am also fundamentally concerned with the ability of advertising messages to influence an individual's sense of self and subjective wellbeing. The majority of research on disability and gender representations in ads focuses on the ways in which ads disseminate information to consumers and the general public. Research on the ways in which individuals respond to advertising representations (portraying their own identity groups) is profoundly lacking – a point I discuss in Chapter Two. My argument is advertising representations not only have the ability to influence mass thought; they too have the power to impact on the way in which individuals perceive themselves. For instance, a progressive advertising

representation of an oppressed identity group may lead individuals within that community to feel more socially accepted. In turn, this is likely to have a positive impact on how the individual believes they are valued and perceived in society – a core element affecting levels of subjective wellbeing.

In my research, I use a sample of ads portraying disabled women, as a prompt from which my fieldwork participants can qualitatively describe their responses to representations and discuss whether and how their personal experiences support or challenge advertising messages. Importantly, I uncover the intricate ways in which individuals encounter advertising representations and respond to challenging and/or progressive portrayals.

1.4   My research standpoint

Ontologically and epistemologically, I am influenced, to an extent, by social constructivist understandings of 'knowledge' and 'reality' as largely moulded by society and I believe that the ways in which we build meanings about our surrounding worlds are socially and culturally mediated. I support the foundational disability studies understanding that disability is a socially created category, not an essential part of an individual (UPIAS, 1976).

My ontological and epistemological positions are also influenced by some critical realist understandings. For instance, I believe that bodily impairment and biological sex exist independently to socially constructed ideologies and understandings. Disability studies scholar, Tom Shakespeare's (2014:73) explanation of critical realist approaches in disability studies fits well with my standpoint:

> Critical realism means acceptance of an external reality: rather than resorting
>
> to relativism or extreme constructionism, critical realism attends to the

independent existence of bodies which sometimes hurt, despite what we may

think or say about those bodies.

Shakespeare's definition of critical realism is helpful because it supports feminist

disability studies values, including: appreciation of personal experience as political

and developing the social model of disability framework to recognise embodied

experiences of impairment and disability. I believe that impairment exists externally to

socio-cultural beliefs surrounding the body. However, I view social constructivist

theory as useful in understanding *how* impairment develops into disability and

biological sex into gender.

In the following literature review chapter, I draw upon social-constructivist theory in

disability studies and feminism. I critically discuss how understanding disability and

gender as socially constructed challenges medicalising discourses that underestimate

social oppression by emphasising supposed biological characteristics that 'explain'

unequal power relations. I draw upon the work of foundational social model theorists,

such as, Mike Oliver (1983, 1990, 1992, 1996), Colin Barnes (1991, 1999, 2008a,

2008b), Geoff Mercer (2005), Len Barton (1993, 1998) and Vic Finklestein (1980,

1981, 1998), in disability studies, and significant gender theorists, such as, Simone de

Beauvoir (1973) and Judith Butler (1986, 1990a, 1990b, 1993).

Through examining the work of foundational disability studies and feminist theorists, I

develop my own research position and understanding of disability and gender as

socially constructed. Ontologically, I do not believe that responses to material factors

– impairment and sex - are natural and innate. Rather, my view is that socio-cultural

discourses permeate our conscious and unconscious reactions to the surrounding

world. I use the term 'socio-cultural' discourses as I support the understanding that

societal and cultural understandings of disability are implicitly entwined and stem from the same discursive roots (Bolt, 2012, 2014; Garland Thomson, 1996, 1997; Mitchell and Snyder, 1997, 2000, 2006).

I believe that whichever disabling barriers or social events we explore, the influence of culture cannot be ignored. From social policy to interpersonal relations, the impact of cultural values and attitudes cannot be underestimated (Bolt, 2012). Such events are always contextualised – they can never exist in a vacuum. Therefore, individuals involved in such events or decision-making, are undeniably influenced by the socio-cultural 'metanarratives', as Bolt (2012) suggests, tied to disability.

However, I do not believe that knowledge is purely comprised of cultural influences. In my first literature review – Chapter Two - I draw upon gender theorist, Judith Butler's (1990a, 1993), approach to gender and sex as inextricably entwined. For Butler, knowledge of physical factors, such as sex, can never be understood in a manner that is not influenced by cultural values. I depart slightly from Butler's position here. In my view, it is helpful to distinctly recognise physical aspects of the body, such as sex and impairment. In doing so, shared characteristics can be established, from which positive identity groups can be formed. In my empirical research, I establish three self-identity groups within purposively selected participants: women with mental health issues or mobility impairments or visual impairments. Individuals who wished to participate in my research self-identify as being women and experience one of the above impairments or mental health issues.

As a feminist disability studies researcher, my core research interest is enriched by the understanding that socio-cultural constructions, such as disability and gender, are

enabled and supported by hegemonic narratives. Garland-Thomson (2011:17),
articulates this idea clearly:

> The informing premise of feminist disability theory is that disability, like
> femaleness, is not a natural state of corporeal inferiority, inadequacy, excess,
> or a stroke of misfortune. Rather, disability is a culturally fabricated narrative
> of the body, similar to what we understand as the fictions of race and gender.

Therefore, for my research project, I decided that focusing solely on my own analyses
of ads was an insufficient route to understanding how 'culturally fabricated' narratives
about disability and gender can be destabilised (Garland Thomson, 2013:17). I made
the decision to interview disabled women in order to elucidate whether and how
stereotypical cultural narratives impact on the ways in which they perceive themselves
and believe other people see them.

1.5   My identity as a reflexive researcher

In this section I describe my identity in order to uncover my embodied connection
with feminist disability studies theory and research. I mark my subjective position as a
researcher in order to bring transparency to the values and beliefs I bring to my
research. By recognising the beliefs I carry, I aim to take a self-critical and reflexive
approach to the research process, acknowledging that my position as researcher is not
impartial (England, 1994).

As a woman who is university educated, teaches at a university and has the
opportunity to undertake a PhD, I believe it is important to mark my social position as
a privileged one. Furthermore, as a white woman, born and living in the United
Kingdom – an economically developed country – I realise that my experience of the
world, so far, has been largely veiled from social, political and economic barriers.

However, my intention is not to position myself as an individual who has little experience of social oppression. Firstly, as someone who is the first generation in their family to enter higher education, my experience of university has been self-guided in terms of navigating the system and bureaucracies of higher education. Prior to joining Liverpool Hope University as a disability studies undergraduate student, I was extremely doubtful that entering higher education was the right decision for me. I attended my local comprehensive secondary school where university education was viewed as a big decision and commitment, rather than a natural follow on from compulsory education. Furthermore, although I would be categorised as middle-class due to my university education and socio-economic background, I strongly resonate as coming from a working-class background.

My choice to study disability studies at Liverpool Hope University was largely a chance decision. When looking through the university's degree catalogue, disability studies appealed to me simply because of my experience and enjoyment working at my local riding school – a school that advertised itself as providing riding lessons for young disabled adults. Since the beginning of my undergraduate degree, my journey with disability studies has been transformative – on a personal and educational scale. I love the subject for its ability to increase individual and collective critical recognition and deconstruction of oppressive social structures and inequalities. I appreciate how the subject has led me to consider my own embodiment – as a disabled woman – through a critical, feminist disability studies perspective.

I identify as a disabled woman, mainly due to my spinal impairment known as 'scoliosis' – a curvature of the spine. However, I would describe my impairment as 'hidden' – in everyday encounters, other people would be unable to notice that I have a spinal impairment and would be likely to apply the label of 'non-disabled' to me. It

is important for me to highlight this point, as it impacts on my everyday experiences of living in a disabling society.

As I have mentioned, I heavily engaged with disability studies theory before connecting with feminist research and theory. My undergraduate and Masters degrees are both in disability studies. During the final year of my undergraduate degree and throughout my Masters degree, I developed a specific interest in intersections between disability studies and feminist theory. Writing an essay on cultural representations of disability was the initial event that prompted my initial foray into feminist disability studies theory. Through focusing on the representations of mental health, I became especially interested in the cultural stereotypes frequently applied to women with mental health issues in particular. At the crux of my research interests, is the process of uncovering dominant cultural stereotypes, and more subtle cultural stereotypes, in order to better understand why and how certain types of 'knowledge' about disabled women predominate in society.

1.6 Thesis structure

In the following chapter – Chapter Two - I contextualise the aims, values and key approaches of feminist disability studies theory and research. Firstly, I track the emergence and burgeoning presence of disability studies and feminist thought in the academy. Additionally, I outline key concepts in both fields and explore ways in which such concepts are interconnected and can be used to powerfully develop one another. In particular, I note critical reflections on the social model of disability by disability studies researchers and feminist disability studies researchers, namely, the reluctance of traditional supporters of the social model to engage with personal and embodied experiences of disablism. In doing so, I explain how a central tenet of

feminist disability studies research is recognising how personal experiences of disablism and sexism have much to offer in understanding mechanisms of oppression.

Chapter Three contains my second literature review and provides critical analysis of the existing literature surrounding the representation of disability and gender in advertising (most noticeably Anglo-American advertising). In this chapter, I hone my focus onto the existing state of knowledge regarding advertising portrayals of disabled women and critically discuss key themes in this area. Of particular significance is the ongoing discussion in the literature surrounding the extent to which advertising representations of disabled women and disabled people more generally can be considered as truly empowering and positive. Within this exploration, I am interested in Davis' (2013) critical approach to diversity, the concept of neoliberal inclusionism, as described by Mitchell and Snyder (2015), Heiss' (2011) suggestion that diverse bodies are naively integrated into ads and Bolt's (2014) ableist advertising aesthetic. Ultimately, my aim in this chapter is to establish dominant understandings in the literature surrounding the extent to which the inclusion of disabled women in Anglo-American advertising is truly moving forward. Through extending this focus by using the concept of subjective wellbeing, I explore how the existing literature can be usefully developed in regards to recognising the ways in which advertising representations of disability and gender can impact on disabled women's sense of self.

In the fourth Chapter, I outline my methodological approach and provide a rationale for my chosen research methods and their application. I align my epistemological and ontological stances with key values and themes in feminist disability studies research. Additionally, in Chapter Four, I explain why using a qualitative approach is necessary in regards to my aim of exploring the representation of disabled women in ads and potential impacts on the subjective wellbeing of women with impairments. I place

particular significance on the support of qualitative research paradigms in disability studies and feminist research, due to the increased capability for weaving out the complexity of social relations and the ways in which individuals understand and encounter various phenomena. In addition, I explain my reasoning behind the two phases I use to collect and analyse data, namely, phase one (my own textual and discourse analyses of individual ads) and phase two (undertaking interviews with participants in order to gather their narratives and responses to ads).

In Chapter's Five to Nine, my data are presented in two phases. In Chapter Five, phase one – my analyses of nine ads – are presented. In this Chapter, my core aim is to systematically track my readings and critical interpretations of the portrayal of disabled women in nine Anglo-American ads. In doing so, I rigorously apply well-established methods used in cultural disability studies research - textual and discourse analyses – to each individual ad to highlight key themes and messages that are prevalent.

In the following chapters - Chapter Six, Seven and Eight – I present narratives from participant interviews. Each chapter corresponds with an impairment category and, within each chapter, I set out individual narratives gathered from each participant interview. Each narrative contains participant responses to the ads they explored within their impairment categories. Additionally, participants were encouraged to explore whether and how their personal experiences and stories chimed in any way with advertising representations.

Chapter Nine contains core themes gathered across participant narratives. Broadly, in this chapter I track how participant responses to advertising representations of disabled women are deeply embedded in personal life-experiences, concepts of self, levels of

subjective wellbeing and individual values. Chapter Nine shows how individual responses to advertising representations and cultural stereotypes surrounding disabled women are inherently complex and have much to show in regards to personal and psychological aspects of disablism. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates how cultural tropes feed into an individual's sense of self and can be critically challenged by an individual's embodied knowledge.

I present my discussion of findings in Chapter Ten. In this chapter, my focus is two-fold. Firstly, I explore the intricacies of individual responses to ads and cultural stereotypes surrounding disability and gender. My research findings distinctively map out personal interactions with cultural discourses and advertising portrayals – an aspect overlooked in the existing literature. My findings demonstrate the ways in which participants frequently use their own personal experiences as a means of describing their reactions to advertising representations. Secondly, I use my own critical analyses and participant responses to advertising representations of disabled women to support my discussion of the extent to which the world of advertising is moving forward in terms of inclusivity and realistic representations of disability and gender. My main argument is comparative to Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of inclusionism and the critical way in which Davis (2013) approaches the interpretation of diversity in society. Specifically, my own analyses and participant analyses of ads suggest that mental health and bodily diversity is insufficiently embraced due to overreliance on normative body ideals and behaviours. However, I also consider the features of ads that myself and participants recognised as positive and empowering for some disabled women.

My final chapter contains my conclusions and recommendations for future research in the area. Notably, through exploring the ways in which the disabled women I

interviewed frequently linked their analyses of ads to their personal subjectivities and life-stories, I suggest that advertising representations *do* substantively affect the subjective wellbeing of disabled women. Leading on from this point, I recommend the following: by listening to the voices of a broad and diverse body of women, the makers of ads would have enhanced opportunities to challenge traditional socio-cultural stereotypes relating to disability and gender. In terms of future research in the field, I add to the growing argument for greater incorporation of feminist values into the social model of disability. Additionally, I suggest that approaching seemingly 'inclusive' portrayals of marginalised identity groups, e.g. disabled women, through the lens of 'inclusionism' (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015) is of benefit to researchers aiming to support social justice values in their work more broadly.

2   Chapter Two: Feminist Disability Studies: Forging critical definitions, contexts and areas of progression

2.1   Introduction

My research has foundations in both disability studies and feminist theory. Therefore, in this chapter, I provide a critical context for both disciplines, following on to discuss the emergence of feminist disability studies theory and research. In particular, frequent intersections of disability studies and feminist theory are outlined and the potential for feminist disability studies research to address personal and embodied experiences of disability and impairment is discussed. The theoretical perspectives, concepts and information gathered in this chapter will also inform analyses and interpretations of my data.

Two main themes emerge when reviewing disability studies and feminist research. Firstly, from a feminist disability studies perspective, the social model of disability insufficiently addresses personal and embodied experiences of disability and impairment (Crow, 1996; Morris, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1996; Reeve, 2002, 2006, 2014; Thomas, 1997, 1999; Wendell, 1996, 1997). Secondly, cultural representations of disability are identified as a significant site of oppression for disabled women and the disabled and female body is often misrepresented in mainstream culture (Donaldson, 2003; Garland-Thomson, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2014; Shakespeare, 1994).

2.2   An overview of disability studies theory, research and models

Disability Studies is a discipline with social justice roots and builds on the work of disability activists, challenging societal discrimination that is specific to people with impairments (Roulstone, Thomas and Watson, 2012). Disability studies theory and research has arguably experienced the largest growth in Britain and the United States

of America, in particular North America (Shakespeare, 1998). In Britain, a central distinction is made in disability studies between impairment and disability: a person may have bodily impairments, however, disability is caused by oppressive factors (for example cultural, societal or political factors) external to the individual (Oliver, 1996; Barnes and Mercer, 2005). Foundational British disability studies scholars, such as, Colin Barnes, Vic Finkelstein, Len Barton, Geoff Mercer and Mike Oliver, tend to emphasise the role of environmental, social and political factors in disablement. A 'social model of disability' is used to describe the process of highlighting and challenging 'material' barriers faced by disabled people (Barnes, 1999). More recently, criticism has been aimed towards the social model's supposed lack of engagement with the embodied and personal aspects of disablement. This is a point I will critically engage with later on in this chapter, particularly in relation to feminist epistemologies.

Within an American context, disability studies is recognised as progressively focusing on cultural forms of disability oppression. Disability studies scholars in the USA, specifically, Lennard Davis, Rosemarie Garland Thomson, David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder and Paul Longmore, have invested great efforts into the deconstruction of dominant cultural ideologies, representations and assumptions that support and construct disablement. Feminist disability studies scholar, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (1997) suggests that greater focus on culture in disability studies enables critical discussion of deep-rooted cultural beliefs that render bodies supposedly normal or abnormal.

Relations between disability rights activists and academic institutions started to gain momentum during the 1970s (Barnes, 2008). However, as Davis (1996) comments, the advent of disability studies in the academy does not mean that its theory and research

is easy to locate or is firmly located in many disability-related courses. Albrecht, Seelman and Bury (2001) acknowledge the humanities and social sciences as primary foundations from which disability studies developed. A key point in the history of disability studies as an academic discipline is the creation of the journal *Disability & Society* in 1986. Founded by influential disability studies scholars, Len Barton and Mike Oliver, the journal became a locus of critical discussion regarding societal oppression of disabled people (Cameron and Moore, 2014).

Colin Barnes and Geoff Mercer have previously aligned their research to the definition of disability established by the disability rights group UPIAS (Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation). UPIAS (1976) foundationally posed disability as the result of an inaccessible and exclusive society that fails to take the lives and rights of people with impairments into consideration. In more recent work, Barnes and Mercer (2004) outline UPIAS' (1976) reconfiguration of disability from individual 'defect' to social construct as a pivotal moment in shifting academic, political and institutional approaches towards disability and impairment.

In his work, Mike Oliver (1983; 1990; 1992; 1996) frequently cites the medical (also referred to as 'individual') model of disability as oppressive to people with impairments. For Oliver (1990), the medical model constructs disability as 'personal tragedy', rather than as a social construct. Oliver (1990:19) tends to convey psychological and biological discussion of impairment and disability as inherently problematic and stigmatising for disabled people:

> The individual model for me encompassed a whole range of issues and was underpinned by what I call the personal tragedy theory of disability. But it also included psychological and medical aspects of disability; the latter being what

I prefer to call the medicalisation of rather than the medical model of disability.

For Oliver and many other disability studies scholars, dominant perceptions of disability and impairment are overshadowed by the medical model. A principal example is found in the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps, commonly referred to as the ICIDH (WHO, 1980), followed by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, known as the ICF (WHO, 2001). Both classifications are recognised as influential in terms of mainstream understandings of disability and impairment (Barnes, 1998). Disability studies scholars have frequently challenged the way that both manuals have positioned disabled people as 'abnormal' through repeated inference that there is a certain, 'normal' way that bodies should perform (Barnes, 1991; Oliver and Barnes, 1998; Abberley, 2002; Hammell, 2004; Shakespeare, 2006).

In 1998, Vic Finkelstein, a pioneering disability activist and scholar, added to the social and medical model approaches to disability and impairment by suggesting that people with impairments are problematically viewed as inherently 'needy' in contrast to supposedly 'self-sufficient' and 'autonomous' non-disabled people. Finkelstein (1981) supports the social model understanding of disability as a societal construction by arguing that people without impairments would also be labelled as 'disabled' if their surrounding environments did little to understand their desires and practicalities.

A wide amount of support and solidarity with Oliver's constitution of the social versus medical model approach exists within disability studies literature. The social model of disability is frequently recognised as holding indisputable power and gains for disabled people (Finkelstein, 1980; Barnes, 1991, 1998, 2008a). However, more recent

disability studies theory and research has called for critical developments of the social model approach. In particular, calls for greater focus on personal experience of disablement in the social model have been made (Crow, 1996; Shakespeare, 2006, 2013, 2014; Shakespeare and Watson, 1997, 2001, 2010).

2.3 The social model of disability: Highlighting and exploring critical developments

UK disability studies scholars, Tom Shakespeare and Nick Watson, have long advocated an empowering, rights-based approach to research on the lives of disabled people (Shakespeare, 1993, 2006; Shakespeare and Watson, 1997; Watson, 2004). However, their work has proposed that the social model problematically conceptualises disability and impairment as distinct (Shakespeare and Watson, 1997, 2001; Watson, 2004). Similarly, Carol Thomas (1999) recognises the problematic approach of viewing disability and impairment as inherently separate. Through her concept of 'impairment effects', Thomas suggests that bodily impairment can be disabling in itself, e.g. through uncomfortable and distressing experiences of pain.

Shakespeare and Watson (2001) suggest that lived experience and knowledge of disability can be used to improve the social model's approach to individual identity and the complex process of disablement. For Shakespeare and Watson (1997, 2001, 2002), it is not that the social model completely ignores the position of bodily impairment in an individual's life. Rather, an undiluted social constructivist approach to disability inevitably ignores emotional and personal aspects of disablement. I support Shakespeare and Watson's ontological understanding, as I believe that although common understandings of impairment are influenced by socio-cultural contexts, impairment exists independent of social and cultural influences. Furthermore, in my research, personal responses to disability representations in ads are

very important: through asking participants to qualitatively analyse ads and link their own experiences to advertising representations, I am interested in participants' embodied knowledge.

Shakespeare and Watson (2001, 2002) recognise impairment as an inherent condition for all humans and suggest that highlighting the natural relationship between bodies and impairment constructs all individuals as 'vulnerable', not just disabled people. Their position constitutes an important part of the literature tableau surrounding social model developments and a need for clarified focus on intersections between disability and impairment (Vassey, 1992; Humphrey, 1994; Crow, 1996; Hughes and Paterson, 1997; Shakespeare, 1992; Thomas, 1999; Shakespeare and Watson, 2002; Shakespeare and Watson, 2010; Shakespeare, 2013).

In more recent work, Oliver (2013:1025) responds to criticisms of the social model by describing it as a framework intended to empower disabled people and describes critiques of the social model as 'attacks' that are, often, misguided. Oliver (2013) suggests that his intention was never to proffer the social model as a tool that could explain *all* aspects of disablism. Addressing claims that the social model inadequately acknowledges personal experiences of disablism and direct effects of bodily impairment, Oliver (2013) suggests that focus on such conversations runs a high risk of de-politicising disability and perceives such claims as counter-intuitive to the disabled people's movement. Whilst I recognise the merit in Oliver's perspective, I reject his view that personal experiences of disablement and impairment de-politicise disability. Rather, I believe that overlooking embodied experience runs the risk of alienating many individuals from the disabled people's movement. If individuals believe that they cannot talk openly about their everyday experiences of disablism,

bodily impairment and mental health issues – whether good or bad – I suggest that they may feel 'unable' to take part in the movement.

2.4   Developing the social model from a feminist disability studies perspective

Feminist disability studies scholars have particularly outlined the role impairment can play in an individual's life. Between the late 80s and 90s, a variety of foundational feminist and disability studies scholars, such as Michelle Fine and Adrienne Asch (1988), Jenny Morris (1991), Liz Crow, Susan Wendell (1996), Carol Thomas (1997), recognised the intersectional power created when bringing both disciplinary perspectives together.

Liz Crow (1996), a disability and feminist activist and scholar, suggests that acknowledging lived experiences of impairment is not necessarily oppressive, when done in a way that understands subjective and lived experience as 'expert' knowledge. An emerging theme in feminist disability studies literature surrounds the intersectional potential of feminist and disability studies, particularly in reclaiming embodied experience as an empowering form of knowledge, rather than remaining in the realms of reductionist and medicalised discourse (Crow, 1996; Wendell, 1996; Garland-Thomson, 1997; Thomas, 1997; Garland-Thomson, 2011; Hall, 2011; Samuels, 2011). I support this particular feminist disability studies understanding in my research by approaching individual narratives as a powerful way by which disabled women are able to critically analyse and navigate advertising representations.

Carol Thomas (1997), a sociologist mainly working in the fields of disability studies and medical sociology, calls for enhanced focus on the 'materiality' of the body. Indeed, Thomas' focus on 'materiality' encourages greater consideration of 'lived' accounts of disability and gender, as opposed to solely relying on socio-constructionist

approaches (Gatrell, 2008). Thomas (2004a: 580) calls for greater focus on a 'social relational understanding of disability', arguing that such an approach is necessary when considering ontologies of disability and the intersection of various identities, i.e. disability and gender. For Thomas, taking a social relational approach to disability entails recognition of the social oppression faced by individuals on the basis of their impairments. In order to critically analyse the nature of disability oppression, Thomas suggests that a plethora of aspects require attention: social and institutional barriers, dominant ideologies and inter-personal dimensions.

Adding to Thomas' argument, I suggest that cultural representations are also worthy of critical attention, from an informed disability studies approach. I understand 'culture' as encapsulating socially learned knowledge, ideologies and behaviours, acquired over a period of time in a given context. My understanding of culture is influenced by foundational cultural studies theorist, Raymond Williams (1958). Interestingly, Williams focuses on culture as 'ordinary' – in the sense that cultural beliefs and practices are a common, often unquestioned, way of life within given contexts. Examining cultural ideologies and representations attached to disabled women is important as they exist in people's lives in complex ways. Using Thomas' (2004a) focus on the materiality of the body, I would suggest that the ways in which individuals experience cultural ideologies cannot be wholly explained through a socio-constructivist approach. Rather, individuals may use their embodiment and personal ontologies to challenge cultural attitudes and stereotypes.

Focusing on the materiality of the body and embodied knowledge, Carol Thomas (2001) proposes that discussion of bodily impairment does not need to be composed of medical and biological discourses. Developing Thomas' perspective, Hughes (2004) proposes that impairment as a lived and socially influenced factor in disabled people's

lives requires much further concentration. Following on, I explore ways the social model can progressively include personal experiences of disablement, with particular reference to feminist disability studies.

The work of Jenny Morris, a disabled feminist, has proved revolutionary in the field of gender and disability (Thomas, 1999). An on-going theme in Morris' (1991, 1992, 1993, 1996, 1998) research is challenging the absence of disability in feminist theory and research, despite the applicability of feminist perspectives to disability studies. Morris (1991:10) acknowledges that feminist writings have made 'serious omissions' in ignoring the experiences of disabled women and she believes that greater understanding of the subjective experiences of disabled women holds transformative potential in recognising political and personal forms of oppression as interlinked.

Morris suggests that exponential development for both feminist and disability studies research can be found by exploring how the personal experiences of disabled women are represented in culture. In doing so, an understanding of disability and gender as social constructs can be expanded by 'owning' and 'taking control of' the way in which society and culture expect disabled women to act (Morris, 1992:164). In other work, Morris (1996) highlights discrepancies between cultural representations within the media, for instance, and the lived experiences of disabled women. Suggesting that personal realms of disabled women are marginalised and distorted in culture, Morris (1993) contends that without exploring first-hand accounts of disabled women's subjective experiences, feminist and disability studies theory and research will continue to be positioned against masculine and normative narratives.

In her work, Thomas (1999) has contested Morris' inference that disability is the main distinctive characteristic between 'us' and 'other' people. Shakespeare's (1996)

perspective on 'simplistic' reductionism, i.e. 'them' and 'us' adds to this discussion. Shakespeare (1996) argues that such reductionism is unhelpful for disability studies, namely, the assumption that all disabled people support a social model approach is naïve, alongside the knowledge that every single person who has an impairment does not necessarily self-define as disabled (Watson, 2002). Additionally, as Thomas (1999:109-10) points out, individuals are likely to engage with multiple identities and not all individuals with impairments will experience the same types of oppression:

> As well as being a disabled person, I am a woman, I am white, I am a mother, I am middle class… and many other things; all of these could be seen as fragments of my identity, or as discursive constructions which constitute my identity.

In later work, Thomas (2007) continues to explore the notion of identity and to what extent it can be considered in either fixed or transient ways, especially in a feminist disability studies and/or sociological context. Thomas (2007) supports an understanding of identity as self-formulated and embedded in individual life-stories and subjective experiences. I will further discuss the relevancy of personal experience and subjective narratives within feminist disability studies in Chapter Three 'Methodology'.

Ana Bê Pereira (2012:366), a disability studies scholar who engages with gender and chronic illness narratives, comparatively focuses on the traditional reluctance to discuss disability issues in feminist theory and research, addressing the significance of personal experience within feminist disability studies research:

> It is not entirely a surprise, therefore, that disabled feminists felt the need to question this split [between public and private realms] as replicated in

disability studies: disability as public and impairment as private. While they understood that talking about the experience of impairment held the danger of reinforcing negative stereotypes of disabled people… they also realised that if disabled people do not reconceptualise their knowledge of the body and impairment in *their own terms,* then that would always constitute a gap that the individual or medical model would eagerly claim and occupy.

Developed in later work, Bê Pereira (2014) suggests the sharing of personal narratives is a key process in challenging the socio-cultural marginalisation historically experienced by disabled women. Bê Pereira (2014) also shares her support for Susan Wendell's work, a philosopher whose work keenly engages with disabled women's embodiment.

In Wendell's (1996) book *The Rejected Body,* she takes a feminist philosophical approach to disability. In her view, disability is a socio-cultural construct, caused by the interaction between inaccessible social environments, 'cultural meanings' attached to disability and 'biological difference' (Wendell, 1996:8). Wendell informs a key theme prevalent throughout this literature review, that is, cultural values and ideologies impact upon identity and sustain the oppression of marginalised identities, namely, disabled women. For Wendell (1996), problematic cultural attitudes towards bodily diversity may be more likely to affect disabled women, due to a heightened focus on women's physical appearance. In her discussion of disability and culture, Wendell supports the idea that identity is substantially impacted by cultural values, suggesting that understanding the body as entirely culturally constructed detracts from the lived experiences and emotions people experience.

Wendell (1996) goes on to highlight the infiltration of consumerist values within culture and the media's demand for bodies to meet unrealistic standards of 'perfection'. As a result, many people feel '…rejection, shame, and fear in relation to both failures to control the body and deviations from body ideals' (Wendell, 1996:85). Whilst I support the view that unrealistic and fixed body ideals are likely to lead to feelings of stigmatisation and oppression, I would also suggest that individuals may respond in less passive ways, for example, use their subjective experiences and knowledge to mitigate the messages arising from problematic representations. Navigation of cultural tropes and advertising representations, alongside personal experiences, is a process I will bring focus to in my 'core themes from narrative analysis' – Chapter Nine.

My approach towards personal navigation of cultural tropes and advertising representations chimes with feminist theorist, bell hooks', understanding of 'self-transformation': 'Speaking becomes a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to subject' (hooks, 1989:12). hooks' emphasis on speech and 'voice' as a key tool in active self-transformation particularly resonates with my argument that by vocalising personal experiences, values and life stories, individuals can demonstrate the complex ways in which they navigate cultural representations. Therefore, an emerging call for heightened focus on the 'voice' of disabled women is strongly represented and recognised as a way of challenging problematic cultural tropes.

2.5   Disability studies, culture and embodiment

Cultural representation of disabled people is an area frequently revisited by US writers, Mitchell and Snyder (1997, 2000, 2001, 2005, 2006, 2010a, 2010b). A key goal of disability studies scholars in the US, according to Mitchell and Snyder (2005),

is to critically analyse and challenge disability imagery in culture. Disability studies from a cultural perspective works alongside disabled people who wish to disavow the problematic and unrealistic ways they are represented in culture (Mitchell and Snyder, 2005). In this sense, culture is commonly approached through a sociological lens in disability studies – aspects of society, i.e. power relations, are viewed as inextricably linked to cultural representations and practices. Snyder and Mitchell (2006), focusing on cultural analyses within disability studies facilitates greater breadth for disabled people to assert their subjective knowledge and experiences in the face of dominant cultural representations of disability. In earlier writing, Mitchell and Snyder (1997) focus on ways that disability is pejoratively reflected in 'the majority of cultures' and suggest that people with impairments are dominantly cast in culture as 'inferior' to 'non-disabled' people.

Finkelstein (1987:2) suggests that the most socio-culturally represented identity group in Britain is the 'white Anglo-Saxon protestant male'. US-based disability studies scholar, Lennard Davis further confirms Finklestein's view by suggesting that American culture is structured around the ideologies and interests of the dominant social group, namely, the 'often white, male, "normal" subject' (Davis, 2002:275). Lennard Davis is commonly regarded as being at the forefront of American disability studies. In particular Davis' (1995, 1997, 2013) foundational work on 'normalcy' draws attention to shaky grounds upon which the normal/abnormal binary stands. For Davis (1995), the 'norm' concept legitimises oppression of people who are perceived as deviating from so-called 'normal' standards, whilst enabling individuals fixed within the 'normal' category to assume a higher rank in society.

A central concern for Davis (1995) is an apparent lack of critical discussion surrounding people with impairments in circles that frequently address the concept of

the 'norm' and other marginalised identities. For Davis (1995:xi), disability identity is an absent point of discussion in many academic and professional circles:

> I believe deeply that people with disabilities… have been relegated to the margins by the very people who have celebrated and championed the emergence of multiculturalism, class consciousness, feminism, and queer studies from the margins.

Taking Davis' (1995) point further, it seems necessary for disability studies researchers to consistently reflect on the basis, portrayals and challenges to disability identity. Moreover, Davis' approach to disability identity calls attention to the importance of intersectional research, such as feminist disability studies, in reflexively being aware of marginalising disability identity at the expense of raising critical awareness to other forms of social injustice. As a feminist disability studies researcher, I support Thomas' (1999) view that all individuals share multiple identities that impact on their experiences of living in the world and the social injustices they face.

An important way in which individuals can share their embodied experiences of multiple identities is through the dissemination of their subjective narratives. Mitchell and Snyder (2000: xii) highlight the complexity of sharing and representing subjective disability narratives:

> In order to *be* disabled, one must narrate one's disability for others in sweeping strokes or hushed private tones. And this narration must inevitably show how we conquer our disabilities or how they eventually conquer us… These were the increasingly personal and political stakes of disability representation.

In the above excerpt, Mitchell and Snyder describe how the experiences, views and stories of disabled people have been historically and culturally marginalised. In much

of their work, a key theme discussed surrounds the meanings, metaphors and purposes of disability representations (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000, 2006, 2001a, 2001b).

I am particularly interested in Mitchell and Snyder's (2000:6) work on disability representations as 'narrative prosthesis': the way in which disability is opportunistically used in a text to supplement a plotline. For example, in an interaction with a 'non-disabled' character and a 'disabled' character, the non-disabled person is likely to be appreciated if they respond in a caring or kind way to their disabled counterpart. Thus, the disabled character is not necessarily shown as a character in their own right. Mitchell and Snyder (2000:8) suggest that the main goal of presenting disability and/or impairment as a form of narrative prosthesis is to '…return the incomplete body to the invisible status of a normative essence'. In other work, Mitchell and Snyder (2001b: 205) highlight the way in which the disabled body is commonly used as a literary device to signal 'social and individual collapse'.

Feminist disability studies researcher, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2017:51), interestingly develops Mitchell and Snyder's (2000:8) view that disability is dominantly viewed as a metaphor for an 'incomplete body':

> … disability gathers us into the everyday community of embodied humankind. If disability is inherent in the human condition, how can it simultaneously disqualify us from full membership in the human community? How can disability be both an occasion for inclusion and exclusion?

In the above excerpt, Garland-Thomson transfigures disability as an essential site of humanness. She positions the disabled body as quintessentially human: to have physical impairments is to *be* human. In my research, I am particularly interested in discovering whether any ads reflect Garland-Thomson's recognition of disability as an

inherent aspect of humankind. In my view, reflection of this attitude in advertising representations of disabled women would signal a positive and empowering move forward.

Additionally, as a feminist disability studies researcher focusing on the portrayal of disabled women in ads, I aim to uncover whether and how disability and gender is used as a prop or supplement for the ad's overall narrative. I am particularly interested in the extent to which disabled women are represented in realistic ways, or, whether their disability/gender identity is distorted in order to serve a metaphorical purpose.

Davis' (2017:44) recent work on disability as 'allegorical' is useful here. In a similar style to Mitchell and Snyder (2008), Davis suggests that the presence of disability in cultural texts (specifically focusing on film in his own writing) *always* has to carry a greater, symbolic meaning. Davis (2017:45) uses the example of portraying a character who uses a prosthetic leg – in his view, the prosthetic leg will always be intended to serve or supplement a larger textual narrative, in a way that a 'functional leg' does not. Davis' argument here is very relatable to my own research as two of the ads in my sample portray women who use prosthetic legs (ads produced by *Channel Four* and *Kenneth Cole*). I am interested, then, to explore whether the prosthetic legs appear to serve as a narrative feature in the ads.

In recent work, Mitchell and Snyder (2015:181) conceptualise 'antinormative novels of embodiment' – disability representation that is distinct from 'traditions of representational deployments of disability as a metaphor of individual or social collapse'. For Mitchell and Snyder, antinormative representations deliberately subvert traditional approaches to the disabled body, e.g. deficit-based approaches. Instead, antinormative portrayals challenge neoliberal ideologies that dominate Anglo-

American societies by constructing the body with impairments as valuable in its own right. In my analyses of advertising representations of disabled women, I am interested in the extent to which antinormative portrayals of disability and gender are supported. Additionally, I am also focused on exploring whether and how participants highlight antinormative aspects in ads, or, use their own personal narratives supporting antinormativity to challenge stereotypical advertising representations.

2.6   Inclusionism

Also in their (2015) work on disability embodiment within neoliberal contexts, Mitchell and Snyder detail the rising prevalence of 'inclusionism' in society. Mitchell and Snyder (2015) use the term inclusionism to critically articulate the tokenistic and superficial ways in which bodies that do not comply with normative and hegemonic values are integrated into society. For Mitchell and Snyder (2015), true inclusion of disabled people is frequently overlooked in society. Instead, mainstream practice and policy tends to interpret inclusion as a process by which bodily differences are shied away from and rendered 'invisible' and 'more normative' (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015:4). True societal inclusion of disabled people, Mitchell and Snyder (2015:5) argue, is supported by acceptance of disabled embodiment as presenting valuable and viably 'alternative' ways of living.

I am very interested in examining the extent to which my sample of ads reflect undertones of inclusionism in regards to disabled women. Exploring the concept of inclusionism in relation to advertising representations is a particularly noteworthy process as information can be gathered in relation to the extent to which the world of advertising – a key channel from which mass messages are disseminated throughout society – is moving forward in terms of conceptualising disability. In my following chapter, I highlight that a key focus of ads is to increasingly target new audiences, for

example, disabled people. Therefore, it is of interest to discover whether inclusionism is replicated in this aim or whether it is possible for authentically empowering representations of disabled women to emerge.

Davis, discusses a similar trend to Mitchell and Snyder's 'inclusionism'. Davis (2013) draws attention to the inherently problematic understanding that dominant interpretations of diversity are often driven by those who occupy traditional spaces of power and do not have direct experience of marginalisation. He suggests that, frequently, socio-cultural attempts to promote human diversity are curtailed by underpinning neoliberal principles. Instead of approaching diversity in a holistic manner and understanding diversity as the natural human state, Davis (2013:3) argues that a process of 'cherry-picking' occurs, wherein the spectrum of different kinds of embodiment are filtered in order to promote only the most aesthetically pleasing and almost 'normal' manifestations of diversity.

To this end, Davis (2013) proposes, diversity is replacing the dominant reign of normalcy within society. Whilst Davis recognises that diversity, overall, is a more positive concept than normalcy, he suggests that dominant societal interpretations of diversity operate within fixed constraints – pertaining to normative values. Resulting from this is tokenistic engagement with and superficial representation of diverse bodies, namely, the disabled body.

2.7 Feminist disability studies: Tracking links between feminist and disability studies theory and research

Feminist sociologist, Nancy Chodorow (1995) argues that gender construction cannot be purely understood through cultural or political approaches. Instead, deeper focus should be paid to personal and psychological dimensions of gender construction.

Examining psychological aspects of gender construction should not involve identifying universal psychologies for women, insists Chodorow. Rather, feminist analysis should move towards the 'personal meaning' individuals hold in relation to their gender identity; as well as being influenced by cultural contexts, gender identity is a product of individual subjectivity (Chodorow, 1995:517). My epistemological position aligns with Chodorow's view; I believe that the ways in which individuals understand and may connect biological sex with gender is influenced by socio-cultural ideologies. However, I also support that individuals may develop counter-narratives and subjective meanings relating to gender construction. Furthermore, in relation to my own research, Chodorow's focus on 'personal meanings' of gender, in addition to cultural influences, is pertinent and relates well to Thomas' (1999) concept of psycho-emotional disablism, because of the recognition of subjective knowledge and beliefs in the formation of identity.

Feminist theory works alongside the understanding that 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (de Beauvoir, 1973:301). This corresponds with the core understanding in disability studies that individuals may only become disabled as a result of disabling environments. Simone de Beauvoir's notion of *becoming* a woman chimes with the understanding that an individual may be assigned a sex, i.e. female or male, at birth, however, the behaviours and traits associated with genders, i.e. being a woman or man, are socially conditioned. For example, if an individual is born a 'female', the feminine traits traditionally associated with their sex are not pre-determined; rather, the individual will absorb this information from their socio-cultural surroundings.

Judith Butler, a foundational scholar in feminist philosophy and gender theory, describes gender as an identity that is developed, rather than an inherent aspect of an

individual. Butler's approach to gender contrasts with Chodorow's (1995) position, as, for Butler (1986:35), gender is purely 'cultural meaning': individuals learn to acquire and adapt to culturally invested beliefs and values associated with gender. Through her concept of 'performativity', Butler (1990a:xv) describes how gender identity is a performed 'repetition and a ritual' that is enacted through gestures, bodily signs, language and other symbolic systems. In later work, Butler (1990b:324) continues to emphasise the role of culture in gender construction; she highlights the cultural marginalisation faced by women:

> We tend to agree that women have been written out of the histories of culture and literature that men have written, that women have been silenced and distorted in the texts of philosophy, biology, and physics, and that there is now a group of embodied beings socially positioned as "women" who now, under the name of feminism, have something quite different to say.

Interestingly, in the above excerpt, Butler connects with thematic strands also prevalent in the previous sections of this chapter: cultural marginalisation, silencing of voices, distortion through medical discourses, embodiment and the movement of reclaiming misinformation and replacing it with subjective, rich experiences. Alike to Mitchell and Snyder's (2005) proposition that disability studies researchers must work with disabled people in order to challenge cultural misrepresentations, Butler suggests that a key goal of feminism is to use women's lived experiences and viewpoints as a tool to confront historical cultural segregation.

As well as illustrating gender as culturally constructed, Butler (1993) takes a further step and suggests biological sex is also a construct, inextricably linked with cultural values and expectations. For Butler (1990a, 1993), the notion of material reality and

'facts', such as biological sex, are tenuous due to the understanding that cultural values and ideologies permeate ways of perceiving and making sense of the world. In her view, separating sex and gender is a process fraught with problems, as the biological discourses that are used to define sex cannot be viewed 'neutrally' from the cultural context in which they exist (Butler, 1990a:149). Butler's (1986, 1990a, 1990b, 1993) work outlines the significance of cultural contexts in relation to gender identity.

Although Butler does not directly refer to disability identity, her theorisations of gender and culture have been recognised as pertinent within feminist disability studies (Garland Thomson, 2002; Donaldson, 2003; Hall, 2011; Samuels, 2011). Whilst I support that cultural norms, values and ideologies are a core factor when analysing gender and disability identity, I also share feminist disability studies scholar, Susan Wendell's (1996) concern that undiluted focus on the body as culturally constructed can diminish the importance of personal and lived experiences of disability.

The knowledge that individuals may connect with various identities is a point of growing awareness in intersectional feminist and disability studies research and theory (Shakespeare, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Scholz, 2010; Garland Thomson, 2011). Feminist engagement with social class and race identity continues to gather strong momentum, largely due to the potential for outlining identity as political and the understanding that, for instance, a woman who identifies as working class is likely to experience a different form of gender oppression to that of an upper-class woman (Skeggs, 1997). In doing this, appreciation of social identity, namely, gender is recognised as a complex phenomenon that must be studied as part of the cultural context in which it exists (Bordo, 1993). However, many disabled feminists have pointed out that intersectional feminist analysis infrequently engages with disability; in doing this, feminist theory runs the risk of further marginalising the voices of

disabled women (Lloyd, 1992; Morris, 1992; Wendell, 1996; Thomas, 1997; Garland Thomson, 2002).

In *Feminist Disability Studies,* a collection of essays demonstrating the strength and burgeoning prevalence of feminist disability studies research and theory, the editor, Kim Hall (2011), asserts that simply joining together disability studies and feminist theory is not enough. Rather, Hall (2011: 4) poses feminist disability studies as a critically reflexive process and stresses the importance of 'lived connections': '…exploring conceptual and lived connections between gender and disability helps to make visible the historical and ongoing interrelationship between all forms of oppression'.

In the same book, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011: 18), whose widely published work in disability studies and feminist theory has proved foundational in the field of feminist disability studies, suggests that there are fundamental principles of feminist disability studies. In an evocative style to that of Butler (1986, 1990a, 1990b, 1993) and Bordo (1993), Garland-Thomson stresses a constructionist approach:

> Feminist disability theory engages several of the fundamental premises of critical theory: (1) that representations structures reality, (2) that the margins define the centre, (3) that gender (or disability) is a way of signifying relationships of power, (4), that human identity is multiple and unstable, and (5) that all analysis and evaluation has political implications.

In later work, Garland-Thomson (2014) adds to the aims and values of feminist disability studies. For Garland-Thomson, an important recognition within the field is appreciation of the body's close connection with the 'self' or personal identity. Interestingly, Garland-Thomson's (2014) perspective appears to fit well with the

disability studies debate I have previously discussed in this Chapter, regarding the social model's lack of interaction with embodiment and personal experiences of disablement (Crow, 1996; Shakespeare and Watson, 2001; Shakespeare and Watson, 2010).

The term 'cultural othering' is used by Garland-Thomson (1997:34) to describe the way individuals are commonly defined by a singular identity or trait by society. Garland Thomson's description here is similar to Bolt's (2015) suggestion, highlighted in my 'introduction' chapter, that bodies with impairments are frequently keyed to metanarratives of disability.

Although gender is not explicitly mentioned in the above description of 'cultural otherness', Garland-Thomson (1997) frequently refers to the disabled and female body as culturally marginalised. In later work, Garland-Thomson (2009) further clarifies her understanding of the 'cultural othering' imposed on disabled women, suggesting that such marginalisation sustains unequal divisions of power in society. Moreover, she suggests that within this process, disability is constructed as a category of 'deviance' (Garland-Thomson, 1997:280). Garland-Thomson's term 'cultural othering' is especially useful when understanding how culture can serve as an instrument of oppression for disabled women.

In my 'discussion of findings' – Chapter Ten, I explore whether the representations of disabled women in my sample of ads promote cultural othering or, if and how, disabled women are alternatively presented as valuable and contributing members of Anglo-American societies. Within this discussion, I draw upon my own analyses of individual ads, from a feminist disability studies perspective. Importantly, I also draw upon the subjective narratives of disabled women and their critical responses to

advertising representations. Through analysing the voices of disabled women, I am able to explore the extent to which they feel able to connect, or whether they feel segregated, from advertising representations.

2.8   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified key concepts and debates that are influential within my research scope and aims. Namely, I have provided critical contexts for disability studies and feminist aims, values, theory and research. Additionally, I have outlined feminist disability studies critiques of the social model, with particular reference to the necessity of developed focus towards the personal narratives of disabled women and their experiences of disability. As a result of this process, I have highlighted how the social model continues to provide a strong and indispensable foundation for research that aims to challenge disability oppression. I have signalled that explicit recognition of personal experiences of disability and the ways in which individuals experience complex forms of oppression on the basis of their multiple identities, is a key way in which a social model understanding can be developed.

A further key focus of this chapter has been outlining the role of culture in the lives of disabled women and the ways in which dominant cultural ideologies impact upon the treatment of disabled women in society. I have explored how critically informed analysis of cultural representations of disabled women can usefully highlight dominant attitudes and understandings of disability and gender. Furthermore, by focusing on advertising representations of disabled women, I am able to examine the extent to which key concepts from feminist disability studies literature, i.e. the cultural othering of disabled women, are supported.

The next chapter comprises my second literature review – focusing on advertising

representations of disability and gender. I also critically explore the state of existing

knowledge regarding psycho-emotional disablism (Thomas, 1999) and subjective

wellbeing – paying particular attention to the ways in which advertising

representations may affect individual wellbeing.

3   Chapter Three: The role of advertising in disabled women's lives: Exploring the ways in which advertising representations impact on women's lived realities and levels of subjective wellbeing

3.1   Introduction

In the previous chapter, I provide a critical context for feminist disability studies theory and research. I suggest that the social model of disability – a centralising paradigm in disability studies – may be usefully developed through greater acknowledgement of feminist epistemologies and cultural contexts in which the phenomenon of disability exists.

Underpinning this second literature review chapter is my belief that cultural representations and discourses surrounding disabled women impact on their individual subjective wellbeing. My argument is that individuals absorb advertising messages in conscious and unconscious ways: for example, an individual may report feeling happy when engaging with a progressive advertising representation. However, when individuals describe their responses in depth, more complex reactions and emotions can be unveiled. In this review of the literature, I explore the extent to which personal and societal responses to advertising representations of disabled women may be influenced by cultural stereotypes surrounding women with impairments.

Secondly, I aim to highlight why and how advertising representations of disabled women have significant potential to impact on both individual subjectivities and societal attitudes towards disabled women. The review suggests that ads are an important way in which cultural values, attitudes and beliefs are disseminated throughout society through influencing perceptions of disabled people on a mass scale (Haller, 2010), and 'mass imagery' regarding disability (Hahn, 1997:184). However in

this chapter, I highlight a lack of research focusing on how representations may impact on individual wellbeing.

Beginning this chapter, I critically discuss the role of ads in supporting and challenging cultural perceptions of disabled women. My aim in the first section is outlining why advertising representations of disabled women are worthy of critical inquiry. Following this section, I critically explore the extent to which these representations support or challenge gendered stereotypes. Moving forward, I review literature that focuses on the potential of ads to challenge traditional cultural tropes surrounding disabled women and whether ads may be a key way of progressively representing disabled women. Following this section, I focus on the specific portrayal of disabled women in ads and identify key themes in the literature within this area. Finally, I explore connections between psycho-emotional disablism and subjective wellbeing, focusing on how the two concepts facilitate inquiry into how advertising representations may impact on disabled women's subjectivities.

3.2   Examining cultural representations of disabled women: Why focus on advertising?

When considering whether and how cultural representations of disabled women impact on an individual's sense of self and wellbeing, the role of advertising is particularly unique and significant. Ads have the ability to communicate and address socio-cultural beliefs and values at a fast and widespread pace. Moreover, the makers of ads have the ability to target specific groups of people through manipulative marketing channels (Yeshin, 2011). In terms of disability and gender representation, ads can be viewed as an opportunity to challenge traditional societal views, or, they can equally provide a channel to further perpetuate stereotypes. O'Barr (1994) highlights that some ads may misrepresent various identity groups, due to a lack of

critical knowledge and awareness of the lives of individuals within those identity groups, amongst the makers of the ads. An important focus in my research is giving space to the views, beliefs and responses to ads by participants. In doing so, I hope to explore the extent to which disabled women feel that they are realistically represented in a sample of ads.

Ads provide mass-mediated information and aim to deliver messages that resonate with the outlooks and values of target audiences (Sheenan, 2014). Therefore, the analysis of ads can reveal ideas and assumptions advertisers hold in regards to the beliefs and interests of target audiences. I propose, then, that ads provide a nuanced window into information and ideologies viewed as socially desirable. Advertising is recognised as a prominent channel within social and macro-level communication (Leiss *et al.,* 2005; Yeshin, 2011). Whilst I am interested in the types of messages ads representing disabled women disseminate to society as a whole, I also aim to uncover the micro-level impacts ads can have, for example, effects on an individual's sense of self and wellbeing.

The makers of ads often strategically seek to provoke emotional responses from audiences (Machleit and Wilson, 1988; Agres, Edell and Dubitsky, 1990; Percy and Rossiter, 1992; Lavidge and Steiner, 2000; Edson Escalas and Stern, 2003; Yoo and Kim, 2005; Rappaport, 2007; Geuens, De Pelsmacker and Faseur, 2011). Thus advertising representations of disabled women and potential impacts on individual levels of subjective wellbeing is a particularly interesting subject. Rappaport (2007) describes the 'engagement model' of advertising as aiming to create an emotional connection between the ad and audience. In Edson and Escalas' (2003) research on emotional responses to advertising, they highlight that audience emotions of sympathy and empathy are most likely to result in positive regard for a brand. Therefore,

considering that a key advertising strategy involves the promotion of audience emotional response, I am interested in discovering the types of emotions disabled women associate with ads and whether such emotions lead to lower or higher levels of subjective wellbeing.

The use of disability representation as an opportunistic prop in culture is well documented, especially in regards to literary texts and film (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000). Taking a critical feminist disability studies perspective towards emotions and ads directs my interest in uncovering whether and how the makers of ads may use stereotypical disability and gender representations in order to gain evocative responses. I am interested in participant reactions to evocative advertising strategies and whether or not participants support emotion-provoking representations of disabled women as opposed to realistic and everyday portrayals. In my research, I aim to investigate the degree to which disabled women are opportunistically used in ads to provoke emotive audience responses.

Charles Riley, a scholar in English and founder of *WeMedia,* a media company specifically focusing on disabled people in the media, suggests that 'the appetite for anything eye-catching is immense in advertising' (Riley, 2005:114). In his work, Riley (2005) demonstrates an open scepticism towards the view that ads can progressively transform socio-cultural attitudes towards disabled people. For Riley (2005:109), ads have an 'openly mercenary agenda' and he finds it hard, at times, to comprehend why disability studies scholars believe that ads can provide a strong route for raising progressive socio-cultural awareness of disability.

Contrastingly, for some disability studies scholars, such as Beth Haller and Sue Ralph (whose work I will cover more deeply at a further point in this chapter), advertising

holds strong potential for positively shifting socio-cultural attitudes towards disabled people. Haller and Ralph (2001) take a more optimistic approach to ads by arguing that the commercial aims of ads to reach a greater number of audiences can benefit disabled people and well-thought out advertising campaigns can provide progressive disability imagery and messages. Riley (2005) also acknowledges this point as he describes how, in recent years, disabled people are increasingly viewed as potential consumers and not simply as the beneficiaries of charity by the makers of ads. Thus, despite his scepticism of the underlying agendas held by makers of ads, Riley highlights a gradual and positive shift in the status of disabled people. Adding to the debate, Longmore (2003) suggests that ads are increasingly including disability portrayals. For Longmore, this trend started in the 1980s. The sample of ads I have selected were all produced post 2000 – I intend to explore whether and how the increasing modern trend of portraying disability in ads challenges or supports stereotypical views and beliefs regarding disabled women.

3.3   The gendered nature of advertising representations

Erving Goffman, a highly acclaimed sociology and anthropology scholar, published *Gender Advertisements* in 1976. Recognised as a foundational study in regards to gender stereotyping in advertising, Goffman (1976) analyses the presentation of bodily gestures shown in advertising. He pays particular attention to the behaviours and bodily movements in advertising that support gender stereotypes. For Goffman (1976:4), gender is culturally dependent; it is not an effect of biological development, rather it must be viewed as a 'cultural resource'. Goffman outlines the role of advertising in informing social behaviour and expectations, suggesting that ads do not necessarily depict the lived realities of people whom they are meant to be representing. Instead of showing real-life scenarios, ads tend to present women and

men demonstrating behaviours and traits that are socially expected. This is of particular significance to my research in examining the ways in which ads reflect socially expected behaviours of disabled women and the analysis of the extent to which both identities inflect upon one another.

Many researchers have taken Goffman's (1976) study further in relation to feminist issues (Smith, 1996), specifically focusing on dominant gender discourses in magazine advertising (Ferguson *et al.,* 1989; Belknap and Leonard, 1991; Wiles, Wiles and Tjernlund, 1995; Kang, 1997; Thompson, 2000; Linder, 2004; Frith, Shaw and Chang, 2005). Kang (1997) works with Goffman's foundational analysis in order to explore the dominant messages regarding women in magazine ads. Kang finds that the portrayal of women in early 1990s magazine advertising has changed little from 1970s advertising gender tropes surrounding women as supposedly passive and less important than men. Moreover, Linder (2004) suggests that fashion and beauty magazines depend on the lowered self-esteem and wellbeing of women in order to encourage a culture of consumerism and 'self-improvement'. I am interested in taking the relationship between wellbeing and advertising further by studying how disabled women self-navigate wellbeing; I aim to explore how disabled women may reflexively absorb and challenge disability and gender tropes in advertising.

Smith (1996) highlights how Goffman (1976) understands 'gender traits', i.e. gestures and expressions typically linked to women or men, as indistinct from their social context and not an aspect of 'natural' human behaviour. Frith, Shaw and Cheng (2005) also support the understanding of gendered behaviours as socially created by outlining how gender representations are largely shaped by cultural contexts. For example, sexualised gestures or dress may be a dominant theme attached to the representation of women in Anglo-American ads, however, in many Asian countries, such a portrayal

would be viewed as offensive and unwelcome behaviour (Frith, Shaw and Cheng, 2005). Pursuing the link between cultural contexts and the ways in which disabled women are represented in advertising is part of a much larger system of understanding how individuals interpret, absorb and navigate cultural ideologies, meanings and deep-rooted beliefs (Kates and Shaw-Garlock, 1999).

Bell and Milic (2002) outline Goffman's (1976) theory of 'female subordination' in advertising as particularly interesting. Goffman (1976) argues that women are given lower status in regards to men in ads, throughout a variety of ways, i.e. smaller sizes, weaker/lighter touch of objects, less important and mainly supportive roles, dependence on familial relations (i.e. emotional emphasis on woman as mother), holding inferior positions or gestures and withdrawing from the scene, e.g. staring at a space outside of the ads' frame (Bell and Milic, 2002). Through outlining advertising as a means of instilling patriarchal values in society, Bell and Milic (2002) articulately draw attention to the social responsibility and influence that advertisers hold. The potential advertising holds in regards to social influence is further explored by Sherry (1987), who suggests that advertising is a powerful way of reflecting reality and socio-cultural ideologies, for example values attached to certain identities.

I intend to contribute to this existing area of knowledge by examining the extent to which modern advertising representations of disabled women challenge or reinforce socio-cultural stereotypes attached to women with impairments. By focusing on disabled women, I am able to work towards a nuanced understanding into the ways in which socio-cultural assumptions and beliefs regarding gender and disability status intersect. From analysing ads representing multiple types of impairment (visual impairment, mobility impairment and mental health issues), I am also able to critically analyse whether or not certain impairment groups are represented as stronger or

weaker than others. Within this process, I hope to better understand how disabled women may experience varying types of oppression based on their multiple identities (Thomas, 1999).

The intersection of gender and disability does impact on audience response (Panol and McBride, 2001). In Panol and McBride's research on the impact of disability representation in ads on non-disabled audiences, their findings demonstrate that grouping a non-disabled man and disabled woman (who uses a wheelchair) produced a negative impact on the audience's keenness to purchase the advertised product. In the reverse situation, a non-disabled woman and a disabled man, there was less negative effect on the audience's desire to purchase the advertised product. Panol and McBride (2001) also point out that negative effects relating to disabled women were more profound if the woman was not perceived as conventionally beautiful. Similarly to Goffman's (1976) foundational study, Panol and McBride (2001) highlight how subtle visual signs often reinforce gender inequalities, for example, portraying women as smaller in size to men. In my research, I am only focusing on representations of disabled women, therefore I am not able to comparatively analyse gendered representations. However, I aim to carry out an in-depth exploration into whether and how gender stereotypes are evident in representations.

3.4 Can advertisements authentically support human diversity and empower disabled women?

Feminist scholars have attributed advertising as a key medium in which female empowerment has been misconstrued, for example, the portrayal of feminism in a way that is commercially appealing and they have critically approached the supposed portrayal of 'real women' and female empowerment in ads (Duffy, 2010; Gill, 2010). In Gill's (2008) study on representations of women in contemporary advertising she

suggests that women are much more likely to be portrayed as 'active' and 'independent' (Gill, 2008: abstract). Gill specifically focuses on the portrayal of female sexual agency in advertising and finds that women are increasingly shown as sexually empowered. Despite this seemingly positive move forward in the world of advertising, Gill exercises caution by suggesting that representations of women's sexual practices, desires and agency are commonly presented in ways that are designed to attract and conform to male pleasure. As Gill mentions that female sexual agency is commonly presented in ways that are pleasing to men, I am interested in whether and how disability identity and bodily impairment are portrayed in ways that are pleasing to 'non-disabled' people. If this is the case, it may be inferred that the true value of human diversity is not being recognised. Instead, the concept of diversity and equality is being used in a tokenistic way to promote consumer appreciation of a particular brand ethos.

Davis' (2013:5) analysis of the 'elements of social control' in dominant societal interpretations of diversity is particularly useful at this point. In fact, in order to explain his belief that dominant (superficial) interpretation of diversity is replacing societal fascination with normalcy, Davis draws upon advertising as an illustrative example. Particularly focusing on a joint advertising campaign between *Wallmart* and *Dove,* 'Campaign for Real Beauty', Davis (2013:3) explains how the neoliberal promise that 'we are all the same despite superficial differences like race, class, or gender', is underpinned by the misleading belief that individuals can be whoever they want to be – despite societal structures and inequalities.

Using *Wallmart* and *Dove's* advertising campaign as an example, Davis (2013) explains how diversity is superficially addressed. A key issue in dominant society's

interpretation of diversity is the naïve and, often, tokenistic way in which it is conceptualised:

> [in the afore mentioned ad] The message being promulgated is that there is no normal when it comes to a woman's appearance. Diversity is all. And we can say that the key to the neoliberal subject is that when we visualise such bodies we see them ipso facto as diverse – but within certain constraints. (Davis, 2013:4)

I am particularly interested in Davis' (2013:4) observation of advertising representations of diversity 'within certain constraints'. I find that Gill's (2008) research findings regarding tokenistic advertising representations of female sexual empowerment, dominantly geared towards male-orientated sexual pleasures, links well with Davis' sceptical analysis of diversity representation in ads. Alike to Gill (2008), Davis (2013:4) notices how aspects of diversity are 'cherry-picked' in advertising representations; for Davis, the presence of 'women with disabilities, obese, anorexic, depressed, cognitively or affectively disabled' are revealingly absent. Both researchers significantly outline how the empowerment of diverse and marginalised groups is increasingly portrayed in advertising representations, however, such portrayals do not yet go far enough to challenge hegemonic terms.

3.5   Are advertising representations of disability positively moving forward?

Harlan Hahn, a disability studies scholar and disability rights activist, has provided important work on the role of advertising in society and expands Bell and Milic's (2002) argument regarding levels of social responsibility held by the makers of ads. Focusing on the social oppression of disabled people, Hahn (1997: 184) asserts:

There seems to be little doubt that the mass imagery emanating from advertising and the media has played a major role in perpetuating discrimination against citizens with disabilities as well as other oppressed groups.

Hahn (1997) pays particular attention towards the role advertising plays within mass perception of the 'acceptable' body. Hahn (1997) describes ads as 'regulating' bodily appearance and performance; 'ideal' images of human behaviour and appearance are depicted in ads and impact societal expectations of how people should appear and behave. Furthermore, Hahn (1997) suggests that ads could play a key role in potentially transforming how society views disabled people. Adding to Hahn's (1997) view, Hardin *et al.,* (2001) and Hardin (2003) suggest that ads can influence how disabled people perceive and construct their own sense of self.

Manca and Manca (1994) support Hahn's (1997) perspective by stating that ads should not be underestimated in their ability to influence mass thought and beliefs, especially in relation to identity. I believe that examining the effects of ads on a micro-level can reveal rich insights regarding how individuals navigate cultural representations of their own identities. A strong example of individual navigation of advertising representations is found in Hardin's (2001) research. Through interviewing participants who are basketball players using wheelchairs, Hardin reported that participants did associate representations of disability in ads with their own social status. Moreover, participants suggested that despite the fact that they often find ads unrealistic, they do embrace positive advertising representations of disability.

Hardin's (2001) research usefully illustrates how content-based (also referred to as text-based) analysis of ads can reveal the complex ways in which disabled people

interact with socio-cultural attitudes and representations. The participants in Hardin's study demonstrate how individuals can positively respond to progressive advertising messages, however, they may still hold feelings of scepticism regarding the ability of ads to portray 'real-life' situations. Furthermore, Hardin (2001) suggests that the literature in this area substantially focuses on researcher responses to advertising representations and lacks input from disabled people who are represented in the ads themselves. I, too, recognise this gap in the literature and believe that participant analyses of ads enable deepened understanding of how individuals react to ads on an everyday basis and navigate cultural representations as part of their lives.

Health researcher, Barbara Mintzes, focuses on 'direct-to-consumer' ads created by pharmaceutical companies marketing over-the-counter medicine, directly to the public. In her (2002) research, Mintzes shares her concern that such ads are encouraging medicalisation of natural human emotions. For Mintzes, an overwhelming majority of pharmaceutical ads encourage individuals to view their emotions through a medical lens. In my sample of ads, I have two ads produced by pharmaceutical companies: *Valeant Pharmaceuticals* (marketing *Wellbutrin XL)* and *Vanda Pharmaceuticals* (focusing on the link between visual impairment and non-24). I am particularly interested in further exploring Mintzes' (2002) research findings and examining if participants report feeling influenced by the advertising messages, or, whether participants challenge medicalised approaches.

Considering Mintzes' (2002) research findings, I am interested in discovering whether my chosen three identity groups – mobility impairment, visual impairment and mental health issues – will hold distinct over-arching themes. For example, in the case of the two ads that are produced by pharmaceutical companies, I am curious to find out if these ads are more likely to portray medicalised and problematic representations of

disabled women. As the purpose of pharmaceutical marketing is to market medicine –
it appears logical to hypothesise that their ads are more likely to portray medicalised
approaches to disability than, for example, an ad produced by a fashion company.

When considering the varying approaches the makers of ads take when portraying
disability, the work of Beth Haller, a professor in media and disability studies whose
research in the field is widely recognised as pioneering, is very useful. Researching
disability representations in UK, US and Canadian advertising, Haller (2010) suggests
that disabled people are progressively occupying advertising imagery. Haller suggests
that a key reason behind this trend is that the makers of ads are increasingly
recognising disabled people as a previously untapped consumer demographic.
Similarly to Hahn (1997) and Manca and Manca (1994), Haller (2010) views
advertising as playing a crucial role in influencing mass perceptions of disabled
people.

Haller (2010) supports Hahn's (1997) view of advertising as a cultural medium that
has the potential to lead towards transformative ways of thinking about disability. For
Haller (2010: 203), the 'more risky' images of disability in ads hold the greatest
potential for shifting public perceptions. The use of 'bold' or 'risky' images of
disabled people in advertisements as empowering is a reoccurring theme in Haller's
work (2001; 2006; 2010). However, Haller and Ralph (2006) propose that a high
volume of disability representations continue to support stereotypical and pitiable
perceptions of disabled people. Indeed, existing research studies have identified the
oppressive and stigmatising nature of 'pitiable' and 'passive' representations of gender
and/or disability in advertising (Goffman, 1976; Barnes, 1991; Doddington *et al*.,
1994; Barnett and Hammond, 1999; Haller and Ralph, 2001; Haller and Ralph, 2006;
Waltz, 2012; Bolt, 2014).

It is important, therefore, to explore the extent to which traditional disability stereotypes surrounding pity and passivity are prevalent in my sample of ads. Furthermore, the research will analyse whether and how 'risky' depictions of disabled women promote progressive attitudes and the extent to which participants positively or negatively perceive them. The participants in my research either identify as having mobility impairment, visual impairment or mental health issues. I am interested to uncover whether or not the advertising representations of impairment groups are substantially different. In their (2001) research, Ganahl and Arbuckle suggest that people with physical impairments are more likely to be portrayed as less powerful in TV ads. I aim to explore whether and how this trope is prevalent in my sample of ads or whether participants highlight such themes within their analyses.

3.6 Portrayals of disabled women in advertising: are 'normative' ideologies deconstructed or reconstructed?

Sarah Heiss (2011), a communication studies scholar, draws attention to the dearth of research focusing on the representation of women with impairments in advertisements. Noticing strong similarities between analyses of disability and gender in advertising, Heiss underlines the necessity of input from feminist disability studies theory. Heiss draws attention to *Dove's* (2004) advertising 'Campaign for Real Beauty' that purported to support women's wellbeing and positive self-esteem. In her analysis, Heiss suggests that the representations of gender and disability within the campaign do not successfully promote inclusion, rather, they portray 'an ideology of naïve integration which (re)inscribed meaning on the normate body and (re)made the body through beauty practices'. Heiss' usefully identifies the burgeoning integration of disability and gender representation in ads as resting on, rather than challenging, dominant ideas of 'normal' body aesthetics and performance.

Davis' (2013) critique of *Wallmart* and *Dove's* 'Campaign for Real Beauty', which I have previously analysed in this chapter, strongly links to Heiss' (2011) analysis of the same campaign. Both researchers find that the campaign ostentatiously supports bodily diversity. However, due to the absence of women with visible impairments (alongside other marginalised identity groups), their approach to diversity is overwhelmingly tokenistic.

David Bolt, cultural and literary disability studies theorist, similarly raises feminist disability studies issues relating to the representations of disabled women in ads (Bolt, 2014). Bolt's (2014:28) 'ableist advertising aesthetic' provides a useful framework for measuring the extent to which ads progressively or regressively represent disabled women. Five categories, including, distortion, alterity, disclosure, segregation and exclusion are outlined as key aspects within the interpretation of advertising discourses and portrayals of disabled women.

Importantly, Bolt signifies that although modern ads are more likely to portray disabled people, the traditional, ableist advertising aesthetic continues to pervade advertising representations. For Bolt, the makers of ads continually portray disabled people as the willing recipients of pity (distortion). Furthermore, portrayals of people with impairments do not commonly engage with responsible and realistic narratives of everyday life (alterity). Instead, Bolt suggests that advertising representations are more likely to present disabled people as 'other'. Here, Bolt's perspective links to Mitchell and Snyder's (2000) concept of disability as a narrative prosthesis. Bolt's ableist advertising aesthetic comparatively addresses how disabled people are rarely represented in a holistic manner, in their own terms. Rather, disability representations are more likely to serve as an appendage to a larger narrative or other 'non-disabled' characters.

In his (2014) study, focusing on the portrayal of visual impairment in advertising, Bolt analyses *Dove's* trilogy of advertisements for their 'colour radiance' hair products, featuring a woman who is visually impaired. Bolt recognises that *Dove* progressively use a model who identifies as disabled, rather than using a non-disabled actor. However, Bolt conclusively argues that the representation does little to challenge gender/disability stereotypes due to an overriding reliance on visual means of perception. For Bolt, sensory diversity is devalued due to the ableist assumption, supported throughout the ad, that visual perception is the more desirable than other forms of perception.

In Ganahl and Kallem's (1998, in Ganahl and Arbuckle, 2001) research, they found that representations of visual impairment were absent in television advertising. This shows that, post-2000, representation of visual impairment in television advertising has grown – Bolt's work brings attention to cases, namely, ads produced by *Dove* and *Royal National Institute of Blind People.* Additionally, in my own sample of ads, two ads representing women with visual impairment are from television. However, my argument is that the content of advertising representations tells us more about socio-cultural attitudes towards disabled people, rather than only measuring quantity. There may be a growth in representations of disability in ads, however, this could be explained by Riley's (2005) assertion that the makers of ads are recognising disabled people as a new consumer market. In my view, the numerical growth of advertising representations tells us little, whereas in-depth and qualitative analyses of content can highlight the extent to which attitudes are transforming.

In more recent work, Bolt (2016) addresses the representation of visual impairment in advertising through the methodological approach of critical discourse analysis and the framework of his ableist advertising aesthetic and tripartite model of disability.

Specifically focusing on the *Royal National Institute of Blind People's* recent campaign, 'See the Need' (2015), Bolt highlights how visual impairment is constructed in terms of pity and fear. Applying his tripartite model of disability to the stereotypical depiction, Bolt suggests that visual impairment is depicted as a 'non-normative negativism'.

Heiss' (2011) concept of 'naïve integration' fits well Bolt's (2014) 'ableist advertising aesthetic' framework, specifically the category of 'alterity'. Bolt suggests that ads relating to this category traditionally represent impairment as a mark of the 'other'. In a similar vein, Heiss (2011) suggests that Dove's campaign supported 'othering' of disabled women by encouraging the audience to 'stare' at the women featured and treat their bodies as physical sites that can be aesthetically 'evaluated'. Feminist disability studies theorist, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's (1996) theory of the disabled form as 'extraordinary' contextualises both Heiss' (2011) and Bolt's (2014) discussion of the female and disabled form as 'other' in advertising. Garland-Thomson (1996) explains how 'different' bodies beckon interest and speculation. I am interested in exploring the notion of the disabled form as beckoning interest. In particular, I wish to examine whether and how disabled women feel that ads aiming to spark such interest can be unhelpful or helpful in challenging oppressive attitudes towards disabled women.

3.7   The role of advertising in psycho-emotional disablism

Due to their ubiquitous presence in society, ads have been described as a frequent means by which individuals are prompted to evaluate their own lives against societal ideals and standards (Richins, 1991). Research in this area has commonly focused on the ways in which advertising images can impact on an individual's perception of their body (Wilcox and Laird, 2000; Halliwell and Dittmar, 2004; Clay, Vignoles and

Dittmar, 2005). In their research on the impact on media and advertising images on the self-esteem of young women, Clay, Vignoles and Dittmar (2005) describe a process by which many women internalise socio-cultural beauty ideals, leading to negative feelings of self-worth and body image. I am interested in the notion of internalising advertising messages and imagery – this concept strongly links with psycho-emotional experiences of disablism.

Researchers working with both feminist and disability studies theory recognise a critical lack in exploring personal experiences of disablism within research that aims to empower individuals, from a social model perspective (Crow, 1996; Thomas, 1999; Reeve, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2012, 2013; Shakespeare and Watson, 1997, 2001; Wendell, 1996). Thomas (1999) uses the term 'psycho-emotional disablism' to describe how disability oppression operates on personal and psychological levels, as well as material and physical forms of oppression:

> This 'inner world' dimension of disablism is closely bound up with socio-cultural processes which generate negative attitudes about impairment and disability, and sustain prejudicial meanings, ideas, discourses, images and stereotypes. These impact upon disabled people in diverse ways and can lodge themselves in their subjectivities. (Thomas, 1999:47)

Thomas' (1999) concept of psycho-emotional disablism provides an important lens into the mechanisms of oppression that affect individuals on a micro level. Through this term, Thomas highlights how disabling barriers are not always tangible: an individual can be disabled through the reinforcement of negative messages and subsequent damage to their sense of self and subjective wellbeing.

Donna Reeve, a disability studies scholar, has also produced significant work on psycho-emotional barriers that people with impairments may face (Reeve, 2002, 2004, 2004, 2012, 2013). Reeve focuses on cultural representations of disability as forming a key part in psycho-emotional disablism:

> This particular dimension of disability which operates along emotional pathways is highly influenced by cultural representations and disabling images…. Negative cultural images and the rejection of impaired bodies from mainstream society have an effect on how disabled people see themselves, but also how they are perceived by others. Thus psycho-emotional disablism can be found in the ways that some disabled people internalise the negative social values about disability… However, it is important to note that the experience of psycho-emotional disablism is not inevitable or fixed. Not all disabled people will experience this form of disability… Disabled people often find ways of resisting this particular form of disablism, although this may have additional emotional costs. (Reeve, 2006:96)

In the above, Reeve details the potency of cultural representations in supporting negative societal perceptions of disabled people and affecting the ways in which disabled people can form positive images of self. Importantly, Reeve highlights that all disabled people do not experience psycho-emotional disablism in the same way and some individuals may not ever report experiencing oppression on personal and psychological levels. Reeve's description of psycho-emotional disablism links with my own approach regarding the potential of advertising representations to impact upon the subjective wellbeing of disabled women. Psycho-emotional disablism provides an insightful framework through which I am able to explore the extent to which advertising representations of disabled women may impact on, challenge or sustain the

ways in which disabled women perceive themselves and believe they are valued by society. Through the concept of psycho-emotional disablism, I am able to critically analyse whether and how ads can act as an intangible disabling barrier in the lives of disabled women.

Additionally, I also aim to explore the extent to which participants resist psycho-emotional aspects of disablism, as described by Reeve (2006). I support the view that by deepening understanding of how disabled women construct embodied narratives and bring together significant aspects of their characters and lives, the socio-cultural assumption that individuals always aspire to lead 'normal' lives is effectively challenged (Meekosha, 1998). The process of rejecting 'normative' frameworks in favour of subjective accounts of gender and disability is an important aspect of research aiming to, in some way, empower disabled women (Piepmeier, Cantrell and Maggio, 2014). Furthermore, Fawcett (2000) argues that experience of disability and/or gender oppression does not mean that an individual is qualified to speak on behalf of all disabled women. Indeed, Fawcett's point is one that I wish to reflect in my own writing; rather than aiming to produce universalising accounts regarding disabled women, it is my aim to explore the intricacies of disabled women's unique stories, experiences and responses to advertising representations.

Leading on from this point, individuals may be viewed as simultaneously absorbing and rejecting so-called 'normal' values embedded in culture (Scholz, 2010). By doing this, individuals, namely disabled women, do not wholly and passively accept 'normative' cultural ideologies (Thomas, 1999). Rather, rich and important knowledge is constructed by those who have embodied experience of living on the 'margins' of society (hooks, 1984).

In order to take existing understandings regarding individual navigation of normative ideologies further, I find Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of inclusionism, and Davis' (2013) critique of dominant and tokenistic approaches to diversity, very useful. Specifically, recent work by the above disability studies theorists has described society's growing tendency to practice superficial inclusion of disabled people and tokenistic approaches to human diversity. In my research, I am interested in exploring whether advertising representations of disabled women promote tokenistic or authentic approaches to inclusion and diversity. The primary way by which I will interpret this aim is by analysing the ways in which disabled women respond to the ads and, if and how, they report experiencing 'real-life' connection to the ads. Through the concept of psycho-emotional disablism, I am also able to uncover the extent to which participants connect personal experiences of disablism to ads, or, whether participants suggest that ads can proactively challenge or sustain the effects of psycho-emotional disablism.

3.8   Subjective wellbeing: Critically developing understanding of the role psycho-emotional disablism plays in everyday life

In order to further understand the ways in which participants address psycho-emotional aspects of disablism, I am interested in their self-reported levels of subjective wellbeing. This means that I am interested in participants' reflections of their emotions, feelings of life-satisfaction, the ways in which they view their own lives and value in the world and their perception of how they are valued by others (Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2002). Thomas (1999) and Reeve's (2006) description of the inner and emotional realms of disablism fit well with the concept of subjective wellbeing. Using subjective wellbeing as a framework, I hope to explore whether and how participants' inner emotions and constructions of selfhood are impacted by advertising representations.

The concept of wellbeing stems from the disciplines of psychology, health research and economics; the study of wellbeing is recognised as bridging disciplinary gaps (Cronin de Chavez *et al.,* 2005). The study of wellbeing encompasses micro and macro scales. Research in the field focuses on individual levels of wellbeing (micro) and overall wellbeing of nations (macro). In my research, I am interested in further understanding individual/micro reports of wellbeing.

Wellbeing research has covered relationships between ageing and levels of wellbeing (Sarvimäki and Stenbock-Hult, 2000), social mobility (Stansfeld, Head and Marmot, 1997; Oishi, 2010), geographical/cultural landscape (Ulrich, 1979; Wilson, 2003), disability/impairment (Beekman *et al.,* 1997; Klerk and Ampousah, 2003; Fisher, 2008; Edwards, 2013; Porcelli *et al.,* 2014; Savage *et al.,* 2014), mental health issues (Burgess *et al.,* 2009; Slade *et al.,* 2009), spiritual awareness (Gross and John, 2003), economic factors (Frey and Stutzer, 2010), happiness (Ryff, 1989; Diener, 2000), and personal levels of motivation/attitude (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

The presence of impairment in an individual's life has been covered in wellbeing research. However, in the following section within this chapter, I argue that the vast majority of existing research takes a problematic and deficit approach to disability and impairment.

Despite the burgeoning prevalence of wellbeing research, Dodge *et al.,* (2012) comment that a stable definition of wellbeing has not yet been reached. Wellbeing is a concept that has multiple, blurred definitions resulting in discrepancy in regards to *how* and *why* it is measured (Dodge *et al.,* 2012). However, it could be argued that approaching wellbeing as an unstable category fits well with the understanding of

embodied experiences of disability and self as multiple and varied (Hanisch, 2014; Reeve, 2006).

Generally, wellbeing is understood as an individual's perception of their life and levels of 'happiness' (Orem, 1985). However, within the wellbeing literature, precise understandings of 'happiness' and the extent to which wellbeing is socially or individually constructed are contested (Cronin de Chavez *et al.,* 2005). Although I do not have the space to exhaustively discuss definitions of wellbeing in this section, I aim to outline my understanding and approach to subjective wellbeing.

Recognising a clear definitional issue, Dodge *et al.,* (2012: 230) propose a new method for the theorisation and measurement of individual (also known as subjective) wellbeing. This is represented through a seesaw analogy; wellbeing is positioned as a centre point and 'resources' (psychological, social and physical) are placed at one end, whilst 'challenges' (psychological, social and physical) are at the opposite end:

> The definition can be applied to all individuals regardless of age, culture and gender… it allows for the notion that each individual has a unique resource pool… It views individuals as 'decision makers, with choices, preferences, and the possibility of becoming masterful…' (Seligman, 2002:3, in Dodge *et al.,* 2012)

The above model is useful as it positions individuals as in control of their own agency and emphasises individual decision-making in regards to subjective wellbeing. In doing so, the proposition that subjective wellbeing is irreducible to cause and effect is supported. By constructing individuals as choice holders, the medicalised assumption in wellbeing research that health issues or bodily impairment automatically leads to

lower reports of subjective wellbeing is challenged (Law, Steinwender and Leclair, 1998).

In my research, I approach subjective wellbeing through a critically informed, feminist disability studies lens. When defining my approach, I find disability studies scholar, Dan Goodley's (2011) application of social psychoanalytic theory within disability studies useful. Goodley highlights how psychoanalysis has previously caused harm to the disability community by perpetuating the misbelief that oppression is largely personal. However, for Goodley, analysis of an individual's psyche can reveal the complex relationship between social oppression and the self:

> The psyche can be reconsidered as a complex tightened knot of the person and the social world, the self and other people, the individual and society. At the heart of this is the internalised experiences of disablism: oppression is felt physically, subjectively and emotionally but is always socially, culturally, politically and economically produced. (Goodley, 2011:716)

Goodley's description of psychoanalysis is comparable to my definition of subjective wellbeing and correlates with Thomas' (1999) concept of psycho-emotional disablism, a key theory within my research. Dominant understandings of subjective wellbeing focus on the individual as autonomously making judgements about their quality of life and the positive/negative affects they experience. By using Thomas' (1999) theory of psycho-emotional disablism and Goodley's (2011) work on psychoanalysis within disability studies, I aim to further understanding on how viewing wellbeing as dependant on the individual's emotions and judgements is problematic and undermines the significance of socio-cultural oppression.

3.9   Challenging normative discourses in subjective wellbeing research

The concept and analysis of subjective wellbeing is currently growing in social, political, health and research contexts. Despite the burgeoning presence of subjective wellbeing, research on disabled people's sense of wellbeing and life-satisfaction is lacking (Savage *et al.,* 2014). In their research, Savage *et al.,* focus on levels of subjective wellbeing in youths with impairments. Their findings suggest that disabled youths are more likely to report lower levels of subjective wellbeing, however, the researchers assert that the often assumed link that impairment equals lower subjective wellbeing cannot be described as accurate or reliable. Savage *et al.,* describe how disabled youth's socio-economic status and access to communal activities are the most important factors influencing subjective wellbeing.

In a similar style to Savage *et al.,* (2014) by approaching subjective wellbeing through a feminist disability studies perspective, I am not focusing on how impairment and/or mental health issues may impact on an individual's sense of wellbeing. Rather, in my research, I am interested in measuring whether and how advertising representations impact on the subjective wellbeing of disabled women. It is possible that participants may acknowledge direct relations between impairment and wellbeing – something Thomas (1999) describes as 'impairment effects'. However, my primary interest is in discovering the extent to which cultural discourses, specifically advertising representations, impact on subjective wellbeing.

I find the concept of subjective wellbeing particularly useful as it provides a framework through which emotional and personal responses to particular events can be analysed (Diener, Oishi and Lucas, 2003). As I discussed in the previous section, Thomas' (1999) concept of psycho-emotional disablism and Goodley's (2011) approach to psychoanalysis in disability studies, enable deeper understanding into how

social and personal realms collide and the ways in which outside barriers may impact on an individual's internal feelings.

In her research on health and wellbeing discourses in UK policy, Pamela Fisher (2008:584) criticises dominant 'normative' approaches to wellbeing, especially in relation to disabled people and their families. From Fisher's (2008:584) point of view, wellbeing discourses in policy overwhelmingly reside within fixed and 'expert' frameworks. As a result, the opportunities for disabled people to construct their own wellbeing narratives are undermined and focus remains on pathologised approaches to wellbeing and disability (Fisher, 2008).

In a similar style, Claire Edwards (Edwards and Imrie, 2008; Edwards, 2013) draws attention to the tendency in wellbeing literature to approach disability and impairment from a 'non-disabled' point of view. Edwards and Imrie (2008) are sceptical of individualising trends in wellbeing, suggesting that emphasis on 'individual empowerment' and wellbeing is typically interpreted as self-reliance and self-motivation – ableist concepts that have traditionally stigmatised disabled people. Additionally, Dodge *et al's* (2012) approach to measuring is found to be somewhat limited due to Edward and Imrie's (2008) argument that suggesting positive wellbeing can be 'achieved' through accessing personal resources undermines emotions as fluid and influenced by external factors.

In later work, Edwards (2013: 189) calls for greater focus in wellbeing research towards 'the social circumstances that shape disabled people's agency'. In her view, compounding links between wellbeing and individual beliefs, resources and experiences supports the medical model notion that disabled people need to search within to explain the oppression they face in society. In addition, Klerk and Ampoush

(2003) suggest that socio-cultural feedback holds critical influence. For example, a disabled person may feel accepting of their disability, however, their subjective wellbeing is affected by the negative reactions and 'staring' of others. Rey *et al.,* (2013) further argue that ignoring socio-cultural factors and maintaining individual focus in wellbeing research contributes to the problematic idea that disabled people are solely responsible for their own 'emotional competence' in the face of adversity.

Comparatively, Savage *et al.,* (2014) comment that the effects of a disabling society on an individual's subjective wellbeing are largely under-researched. Dominant accounts of disability and impairment in wellbeing research have positioned disability as an inherent 'threat' to a person's happiness, reporting in a 'significant' drop in subjective wellbeing (Lucas, 2007). Through positioning disability as a solely negative indicator within wellbeing, research has monopolised the multi-faceted, positive and embodied life experiences that many disabled people report (Goering, 2008).

Placing emphasis on societal oppression of disabled people as a negative influence on subjective wellbeing is vastly underrepresented (Rose, 1999, cited in Fisher, 2008). This may be explained by the focus of traditional wellbeing discourses on objective ways of measuring self-worth and happiness, stemming from psychological journals (Costa and McCrae, 1980; Argyle, 2001; Diener and Lucas, 1999) and the concept that there is a 'normal' baseline of wellbeing (Fisher, 2008). Little recognition is given to the knowledge that an individual, for example, a disabled woman, may embrace her gender and impairment but feel that society's views and representation of her multiple identities are disparaging and disempowering (de Klerk and Ampousah, 2003).

In her review of quality of life measurement scales, Ann Bowling (2005) suggests that subjective wellbeing research must look beyond either the presence or absence of

impairment in an individual's life. In subjective wellbeing research, it is often the hypothesis that disabled people will have lower levels of wellbeing due to the assumption that impairment automatically causes restriction (Edwards and Imrie, 2008). For Bowling, (2005) measuring subjective wellbeing should resemble a more formal process of the natural self-reflection that individuals frequently, and often unconsciously, undertake. A central component of this process, Bowling (2005) suggests, is consideration of how the individual views themselves; a person may well describe the feeling of having multiple selves within different contexts or stages in their life. Bowling's conceptualisation of subjective wellbeing is one that I find very useful in the context of my own research. Her description of the multiple and varying selves that individuals may describe at different points in their lives fits well with my focus on participant narratives as a way of responding to advertising representations. I am interested in whether and how participants describe varying 'selves' over the course of their narratives.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the potential for ads to either sustain or challenge socio-cultural attitudes and beliefs surrounding disabled women. Furthermore, I have also critically explored researcher viewpoints as to whether and how advertising representations of gender and disability are progressively moving forward. The current consensus seems to be that advertising representations are improving and traditional stereotypes, for example, disabled people and women as passive, are being challenged. However, disability studies and feminist researchers tend to take a critical view surrounding the extent to which ads are meaningfully deconstructing socio-cultural stereotypes.

Finally, I have drawn attention to the ability of ads to impact on an individual's subjective wellbeing and sense of self. Reeve's (2006) understanding of the ways in which culture impacts on an individual's self-worth and perception is one that I find particularly useful in terms of considering the ways in which advertising representations may influence how disabled women view themselves or believe other people perceive them. Leading on from this discussion, I have linked the concepts of psycho-emotional disablism, psychoanalysis (specifically in disability studies) and subjective wellbeing in order to provide a critical framework through which I can explore the ways in which participants navigate advertising representations and messages.

The following chapter focuses on my qualitative methodological approach and provides a rationale for my research design. I also provide critical contexts and explain my use of the following methods to gather data on the representation of disabled women in Anglo-American advertising: TA, critical discourse analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis.

4   Chapter Four: Methodology and Data Collection Methods

4.1   Introduction

This chapter outlines my chosen methodological approach and research methods used to analyse the representation of disabled women in Anglo-American ads. I have chosen a qualitative approach to explore the issue of disability and gender portrayal in advertising, from a feminist disability studies perspective. The potential of qualitative research to uncover complex accounts of individual subjectivity is the primary reason behind my methodological decision.

In this chapter, I provide definitions and outline key aspects and issues relating to my research methods: TA, critical discourse analysis, multi modal discourse analysis, semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis. My application of research methods are also detailed in order to provide a transparent guide to my processes of data collection. A further core aim of this chapter is to critically discuss existing understanding of 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity' in qualitative approaches. I extend this debate by exploring the position of the 'self' in feminist disability studies research.

As I outline in Chapter One – my introduction - from an ontological perspective, I believe that certain things, i.e. bodily impairment, exist independent to social-cultural influence. However, it is my view that the way we 'know about' and perceive such things is influenced by our experiences, social contexts and the ways that we collect and interpret data. For example, a researcher who seeks to develop knowledge about bodily impairment and its impact on the lives of people will, in my opinion, create different interpretations and 'ways of knowing' if they are from a disciplinary background that support medical rather than social model approaches. My understanding chimes with

Eisner's (2017:7) view of human knowledge as inherently constructed and stemming from reflections of 'the mind as well as nature'.

From an epistemological angle, I believe that the ways in which individuals understand and create 'knowledge' about the world is socially, culturally and personally mediated. I understand that my interpretations of how other people view the world will always be partial and never complete. I am committed to highlighting the ways in which my personal experiences, aspects of identity and feminist disability studies values may influence the way I approach and interpret the data that I collect. I support the view that, to some extent, all forms of knowledge rely on human reasoning: a process that is fallible and can be subject to change and influence. Creating research that enables the researcher to sustain dialogue with participants is recognised as a valuable aspect of feminist epistemology (Campbell and Wasco, 2000).

4.2   Defining a Qualitative Approach: A broad context

Qualitative approaches to research are characteristically identified by a desire to gather rich interpretations of the world and social phenomena (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Within the academy, the social sciences are generally accepted to be the roots of qualitative research inquiry (Berg, 2003). However, qualitative approaches can take place in a vast spectrum of disciplinary contexts when a researcher wishes to explore *why* and *how* an event, behaviour or phenomenon occurs, rather than simply quantifying its existence (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013).

Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (2003), two leading practitioners and theorists of qualitative research, suggest that taking a qualitative approach involves close interaction between the researcher and research participants. Qualitative research is distinctive from quantitative approaches largely owing to its potential to develop a dialogic approach

between the researcher and participants (Becker, 1996, in Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Holman Jones (2017) articulates qualitative inquiry as a means of thinking about the ways in which 'we' (researchers and participants) dialogically produce knowledge. As quantitative research relies on numerical and statistical data, it may be viewed as limited in its capacity to examine the intricacies of findings, for example, studying the relationship between data, participant 'voice' and the complex social environment (Ezzy, 2002).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005:1-2) acknowledge that both qualitative and quantitative research should be both understood as risky practices that carry histories of oppression:

> Research, quantitative and qualitative, is scientific. Research provides the foundation for reports about and representations of "the Other"… By the 1960s, battle lines were drawn within the quantitative and qualitative camps. Quantitative scholars relegated qualitative research to a subordinate status in the scientific arena. In response, qualitative researchers extolled the humanistic virtues of their subjective, interpretive approach… In the meantime, indigenous peoples found themselves subjected to the indignities of both approaches, as each methodology was used in the name of colonizing powers…

Denzin and Lincoln's perspective here serves as a useful reminder of traditional power imbalances between the researcher and the researched. Rather than becoming submerged in heated debates as to which methodological approach is inherently better suited to social justice orientated research, it is perhaps most appropriate to reflexively recognise the ability of both approaches to sustain power imbalances between the researcher and researched.

I believe that qualitative approaches to research best suit feminist disability studies understandings of 'knowledge' as intricate, complex and culturally mediated. However, in this chapter my primary aim is not to simplistically portray qualitative approaches as 'empowering' and quantitative approaches as 'disempowering'. Instead, through taking a reflexive approach, I aim to deepen understanding of the power of research, as a whole, to sustain or challenge socio-cultural power imbalances.

Additionally, by identifying as a reflexive researcher, a further focus in this chapter is exploring how I am, as the researcher, a 'key instrument' in my study (Creswell, 2013:45). In challenging the traditional and misguided concept of researcher 'objectivity', I discuss my position in the research process. Although I aim to promote a dialogic relationship between participants and myself, I recognise that I solely make key decisions affecting the research. For example, open-ended questions were used during interviews to enable participant directed conversation. Also, narrative analysis was applied to interview data in order to facilitate closer engagement with participant voice. However, the choosing of excerpts from participant data, was made by me. Participants were invited, at the end of our interview, to read over my transcript and analysis of the interview data and highlight if I had misheard or misinterpreted any points. (Only one participant chose to read her interview transcript to change details that could lead to her identification). I chose not to invite participants to actively analyse the interview data as I recognised this would be time and energy consuming for participants. By explicitly recognising my position in the research, I am able to reflexively mitigate any power imbalances working in my favour. Particularly, during the data analysis stages, I aimed to challenge my pre-conceived and embodied opinions by immersing myself in each individual participant's perception of the world (Mauthner and Doucet,

2003) – recognising that their perceptions may be different to my own and unparalleled to feminist disability studies beliefs.

In his work on factors of 'quality' in qualitative research, Seale (1999:467) explains how challenging assumptions of researcher 'neutrality' is an important factor when doing qualitative research. Moreover, in feminist research, 'the self' is a term used to describe close commitment to research processes and feminist values (Mauthner, 1998). Feminist methodologies typically oppose the traditional research pressure of 'distancing' and maintaining a strict 'objective' stance from the research, in favour of reflexively engaging with the researcher's background experience, values and assumptions (England, 1994). It is not to say that the researcher's background biases research outcomes. Rather, feminist paradigms find it more appropriate to highlight and be reflexively aware of a researcher's background, as opposed to simply ignoring this crucial factor.

Focusing on the process of reflexivity in feminist research, David *et al.,* (1996:209) understand reflexivity as 'a continual consideration of the ways in which the researcher's own social identity and values affect the data… and the picture of the social world produced'. Further to this, I understand my own position, as a feminist disability studies researcher, as part of a reciprocal relationship of 'knowledge sharing' with participants. Upon this understanding, I was open and attentive to the effects of my personal and disciplinary background when interpreting the data I collected (England, 1994), particularly by highlighting the points at which participants' views clashed with my own feminist disability studies understandings. During the stages of my data analysis, I focused on highlighting the aspects of ads that participants mark as important – as opposed to concentrating on the aspects I viewed as interesting, from a feminist disability studies perspective.

hooks (1984) describes feminist theory and research as determinedly 'critical'; for hooks (1984), feminist researchers must reflexively consider their own sexist views, absorbed from living in an oppressive, patriarchal society. As a researcher, by openly working with the 'self' and explicitly stating my preconceptions, biases and methodological issues, I hope to highlight the institutional, academic barriers that I am consciously or perhaps unconsciously, supporting (hooks, 1984). For example, a limitation within my research stems from my decision to recruit participants via academic mailing lists. I chose to disseminate calls for participation through academic mailing lists, as they provide a fast and efficient way of contacting many people across the UK who may be more likely to participate in research, as they are familiar with the context of the academy. I recognise that, resulting from my decision, a limitation is that I may not reach disabled women who have not been university educated.

When considering my own perception of 'self' and how it may influence on my position as a researcher, I am supported by Rinaldi's (2013) perception of the emphasis in disability research to provide personal narratives and disclose disability status in order to support one's credentials to research in the field. Whilst I understand and advocate the reasoning that sharing personal and embodied experiences bolsters political goals and bringing oneself into research challenges the traditional misnomer of researcher neutrality, I also sympathise with Rinaldi's (2013) recognition that sharing aspects of the self in public platforms can be very uncomfortable. Additionally, Rinaldi's (2013) point that too much focus on self-reflexivity runs the risk of placing oneself at the centre of research, as opposed to the research participants.

Describing my own identity and sense of self, in relation to my research: I identify as a disabled woman. The most significant impairment I experience is scoliosis – a double curvature of the spine. I am invisibly disabled – my spinal curvature is not noticeable

unless I were to point it out and on a day-to-day basis, the effects of my impairment, for example, muscular pain and difficulty in sitting/walking at times, are not obvious to other people. I am also white and I was born and live in the United Kingdom. I am in my twenties and, due to my educational background and work as a university tutor, I fall into the category of middle class. However I identify with strong working class roots. I am university educated and I am a researcher in the discipline of disability studies, although I define my work as belonging within feminist disability studies.

As a disabled woman who is university educated, born in an economically developed country and identifies as middle class, I realise that my position is privileged. Considering that my impairment is largely invisible to the public gaze, I also recognise that my experiences of disablism are likely to differ from women who have visible impairments. I am also aware that myself and the research participants all identify as white. Therefore, a limitation of the research findings is that the experiences of black disabled women are absent. In the conclusion chapter, purposively gathering the responses of a more diverse range of women, to advertising representations, is identified as a future development for the research.

By highlighting that the research participants and myself share an identity – as disabled women – my intention is not to assume that our responses to advertising representations will be corresponding. Rather, I believe that as a result of our shared identity, participants may feel more at ease when sharing personal stories and experiences with me in an interview setting (Finch, 1993). However, I also recognise, as Riessman (1987) describes, that the ways in which participants share their stories is likely to vary as a result of other aspects of identity, for example, cultural background.

Although this research focuses on two aspects of identity: disability and gender, by choosing a qualitative methodological approach and the method of semi-structured interviews, participant autonomy to discuss their multiple aspects of identity, should they wish to, is facilitated. A qualitative approach is recognised as important when enabling discussion of intersections of identity, due to the ability to discuss overlapping and 'multidimensional' phenomenon within qualitative research (Shields, 2008:306).

4.3   Qualitative Research: Debates surrounding objective and subjective practices

The notion of researcher bias continues to be the subject of much debate. Christians (2003) outlines the Enlightenment period (1620s – 1780s, Western Europe) as a key force in understanding knowledge as logical, objective, rational and separate from subjective feelings. Researcher of indigenous peoples and education, Tuhiwai Smith (1999), builds upon this point from a feminist perspective by adding that the current research climate is colonised by positivist values stemming from the Enlightenment period. For Smith (1999), researchers that preach 'objective' and removed positions do little to facilitate the 'voice' of participants, instead the experiences of the 'other' is further marginalised.

Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) criticism of positivist values in research is part of a larger debate surrounding research paradigms and their influence on values and morals of research. A research paradigm refers to a specific framework that is used to approach research, for example, positivist paradigms are characterised by the scientific belief that universal laws can be applied to better understand events, behaviours and situations (Hughes, 2001, in Williams, 2006). Furthermore, such universal laws are recognised as static within a positivist paradigm (Williams, 2006).

Guba and Lincoln, (2005) comment that positivist paradigms overwhelmingly occur in quantitative based research that is interested in uncovering 'real' truths about the world. In contrast, Guba and Lincoln (2005) introduce critical research paradigms as interested in the complexity and delicate nature of exploring and developing knowledge. Taking a critical approach to research recognises that 'knowledge' is never fixed or absolute; researchers can only access 'truths' that are influenced by social and cultural contexts and are subject to change over time (Guba and Lincoln, 2005).

Critical research paradigms that emphasise 'knowledge' as socially and personally constructed hold a distinctly different epistemology to positivist approaches, due to the former's focus on 'reality' and 'knowledge' as shaped by cultural values and individual subjectivities (Schwandt, 2005). From a feminist standpoint, research influenced by a critical, constructivist approach recognises that women's voices offer rich and detailed experiences that consider the complex ways in which society develops and sustains attitudes, beliefs and identities (Campbell and Wasco, 2000: 780):

For Birgit Locher and Elisabeth Prügl (2001), in their paper on feminist constructivism and international relations, feminism and constructivism share an epistemological understanding that gender and identity are socially constructed. Rather than suggesting that feminism can be 'added' to constructivism in a supplementary sense, Locher and Prügl (2001) understand the two to be mutually beneficial to one another. According to Locher and Prügl (2001: 113), constructivism facilitates a focus on the role of individual agency, therefore emphasising the personal power and navigation of the world experienced by women; feminism also has rich gains to offer constructivism:

> …feminism contributes to constructivism an understanding of power as an
> integral element of processes of construction. Because they leave the social

construction of power under theorised, constructivists lack the tools to explain how gender and power reproduce, how and why certain constructs emerge as more influential than others.

Calls for a developed focus on constructivism in feminist research are well-documented (Berg and Lie, 1995; Campbell and Wasco, 2000; Locher and Prügl, 2001; Allen, 2011). However, Elizabeth Stokoe (2008), a feminist researcher commenting on constructivist approaches to research, points out that an over-encompassing grounding in constructivism may deny the 'real', everyday lived experiences of gender. Stokoe (2008) reflects that denial of gender as a category effectively belonging to individuals and solely describing it in social constructivist terms could be perceived as patronising and ignorant of personal experience and agency. Stokoe's view is one that I support – whilst I believe that common understandings of disability and gender are socially constructed, I recognise impairment and sex as material factors.

4.4   Qualitative research and subjective knowledge

So far in this chapter, I have argued for the potential of qualitative research to uncover embodied experiences that have the ability to challenge traditional assumptions, objective perspectives and stereotypes towards marginalised identity groups, i.e. disabled women. At this point, it is important to outline my understanding, as a feminist disability studies researcher, of the position and importance of subjective knowledge in research.

Sociologist and qualitative researcher David Silverman (2013:325), provides a nuanced view into dominant assumptions regarding qualitative research and subjective knowledge:

Many people are attracted to qualitative research because they assume that it offers them a special opportunity to peer into the human psyche. For them, qualitative research is always about how people perceive the world, their emotions and 'lived experience'… It is then hardly surprising that so many beginning researchers assume that qualitative research is only about 'experience' and that the optimum method is the interview.

In the above excerpt, Silverman details how many qualitative researchers are driven to use interviews as their primary, or only, research method. For Silverman, some qualitative researchers may make this decision, as they believe that conducting interviews will enable them first-hand access to an individual's experiences and embodied knowledge. Silverman acknowledges that, to an extent, this belief is viable. However, Silverman (2013:326) cautions that the nature of recounting experience is *always* mediated, for example, by cultural ideologies or the act of sharing experience to an 'authorised teller', i.e. an interviewer. Experiences are not retold as they originally occurred. Rather, the individual undertakes a process of storytelling by making sense of past events in a narrative style.

Silverman's (2013) cautionary tale of accessing subjective knowledge via interviews is one that I follow in my choice of research methods and overall design. In my research, I incorporate my own textual analyses of nine ads representing disabled women (labelled as phase one of my research) and draw upon the subjective experiences and responses gathered from participants, via semi-structured interviews.

Feminist researcher and activist, Nicole Westmarland (2001) highlights semi-structured interviews as a key method used by feminist researchers, due to their potential for involving participants in the research process, in the sense of contributing their

emotions, beliefs and values in more direct ways. In Westmarland's view, semi-structured interviews enable researchers to gain a unique closeness to participants in uncovering the real-life issues that they believe are most pressing and important. Westmarland's approach is useful to consider alongside Silverman's (2013) caution of sharing stories as a process that is always mediated. Rather than presenting participant stories as 'absolute truths', Westmarland highlights how semi-structured interviews provide a context for participants to highlight and qualitatively discuss the real-life issues that matter to them: this is my understanding of subjective knowledge as produced within an interview setting.

In addition to existing knowledge surrounding reflexivity in feminist research, practical and philosophical advice can be found in disability studies research. Salmon and Basset's (2009) article on their PhD student (Salmon) and supervisor (Bassett) relationship and perspectives on reflexivity in disability research is particularly useful. In their article, Salmon and Bassett uncover the struggles new researchers experience in respect to defining their approach to reflexivity when doing research for and about marginalised peoples.

Salmon and Bassett (2009:915) discuss researcher and participant knowledge as inherently 'partial'. Their point here is very helpful when considering the, at times, undiluted focus on subjective knowledge in qualitative research – a phenomenon queried by Silverman (2013). In their discussion, Salmon and Basset explore how knowledge shared by participants is influenced by dominant cultural ideals and their absorption of how they may be viewed by other people, e.g. family and friends. Leading on from this, it is necessary for me to continually consider the influence of social, cultural and inter-personal contexts on participant experiences and stories (and, indeed, my own interpretation of data).

Salmon and Basset (2013:915-16) also caution that researchers working with oppressed identity groups should not take the role of 'conduit' between the world of researchers and the researched. In doing so, they argue that the researcher risks assuming the role of 'seeing for' instead of alongside participants, thus enforcing a 'them and us' binary. Salmon and Basset's approach to researcher reflexivity in disability research enables me to better consider my own position and approach to reflexivity. In particular, their insights encourage me to critically and productively engage with my own limitations as a researcher. By viewing the production of knowledge as fragmentary by nature, I am able to understand the purpose of my research as producing multiple truths. Furthermore, I am able to appreciate and accept that the 'truths' I uncover may be conflicting, incomplete and, at a later point, refuted. As Pillow (2003:178) describes, my task is to open up my interpretations of data to scrutiny in the greater aim of reducing and critically approaching how forms of knowledge are distorted.

4.5   Research Design: 'Nothing About Us Without Us': Including the personal narratives of disabled women in feminist disability studies research

In order to meet the primary aim of my research, I selected nine Anglo-American multi-media (newspaper, magazine and television) ads, created post 2000, containing representations of disabled women who are shown to have either mobility, visual impairments or mental health issues. Each impairment category contains three corresponding ads.

UK and US ads were chosen due to similarities between both socio-cultural contexts, and, due to the similar growth of disability studies in both countries. The two countries share English as the primary speaking language. Furthermore, disability studies analyses of culture have, to date, largely been conducted in UK and US contexts. Disability studies is recognised as emerging in the same period – between the late 1970s and 1980s

- in the UK and US (Connor, et al., 2008). In the UK, the *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* is recognised as a spearheading base in cultural disability studies research, while key cultural disability scholars, such as, Sharon Snyder, David Mitchell, Lennard Davis and Rosemarie Garland Thomson, live in the US. Previous disability studies research focusing on advertising has suggested that the portrayal of disabled people in ads is burgeoning in UK and US contexts (Haller and Ralph, 2006). When reflecting on my own positionality as a feminist disability studies researcher who was born and lives in the UK, it is plausible that I am more likely to understand and easily identify cultural referents in UK ads. To mitigate this potential issue, I made detailed notes against all multi-modal aspects of ads, not just the aspects that were most appealing or obvious in my own reading.

I purposively selected a small sample of ads, representing women with either mobility impairment, visual impairment or mental health issues. These categories were purposefully chosen with the intent of broadly reaching across impairment categories, namely, physical impairment, sensory impairment and mental health. However, I note that my chosen impairment categories are rudimentary and do not suggest that they are inclusive of a rich spectrum of impairment identities. Additionally, it is recognised that the sample of ads mostly represent white, disabled women. Therefore, it appears that black disabled women are less visible in the world of UK and US advertising, a point that informs Davis' (2013) argument that 'diversity' is only portrayed, in constrained ways, in mainstream culture. I only selected ads containing women with impairments as the main character. When choosing ads, I aimed to select a sample that reflects different types of advertising: for example, fashion/beauty ads, charity ads and pharmaceutical ads. This enables exploration of whether and how different types of ads produce comparative or contrasting portrayals. Only UK and US ads, produced post-

2000, were chosen in order to gain an understanding of current ways in which disabled women are represented.

I collected ads via internet search engines, namely, google.com and bing.com. The following keywords were used in the search for ads: 'disab*', 'disabled wom*', 'advert*', 'advertising campaign', 'UK' and 'US'. The two search engines were selected as they are the leading search engines in the UK and US (Statcounter, 2017). Considering this information, it can be deduced that these search engines are most likely to be accessed by the general public, thus ads found via these engines are more likely to generate public interest and impact on society. Only these two leading search engines were used as the aim was not to produce a systematic review of ads featuring disabled women. Rather, the process was aimed toward identifying ads representing disabled women that have generated public interest and explicitly focus on disability and gender identities, in order to enable the research findings to further develop existing conversations, from a critically informed, feminist disability studies perspective.

Through using search engines, direct links to ads and online webpages and newspaper articles discussing ads that portray disabled women were uncovered. Details of the search and ads uncovered were stored in a table, stating the search engine used, the date of search, ads uncovered and whether or not the ad met the inclusion criteria (see appendix H). In total, twenty-seven articles or direct links to ads were identified. Not all ads featured disabled women as the main or sole character, therefore, they were discounted. This information suggests that disabled women, as an identity group, continue to be underrepresented in the world of advertising. While the inclusion of disability imagery in advertising may be slowly growing, specific focus and appreciation of the disabled and female form is still lacking.

My research design contains two main phases. Both phases critically engage with the distribution of power in society; the former phase focuses on how advertising discourses may impact or challenge hegemonic assumptions tied to disabled women and the latter phase explores how disabled women may subvert or be influenced by socio-cultural stereotypes surrounding disability and gender. In my discussion of findings – Chapter Ten – I bring both phases together by highlighting moments when participant analyses of ads compare or contrast with my own.

The first phase is underpinned by my own analyses of ads and the second phase focuses upon participant analyses of ads:

First Phase: The first phase of my research design involved application of TA to each ad in order to establish my interpretations of the dominant messages surrounding disability, gender and the main purposes of individual ads. The ads chosen do reflect various aspects of identity, for example, ethnicity, gender and disability status. However, for the purpose of my research, I only focus on providing in-depth explorations of intersections between disability and gender identities. This research has a feminist disability studies theoretical framework, therefore, the identities of disability and gender are directly focused on in a detailed and informed manner.

Critical discourse analysis was applied to each ad in order to deepen understanding of key messages and outline how words and terms contribute to key themes surrounding disability and gender. Multimodal discourse analysis was then applied to each ad in order to analyse the ways in which text layout, style, font and colour schemes contributed to key themes. Data gathered from TA foregrounded my exploration of each ad. Data gathered by application of critical and multimodal discourse analyses was stored in corresponding tables for each individual ad. Further on in this chapter, I

describe the exact processes by which I applied textual, critical and discourses analyses to each ad.

In undertaking this work I use established methods in cultural text analysis. TA is frequently used by researchers who are invested in uncovering the politics of production and interpreting purposes of texts (Kovala, 2002). Moreover, discourse analysis is recognised as strongly supporting the process of critically exploring cultural texts, due to the specific aim of interpreting how the world around us is constructed through language (Baker and Galasiński, 2001; Threadgold, 2003; Paltridge, 2012).

Second stage: The second stage in my research design focuses on the collection of original data through semi-structured interviews. Using six open-ended questions, I held individual and one-off interviews with a purposively selected sample of disabled women (n=15) who self-identify with the impairments represented in the ads.

I recruited participants through academic and interest related mailing lists, specifically, women's studies, disability and media studies mailing lists. In my recruitment email (see appendix A), I self-identified as a feminist disability studies researcher and stated that I am recruiting women who identify as having mobility impairment, mental health issues or visual impairment. In emphasising that I am recruiting participants who 'self-identify' as disabled women, I followed a 'loose' design that prioritised participants' right to assert their own identity, as opposed to enacting detailed and narrow participant selection processes (Miles and Huberman, 1994, in Flick, 2007:32). I was not able to offer reimbursement for participant travel expenses, therefore in order to hopefully widen participation in my research, my participant recruitment email stated that I am happy to travel to interview participants in locations most convenient for them.

I recruited participants via academic mailing lists (namely, disability-research@jiscmail.ac.uk; dshum@listserv.umd.edu; femptheoryqueer@listserv.aoir.org and wmst-l@listserve.umd.edu). I used this strategy as I anticipated a fast response rate as a result of reaching out to individuals who are likely to be familiar with and potentially active in research already (my hypothesis here was later validated as I managed to recruit all participants within a four month period).

As someone who is completing a PhD, thus a relatively 'novice' researcher, I believe it was more ethically sound for me to conduct research with individuals who were likely to be more confident with research processes already. However, I recognise that only recruiting participants from academic mailing lists means that I worked with a sample of participants who were university educated and, therefore, not representative of a large demographic of disabled women. Therefore, the voices of disabled women who have not entered into higher education are absent, in my research. I consider this limitation of my research in my final 'conclusion' Chapter. While it is recognised that the participant sample is not reflective of a wide spectrum of disabled women, a core feminist disability studies value I hold is that participation in research can be a means of consciousness raising on an individual level. Research seeking to uphold social justice values can do so, in part, by emphasising the role of research participation in enhancing individual awareness and engagement with socio-cultural issues (Kitchin, 1999).

During interviews, participants were only shown ads from their impairment category and were asked to outline key messages they perceived from the ads, discuss any

personal experiences sparked when engaging with the ads and reflect on whether and how the portrayal of disability and gender affects their subjective wellbeing[1].

Each interview was transcribed and narrative analysis was applied to data gathered from each interview in order to outline dominant and reoccurring narratives for each participant. Individual narrative summaries were created for each participant and organised into three chapters, corresponding with impairment category – shown in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. In order to make participant data more digestible for my discussion of findings, core themes were collated from participant narratives – shown in Chapter Nine. In my 'core themes from participant narratives' chapter, participant narratives are cross-compared and overarching narrative themes will be evidenced.

Following this, in my 'discussion of findings' – Chapter Ten, relevant data from my literature review was to develop key themes and test the applicability of concepts, terms and conclusions gathered from similar research studies. Leading on from my data analysis chapter, key ideas and conclusions were summarised, alongside limitations of the research in my conclusion chapter.

4.5.1.1 Phase One: Analysing nine Anglo-American advertisements through application of textual, critical discourse and multi-modal discourse analyses:

4.5.1.1.1 TA (referred to by some authors as 'content analysis')

In their extensive analyses of disability representations in culture, Snyder and Mitchell (2006: 201) suggest that TA is the only research method equipped to challenge the traditional oppressive research regimes faced by disabled people:

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[1] Coincidentally, all participants reported that they had not come across any of the ads in my sample prior to the interview.

…textually based analysis is the only *absolute* remedy to the exhaustion of people-based research practices. First, no matter what its limitations, a study of texts exhausts no one other than the researcher (and, perhaps, the original author). There is a great practicality to approaching disability as an object of study in this manner.

Snyder and Mitchell (2006) go on to explain that texts are prime artefacts for disability studies research due to their potential in reflecting the social beliefs, values and ideologies of the time period in which they were produced. For Snyder and Mitchell (2006: 201-203) texts, e.g. books or advertisements, offer a channel through which disability studies researchers can uncover past and present socio-cultural attitudes towards disabled people.

In his work documenting the representation of blindness in twentieth-century literary texts, Bolt (2014) reflects on Mitchell and Snyder's (2000) approach to TA, in particular, their perception of disability as a common form of 'narrative prosthesis' in literature. Bolt (2014) suggests that disabled characters in texts dominantly hold a subjugated position to the 'norm' and so-called non-disabled characters. Bolt's (2014) use of the term 'metanarrative' appears particularly relevant to TA. For Bolt (2014), metanarratives of disability obscure the complex individual and identity, and render disability under an all-consuming narrative in a text.

In my research, I approached textual analysis (TA) as a means of understanding and making critical interpretations from ads and the positioning of disabled women in this form of media and culture. I applied TA to each ad – the process of which is described at a later point in this section - before applying discourse analyses, in order to enable

me to gain familiarity with the core messages in each ad and to foreground my more detailed applications of critical and multimodal discourse analyses.

I performed TA on a small scale, analysing nine advertisements. My aim was not to cultivate macro and representative judgements regarding the representations of disabled women in advertising. Instead, I focused on drawing attention to the complexity of representation, discourse, and representation of disability/gender identities. Therefore, in my application of TA to each ad, I read/watched each ad and made detailed notes. My notes described general themes and my first impressions of each ad. This process was primarily designed to aid my familiarisation with the ads.

Slater (1998) understands TA as a way of rigorously and comprehensively attaching meaning to cultural texts. Supporting Slater's point of view, McKee (2003) suggests that TA is an excellent tool for interpreting the meanings and purposes of texts. McKee highlights TA as commonly used in the fields of cultural and media studies, and more broadly, sociology. Interestingly, McKee (2003) explains how TA potentially provides more nuanced and critical interpretations of cultural texts than data collected by interviewing people on their responses to texts. McKee describes how many individuals may not have stopped to think about the significance or messages behind cultural texts. When prompted by a researcher to consider the meanings behind texts, McKee suggests that it is possible for individuals to filter their responses in ways that they believe appear intelligent and desirable for researchers.

Moreover, renowned discourse analyst and researcher, Norman Fairclough (2003:8), highlights that critical analysis of cultural texts is an important means by which researchers can uncover how texts act as 'social agents' and impact upon people's behaviours, the physical world and relations between people. In Fairclough's view, texts

are a strong channel through which socio-cultural ideologies are disseminated to the public.

In her research on disability representations in advertising, Beth Haller (2010) uses TA (although she uses the interchangeable term 'content analysis') due to its potential to address the complexity of disability discourse and cultural meaning. Specifically, Haller (2010: 26) proposes that content analysis effectively addresses the following:

> Content analysis of mass media seeks to discover two different types of content: manifest content and latent content. Manifest content refers to that which is directly observable… Latent content encompasses the meanings within communication and requires the researcher to make inferences.

In my application of TA, I approached each ad with the intention of uncovering both manifest and latent content. After carefully reading and studying each ad, I made notes on both forms of content at the same time. For example, I made notes relating to the ad's tagline (manifest content), followed by listing possible interpretations, links to disability and/or gender stereotypes or exploring the extent to which the term/image is progressive (latent content). Generally, my descriptions of TA comprised a few, small paragraphs. At this point, I focused on generating multiple themes that were later narrowed down and interpreted further alongside critical and multi-modal discourse analyses.

4.5.1.1.2   Critical Discourse Analysis

I used critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a means of further analysing key themes established through TA. Substantially, the literature surrounding CDA approaches this method as an inherent facet of TA (Fairclough, 2003). However, I approached textual and critical discourse analysis as two distinct methods due to the enhanced potential of

the latter to focus on the derivations, deconstruction and meanings of specific words and terms.

During the process of CDA, I used themes established from TA as a means of 'collecting' linguistic evidence. For example, if I had established the theme 'super crip' within TA, I would then identify words and terms that supported this disability trope, i.e. 'superhuman' or 'aspirational'. For each ad, I stored data collected via CDA in a table. The header row contained themes established by TA and CDA, and the corresponding columns contained the linguistic evidence.

The way in which I applied CDA to advertising discourses is largely influenced by Fairclough's (2003) focus on both the internal and external aspects of texts. Internal functions may relate to the 'syntagmatic relations' within a text, for example, how certain words or terms interact, compare and contrast to one another. When applying CDA to ads, I used different colours to code words and terms that create messages about disability and gender. Through using colour coding, I was able to highlight the prevalence of discourse themes and note how these themes interact with one another in the text. For example, if I uncovered words and terms relating to traditional beauty standards in an ad, I highlighted using a certain colour. After colour coding, I stored the data I collected in a table, with columns corresponding to the dominant themes I highlighted.

External functions refer to the impact and influence texts can have on societies, institutions and individuals (Fairclough, 2003). Considering this aspect, when analysing the data I collected through application of CDA, I referred to the extent to which discourse themes may challenge or sustain traditional cultural stereotypes surrounding disability and gender. My approach here was influenced by Gordon Allport's (1954)

'Model of Prejudice', particularly in regards to his understanding of 'antilocution' (using pejorative words and terms to describe an identity group) as the foundational platform from which certain identity groups can be marginalised and stigmatised in society. Fairclough and Allport are similarly interested in the extent to which language can reinforce or challenge the oppression of identity groups in society. By applying CDA to my sample of ads, I critically explore whether and how advertising discourses may uphold or challenge stereotypes surrounding disabled women.

I stored the data I gathered via application of CDA in individual tables for each ad. Once tables were completed, I started to search beyond the literal word, with the specific aim of interpreting how use of language sustains, supports or challenges traditional structures of disability and gender (Sunderland and Litosseliti, 2008). The 'critical' part of CDA is made possible when interpretation encompasses the histories, socio-cultural contexts and power relations of certain words and terms, whilst also paying attention to linguistic form and structure (Paltridge, 2012). The former aim of CDA is arguably more relevant than the latter on the basis that 'criticality' is connected with the use of language by social agents and within a socio-cultural context (Grue, 2015).

In my discussion of findings – Chapter ten - I applied key concepts surrounding disability, gender, discourse and culture from my literature review, in order to form interpretations from a feminist disability studies perspective. In this process, I repeatedly asked myself probing questions, such as, 'what does this use of language assume about disabled women?', 'what value or attribute does this word/term presuppose and attach to disabled women?' and 'what cultural stereotype relating to disabled women is reinforced or challenged through this use of language?' (Gee, 1999).

Paltridge (2012) defines CDA as a research method motivated by understanding the relationships between discourse and cultural, political and social contexts. Adding to this, Paltridge (2012) outlines the potential of CDA to uncover the performance of power relations within discourse: a process that simultaneously supports and constructs power structures in society. A key way that discourse contributes to social power relations is through reliance on stereotypes (Paltridge, 2012).

Critical discourse analysis does not rely on a prescribed process, rather different disciplinary contexts shape the researcher's approach to CDA and interest in the power of words and terms (Van Dijk, 2006). CDA is commonly used by researchers from disciplinary backgrounds with a strong social justice leaning, such as feminist disability studies, because it is predicated on the belief that discourse is an active and aggravating factor in unequal power relations (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). Furthermore, CDA practitioners are united by the understanding that social problems continue to exist and are supported by language: discourse distributes and adds meaning to words, terms and labels that are used to subjugate many in society (Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak, 2011).

Grue (20009; 2011; 2015) suggests that the deconstructionist and social justice aspects of CDA fit well with disability studies aims. Precisely, CDA recognises that in every instance of text, whether it be spoken or written, there is always a choice regarding the language that is used (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). For Grue (2015), the media is a key site wherein discourse is used to create and perpetuate stereotypical narratives of disability. In Grue's opinion, it is not so much that the media misrepresents the reality of having impairments and living in a disabling society, rather, media texts use disabled people as objects upon which stories, ideas and symbols are opportunistically imprinted on.

Advertisements are particularly interesting from a CDA approach rooted in a feminist disability studies context due to their dominant focus on persuasion, consumerist values and projection of societal ideals. Goldman (1992:5) suggests, 'to study ads is to study the framing of meaning'. Therefore, advertising discourse is understood as intrinsically contextualised; in order to understand the way that identities, namely, disability and gender are represented in ads, terms, words and images cannot be explored in isolation (Williamson, 1978). Bell and Milic (2002) position later work of Williamson (1986) as foundational in understanding how advertisements add weight to cultural ideals and oppression of certain identities, i.e. women. Bell and Milic (2002) particularly emphasise Williamson's (1986) work on 'cultural referents', suggesting that certain identities, such as gender, are continually attached to certain themes and lifestyle choices in ads that support cultural stereotypes.

4.5.1.1.3 Multimodal Discourse Analysis

I used multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA) to interpret ads containing other modes of communication than language, for example, images and font styles (Gee, 1999). MMDA is a well suited to the analysis of ads as images, colours and 'signs' are an extremely popular way of conveying 'instant' meaning to audiences (Coomber, 2012). I applied MMDA following CDA as a means of further evidencing how themes surrounding disability and gender are given maximum impact through written, oral and visual communication.

In their application of MMDA on magazine advertisements, Ferreira and Heberle (2013), use Mitchell's (1995) 'problem-solution' concept to study the inter-play of modes of communication. Ferreira and Heberle suggest that advertisements often strive to construct a 'problem' that may resonate with the audience/potential consumer. For example, when viewing an advertisement an individual may suddenly think 'yes, I am

lacking x, y, or z'. At the same time, the advertisement provides an instant 'solution' for the 'problem' that has just been created. Usually, advertisers will propose that the solution can be found in the product that is being advertised (Ferreira and Heberle, 2013).

I applied MMDA to each ad in order to develop understanding of how meanings regarding disability and gender are communicated. MMDA facilitates deconstruction of different aspects of a text in tandem, for example, approaching how the font size, style and colour may interact with written text to affect meaning. Incorporation of images and colours in texts acts as a bolster to the language that is used, for example, the colour of a text has an effect on the reader's overall impression (Barthes, 1977). Working with a printed copy of each ad, I circled images that appeared to carry significant meaning within the ad. I was influenced by Barthes (1964) perception that images have the ability to signify meanings in subtle ways. I also drew arrows and made notes next to creative aspects of ads, for example, font styles and colours. In my notes, I described connotations relating to such aspects, for example, the colour red may indicate passion. For television ads, I watched each ad three times and made notes of images, sounds and colours – writing the corresponding time in which they occurred.

My approach to MMDA was influenced by Roland Barthes' (1964) study of semiotics. In *Elements of Semiology,* Barthes (1964:1), a philosopher and linguist, uses the term 'semiotics' to define 'any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects and the complex association of all these'. Building upon the work of linguist Ferdinand de Sassure (1916), Barthes engaged with the notion that there are two parts of every sign: the signified and the signifier. Semioticians frequently interpret this understanding as a cognitive process, the 'signified' has a mental, not material form (Chandler, 2004). In relation to the 'semiological sign',

Barthes (1964) posed that a sign, i.e. an image of a coat, bears a function and message, for example, staying warm and protected from cold weather. In terms of ads, signs are considered to carry a motivation, for example, to support a particular message about a company, group of people or object.

In later work, Barthes (1977), describes how images and words/terms anchor one another in a text. By 'anchorage', Barthes (1977) refers to the way that a message can be extended and impacted by the use of more than one mode in a text. For example, in a charity advertisement focusing on disability, words and terms may connote 'pity' and this could be further impacted by the sign of a tear on a disabled person's face. By focusing on the 'anchorage' of various images and instances of language, I was able to consider the ways in which advertisers often play on 'puns' or use words/terms with multiple meanings.

Alongside images and language, I studied the main colours used in each ad. For example, in order to create a theme of 'purity' advertisers may use a colour scheme of pastel and light shades (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006). Further to this, by focusing on the typography (font style/size) used in each ad, I was able to further consider how certain themes and emotions are created. For example, a bold and large font style may indicate a 'serious' tone, therefore, it is possible to interpret the messages advertisers are placing most focus on (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006).

The data gathered through application of MMDA was stored in a single table for each advertisement. I stated key themes in the header row and stored corresponding

information in the below columns. Therefore, each advertisement generated three tables, TA, CDA and MMDA[2].

4.5.1.2 Phase Two: Accessing the Perspectives of Disabled Women on the Representation of Disabled Women in Anglo-American ads: Exploring embodied insights through semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis:

Turning to the second phase in my research design, I now discuss my approach to semi-structured interviews, sampling, and data analysis:

4.5.1.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a commonly used method in qualitative research due to their capacity to enable in-depth exploration of a topic and their potential for unearthing streams of data, understood as complex and interdependent (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). By interviewing a participant, the researcher actively joins a conversation about a particular topic or event and makes the process of data collection more dialogic (Silverman, 1997). At a base level, three broad types of interviews exist: structured, semi-structured and unstructured (Gill *et al.,* 2008).

I decided on semi-structured interviews as a means of gathering the subjective experiences and reactions to ads from disabled women. With each of my fifteen participants, I held one interview, on average lasting for an hour each. During the course of the interviews, which were audio recorded, I asked six open-ended questions (see appendix E), concerned with three main areas: personal opinions and reactions towards the representation of disability and gender in the selected advertisements, defining life

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[2] The themes I generated for each table were not exactly the same for each method; however, I found that they were often interlinked.

experiences as disabled women, and the extent to which advertising representations affect subjective wellbeing.

In my role of interviewer, I consciously strove to create an informal and dialogic approach, following a conversational style (Oakley, 1981). For example, on a couple of occasions, I remarked if I had shared similar life-experiences to participants[3]. My decision to opt for a more informal approach to interviewing is part of a wider and more complex process of mediating my feminist disability studies' values with practical qualitative research issues. Moreover, I wished to start conversations with disabled women about feminist disability studies issues and draw attention to the often unnoticed ways that advertising portrays disabled women. As a feminist disability studies researcher, I felt strongly about engaging disabled women in conversations that are often unspoken and overlooked in public and the academy (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). However, I considered the important issue of reflexively balancing my own social justice perspectives in order to avoid biasing the answers of participants.

Following on from my awareness of the potential for biasing the interviews, I created six open-ended interview questions, purposefully designed to prompt participant storytelling or the opportunity to explore past experiences, i.e. 'could you reflect on your experience of…' I used such questions as a 'way in' to further dialogue; for example, on occasions I followed a participant's response with further prompts, 'that's an interesting point, could you elaborate?' Through using open-ended questions, participants had greater opportunity to reflect on issues they perceive as important. For

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[3] For example, at one point in my interview with J.K., she asked me how I became to identify as a feminist and I felt very comfortable in sharing my story with her. In turn, she offered her story of identifying as a feminist. My decision to offer small contributions to the interview dialogue stemmed from the desire to humanise myself and attempt to challenge potential power imbalances between myself and participants (Foley and Valenzuela, 2005). Additionally, on some occasions, participants would share an experience or story, ending with the phrase, 'do you know what I mean?' or 'you know?' If I had shared a similar experience, I felt comfortable sharing this in the interview setting.

example, they could choose to comment on other aspects of their identity – aside from disability and gender – if they wished to[4]. Through using open-ended questions, I was hopefully able to mitigate, to some extent, potential power imbalances between participants and myself, as participants were able to steer the direction of their responses.

When using prompts, I made a conscious effort to mirror the language used by participants and repeat phrases/terms that they had used, in an effort to cultivate dialogue in a way that was more participant and less interviewer led (Roulston, 2010). Due to my support of interviews as a dialogic process, I did not attempt to conceal my body language or facial expressions. I also reiterated points raised by participants if I was unsure that I grasped the point they were making.

As I have mentioned at an earlier point in this chapter, I recruited participants via academic mailing lists. A benefit arising from my choice is that participants were familiar and more confident with research processes, thus potentially meaning that power imbalances during interviews were lessened. However, I remained mindful not to assume that participants automatically felt at ease during interviews and, if a participant would have appeared uncomfortable during their interview, I was ready to invite them to take a break and remind them of their right to withdraw at any point during the interview.

At the end of each interview I asked each participant if they would like to see a copy of their interview transcript and, at a later date, interpretations/conclusions I have drawn

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[4] However, it is interesting to note that participants did not refer to or share stories relating to any other aspects of their identities.

from their interview data. This provided a further opportunity for participants to verify and have greater control over the way I interpreted their views, experiences and stories[5].

4.5.1.2.2 Narrative Analysis

Carol Thomas (1999:5) describes the personal narratives of disabled women as encompassing 'power to illustrate and illuminate' the complexity of embodied experience and interactions with inter-personal and societal oppression. I perceive individual narratives as enabling closer insight into the ways in which participants make sense of their surrounding worlds and aspects of identity. I do not believe that participant narratives provide raw or uninhibited access to their personal views or feelings as I believe that the ways in which we all process reality are socio-culturally mediated.

In more recent work, Thomas (2010) describes the literature on narrative analysis and methods as complex and the subject of much debate. Thomas (2010) recognises that some qualitative researchers writing about narrative analysis, such as Atkinson (1997), criticise the way that narrative data is often confusingly positioned as more 'transparent' and closer to 'true' forms of knowledge than other data sets. For Atkinson (1997, in Thomas, 2010), researchers must be wary of 'romanticising' participant narratives due to a risk of straying away from traditional and objective commitments to research.

I took a 'sociology of stories approach' (Plummer, 1995) to narrative analysis. By using this term, Plummer (1995) positions humans as 'sense makers' of the surrounding world: people use the language, images and signs within their socio-cultural context to interpret meanings and to take significance from their life experiences. Taking a sociology of stories approach to narrative analysis leads to less focus on linguistic

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[5] Only one participant wanted to check her interview transcript (to confirm that no personal details that could potentially lead to identification were present) and no participants asked to read over my analyses of our interview.

features, style and structure and greater concentration on the social and cultural contexts in which they take place (Plummer, 1995).

A pivotal reason behind my choice of narrative analysis is the potential to illustrate the personal, powerful and transient form of experience and identifying as a disabled woman (Thomas, 2007). In both feminist and disability studies research, personal narratives are commonly recognised as a necessary tool within the aim of listening to historically 'silenced' voices (Chase, 2005; Smith and Sparkes, 2008). I am particularly interested in the ways in which participants use personal stories to self-articulate their understanding of disability, gender and the ways in which they perceive disabled women to be represented in advertisements.

The stories people share can be understood as recollections and organisations of important events and interpretations of personal experience (Barthes, 1975). Writing about personal narratives, Birch (1998:178) uses the phrase 'assembly of life episodes' to highlight the careful and logical process by which people try to make sense of their lives. Adjacent to this process, by approaching narratives as stories rooted in socio-cultural contexts, it is understood that individual identity is also formatted in a similar way. When people tell stories, they are deciding for themselves how to interpret their own lives, behaviours and significant experiences.

Therefore, by taking a sociology of stories approach to narrative analysis on the interview data I collected, my main focus was directed toward the ways that participants construct meaning from their own experiences, reactions to advertisements and subjective evaluations of wellbeing. When applying narrative analysis to interview data, I focused on the key stories and events described by participants, rather than taking a more structural approach (favoured by Labov and Waletzky, 1997; Labov, 2006) and

choosing to focus on the ways in which individuals structure the plot lines of their stories.

In my application of narrative analysis, I firstly read each interview to build my understanding and familiarity of key narrative thread aspects. Then, I colour coded various narrative threads in the text. For example, if a participant referred to their partner, I coded such instances by using one colour, then, if a participant referred to societal discrimination, I colour coded each instance using a different colour. The codes were later used to establish central themes within each participant's narrative. For each participant, I made a table with the key themes as headings and then stored words, sentences and phrases under each corresponding heading – in order to aid my own organisation and understanding of participant data. Within this process, I started sketching interpretations from participant stories. For instance, if I noticed repetition of a particular word or repeated inference of an idea, I aimed to immerse myself in the data and reflexively think about my own views of the advertisements. I also used key concepts and findings from related studies in my literature review to consider the narrative themes and their location in socio-cultural contexts.

When exploring the narrative data, I approached the experiences of disabled women as 'stories', specifically aiming to understand how participants select certain events from their lives, personal experiences and describe their identities (Riessman, 2003). By sharing narratives about themselves, people actively organise their own memories and thoughts in order to create logical and meaningful stories (Cortazzi, 1993). Approaching the narratives of disabled women as carefully structured stories fits well with Ribbens and Edwards' (1998:13) call for feminist qualitative researchers to gather 'forms of self-representation, and to make visible a different, alternative, social and cultural order within which to define our identity and subjectivity'.

4.6   Ethics

Prior to undertaking my fieldwork, I completed an 'ethics application form' (see appendix F) and obtained ethical approval from the Faculty of Health and Medicine's ethics committee on 1st May 2015 (see appendix G). As part of my ethics application, I also submitted a research proposal containing a discussion of ethical considerations, with specific consideration of feminist disability studies values and aims in research.

A potential ethical issue I raised in my ethics application was my concern that some of the disabled women that reply to my 'call for participants' email may be known to me as we are part of the disability studies / feminist community in the UK. The potential issue outlined - that some participants may be individuals that I know or consider to be friends or colleagues - was understood as a manageable 'issue'. All participants contacted me in response to my recruitment email and expressed interest in my research study of their own will. Within the information sheet, consent form and introduction to the interview I stated that any interview dialogue would remain strictly in the confines of the formal interview setting – I would not ask questions or talk about any of our dialogue in everyday, informal settings following the interview. Participants were also made aware on the information sheet that I would be obligated to take appropriate action and potentially discuss any situations with my supervisor that were considered to place the participant or other individuals at risk.

4.7   Sample

My sample consists of fifteen disabled women, all of whom live in the United Kingdom and are aged above 18. I used a purposive sample approach, in accordance with three impairment categories: mobility impairment, visual impairment and mental health issues. Initially, I felt uncomfortable with the notion of impairment categories, I was anxious that I could be reinforcing the labelling and categorisation of disabled women that I strive to challenge. However, my rationale was supported through the participants

self-identifying with an impairment category and my belief that personal identity with impairment status is not something to be automatically obscured. On a more practical level, I required a straightforward and comprehensive way to reach out to potential participants who could identify with the impairments represented in my chosen advertisements. It is important to note that I sought to understand the individual and subjective experiences of a selection of disabled women. I did not wish to position the experiences of fifteen disabled women as 'representative' of a large and richly diverse community.

Below, I have included a very brief biography for each of my participants (pseudonyms used), in alphabetical order:

Alice: Alice is a woman in her twenties and she has recently completed a Master's degree. She currently lives in the midlands and dedicates time to volunteering for a charity organisation. Alice identifies as having visual impairment.

Annie: Annie is currently completing an undergraduate degree and is based in the midlands. She is in her twenties and identifies as having visual impairment.

Chris: Chris is in her fifties and works as a support worker. She lives in the North of England with her family. Chris identifies as experiencing mental health issues, particularly anxiety and depression. Chris completed an undergraduate degree a few years ago.

Fran: Fran is in her twenties and she is currently studying at postgraduate level, whilst working in the healthcare system. She is based in the midlands and identifies as having visual impairment.

Helen: Helen is currently studying at postgraduate level and is in her twenties. She is based in the North of England and identifies as having mobility impairment. Helen has direct experience of disability studies theory.

Isobel: Isobel is in her forties and lives in the North of England. She works in higher education and completed an undergraduate degree a few years ago. Isobel has direct experience of disability studies theory. She identifies as experiencing mental health issues, namely, depression.

Joanna: Joanna is in her fifties and is based in the South of England. She has studied at postgraduate level and has direct experience of disability studies. Joanna identifies as having mobility impairment.

J.K.: J.K. has undergraduate and Master's degrees. She is in her forties and she is based in England. J.K. identifies as having visual impairment.

Lily: Lily is currently studying at postgraduate level, in the North of England. She is in her twenties and has direct experience of disability studies theory. She identifies as having visual impairment.

Louise: Louise completed an undergraduate degree a few years ago and is currently setting up her own disability foundation. She is in her twenties and has direct experience of disability studies theory. She is based in the midlands.

Mary: Mary is currently completing a postgraduate degree and she is based in the North of England. Mary is in her twenties and has direct experience of disability studies theory. She identifies as experiencing mental health issues.

Mary-Jane: Mary-Jane is studying at postgraduate level and currently lives in the North of England with her children. She is in her fifties and identifies as having mobility impairment.

Penelope: Penelope has an undergraduate degree and is currently based in London. She is in her thirties and identifies as having mobility impairment.

Susanna: Susanna is in her fifties and lives in the North of England. She has completed an undergraduate degree and currently works in further education. Susanna identifies as experiencing mental health issues and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME).

4.8   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined my qualitative approach to analysing the representation of disabled women in Anglo-American advertising and potential impacts on the subjective wellbeing of women with impairments. I have described my epistemological approach to knowledge as subjective and socio-culturally influenced. Ontologically, I have outlined my perspective as critical-realist: I believe that bodily impairment exists independently of socio-cultural ideologies, however, I suggest that the types of knowledge produced surrounding impairment are always socially and culturally mediated.

A further key purpose of this chapter has been outlining my research design, specifically, phases one and two of my data analysis. I have also critically reviewed and justified my choice of research methods, namely, textual, critical and multi-modal discourse analyses within phase one. Further to this, in phase two, I have explained my use of semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis.

Finally, I have provided an outline of my participant sample and brief synopses for each participant. In the following chapter, I describe the data gathered within phase one of my data analysis.

5   Chapter Five: Phase One of my Data Analysis

5.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I present phase one of my data analysis: my own interpretation of nine
advertisements. Firstly, I analyse three ads representing women with mobility
impairment, followed by three ads containing women with mental health issues and,
finally, three ads representing women with visual impairment. I begin each individual
analysis by providing key background information for each ad. I then apply TA to
each ad, as explained in Chapter Four 'methodology', in doing so I am able to describe
the main features, overriding themes and events prevalent in each ad. Following this, I
apply critical discourse analysis to each ad containing text to uncover discourse
themes and to facilitate critically informed inquiry into the values and ideologies that
may be hidden behind written or spoken discourse. Finally, I apply multi modal
discourse analysis to each ad, highlighting sounds, colours, images, word font, size
and style – compiling the data into themes.

5.2   Three advertisements featuring women with mobility impairments

5.2.1   Kenneth Cole's (2009) print ad, US

Web link: https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/116601077824995223/

5.2.1.1   Background Information

Kenneth Cole, founded in the early 1980s, is a fashion company based in the US. The
company website dominantly features images of young adults who are conventionally
attractive and their clothing range is described as 'effortlessly stylish'
(kennethcole.com, n.d.). The company has previously received media coverage for
campaigns bearing social justice messages, for example, promoting acceptance of
same-sex marriage, women's rights and AIDS (Currid, 2007). The *Kenneth Cole* ad I

have chosen to focus on was produced as part of a campaign, 'We All Walk in Different Shoes'. Some of the other ads in the campaign featured a woman with a HIV+ tattoo and, in another, a man using a wheelchair.

Aimee Mullins is featured in my chosen ad, she is a well-known figure in the US and, to a smaller extent, in the UK. She is most famous for her career as a Paralympic athlete, actor and fashion model. Aimee Mullins is also known to have worn prosthetic legs since early childhood and has publically spoken about her identity as a disabled woman (aimeemullins.com, n.d.).

5.2.1.2 Textual Analysis

In the ad, Mullins wears a black knee-length skirt, black stilettos and a bright red tank top underneath a tightly fitted black jacket. Her hair is neatly tied back and it looks as though she is wearing make-up, including black eye shadow and red lipstick. The skin on Mullins' chest appears to glisten – it appears as though she is perspiring slightly. She wears black high-heeled shoes and one of her legs is slightly turned inwards. In my view, the makers of the ad are deliberately portraying Mullins' in a sexualised and glamorised way. I believe that the colour red is used as a visual code to signal passion. The tight-fitting clothes that she wears draw attention to her slim figure and her 'hand-on-hips' pose suggests that she is a confident and assertive person.

When viewing the ad, one of the first aspects I notice is reliance on normative beauty standards: Mullins is very conventionally attractive and the only visible 'sign' that she has bodily impairment are a pair of largely unnoticeable prosthetic legs. In fact, when discussing neoliberal tolerance of disability, Mitchell and Snyder (2015:44) use Aimee Mullins as an example of the 'able-disabled'. In using this term, Mitchell and Snyder

describe how only select disabled people – those who largely fall within normative aesthetic standards – are integrated into mainstream society and culture.

Mullins is positioned at the centre-left of the frame, with her legs apart from one another and her hands resting on her hips. She holds a dominant pose as her body takes up most of the frame's space. Her head is titled slightly upwards and her eyes look down towards the camera lens, giving the impression that Mullins' is addressing the audience as her inferiors. Her expression is quite serious and stern; she is not smiling and her eyes appear slightly narrowed. Mullins' seems to fit into the character of a boss or a similarly important role. I believe this aspect of the ad is progressive as a disabled woman is shown as powerful, thus challenging the cultural stereotype of passivity traditionally associated with disabled women.

The main tagline 'We All Walk In Different Shoes' is placed in the mid-section of the frame and is closely positioned to the right side of Mullins' torso. The tagline uses black capital letters and the font gives the impression of being handwritten. The makers of ads tend to use handwritten style fonts to convey a personal and 'human' message to audiences (Goddard, 2002:13). My view is that the font is designed to give the impression that Mullins has written the message – seemingly the tagline is one that she personally believes in. Smaller text below reads, 'Aimee Mullins, Paralympic athlete, actor, and president of the women's sports foundation'. At the bottom right of the frame there is another section of small text, 'kennethcole.com/25 years of non-uniform thinking'. The handwritten and informal style of font gives a relaxed and slightly rebellious impression. By not using a more traditional font, the makers of the ad are creating the impression that *Kenneth Cole* is not a company that follows conventions – this is further impacted by the phrase 'non-uniform thinking' positioned directly below the company website address.

Mullins has worn prosthetic legs since the age of two and has become well known for wearing carbon legs that resemble a cheetah's hind legs, at sporting events (Mullins, n.d.). Mullins has also led a TED talk focusing on her collection of twelve prosthetic legs, including a pair carved from wood that she describes as 'art' that 'invites people to look' and lessen any 'fear' they may have in relation to her disabled body (Mullins, 2009). I find her use of nude coloured legs in the ad interesting and significant: it seems to contradict her (2009) desire to invite people to stare at her legs. It may just be Mullins' preference to wear nude coloured legs in the ad, however, one of her legs is partially obscured at the point at which it joins her knee. This leads me to question if the makers of the ad are intending to make the audience 'double-take' and create the notion that Mullins is gradually disclosing her disability status. Disclosure is used to describe the way in which some ads obscure bodily impairment in order to ensure that normative aesthetics are not drastically challenged (Bolt, 2014).

5.2.1.3   Critical discourse analysis

Table 1

Walking as primary means of mobility	"walk"
	"shoes"
Subversion / Risk	"different"
	"non-uniform thinking"

The above table highlights two themes arising from the written text: 'walking as primary means of mobility' and 'subversion/risk'. The former theme extends my findings from application of TA, particularly, the use of nude coloured prosthetic legs. In my view, both themes contribute to support of normalcy in the ad. By assuming that

all individuals walk ('we all walk…') and using prosthetic legs that appear to be
deliberately unapparent, I would argue that the makers of the ad do not seem to be
challenging normative assumptions or aesthetics, despite their assertion of 'non-
uniform thinking'.

5.2.1.5 Multi modal discourse analysis

Table 2

Power	Direct stare
	Assertive pose – hands on hips and legs apart
	Smart suit
	Bold, capital font used
	Downwards camera shot – Aimee looks slightly down at the camera lens
	Aimee is the main focus – positioned in almost in the centre, main part of the scene (appears slightly more to the left)
	Text beside Aimee includes her accomplishments, including role as 'president of women's sports foundation'
Sexualisation / Glamour	Sleek, styled hair
	Red lipstick
	Tight fitting, sophisticated looking suit
	Bold red top
	High heels
	Jaunty head tilt
Disclosure	Red bold top directs audience attention to the middle, upper part of her body (distracts away from prosthetic limbs)
	Flesh coloured limbs
	Knee length skirt worn – meets the top of prosthetic limbs and partially obscures the top of one limb.
	Font is informal and appears to be hand-written – creates a personal atmosphere of disclosing information.

I find two themes highlighted in the above table progressive in relation to the
representation of disabled women, namely, 'power' and 'sexualisation/glamour'. In

my view, both themes contribute to a positive understanding of disabled women as powerful and desirable. However, I also recognise that the theme of 'sexualisation' can carry problematic messages in relation to the sexual objectification of women in advertising. Furthermore, it is important to note that Mullins' beauty aligns with normative beauty standards; therefore, little is done to introduce new understandings of beauty, i.e. the disabled body as beautiful. As I mentioned in my analysis of data uncovered by CDA, notions of normalcy are upheld in the ad, rather than challenged.

5.2.2   Nordstrom's (2014) print ad, US

Web link:

http://images.latintimes.com/sites/latintimes.com/files/styles/large/public/2014/07/18/j

illian-mercado.jpg

5.2.2.1   Background Information

Nordstrom is an American fashion retailer whose target audiences are predominantly

children, young men and women. The brand commonly uses popular celebrities in

their advertisements. Featured on the homepage of the brand's website in May 2017

are American actors Reese Witherspoon and Gywneth Paltrow (shop.nordstrom.com,

n.d.).

In the ad I have chosen to analyse, the model featured is Jillian Mercado, a fashion

blogger and writer based in America. Mercado has also modelled for fashion label

Diesel and has muscular dystrophy. On her website, Mercado describes herself as a

'model, creative, activist, Latina' (Mercado, n.d.).

5.2.2.2   Textual Analysis

Mercado is positioned within the right centre half of the frame and her figure takes up

just over half of the frame. The background shades are neutral shades of dark

white/grey. Nothing else is present in the background, meaning that attention is

immediately focused on Mercado. Her whole body is facing towards the right side of

the frame, however, her head is turned to face the camera lens. Half of Mercado's face

cannot be seen due to the angle of her head. Mercado is sitting upright and slightly

forward in her power-wheelchair. Her legs appear to be close together and one arm is

resting on the arm of her wheelchair. Only one side of her body can be seen. Light is

shone directly onto Mercado and a shadow is cast behind her – I perceive this technique as creating the idea that Mercado has depth to her character.

Mercado appears to be wearing little make-up, if any at all. Her hair is roughly styled, in a short pixie crop and it is coloured light purple. She appears to be half-smiling and her face looks calm. Her eyes are focused directly towards the camera lens. She is wearing a black leather jacket, black patterned skirt that falls below her knees and leather boots with a chunky, small heel. Mercado's power-wheelchair takes up almost half of the whole frame, however, on the right side, a small part is cut off the frame. The accessories she wears, such as the chunky black boots and black leather jacket are similar in appearance to her black and robust looking wheelchair. It is possible that the accessories Mercado wears are intended to appear as an extension from her wheelchair. My view is that such a technique could prove to be progressive – instead of portraying Mercado's wheelchair as a foreign, undesirable object, the makers of the ad are positioning the wheelchair as a key part of the overall style aesthetic.

My first impression upon viewing the ad is that Mercado does not follow mainstream fashion standards, instead, she has a punk/rock style. From her direct gaze into the camera lens, I gain the impression that Mercado is a confident and assertive woman. She is smiling slightly, appearing to be someone who is self-confident and assured. For these reasons, I suggest that the ad provides a progressive representation of a woman with mobility impairment. Mercado seems to be the type of person others may aspire to emulate. I warm towards this ad because Mercado and the wheelchair she uses are presented in a direct and largely unfiltered way. Both are not designed to appear as 'spectacle', rather, the image shown looks like a snapshot from everyday life.

5.2.2.3 Multi-modal discourse analysis

Table 3

Toughness	Thick leather jacket
	Power wheelchair has signs of rust and wear on wheels
	Chunky leather boots
	Self-assured gaze directly at camera lens
Rebellion	Dyed purple hair
	Leather clothes
	Facing side-ways instead of conforming to a conventional, forward facing position
Synthesis between Mercado and her wheelchair	Black leather jacket and boots are the same colour as the wheelchair
	Mercado is sitting on the wheelchair and holding one handle – she appears very connected with the wheelchair
Confidence	Direct stare towards the camera lens
	Open body position
	Mercado is slightly smiling

I interpret all themes highlighted through application of MMDA to the ad as positive. In my view, the themes culminate in the portrayal of Mercado as a woman who is comfortable with her body. She does not attempt to 'normalise' her aesthetic by conforming to typical beauty standards expected of women, e.g. soft femininity as opposed to toughness, or, those expected of disabled people, e.g. an obligation to 'pass' as non-disabled by concealing overt 'signs' of disability.

5.2.3 Channel Four's (2014) 'Prototype' television ad, UK

Web link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jA8inmHhx8c

5.2.3.1 Background Information

Channel Four's 'Prototype' ad, featuring Viktoria Modesta, was shown on UK (evening) television towards the end of 2014. *Channel Four* is a British television channel that holds a parliament set remit to produce media that appeals to a 'diverse' society (Channel Four, 2015). In recent years, *Channel Four* has undertaken a 'rebranding' process – a 'Born Risky' campaign was introduced as a result (Bovill and Allison, 2015). In order to advertise the 'Born Risky' campaign, Modesta's song 'Prototype' was featured as a TV ad. Frequently, the full ad would not be aired as it is just over six minutes in length. Instead, small segments of the ad would be shown during advertising breaks.

Director of the video, Saam Farahmand, highlights his aim for the ad to illustrate 'amputation as a poetic concept, rather than a medical procedure' (Alfaya, 2015). He also rejects his perception of the cultural stereotyping of disabled people as 'admirable' and 'wholesome', suggesting that such limiting views are regressive (Alfaya, 2015). On their website, *Channel Four* introduces Modesta as the 'world's first amputee pop-artist' and states, 'her physicality has become known for challenging the modern perception of altered beauty' (Channel Four, 2017). On Modesta's personal website, she defines herself as, 'an artist, a singer, a writer' and a 'bionic multimedia artist'. She also describes a personal interest in 'aesthetic eccentricity' and states not 'identifying with the disability tagline' (Modesta, 2015).

Modesta was born in the Soviet Union in 1987 and moved to London with family

during her childhood. She describes her prosthetic legs in positive terms, adding that

some prosthetic legs make her feel as though she has 'special powers' (Modesta,

2015). Modesta further describes her life as a 'fight' against 'categorisation' and

mentions she has 'never felt comfortable thinking of myself as disabled' (Modesta,

2015). For her, 'the time for boring ethical discussions about disability is over. It's

only through feelings of admiration, aspiration, curiousity and envy that we can move

forward' (Modesta, 2015). Modesta notably performed at the London 2012

Paralympics closing ceremony (also aired by *Channel Four*). She is also known for

modelling in fashion magazines, including *Vogue* and *Elle* and artistic performances at

fetish clubs (Modesta, 2015).

5.2.3.2 Textual Analysis

The first scenes of the ad are entirely black and the only noise that can be heard is that

of a steel, spiked prosthetic leg hitting the floor. White text is shown against the black

background: 'forget what you know about disability / *Channel Four* presents / a new

kind of pop artist'. The first glimpse of Modesta only features her legs and her black,

spiked prosthetic leg is the focus of the frame. The next scene features Modesta sitting

high up on a throne whilst people in red, hooded cloaks are kneeling close to her. One

person is holding a knife (with blood on the tip) and another is holding a large needle.

Her prosthetic leg is not visible during this scene. In my view, these scenes create a

sense of uneasiness and fear – the main purpose at this point appears to be building

audience suspense for the 'reveal' of the main event. I am concerned that the 'reveal'

will be connected to Modesta's disability status.

In the following scene, Modesta is portrayed as a cartoon character on a small black

and white television. A young girl watches Modesta's cartoon and tries to take a leg

from her doll. The girl's mother enters the room and is visibly distressed at this sight. Scenes then flash on the screen of Modesta's legs – she is walking on a wooden floor and her prosthetic leg is shining brightly and it is surrounded by moths. The artistic and eye-catching prosthetic legs Modesta wears work as a device to immediately attract the audience's attention. I largely react positively to her artistic prosthetic legs, in my view, they appear to be an artful and powerful expression of individual style. However, her elaborate prostheses remind me of Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of 'hyper-prostheticisation'; rather than portraying impairment as part of every-day life, it is made into a spectacle.

Alternate scenes of a school room appear in following scenes – a teacher appears to be concerned when she finds a young boy drawing a picture of cartoon Modesta. In my view, the makers of the ad are creating the idea that Modesta is some kind of revolutionary leader or activist and is either feared or admired by people.

Modesta wears tight-fitting outfits on multiple occasions –they appear to create an artistic, glamorous and alluring appeal. A couple of shots are composed entirely of Modesta's face; the downcast and deliberately slow moving of her eyes creates a more sensual response. During the middle section of the ad, Modesta is shown passionately kissing a male in bed, whilst she appears to be naked. A few seconds later, Modesta is shown sitting with another female on the end of the bed. They both appear naked and, interestingly, it is the first time that Modesta is shown without a prosthetic leg. When viewing this scene, I initially feel shocked as the content is quite provocative for a mainstream ad. However, upon reflection, I believe that the scene positively challenges the stereotypical assumption that disabled people are not sexually active or desirable.

Later scenes depict a male who is getting a tattoo of Modesta on his back. Later on, Modesta is shown as being arrested by guards and questioned. During the scenes where she is questioned, Modesta wears a crystal encrusted prosthetic leg and a small, white dress-suit. A guard chastises Modesta and condemns her for influencing society – it seems as though Modesta is a challenging presence to the dominant societal system. Whilst shouting at Modesta, the guard shows her a picture of herself. In the image, it appears as though she has just lost her leg – no prosthetic leg is in sight and a small pool of blood is evident below her amputated leg.

During the final few scenes, Modesta is shown wearing a black outfit, including a tutu and mask over her face. The prosthetic leg she wears is a black spike and her arms are held by strings – like a puppet. Modesta is shown dancing against a red background and, for the most part, the only noise is the black spike scraping against the floor. Again, the theme of suspense and fear from the first scenes remerges. I find this problematic when connected with the portrayal of disability, as it may support stigmatising stereotypes linked to disabled people.

5.2.3.3   Critical discourse analysis

Table 4

Risk	'some of us were born to take risks'
	'born risky'
Body as 'machine'	'I'm the prototype' x 4
	'another life, filled with parts'
	'circuit board'
	'I ain't another project'
	'assemble me, piece by piece'
	'strip away the incomplete'
	'model of the future'
Power	'We're playing God'
	'we're limitless, we're not confined'
	'our future'
	'I'm progressive'

	'I'm not restricted'
	'give me ammunition'
	'feel the sparks, we're making art'
	'freedom'
Danger/fear	'I got a full clip and a hot whip'
Sex / sexualisation / passion	'connecting hearts'
	'Provocatively'
Challenging 'norms' and stereotypes	'forget what you know about disability'
	'a new kind of pop artist'
	'I'm progressive, not aggressive'

Exploring my findings gathered by application of CDA, I interpret that the themes uncovered work together to create an overall narrative of provocation and riskiness. Whilst I have highlighted the theme of 'challenging 'norms' and stereotypes – a theme which I believe is very useful in terms of subverting traditional societal expectations of disabled women – I have also identified the theme of 'danger/fear', which I interpret as problematic. In my view, portraying a disabled woman as fearful carries the risk of upholding stigmatising links with disability and impairment. In my following analysis of data uncovered by application of MMDA, I explore a comparative theme of 'danger/fear'.

5.2.3.4 Multi modal discourse analysis

Table 5

Risk	Man is sat in a tattoo parlour. Another man stands is preparing to tattoo him 2.19
	Man receives tattoo whilst looking at a picture of cartoon Modesta 2.24
	Tattoo artist is drawing cartoon Modesta 2.28
	Cocktails are placed on both bedside cabinets 2.44
	Scene reverts back to man getting tattoo of cartoon Modesta on his back. A tattoo of Modesta's logo can also be seen on the tattooist's hand 4.26
	Young girl is watching Modesta cartoon. A woman, presumably her mother, comes into the room and quickly tries to shield her and stop her watching the cartoon. Cartoon Modesta winks. Mother looks very scared and holds young girl close 4.36
Body as 'machine'	Prosthetic leg lighting up (appears to contain bulbs) 1:11
	Modesta is standing in middle of frame whilst dancers in silver body-suits surround her – resembles a larger machine-like function 1:54
	Modesta wears prosthetic leg that is emanating light 2.08
	Modesta is wearing a steel, prosthetic leg that is encrusted with crystals 3.16
	She is in the trial room, facing the guards. She uses her steel leg to bounce a red laser onto the guards face 4.50
Power	Modesta sitting on throne, looking down towards camera lens 0:27 (lasts over ten seconds)
	People kneeling at Modesta's feet 0:27 (lasts for scene)
	Sky background – heaven? Hint that Modesta is god-like 0:27 scene
	Close up of Modesta's face – she is peering downwards towards camera lens 1:21
	Modesta is lying in the arms of a male, he is leaning down to kiss her. For the first time it seems that she is in a submissive position 2.39
	Men who appear to be guards drive up to a house in an expensive looking, black car. One guard looks suspiciously out of the window 2.56
	Modesta is walking in front of a couple of guards. She is wearing a black, round hat that gives a 'halo' effect. She looks powerful as she is in the centre of the screen and appears to be leading the guards in a confident manner. However, it could also be read that she is in a powerless decision as she is 'captured' by the guards 3.23

	Modesta is sitting down whilst guard is standing over her saying 'our system protects the people, but they believe in this, they believe in a symbol, look, they believe in you Viktoria… how do you plead?' (shows paper with her logo on, a picture of a crowd holding a poster with her logo and a man holding a knife who appears to have severed his leg – he is also doing the peace sign). She looks up at guard and slightly smiles 3.55
	Scene reverts to school boy drawing Modesta's logo. Teacher stands over his desk and grabs his pen 4.21
	Echo sound of spiked leg on floor 0:10
	Spike hitting floor 0:13
	Needle on right side of frame, close to Modesta's face 0:27
	Meat cleaver/knife held by person in red cloak on left side of Modesta 0:40
	Cartoon Modesta kicks monster with spiked leg 1:34
	Young girl uses doll with one leg to stamp on another toy whilst watching Modesta cartoon 1:36
	Modesta is in the centre of the frame, surrounded by dancers in silver costumes. Background is almost in complete darkness apart from a small light 1:54
Danger / fear	Scene quickly switches to cartoon – Modesta forcefully kicks monster with her spike shaped leg 1.58
	Young girl watching cartoon Modesta now kicks in the direction of the TV screen 2.04
	Scene quickly switches to cartoon Modesta kicking monster again 2.06
	Young girl watching Modesta cartoon continues to kick in the direction of the TV screen – copying Modesta's behaviour?
	Modesta walks downstairs and there are a few guards in the house. One is roughly shaking the man who she was kissing in previous scenes 3.04
	Modesta is sitting on a black chair in a dark, empty room. She is wearing a white, short costume and a crystal encrusted prosthetic leg. Her body faces the camera, yet her head is turned towards the bottom right of the screen 3.46
	Scene is shot from behind Modesta. She is sitting on a chair, directly facing a guard who says 'our system protects the people'. A row of people (trial) sit in front of her. A red laser triangle can be seen (Modesta is pictured at the top of the triangle) and a laser line separates her from the row of people behind the table. Laser looks like Modesta's logo. 3.50
	After the screen is completely black for a couple of seconds, we see a white screen with Modesta's legs at the centre. She is wearing her black, spiked prosthetic leg and a black high heel. The noise of her spiked leg on the tiled floor is quite eerie 4.59

Danger / fear (Continuing)	We then see Modesta's face, it is largely covered in an unusual and perhaps intimidating black mask 5.10	
	Modesta's black spiked leg hits the floor and cracks it 5.31	
	Screen has a red filter. Modesta jumps in the air (supported by strings) and she wears a black tutu. Her eyes and face are covered by a black mask. She spins around and scrapes her spiked leg on the floor – it sounds like a knife being sharpened. The effect is quite shocking, possibly scary 5.32	
Sex / Sexualisation / passion	Three people wearing red cloaks 0:27	
	Modesta as cartoon (coquettish glance to camera and dressed in small, revealing costume) 0:57	
	Cartoon Modesta shown walking down street, winking to camera whilst an older man is peering around the corner at her in a hidden way 1:19	
	Modesta is wearing a top that almost appears transparent and short, silver hotpants with high heels 1:52	
	Scene begins by showing Modesta (from shoulders up) lying on a black, silk sheet. She appears not to be wearing a top. Her hair is loosely spread around her for the first time 2.16	
	Modesta is lying down on a bed – she appears to be naked. She is passionately kissing a man with very light blonde hair. His arm is covering her breasts 2.39	
	Modesta is sitting on the end of a bed with another woman behind her. Both appear naked and seem to be caressing. A man (who she was kissing earlier) is standing in the background, behind the bed and he appears to be watching them as he gets dressed. A picture of cartoon Modesta is in the background. The background is composed of mostly dark colours, however, two light stands are at either side of the bed 2.44	
	Modesta crosses legs whilst wearing a short, white skirt. Resembles the 'Basic Instinct' scene. Her knees are the main focus of the screen, the camera lens is zoomed in. Modesta is wearing her prosthetic leg encrusted with crystals. She is in the dark room on trial 4.44	
	Modesta is wearing a revealing, skin-coloured costume 5.25	
	Screen has a red filter whilst Modesta is dancing in a slow manner 5.51	
Challenging 'norms' and stereotypes	Prosthetic leg clearly visible and extraordinary as it is lit 1:11	
	Young girl rips leg off doll as she is watching cartoon Modesta 1:26	
	Scene takes place in a school room, strict uniforms and sitting behind desks (idea of conformity) 1:42	
	Modesta's lit leg is now shown in centre of screen, whilst she is walking. Leg is now surrounded by moths 1:49	
	Modesta is wearing prosthetic leg that is lit up 2.08	
	For the first time Modesta is shown without any prosthetic legs. She is positioned in the centre of the screen. Also, a woman with light blonde hair is sitting behind hair, seemingly stroking her back. It is not clear whether or not the other woman has the lower	

	part of her legs as she is possibly kneeling. Both appear naked 2.44
Challenging 'norms' and stereotypes (continued)	Modesta is wearing a crystal-encrusted leg with black high heels. Only her leg can be seen at the centre of her screen – no other parts of her body are visible. She appears to be entering a car and the door is held open by a guard (only his boots are visible) 3.16
	Black screen with white, capital lettered writing 'some of us were born to be different', next screen shot, 'some of us were born to take risks' 6.01 and 6.02
	'Born risky' flashes with red laser triangle in the background 6.06

The above table highlights data uncovered by application of MMDA: the themes are very close to those uncovered in my previous table, relating to data uncovered by application of CDA. Particularly, I have uncovered a substantial amount of visual and audio aspects signifying 'danger/fear'. As I discuss in my TA and CDA sections, I am concerned by this theme, due to its potential for consolidating dominant societal uneasiness surrounding bodily impairment.

I also uncover themes contributing to portrayal of Modesta's body as 'extraordinary', to use Garland Thomson's (1996) term. I highlight the theme of 'body as machine', arising from the use of Modesta's elaborate prosthetic legs, for example, one of which appears to be stainless steel and has a spiked end. As highlighted through my application of TA to the ad, Modesta appears to take the role of a leader and someone who challenges the dominant social order, in the ad. Therefore, it appears logical, to an extent, that she would be shown as an 'extraordinary' person.

5.3   Advertisements representing women with mental health issues:

5.3.1   Mind and Rethink's (2009) 'Time to Change' ad, UK

Web link:

http://c0248141.cdn.cloudfiles.rackspacecloud.com/MILC_16020_34455278A.JPG

5.3.1.1   Background Information

Mind is a charity aimed towards people with mental health issues, in the UK and

Wales. It was set-up in the mid-90s and aims to raise social awareness of mental

health issues and provide supportive information for people with mental health issues

(Mind, n.d.). In 2009, *Mind* launched a 'Time to Change' campaign, together with

Rethink Mental Illness. Based in the UK, *Rethink* was created in the late-90s by family

members of people who experienced mental health issues (Rethink, n.d.).

The 'Time to Change' campaign seeks to reduce a lack of public awareness and

stigma surrounding mental health issues in the UK (Time to Change, n.d.). A key

strategy used in the campaign was an 'anti-stigma' pledge designed for individuals,

companies, organisations and politicians to sign up to (Time to Change, n.d.). The

campaign also used television and print (newspaper, magazine) advertising, featuring

a variety of UK celebrities and public figures.

5.3.1.2   Textual Analysis

The ad consists of an image of Trisha Goddard's face, comprising the top-left quarter

of the frame, next to the key phrase, 'There are no 'Get Well Soon' cards with mental

illness' and smaller writing in the bottom-left of the page which details Trisha's

experience of depression. The text reads:

'Trisha has personal experience of mental illness, even spending some time as an in-patient at a psychiatric hospital. And compared to when she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008, Trisha believes that her mental illness was more difficult to deal with.

"Both experiences were horrible. But with breast cancer, people ran towards me with open arms and hugged me. With depression, people ran away."

Comparing the two experiences, Trisha sees clear evidence of how people behave differently to those with mental health: "When I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I was inundated with 'Get Well Soon' cards. When news leaked out that I was in a psychiatric hospital following a breakdown, not a peep. And certainly no cards."

According to Trisha, part of the problem is that people are more comfortable talking about physical health than mental illness. "With breast cancer, people talk about it and wear pink ribbons; people are open about it."

As Trisha knows only too well, the reactions of other people can make recovery from mental illness even more difficult, quite often without realising it. "When I tried to talk to people about my depression, they made me feel embarrassed and ashamed. They wouldn't look me in the eye. And that made me feel guilty."

One in four of us will have some sort of mental health problem, so Trisha's keen to see an end to this intolerance. "In time, I really hope attitudes can change."'

The ad has a white background and logos for *Mind* and *Rethink* are at the bottom of the frame. There are also logos for the campaign's funding bodies, *Lotto* and *Comic Relief.*

Through applying TA to the ad, I interpret a strong emphasis on personalization and

intimacy in the ad. The image of Goddard shows her resting her chin in one hand, evoking a feeling of personal communication and disclosure. Additionally, I perceive the function of italicized text here as creating the impression of handwriting. The text also includes direct quotes from Trisha and makes frequent and explicit reference to her personal experiences. From a feminist disability studies perspective, intimate and personal representations and narratives of mental health issues are complex and interesting. From a disability studies perspective, such a representation could be viewed as problematic, insofar as mental health issues are located in the individual sphere, as opposed to dominant focus on socio-cultural contexts. However, from a feminist perspective, direct recognition of personal experiences and distress in relation to mental health issues could be recognized as productively acknowledging the value of embodied experience and raising social awareness of personal experiences as a key element in public debates surrounding mental health.

In my view, the personal overtones in the ad relating to mental health issues are both useful and limiting. I suggest that the representation is useful in the sense of raising social awareness of the prevalence of mental health issues. As Goddard is a well-known figure in the UK, I believe it may support some individuals in recognizing that mental health issues are a commonality, as opposed to the exception. However, I also find certain elements of the ad's representation of mental health issues to be problematic. Most notably, the entire focus on Goddard's personal experience relates to distressing situations, for example, spending time as an 'in-patient' in a psychiatric hospital and referring to mental health issues as more difficult than experiencing breast cancer. Whilst the prior information may be true in Goddard's case, my argument is that such a portrayal only works to highlight mental health issues as inherently problematic, distressing and akin to illness.

5.3.1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Table 6

Pathologisation of mental health issues	'There are no "get well soon" cards with mental illness' (main slogan)
	Mental illness x 4
	'in-patient at psychiatric hospital'
	'compared to when she was diagnosed with breast cancer'
	'mental illness more difficult to deal with'
	'I was in a psychiatric hospital following a breakdown'
	'one in four of us will have some sort of mental health problem'
Family / friends reactions and support	'with breast cancer, people ran towards me with open arms and hugged me. With depression, people ran away'
	'people behave differently to those with mental health'
	'When news leaked that I was in a psychiatric hospital following a breakdown, not a peep. And certainly no cards'
	'people are more comfortable talking about physical health than mental illness'
	'the reactions of people of other people can make recovery from mental illness even more difficult'
	'when I tried to talk to people about my depression, they made me feel embarrassed and ashamed. They wouldn't look me in the eye'
	"I really hope attitudes can change'
Attitudes	'with depression, people ran away'
	'people behave differently to those with mental health'
	'people are more comfortable talking about physical health than mental illness'
	'with breast cancer… people are open about it'
	'they made me feel embarrassed and ashamed'
	'In time, I really hope attitudes can change'
	'end to this intolerance'
	'pledge to end mental health prejudice'
	'time to change, let's end mental health discrimination'
Recovery	'Get well soon' x 2
	'recovery from mental illness'
Mental health as 'experience'	'Trisha has personal experience of mental illness'
	'both experiences [breast cancer and depression] are horrible'
	'comparing these two experiences [breast cancer and depression]'

Through application of CDA, I have uncovered a variety of key themes, two of which

I find particularly problematic: 'pathologisation of mental health issues' and 'recovery'. Both themes are underpinned by a medical model approach to mental health issues, namely, sustaining the assumption that individuals automatically need to recover and be cured of mental health issues. Furthermore, through pathologising mental health issues, for example, recurrent use of the term 'mental health problem' and describing mental distress as 'breakdown', the makers of the ad further support a medicalising approach. Interestingly, I also highlight the theme of 'mental health as experience' in the above table. Thus, the medicalization of mental health issues in the ad is mitigated, to some extent. Use of the word 'experience' suggests a more inclusive understanding of mental health issues as a natural part of human life.

5.3.1.4 Multi-modal discourse analysis

Table 7

Personal / intimate	Close up image of Trisha's face at the top-left of frame
	In the picture, Trisha has a relaxed pose and rests her head on one hand. Her eyes are wide open and stare directly at the camera lens, gives an 'open' and 'honest' impression
	Italicised text used for Trisha's story. Gives a sense that it is hand-written
Simplicity	Aside from Trisha's picture and the small logos at the bottom of the frame, only black (text) and white (background) used
	The main tagline, "There are no 'Get Well Soon' cards with mental illness", is in bold, black writing in a basic font. It is separated, by a black line, from the image and small text and appears on a white background.
Beauty	In the image, it appears as though Trisha is wearing makeup and her hair is neatly styled. Her nails also appear manicured
	Italicized text creates an elegant, graceful impression

The above table highlights themes uncovered through application of MMDA. Through use of MMDA, I am able to further evidence and extend findings from my application of TA, specifically, the theme of personalisation and intimacy. Another interesting

theme highlighted in the above table is 'beauty'. This theme leads me to consider

Mitchell and Snyder's (2015:12) concept of the 'able-disabled': Goddard is pictured in

a simplistic and serene manner, and she is beautifully made-up. Thus, I believe that a

very palatable and polished image is given, that is not reflective of a wide range of

women who identify as disabled and/or experiencing mental health issues.

5.3.2 *SAMHSA's (2006) print ad, US*

Web link:

http://payload51.cargocollective.com/1/5/162883/3328238/AC_MentalHealth_Female_Final_905.jpg

5.3.2.1 Background information

SAMHSA is an abbreviation for 'substance abuse and mental health services administration'. *SAMHSA* was established by the US Department of Health and Human Services in 1992 and supports American citizens with mental health and/or substance abuse issues. Beginning in 2006, *SAMHSA* joined the *Advertising Council* (a non-profit agency that facilitates public service media campaigns) to launch a campaign aimed at raising awareness of mental health in American Indian communities (SAMHSA, n.d.).

5.3.2.2 Textual Analysis

The only character, a woman wearing a black top, light blue trousers and a turquoise necklace, is positioned at the centre-left of the frame. She is smiling and her head is titled to the right, next to a silhouette that takes the shape of another person. The silhouette is comprised of small, black text that appears to describe their friendship and the friend's offer of support in relation to the woman's mental health issues. The background is filled with a clear blue sky and there is a glimpse of green treetops behind the woman. At the bottom-left of the frame, there is a white box that includes blue logos and writing relating to *SAMHSA*, the *Advertising Council* and the campaign website, accompanied by the phrase: 'to learn how you can help support a friend'.

My immediate response to the ad is positive, due to the confident and happy appearance of the woman featured. In my view, representing an individual who

experiences mental health issues in a positive light, challenges the traditional stereotyping of mental health issues as unequivocally distressing.

However, when reading the accompanying text, I am less enthusiastic in regards to the ad's portrayal of mental health issues. In particular, the ad's use of the term 'mental health problem' automatically infers that mental health issues are something to be 'fixed' or 'cured', as opposed to part of the rich variety of human experience. Furthermore, the ending sentence: 'we will recover together' exacerbates the notion of mental health issues as an inherently problematic force in an individual's life.

5.3.2.3 Critical discourse analysis

Table 8

Friendship / togetherness	We × 9
	Our × 2
	Together × 3
	Both
	'Never apart'
	Everyone
	'Best friends'
	Roommates
	'My support'
	'how you can help support a friend'
Recovery	'your recovery'
	'recover together'
Accomplishments	'ride our bikes'
	'speak our language'
	'when we decided to go to school'
	'we were going to be roommates'
	'landed that first job after all your hard work'
	'help the youth on the reservation'
Mental health	'mental health problem'
	depression
	anxiety
	'mental health problems'
Emphasis on 'I' / individual	'I was the first to say'
	"I said, "let's do it together""
	'Now I know'
	'I didn't really understand'
	'I am here for you'

	'I will be here for you'

Application of CDA uncovers a mixture of positive and problematic themes. Particularly, I find the themes of 'friendship and togetherness' and 'accomplishments' helpful in creating a more inclusive and progressive approach to mental health issues. However, I am troubled by the ad's dependency on describing mental health issues as 'problems' and the theme of 'recovery' that is present in the ad. Interestingly, the mix between positive and problematic themes is also prevalent in my findings uncovered by MMDA, shown in the below table.

5.3.2.4 Multi-modal discourse analysis

Table 9

Blue	Background is clear blue sky
	Female character is wearing turquoise necklace
	She appears to be wearing very light blue trousers
	Blue text in the box positioned at the bottom-right of the frame
Black	She is wearing a black top
	Black writing in the middle-right of the frame (in the silhouette of a friend)
Friendship / happiness	Silhouette of a person in the centre-right of frame. Female character is leaning into this silhouette and smiling – suggesting friendship?
	Female has a happy and relaxed expression on her face, her arms are apart suggesting an openness.

The above table highlights three themes uncovered by application of MMDA to the ad: 'blue', 'black' and 'friendship/happiness'. Critically evaluating the themes, I would describe 'blue' and 'friendship/happiness' as creating a positive and warm narrative – both working together to sustain a promising and cheerful impression.

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However, the use of the colour black in the ad could be interpreted as a visual cue for the presence of darkness in the ad's narrative. It is interesting that the maker's of the ad choose to feature a black shadow (in the shape of the woman's friend) and feature the women as wearing a black top in otherwise brightly coloured scene. This leads me to consider whether the use of black is used as a symbolic link to mental health issues. It is worrying if this is the case, due to the reliance on traditional stereotyping of mental health issues as automatically substituting a 'dark' part of an individual's life.

5.3.3 *Wellbutrin XL's (2013) print ad, US*

Link: http://imgur.com/dztVLDB

5.3.3.1 Background Information

Wellbutrin XL is the market name for 'bupropion hydrochloride extended-release tablets'. *Wellbutrin XL* is a pharmaceutical drug that can be purchased over the counter throughout the US (FDA, 2016). *Wellbutrin XL* is dominantly targeted towards people with mental health issues, for instance, depression.

5.3.3.2 Textual Analysis

This ad shows a woman, towards the left of the frame, wearing a pink blouse and smiling broadly. She appears to be standing in front of a beach scene. On the right side of the woman is a box containing the logo of *Wellbutrin XL.* The tagline is positioned at the top right of the screen, 'I'm ready to experience life. Wellbutrin XL works for my depression with a low risk of weight gain and sexual side effects'. Below this, in small print, is the phrase 'your results may vary'.

My attention is first directed towards the image of a woman occupying the left of the frame - she appears happy and content. However, my focus is quickly detracted as I turn to read the ad's tagline 'I'm ready to experience life' – positioned close to the woman's head. Reading the smaller text underneath the tagline, it becomes clear that the woman believes she is ready to experience life after taking medication – *Wellbutrin XL* – for depression. From a disability studies perspective, I find the inference that without taking medication, an individual would be unable to experience life very problematic. Such a suggestion works upon the misnomer that living with mental health issues does not qualify as life experience. Whilst I recognise that the ad is produced by a pharmaceutical company and is purposefully aiming to positively

market medication, I believe that the equation between medication and improved life experience is assumptive.

5.3.3.3   Critical discourse analysis

Table 10

Recovery	'I'm ready to experience life'
Gendered expectations	'low risk of weight gain and sexual side effects'
Medical	'once-daily, Wellbutrin XL, bupropion hydrochloride extended-release tablets, 150mg, 300mg'

Through application of CDA, I have further expanded on my discussion of the medicalised approach taken to mental health issues in the ad, as uncovered through my application of TA. As the ad is produced by a pharmaceutical company, I realise that a medicalised nature is to be expected, to some extent. However, from a disability studies approach, it is noteworthy that depression takes the form of a metanarrative (Bolt, 2012) in the ad. Depression is positioned as the over encompassing reason as to why the woman featured believes as though she was previously unable to 'experience life'.

5.3.3.4   Multi-modal discourse analysis

Table 11

Personal	Italicised text [top right of frame]
	Woman's head is tilted to the right side
	Welcoming smile
Calm / tranquil	Beach background – blue, still water, yellow sand, green and lush trees.
	Woman's expression appears calm and happy – broad smile, eyes slightly narrowed and she is looking directly at camera lens
	Light, pastel colours are used: woman is wearing a light pink shirt, white top, she has light blonder hair, medium blue

	writing, yellow detailing on *Wellbutrin XL* logo box at the centre of the frame
	Around *Wellbutrin XL* logo is a simple crescent shape and small triangles – made to look like a sun
Beauty norms	The female character is, arguably, conventionally attractive. Her blonde hair is neatly tied back, she is wearing neat clothes and a delicate gold necklace.
Medical dominance	*Wellbutrin XL* logo positioned in the centre of the frame.

The above table shows four themes, uncovered by application of MMDA. The first theme, 'personal', describes the closeness simulated by the makers of the ad, between the woman featured and the audience. The makers of the ad could be trying to encourage viewers of the ad to perceive themselves in the woman's position. A theme of tranquillity is also prevalent due to the light colours used in the ad and the background of a beach. This theme is arguably more troubling as it underpins the idea that the woman featured is able to enjoy life and experience the beauty of life now that she has 'recovered' from depression, after taking medication. This point is also identified in my discussion of findings from application of TA and CDA.

5.4   Ads portraying Women with Visual Impairment:

5.4.1   The Guide Dog's Association (2015) 'Emma and Jazz' television ad, UK

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW8PbN1djso

5.4.1.1   Background Information

The Guide Dog's Association is a charity based in the UK that aims to provide guide dogs for people who have visual impairment. The charity does not receive government funding and campaigns through multiple media channels, including, newspapers, television advertising and their official website. The charity also provides training for organisations, with a focus on promoting access for people with visual impairment in public spaces (*The Guide Dog's Association*, n.d.).

5.4.1.2   Textual Analysis

The voice of a young boy narrates the ad - he appears to be the son of Emma, the woman who has visual impairment. A light, cheerful tune plays in the background. The beginning scene is a close-up shot of a young, Labrador puppy. The narrator says, 'this is Jazz the puppy, see Jazz run'. The puppy runs towards the right side of the frame. A small blue logo for *The Guide Dog's Association* can be seen at the top and bottom of the frame, on the right side. The narrator says, 'she's [Jazz] always running about, except when she's sleeping, sssh'. When viewing this part of the ad, my focus is directed to Jazz and I respond warmly to images of a puppy sleeping and playing.

The next scene shows Jazz, as a puppy, sleeping in a yellow basket. She then sits on a red carpet when the young boy narrating (who is not shown on the screen) instructs her to. He then exclaims, 'watch Jazz learn, "sit Jazz", isn't she clever? She's not like other puppies, she's special. This is Jazz, mum's [Emma] guide dog'. Jazz as an adult dog then appears on the screen, sitting down. The next scene shows Jazz, the young

boy, his brother and their mother walking to school. The narrator says, 'see Jazz and mum walk to school. That wasn't very easy for mum before – her eyes don't work properly'. At this point I begin to feel uneasy when viewing the ad – in my view the makers of the ad are suggesting that Emma is reliant on Jazz. Such a portrayal could be interpreted as positioning Emma as 'dependent' on Jazz, as opposed to being assisted by Jazz. The camera lens is positioned behind a set of colourful railings at first and then it moves to behind the family, as if they are unaware of being filmed. The narrator says, 'look at Jazz and mum take us to the park, we go to lots and lots of places together now'.

The next scene depicts Emma, who is the boys' mother, choosing fruit in a grocery store. She is also filmed from a distance and does not look directly at the camera lens or seem aware that she is being filmed. The boy who is narrating says, 'Jazz and mum go shopping, mum couldn't do that on her own'.

The following scene shows the boys running in front of their mother and Jazz. Again, the camera is positioned behind an object and is far away from the family, the filming seems to be incognito. For the first time, a blue banner appears at the bottom of the screen and bears the writing, 'Sponsor a puppy for just £1 a week', below is the contact details and at the side there is a couple of images of a guide dog toy and booklet. The young boy narrating says, 'see Jazz help mum be mum'. Again, I respond uneasily to the suggestion that Emma could not be a mother without the assistance of Jazz. Instead of working with a narrative of interdependence – how all characters in the ad are reliant on each other in one way or another. I believe that the ad solely focuses on Emma as dependent, due to her identity as visually impaired.

Next, a close-up shot of Emma and Jazz together is shown. Emma looks happy as a female voice (presumably Emma) says, 'every hour someone in the UK goes blind, for just one pound a week, you can sponsor a puppy like Jazz and help a life like mine'. Details about how to contact and donate money to the charity are then given whilst on the screen Jazz can be seen besides a guide dog puppy. The camera then focuses directly on the young puppy's face and this dominates the frame. The woman narrating then comments that people donating money will receive 'pictures and a free cuddly toy' and the young boy adds, 'and you see your puppy grow up to help someone like my mum'.

5.4.1.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Table 12

Maternalistic	'see Jazz help mum be mum'
	'my mum' × 2
Emma 'dependent' on Jazz	Jazz as 'special'
	Jazz as 'clever'
	'See Jazz and mum walk to school. That wasn't very easy for mum before'
	'we got lots and lots of places together now [because of Jazz's assistance]
	'Jazz and mum go shopping, mum couldn't do that on her own'
	'see Jazz help mum be mum'
	'sponsor a puppy like Jazz and help a life like mine'
	'see your puppy grow up to help someone like my mum'
Audience as 'helping' through donating	'Sponsor a puppy'
	'sponsor a puppy like Jazz and help a life like mine'
	'[if you donate] see your puppy grow up to help someone like my mum'
Cuteness	puppy
	'except when she's [the puppy, Jazz] sleeping, ssh!'
	'isn't she [Jazz] clever?'
	'she's [Jazz] special'
Ocularcentrism	'her [Emma's] eyes don't work properly'
	'every hour someone in the UK goes blind'
	'life like mine [having visual impairment]'
	'someone like my mum [who has visual impairment]'

The above table highlights themes gathered via application of CDA to the ad. The

language used in the ad creates an impression that Emma is reliant on her guide dog,

Jazz, and, in turn, the audience's donations in order to fully live her life. Terms, such

as, 'see Jazz help mum be mum' and 'help a life like mine', contribute to the idea that

without the intervention of others, Emma is incapable of leading a functional life.

Mitchell and Snyder's (2000) concept of 'narrative prosthesis' is relevant here: instead

of being portrayed as a person in her own right, Emma's character is used as a means

of showing how useful guide-dog's are, and, how the audience can show benevolence

by donating to a charitable cause.

5.4.1.4   Multi-modal Discourse Analysis

Table 13

Cuteness	Jazz as a puppy (first scene)
	Young boy as narrator
	Light, cheerful, (sentimental?) background music
	Emma and her young boys hugging and petting Jazz – table and sofa in the background suggests a homely, family scenario (0.44)
	Jazz (as an older dog) sits on right side of the frame. Young guide-dog puppy walks over to Jazz whilst wagging tail (0.47)
	Blue banner at the bottom of frame (containing donation details) contains picture of a soft, cuddly guide dog toy
	Camera focuses in on young guide dog puppy who cocks head to one side (0.52)
Jazz as most important figure	First 18 seconds of ad only shows and discusses Jazz. White background and close up shots of Jazz used to maximise focus.
	When Emma and her two sons are sitting together, Jazz is the central figure who everyone is focused on and playing with (0.40)
	Last 12 seconds of ad is also focused on Jazz – white background encourages viewer to pay attention to Jazz. Emma and boys are not included.
Brightness/happiness	Jazz running (0.3)
	Emma, Jazz and sons walking to school – cheerfully interacting. Camera is positioned behind multi-coloured railings. Boys wearing bright red and blue coats. Image is very clear and colours well-defined (0.20)
	Emma in a grocery store, surrounded by brightly coloured, fresh fruit (0.27)

	Family at park, brightly coloured gate and swings. Boys running towards play park excitedly whilst Emma and Jazz follow (0.30)
	Boys on swings and broadly smiling, sun rays visible on frame (0.33)
	Camera behind Emma's head, her face is turned slightly towards the left. She begins to smile (0.35)
	Emma and Jazz close together. Jazz is affectionately licking Emma's face. Emma looks happy. Sun shining behind them, rays are visible between them (0.39)
	Emma and boys are playing with Jazz. They are all smiling. Boys are wearing bright red and blue t-shirts (same colours as previous coats) and the sofa in the background is bright blue with yellow cushions. A table in the left hand side of the background is painted bright yellow with a blue photo-frame (0.43)
	Small guide-dog puppy happily wags tail when approaching Jazz. White background means that viewer attention is instantly drawn to the two dogs (0.50)

The data collected via application of MMDA further extends the discussion of my data collected via TA and CDA. Significantly, the theme 'Jazz as the most important character' further evidences my discussion of Emma's character as a 'narrative prosthesis', serving to bolster the importance of Jazz and the audience as benevolent donators to the charitable cause. I also uncover themes of 'cuteness' and 'brightness/happiness'. Whilst I believe the bright and happy tone of the ad is useful insofar as challenging pitying stereotypes towards disabled people, that are usually supported in charity ads, I find the 'cuteness' theme patronising when linked to an adult woman.

5.4.2 *Vanda Pharmaceuticals (2014) 'Non-24' television ad, US*

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MOygIWPTitY

5.4.2.1 Background Information

Vanda Pharmaceuticals is a US company, founded in 2003, that focuses on creating and selling pharmaceutical drugs for people who have central nervous system disorders. In 2014, *Vanda Pharmaceuticals* started airing an ad on US television, for their medication (*Tasimelteon*) targeted towards people with visual impairment who experience 'non-24-hour disorder'. *Vanda Pharmaceuticals* describe 'non-24' as a disorder often experienced by 'blind individuals' who do not perceive light and experience a disrupted 'circadian system'. In other words, a disrupted sleeping pattern, e.g. sleeping in the day rather than in the night (*Vanda Pharmaceuticals*, n.d.).

5.4.2.2 Textual Analysis

This ad lasts for one minute. During the first scene, the camera lens is positioned at the bottom of a flight of stairs whilst a woman carrying a washing basket walks down, holding onto the rail. Two seconds into the ad, a female narrator (presumably the woman shown on screen) says, 'I am totally blind'. She goes on to say, 'I began losing my sight to an eye disease when I was ten'. The next scene shows her loading a washing machine with clothes, whilst the narrator says, 'but I learnt to live with my blindness a long time ago, so I don't let my blindness get in the way of doing the things I love, but sometimes it feels like my body doesn't know the difference between day and night'. Viewing this ad, my first response is uneasiness due to the focus on the female character carrying out household chores. From a feminist perspective, such a portrayal does little to challenge the traditional stereotype of household chores as 'women's work'. Also, it is problematically assumed that blindness *would* interfere with an individual's everyday capabilities.

Next, the woman is shown walking towards a garden door to let her dog in. Whilst she is walking through a bedroom and living-room, the narrator says, 'I struggle to sleep at night and stay awake during the day. I found out this is called 'non-24', a circadian rhythm disorder that affects up to seventy percent of people who are totally blind'. Whilst she is speaking, 'non-24, a circadian rhythm disorder' appears on the screen in large, blue and green writing. Following this, a male narrator says, 'learn about the link between 'non-24' and blindness', then he gives a contact number that also appears on the screen alongside a website address. Whilst he is speaking, the woman is shown opening the front door of her house to greet her young daughter who is stepping off a school bus. The woman smiles broadly and kneels to hug her daughter. In my view, she is shown as leading a happy and fulfilled life – positively challenging the traditional equation of visual impairment as a 'loss'. The neighbourhood she lives in appears quiet and well presented. The ad ends whilst the female narrator says, 'don't let 'non-24 get in the way of your pursuit of happiness' – referencing a well-known phrase used in the US Declaration of Independence (1776). The last scene is a white background with the logo '*Vanda Pharmaceuticals Inc*.' in large, blue and green letters.

5.4.2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Table 14

Blindess – most dominant characteristic	'I am totally blind'
	'I learnt to live with my blindness a long time ago'
	'I don't let my blindness get in the way of doing the things I love'
	'don't let non-24 get in the way of your pursuit of happiness'
Visual impairment as 'deficit'	'I began losing my sight to an eye disease when I was ten'
	'I don't let my blindness get in the way of doing the things I love, but sometimes it feels as though my body doesn't know the difference between day and night'
	'struggle'
	'eye disease'

| Medical pathologisation of visual impairment | [on difficulty of staying awake in the day and sleeping at night] 'I found out this is called non-24, a circadian rhythm disorder… affects people who are totally blind' |
| | [spoken by male narrator] 'link between non-24 and blindness |

Through application of CDA, I have uncovered three problematic discourse themes in the ad: blindness as most dominant characteristic, a deficit approach to visual impairment and medical pathologisation of visual impairment. These themes extend the data uncovered via TA, particularly in regards to my perception that the makers of the ad assume that identifying as blind would interfere with an individual's everyday capabilities. Overall, the discourse used in the ad creates the impression that visual impairment signals automatic deficit in an individual's life.

5.4.2.4 Multi-modal Discourse Analysis

Table 15

Fulfilling traditional gender role	Main female character walks down stairs with washing basket (0.02)
	Wearing band on wedding ring finger – close up shot and hand is central to the frame (0.6)
	Loading clothes into washing machine (0.09)
	Greeting her child as she is getting off the school bus (0.43)
'Passing' as having full sight	She walks down stairs unaided except for using the railing. There are no obvious signifiers that she has visual impairment (0.03)
	Woman is staring directly at washing machine buttons when pressing one. The washing machine is shot from the side – so it is only slightly clear that the buttons contain braille (0.14)
	She walks directly to a door and opens it without feeling the frame (0.20)
	She walks quite quickly through her bedroom – no signs of assistance (0.27)
Sharp contrast between light/dark	First scene is very light, she is wearing light cream clothes and the walls are painted light cream.
	Scene two shows woman in a kitchen with white walls and light furniture. She loads clothes into a white washing machine.
	She walks through a living room with pale wood flooring and opens a garden door with a white frame to welcome a sandy coloured Labrador. Sunlight shines into the room from the garden. White ornaments are in the background (0.24)

Sharp contrast between light/dark (Continuing)	She walks through a bedroom with white walls and furniture. A white blanket is on the bed and there is a long window, a light blue sky and treetops can be seen. Two small, bright lights are on the ceiling (0.25)
	She then walks into a very dark room, her face is obscured due to the lack of light. At the same time she first mentions 'non-24' (0.29)
	As the 'non-24' logo emerges, the room lightens and the women's face becomes visible. Black and white framed pictures are in the background (0.33)
	She walks into a different room that is extremely light and bright. There is a long window, through which a clear sky can be seen. The walls, floor and furniture are white (0.34)
	She opens the front door and the house walls are white, there is also a white plant pot at the right side of the door (0.38)
	As the woman stands at the front door, waiting to greet her daughter, her face is bathed in light. Contrast as she is standing in front of a dark, wood door (0.44)
	Final scene shows Vanda logo against a white background
'Signs' of visual impairment	Second scene: woman is loading clothes into washing machine. Long stick is shown leaning against a ladder at the right of the frame. Assistance cane?
	There appears to be braille on a button on the washing machine. Shot from a side view so it is hard to tell (0.15)
	As she opens the front door, she briefly touches the frame when stepping out (0.40)

The above table contains themes gathered from the ad, through application of MMDA. 'Sharp contrast between lightness and darkness' is a particularly interesting theme when considering themes, such as the pathologisation of visual impairment, also highlighted via application of CDA. Through emphasising the contrast between lightness and darkness, my interpretation is that the makers of the ad are trying to communicate the assumption that, without medical intervention, an individual may experience many moments living in the dark. I believe this also links to the common metanarrative in culture, associating blindness with being 'unknowing' (Bolt, 2014).

5.4.3   The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust (2014) print ad, UK

Link: http://img01.thedrum.com/s3fs-

public/styles/creative_review_large/public/creative_review/177949/cr_images/DKHT

%20-%20Haleemah.jpg?itok=6QCSWrKZ

5.4.3.1   Background information

The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust is a UK charity, started in 2008 by Kelly Holmes, a

well-known Olympic athlete. The trust aims to support and mentor young adults who

are considered to be disadvantaged (The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust, n.d.). In 2014,

the trust released a print ad featuring Haleemah, a young woman who is interested in

fashion and has visual impairment. Haleemah has received mentoring from the trust.

5.4.3.2   Textual Analysis

The upper half of Haleemah's body is the main focus of the ad and comprises the

central majority of the frame. Her head is tilted slightly upwards and her eyes are

directed towards the left, to a point beyond the frame. Her body is also slightly turned

towards the left side of the frame – she is not facing the camera lens directly. She is

wearing what appears to be a dress, with a long-sleeved t-shirt underneath. Haleemah

also wears a headscarf and a small piercing can be seen on her nose. Haleemah and the

background are depicted in grey-scale. The only colour in the ad is a symbol of a gold

ring – the right side of the ring is larger than the left side. On top of the ring is bold,

white text: 'my double gold / lost my fear. / found my flair.' Within the left side of the

circle, smaller and white text is used: 'Haleemah may be visually impaired. But that

didn't stop her holding her first fashion show. With mentoring from our team of

world-class athletes, she found her courage. And that's something double gold

medallist Dame Kelly Holmes knows all about'. Towards the bottom of the frame

there is smaller white text: 'Help us [*The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust*] find the double gold in every young person', their website is also given.

My first impression is that Haleemah appears to be strong and determined – her face bears a serious expression as though she is sure of herself and the direction in which she is heading. The use of the gold ring automatically leads me to think of the Olympics, thus prompting me to associate Haleemah with success and reinforcing the notion of strength and determination. I interpret the simplistic grey-scale colour tone of the ad as sophisticated and it effectively causes the gold ring to stand out from the background.

In regards to the language used in the ad, I identify problematic aspects from a disability studies perspective. Firstly, the smaller text positioned within the left side of the gold ring begins by stating 'Haleemah *may* be visually impaired. But that *didn't stop her* holding her first fashion show' [emphasis added]. Presupposing that the presence of visual impairment in an individual's life can automatically hinder chances of success supports a deficit approach to bodily impairment. Additionally, I would ague that hosting a fashion show is a feat worthy of respect for any individual – regardless of disability identity. Therefore, it is interesting to note that the makers of the ad purposefully highlight that she has visual impairment before mentioning her fashion show success. An important question is whether the same focus that is brought to disability identity would have been brought to any other identities, for example, gender, sexuality, religion or race?

5.4.3.3 Critical discourse analysis

Table 16

Courage/fear	'lost my fear'
	'with mentoring from our team of world-class athletes, she found her courage'
Success	'found my flair'
	'my double gold'
	'help us find the double gold in every young person'
	'world-class athletes'
	'double gold medallist Dame Kelly Holmes'
Sight	'Haleemah may be visually impaired. But that didn't stop her holding her first fashion show'
	'see how'

Analysing the use of language in the ad, two key themes relating to notions of courage and losing fear are uncovered. These themes are significant when considering the data uncovered via application of TA. Namely, the focus placed on Haleemah's visual impairment and the underlying assumption that having visual impairment may automatically hinder an individual's chance of success in life. This discussion is complex as, for some individuals, being aware of the achievements of a person from an oppressed identity group may be empowering and affirmative. However, for others, it is possible that emphasis on Haleemah's visual impairment, may appear patronising and emblematic of the 'super-crip' stereotype (Barnes, 1992). In this sense, empowerment of disabled women may be interpreted as 'naïve' rather than meaningful and authentic (Heiss, 2011).

5.4.3.4 Multi-modal discourse analysis

Table 17

Sight	Haleemah looks at a spot beyond the frame
	Writing is in white font against a grey background – creates a strong visual contrast which seems to draw audience gaze to the writing
	Gold circle in the middle resembles a 'bulls-eye' point in the middle of the frame – eye line is immediately drawn within the circle

	Haleemah does not return the gaze of the audience, instead, she is turned to the left and looks away
	The sentence, 'Haleemah may be visually impaired…' is the only indication that she has visual impairment. The white font is positioned on the left side of the frame and is smaller than writing on right side.
Success	Gold circle – metaphor for medal?
	Bold, capitalised and white writing brings attention to the phrase 'MY DOUBLE GOLD' - positioned right next to Haleemah's face
	Haleemah is looking in a direction off the frame – suggesting that she is aware of something we are not/in the direction of the future?
	Haleemah is standing up-right – she looks confident and in-control
	The image of Haleemah, albeit in the background, takes up the majority of the frame. In this sense, she is the main focus
Strength	Three phrases on the right side of the frame are in bold, capital letters
	Haleemah stands in a powerful position – her head appears slightly lifted and her line of vision is focusing straight ahead
	She has a calm and focused expression on her face. She looks quite serious and determined
Sadness	Image of Haleemah is in grey-scale. Contrasts with the bold, white writing and gold circle that is placed in front of her
	She is not smiling and her expression is quite serious (facing adversity?)

I interpret the data and key themes uncovered via MMDA, as more authentically empowering that the themes highlighted via TA and CDA. The visual aspects of the ad appear to signal empowerment in a stronger and more simplistic manner. In particular, I find Haleemah's direct stare towards the outside of the ad's frame positive. In my view, this technique creates a determined and strong atmosphere surrounding Haleemah – she appears quietly confident in her own capabilities.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have applied textual, critical and multi modal discourse analyses to nine ads containing representations of women with mobility, visual impairment and mental health issues. The data produced has been organised in tables and highlights strong themes running through each ad.

This information provides a clear foundation for the second phase of my data analysis, namely the narrative analysis of fifteen interviews with disabled women. The following chapter identifies key narrative threads relating to the women's subjective experiences and their reactions to the ads representing their impairment.

6 Chapter Six: Narratives of women who have mobility impairments

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the individual narratives of women who identify as having mobility impairment. My aim is to identify and illustrate key themes and stories explored by participants during our interviews. My narrative analyses of participant interviews are presented individually and, in keeping with narrative methods, contain lengthy quotes in order to minimise the 'filtering' of participant voices. Participants with mobility impairment engaged with three ads produced by the following: *Channel Four, Kenneth Cole* and *Nordstrom.*

6.2 Helen

Helen is a postgraduate student, with direct experience of disability studies. She is in her 20s and lives in the North of England. Helen has motor-neurone impairment and uses a wheelchair.

Helen critically approaches *Channel Four's* ad featuring Viktoria Modesta and particularly focuses on the notion of 'normalcy'. For Helen, the ad addresses normalcy in a complex way: Helen appreciates the ad's direct questioning of normalcy; however, she questions the extent to which normative aesthetics are truly challenged:

> I think it's a bit ambiguous… I feel like she's trying to underline the fact that society feels threatened by what they perceive to be abnormality and that her challenging this notion of the 'normal body' [participant emphasis] through her very visible prosthetic and very artistically emphasised prosthetic is something that people feel threatened by and are scared of, which we can especially see when the mother tries to take her child away from the TV and she [Viktoria Modesta] is later being interrogated for basically posing this political threat to,

I guess, the dictatorship of normalcy… in that sense, it is an empowering

narrative, but, at the same time, in order to do that she still very much

subscribes to normative notions of aesthetics... wearing high-heeled shoes

and… meeting conventional beauty standards – being thin, white, wearing lots

of make-up and expensive clothing and, like, moving in a certain type of way,

so, I don't feel like it's a very radical challenge of normative beauty

standards… by saying 'see this is how threatened society is by my difference',

you're acknowledging that very difference. And I'm not saying brushing over

it or glossing over it would, in any way be more liberatory, but, the fact that

she feels that society can perceive her difference so much as a threat, in itself,

carries a negative message of 'people will never get used to this'.

The portrayal of beauty standards in the ad also prompts Helen to reflect on how she

views her own body and identity as a disabled woman. From Helen's perspective,

'we're [disabled women] only included in advertisements if we subscribe to certain,

very narrow, beauty standards'. Helen discusses the concept of 'passing': the decision

whether or not to conceal one's impairment:

…When I thought about 'do I identify with this?' I think the challenge that I

have there is that I think that amputees are a particular type of people with a

physical impairment because their bodies are almost 'normal' [participant

emphasis] apart from this one missing limb which they can either gloss over if

they want to, or not. And I appreciate that very much, that the pop artist in this

advertisement doesn't gloss over it, but, at the same time, it's something she

can use as, like, an artistic highlight. Whereas, I feel like for people with my

type of impairment, I look almost normal whereas my movement is abnormal

and I don't want to make a statement as to which is harder for non-disabled

people to adjust to… but I feel like, in a way, the prejudices and challenges we face would be quite different, in that regard… whilst I might be able to fit beauty standards in a photograph, which she [Modesta] is also able to but she has to make the decision of whether to hide the missing limb or whether to embrace it – I don't have to make that decision in a photograph but I can never adopt the graceful, like, elegant walking of a model on a cat-walk, whereas, Viktoria Modesta probably would be able to do that with the difference of using the prosthetic limb… I think this whole question of… 'do I perceive myself as beautiful – how do I get society to perceive me as beautiful and not defective, how do I present my impairment or my persona as something to aspire to rather than something to pity, how do I exude dominance rather than helplessness?

For Helen, ads need to move towards representing impairment as 'everyday' and as a 'mundane' part of life. Challenging the provocative ways in which impairment is presented in *Channel Four's* ad, Helen feels that impairment is a natural and 'normal' part of life. However, she does not believe that presenting impairment as a 'normal' part of life should involve presenting individuals as the same. Helen makes this point particularly clear when exploring the tagline, 'We All Walk in Different Shoes' in *Kenneth Cole's* ad. For her, suggesting that all people are mobile through walking is not 'inclusive' and undermines individual 'body variations':

I feel like now diversity is used as this eye-catcher. I mean it isn't here [pointing to Aimee Mullins advertisement] because it's barely visible… but if they used a photograph where you can clearly see that she is wearing prosthetics because she is putting one on… if that would be used as just variation as opposed to this 'eye-catcher' or this 'special' campaign

[participant emphasis] then I think over the long-term it might change cultural assumptions… Impairment is the mundane for me, it's not the extraordinary. I see how other people don't view it as the ordinary but in my everyday life, it's my normality. [Regarding Kenneth Cole's ad] … we don't all walk in shoes, at all. So saying we all walk in different shoes is not inclusive. Some of us don't have to wear shoes, some of us can't wear shoes… some don't walk… what's so wonderful about walking? ... I'm not saying every advertising slogan should be completely inclusive of all possible body variations but Aimee Mullins doesn't even really walk in shoes – she walks on prosthetics.

As well as discussing the concept of normalcy, Helen also focuses on the portrayal of disabled women as sexual in my sample of ads. When analysing *Channel Four's* ad, Helen talks openly about her own experiences of sexuality and how she feels others respond to her identity as a sexual being. Significantly, when exploring the representation of sexuality in *Channel Four's* ad, Helen immediately links to her own experience of sexuality as a way of making sense of the advertising representation:

I mean what I find very interesting about the clip is I feel it is also quite sexualised… in my own experience, it took me quite some time to come to terms with… my own sexuality. It wasn't so much that I was confused about my sexuality, it was more this idea that the society around me didn't recognise me as a sexual being… wheelchair users, I'm saying are traditionally assumed to be gender-less and asexual and child-like, dependent, etc. [cynical tone], um, and I know that some disabled people, not necessarily people I know personally but just, like, people I've seen in the media or heard about, take a very overt approach to their sexuality, kind of like an 'in-your-face' approach to overcome that stigma… I never really felt comfortable with that because, I

think, it's something that's just not in my personality – I naturally wouldn't do that, just amongst able-bodied or non-disabled people, there's some people who tend to be more overtly sexual and others whose style that just isn't…

Helen also shares a story from her adolescence – she recalls a time when she felt as though her mother could not recognise her as a sexual being. This story could initially be interpreted as a common, over-protective response from a parent to their child. However, from Helen's viewpoint, her mother's feelings stemmed from an impulse to over-protect on the basis of Helen's disability identity:

> … discovering your sexuality starts at like age 13 or 14 and I had some experiences, like once a family friend was visiting us at home and when she left she turned to me and asked whether I had a boyfriend and my mum was standing next to me and without even looking at me my mum said 'oh no, Helen isn't interested in boys yet!' [laughing] and I was 14 and I just turned to my mum and said 'you can't know that?! What makes you say that?' [laughing]. But she said it with such certainty and it was very, like, it was absurd. But I've read a lot in the literature about how that is quite a common experience for disabled children and teenagers to be infantilised, especially by their parents who just want to protect their children and I guess it's easier to, because… with disabled children who are more dependent on their parents for support – as I was throughout my childhood, the relationship is often a lot more closer so it's a bit difficult, I suppose for the parents to let their children grow up and become independent… and this whole issue of independence is still somewhat contentious between me and my parents, even though I moved out of home eight years ago and I've been away for a long time!

It is interesting how highlighting the theme of sexuality in *Channel Four's* ad leads

onto a process of self-reflection and exploration of personal experiences for Helen. It

seems as though a key way she makes sense of advertising narratives is through

drawing upon reflections of significant personal experiences.

The final ad Helen engages with is produced by US fashion chain *Nordstrom.* Helen's

response to this ad is overwhelmingly positive. In particular, Helen likes that Mercado

is the sole focus in the ad: '…with these supposedly inclusive ads, they'll portray a

bunch of normal people and the odd wheelchair user [laughs]'. Also, Helen positively

reacts to the 'subversive' theme of the ad that is supported by Mercado's 'leather

jacket and purple-bluish dyed hair'. For Helen, the way Mercado is portrayed

challenges the stereotype of disabled women as 'passive'; instead, she comments that

Mercado 'looks like a rock star'.

Whilst exploring this ad, Helen begins to reflect on how she would like to see disabled

women represented in ads. She focuses on one key aspect, that is, a desire for ads to

portray disabled women in 'traditional motherhood' roles:

> … I think what for me would be quite empowering is a woman in a traditional
>
> motherhood role, even though I know that laundry detergent advertisements
>
> are quite sexist because you never see the man doing the laundry… apart from
>
> the fact that I mind the sexism and I don't think only women should be
>
> portrayed in laundry detergent advertisements, I think I would still be quite
>
> happy if they portrayed a disabled woman in a laundry detergent advertisement
>
> as if it were a completely normal thing… apart from all the other types of
>
> oppression that you can very starkly, very clearly see in advertisements… I
>
> think at least if they would include or represent impairment in sexist

advertisements I would still mind it because it's sexist but I would be so happy

to see a wheelchair user or a woman with a visible, physical impairment as a

mother in a family-orientated advertisement [laughing].

In the above excerpt, Helen wrestles with the complex forms of marginalisation that people face, on the basis of their multiple identities, i.e. gender and disability status. Whilst Helen finds sexist portrayals of women in ads problematic, she highlights that disabled women frequently remain exempt from, in her words, 'family orientated' ads. This results in a lack of cultural and social awareness surrounding the parental capabilities of disabled women. In a similar way to Helen's frustration when feeling as though she is not perceived as a sexual being, she problematizes the lack of advertising imagery surrounding disabled women as able to parent.

6.3   Joanna

Joanna lives in the South of England and is in her fifties. She has completed a PhD and has direct experience of disability studies. Joanna identifies as having mobility impairment. During our interview, Joanna tells me that she is unsure of the ability of advertising in challenging problematic attitudes in society towards disabled people. Joanna feels that the short time frames of ads means that the richness of diversity cannot be fully embraced:

…[advertisements] only last a couple of minutes - you cannot, in a couple of

minutes, hope to get across the experience of many types of impairment or

disability, so they'll always go with wheelchairs. They'll do the stereotype of

easy to do, looks good. You can't – in an advert – do the messiness of living

with multiple sclerosis, whereas you can do it in a movie, do it in a book… I

suppose I think that there are so few ads on disability that what's far more

likely to impact on somebody's subjective wellbeing is what you get in the newspapers, in literature and on films because that's bigger. Whereas I've probably only watched about twenty minutes of disability adverts in my life, whereas I've seen a lot more movies which portray them. And, I guess because of my age, I'm middle-aged, I would have grown up on a diet of 'What Heidi Did' and all those awful childhood books which teach you as a child that if you're going to be disabled you have to be grateful, you have to be passive and you have to be brave and all of that stuff.

In the above excerpt, Joanna describes how she is unsure of whether and how disability representations in ads can bring about progressive societal change. Despite questioning the ability of ads to shift societal perceptions of disabled people, Joanna highlights socio-cultural representations of people with impairments as impactful.

Perhaps Joanna's experience of disabled people being portrayed as 'passive' in childhood books can be used, in part, to explain her appreciation of Viktoria Modesta as 'strong and sassy' in *Channel Four's* ad. The terms Joanna uses to describe the ad tend to centre on the themes of strength and power:

…I loved the dance bit, involving the artificial leg with a spike on the end on the glass. I thought that was wonderful – it was performance, it was powerful, it was beautiful to watch… like the last scene where she is dancing is almost a prototype for a different form of moving and of using the body. I mean how many ballerinas can smash a glass window or a glass floor?

As our interview progresses, Joanna begins to talk more explicitly about her experience of disability and impairment as a child. She particularly focuses on how she feels her parents reacted to her mobility impairment and how this affects her

identity as a disabled woman. Joanna tells me that she only identified as disabled during the more recent stages of her life. She explains her reticence to identify as disabled through recalling past experiences of psycho-emotional disablement, involving family members. Interestingly, when Joanna describes her childhood, she seems to disassociate from her current identity as a disabled woman. By saying, 'I avoided them [disabled people] like the plague', Joanna explains how she used to feel separated and distinct from disabled people. Growing up with parents who held profound, negative views towards disability meant that Joanna's ability to embrace, or even recognise, this aspect of her character was severely suppressed:

> … I didn't define as disabled until I was in my late-thirties. I hadn't even met another disabled person until then. I avoided them like the plague. But that was because my parents did too. They didn't want a disabled child and made that quite clear. So I guess a lot of my defining moments have been in childhood, when the message is that you're not acceptable as a disabled person.

Exploring *Nordstrom's* ad featuring Jillian Mercado particularly spurs Joanna's reflections on her childhood. Joanna positively remarks on Mercado's hairstyle and colour. She identifies a feisty and 'assertive' vibe from the ad and says that Mercado is almost saying, 'come on world, I'm taking you on'. When I ask whether or not Joanna has any personal stories or experiences that are sparked by viewing this ad, she responds by expressing the sadness she feels when realising how 'comfortable' Mercado appears in her own skin and in relation to her disability identity:

> I'm quite, not jealous but sad that I'll never be as comfortable – like, she seems comfortable about being a wheelchair user as well and I struggle with that and I know how difficult I find it to use a wheelchair… I can't imagine feeling that

comfortable in my own body and with myself and able to hold my head up

high and be proud of who I am.

In the above excerpt, Joanna mentions not being able to feel comfortable in her own

body and hold her 'head high'. This sentence reveals Joanna's complex feelings of

insecurity, despite recognising that she has the potential to be 'proud' of who she is.

As a narrative analyst, my question is whether Joanna or not would hold these

insecurities if she lived in a different culture, one that did not consistently devalue the

disabled and female body. There is no definite way of answering this question,

however, from the stories she tells from her childhood and relationship with her

parents, it becomes clear that interpersonal experiences of oppression have also

impacted on the way she perceives herself:

> …I had absolute miserable teenage years and because of hospital treatment that
>
> meant I couldn't leave the house without my father driving me anywhere, and
>
> he wouldn't drive me anywhere, it meant I grew up as a teenager with no
>
> friends… I never did the whole dressing up, going out, wearing make-up
>
> thing… I guess it just makes me feel a bit sad and when you think back and
>
> think of how life might have been different if certain things were better when
>
> you were a child, growing up and how you might have turned out more like
>
> this if you would have had more of the right types of encouragement, instead
>
> of sort of kick-backs all of the time… I have sisters and was differentiated
>
> from them. They got to do things and I didn't and it was because I was
>
> disabled. So, they could wear makeup, I couldn't. They could have new
>
> clothes, I couldn't. Unfortunately my parents were pretty rubbish so I guess
>
> I've had more of those defining moments which mark you out as different,
>
> undesirable...

Joanna's recollection of her formative years and being made to feel 'different' from her non-disabled sisters, seems to have provided her with a frame of reference which now influences how she values herself. Additionally, Joanna's early experiences of being made to feel 'different' and 'undesirable' influence how she approaches and makes meaning from the advertising messages surrounding disabled women. When exploring *Channel Four's* ad featuring Viktoria Modesta, Joanna again comments that she feels 'different' to the 'desirable' Modesta:

> For me this [Channel Four's ad] had a negative impact on my subjectivity, without a doubt. Not only did I find it quite disturbing and unsettling, and not in a good way, because I didn't feel like it was a useful job of what it was trying to do – it felt like fall-out. The overriding message for me, from the advert, was this is so desirable and I'm so different from what is desirable that for me, it was quite a negative message. And I can never be this person, in any way. So, this is what is 'good disability' and I am what is 'bad disability'.

When responding to *Channel Four's* ad, it is also clear that Joanna is critical of the 'over-sexualised' representation of a disabled woman. From Joanna's perspective, the ad's potential to provide progressive messages surrounding disabled women is limited due to the reliance on sexualised portrayals of women. Joanna also believes that the ad leans towards fetishized imagery, as opposed to realistic and responsible portrayals of disability and sexuality:

> So you've got the whole underpinning of over-sexualised women amputees and being lusted at by men and all of that was in there… Yes, so there was the bisexuality – I sleep with men, I sleep with women and I'm not quite sure how that fits with stereotypes of disabled people. That was a bit – it just felt tacky…

It felt like there was an awful lot of imagery surrounding the disabled person as sexual fetish…

Moving onto *Kenneth Cole's* ad, featuring Aimee Mullins, Joanna's feelings of being 'different' to the models in the ads remerges. Joanna remarks that the models in both ads have 'quite normate bodies'. Joanna explains how she feels alienated from the ads due to their support of traditional beauty standards. In her view, the ads reinforce a fixed notion of femininity that she does not identify with:

> …they're still quite normate bodies [Modesta and Mullins]… Here we have a woman [Mullins] who looks like Marilyn Monroe, who is standing there quite provocatively and that isn't how I look. So again, I wouldn't see myself as reflected in this particular advert… I guess for me this image reminds me that I haven't worn a skirt since I was thirteen and I can't wear a skirt because of my mobility impairment… So therefore I can't do this whole feminine thing, so that's what this advert would remind me of – she's a woman and I know I define as a disabled woman but actually, deep down I often think I don't because I can't do the feminine stuff and for me being a woman means wearing a skirt, wearing a dress and I can't do that.

The above excerpt also demonstrates how Joanna's 'internal structures' (Smith, 2000), that is internalised feelings of being 'different', influence her response to the ad and contribute to her frustration towards narrowly defined images of disabled women. However, it could be argued that by identifying the representation of 'normate bodies' in the two ads, Joanna takes an important step in resisting the message that such aesthetics are the 'average' or should be aspired to.

6.4 Louise

Louise is a university graduate and is in the process of creating her own disability foundation. During our interview, Louise describes her involvement and activism in the disability community. She has also had experience of disability studies theory and concepts. For Louise, representing disabled women as confident and outwardly strong is an important aspect that the makers of ads should support. When exploring *Channel Four's* ad featuring Viktoria Modesta, Louise identifies themes of challenging oppression and personal empowerment:

> … there's one particular bit where she kind of stabs her prosthetic spike down a few times and it's quite… it kind of made me think, okay it's maybe a form of saying 'this is for all of the times when I've been a bit cheesed off – I'm kind of showing you that it's not stopping me from doing what I want to do.

Louise warms to the artistic tone of the ad, however, she highlights that the artistic prosthetic legs Modesta wears are not relatable to everyday life for most disabled women. Louise seems to find the extraordinary prosthetic legs worn by Modesta as problematic in the sense that it is an unreachable representation for many disabled women:

> You know, the one that was lit, like, solely lit? I just thought, to be honest, that is incredible that they can actually do that but at the same time I was, like, nobody in their day-to-day life would want that. You know, I get that she is very out there and she is on stage and all of that, but, I guess it didn't really show a great representation in that way because if anyone sees it they're going to think 'oh my gosh, if I have to have a prosthetic limb is it going to have to

look like that?' You know, let's be honest, 99.9% of the time they definitely don't look like that.

When engaging with *Kenneth Cole's* ad, Louise similarly identifies a theme of empowerment. It seems that Louise appreciates the portrayal of disabled women as successful, despite their experiences of oppression:

> …I think showing that you can be anybody with any sort of background, situation, anything, can do what they want to do and be successful if they put their mind to it and that's what she's [Aimee Mullins] done.

Overall, Louise responds very positively to *Kenneth Cole's* ad. From her perspective, the makers of ads should concentrate on the message that disabled people can actively contribute to society. For Louise, presenting impairment and disability as a coincidental part of an ad is progressive – she does not think that bringing direct attention to impairment or disability is particularly useful:

> I think it's a really good message. I think it's probably something we should do in advertising more – to kind of not focus on the differences people have but to focus on the, you know, people as a whole and look at the messages that different people are giving out because, you know… she's [Aimee Mullins] also president of a women's sports foundation and she is a face of different things but they don't focus on disability – they focus on her as a person and I think that's the most important thing… I actually think they've covered it pretty much perfectly. I really don't think you can't impose any sort of day-to-day struggle that anyone might have in that sort of advertisement because of the person that they've used. You could potentially if they've used a few people, let's say, but looking at that advertisement as it is now, you know, I

think they've used the right terminology, they've not focused on her impairment in the image, it's not overly photo shopped – it doesn't look it anyway, you know, and I just think they've kind of got it right for once [laughing]. It's not the sort of image you could sit and complain about for a long time. I think it's quite… I think you'd have to be quite nit-picky to find an issue with it, I would say, anyway… I think that the way they've done it is very powerful because they've not… focused on her disability or her issues, they've kind of just said 'we all walk in different shoes and we are all different'. But they've not put it in black and white that, 'oh, she's different, this is what's wrong with her'. They've said 'we've got to remember we are all different and it's not necessarily always obvious'. And that's what I think is good here, because it is not remotely obvious that she has any sort of disability.

It seems as though Louise supports the ad's indirect approach to Mullins' impairment. In the ad, it is not immediately obvious that Mullins is wearing prosthetic legs. This subtle approach to impairment contrasts to the overt manner in which impairment is represented by *Channel Four*. In their ad, Modesta wears attention-catching prosthetic limbs that feature elaborate designs, such as, crystals and bright lights. Louise expresses annoyance with the term 'prototype' which is frequently used in the ad – the background song is titled 'Prototype' and Modesta repeatedly sings 'I'm a prototype':

'Prototype', now, for me, that kind of wound me up a little bit. I thought, well, a prototype is something that's not perfect – it's something that you're working on. Well, what are you saying is imperfect about her [Viktoria Modesta]? Just the fact that she's got a prosthetic limb? I just thought it was a little bit… they could have maybe used something else, possibly.

Turning to *Nordstrom's* ad, Louise expresses support for the relaxed and understated way the model, Jillian Mercado is presented. Similarly to *Kenneth Cole's* ad, Louise does not feel that impairment/disability is the focal point:

> In the advert they have only included the first half of the wheelchair… I kind of think its good that they've left that part of the chair out because they're showing that we're focusing on the person, not the fact that she's sitting down in a wheelchair… I mean anyone looking at it, I think, would feel quite happy about the image because the girl in the image herself has got a smile on her face. She's happy, she looks comfortable doing what she's doing and I don't think anyone would look at that image and have anything negative to say about it.

For Louise, it seems that the ads presenting impairment as an everyday aspect of life are most progressive. During her analysis of *Nordstrom's* ad, Louise begins to reflect on her own experience of having photographs taken for the foundation she is setting up:

> I've actually done a photo-shoot – I'm starting my own foundation and I did a photo-shoot. I actually didn't want to be this big poster person, because I'm not like that, I kind of just like being in the background and not very noticeable but the people who are helping me to set up the foundation were adamant that because it's about me I should be on a big poster… I felt quite self-conscious to begin with because I thought that I want the image to focus on me and not the wheelchair, but actually, when I sat and looked at them, like this advert, I focused on the girl before I focused on the wheelchair. Now some people might focus on the wheelchair before they focus on the person, but because I

can relate to her, in my pictures, I admit the first time I looked at them I looked

at my chair first because I don't necessarily always like the way I look in a

photograph. So I was more concerned about how much of my chair you could

see to begin with. But, actually, the more images I looked at, the more I

focused on how I looked and not the chair. And, actually, the final image that I

chose has the most amount of my chair in – out of any of them.

In the above excerpt, Louise explains how, when taking pictures for her new

foundation, she initially wanted to keep her wheelchair out of focus, as she was

concerned that people may engage with her wheelchair before they actually look at

her. However, she goes on to explain how the final image she chose is the image that

contains the most amount of her wheelchair. Louise relates her personal experience to

Nordstrom's ad featuring Jillian Mercado and highlights how she is drawn to Mercado

first, instead of focusing on her wheelchair. This leads Louise to remark that she can

'relate to her [Mercado]' – it is interesting, then, to reflect on the extent to which

Louise's positive response to the ad is influenced by the fact that she is able to

perceive herself in Mercado.

Edson Escalas (2004:38) discusses how the makers of ads commonly try to provoke

'narrative transportation' for audiences. Edson Escalas (2004:37) describes this

concept as a key component of 'mental stimulation' - the process of hypothesising

future events based on behaviours we feel able to carry out. In Edson Escalas' view,

the act of imagining or placing oneself in similar events to those portrayed in ads, is

facilitated by reflection on personal story-telling. It seems as though Louise has

mirrored this process when engaging with *Nordstrom's* ad; Louise perceives Mercado

looking 'happy' and 'comfortable' and transports herself to a moment when she also

experienced a feeling of comfort and positivity when having a picture taken with her wheelchair.

6.5 Mary-Jane

Mary-Jane is a postgraduate student who lives in the North of England with her children. She is in her 50s and identifies as having mobility impairments. She has some experience with disability studies theory. An important feature in Mary-Jane's stories and reflections is her love of creativity. In particular, she appreciates innovative attempts at creativity, whether it be dance performance or dressing in a way that expresses your personality. When analysing *Channel Four's* ad, featuring Viktoria Modesta, Mary-Jane frequently shows a positive regard for creative features in the ad:

> And, you know, she [Modesta] is creative. She is using every part of her body, whether it be the part that we would say is 'impaired'… to any other part, to, you know, show her personality, show who she is and what she can achieve… I'd be happy with anybody watching this… I like arty stuff and I love art that reflects disability, so, it does something to me inside. You know, like when you go and watch a film and you leave, you feel different to when you went in, you know?

Discussing the creative features of the ad, for example, the unusual clothing that Modesta wears and the frequent choreographed dance routines, prompts Mary-Jane to share her own creative experiences. It seems that seeing her own interests reflected in the ad spurs Mary-Jane to appreciate the creative and 'risky' attitude the makers of the ad are trying to portray. It could be that Mary-Jane's sense of self is mirrored by Modesta's display of creativity in this ad; seeing an event or process that responds to

our own beliefs about 'who we are' further confirms that our self-identity is valuable (Witz and Lee, 2013).

> I love it – I mean I love dancing for a start. And, before, I actually danced once on the city, no, town hall stage years and years ago. I love [participant emphasis] dancing… I love it and I've written a poem about dancing in a swimming pool as that is the nearest I could get to dancing and I think dancing is wonderful… sometimes, when I go out, I wear quite, for me, they feel like bright colours sometimes. I worry that I'm projecting myself too much or whatever, but, umm… it is about projecting my personality so that people can see that the way I dress is a reflection of someone who is creative.

Mary-Jane goes on to reflect on how her creative passion entwines with her experience of disability and impairment. It is particularly interesting how she merges her identity as a creative artist with her identity as a disabled woman. Mary-Jane pinpoints her creativity as one of the ways she expresses her subjective knowledge and experience. It seems that she recognises her creative ability as a central positive aspect of her self and the way she approaches issues surrounding identity, impairment and disability awareness:

> I've written poetry about having an impairment and how people stare at me and things like that. That was used in a module at the university [where she is completing a postgraduate degree] for medical students. It's a module that one of the English Professors was doing, something like 'not just case notes'. And they used my poetry, he got them to go out into the wards and meet people who've either got long term health issues or disabilities, for them [medical students] to get to know them as a person and they've got to create a piece of

art in some way – the medical students with the person – about their lives, which wasn't focused on their impairment.

For Mary-Jane, the creativity that she loves should be taken further in advertising, particularly when representing disabled people. In particular, she suggests that 'outrageous' representations are likely to challenge ingrained societal attitudes towards disabled women. Mary-Jane's belief in the 'outrageous' strongly corresponds with Haller and Ralph's (2006) suggestion that representations of disability in advertising need to move towards 'bold' and 'risky' narratives.

A theme of pushing boundaries in creative ways is also highlighted when Mary-Jane analyses *Nordstrom's* ad, featuring Jillian Mercado. Mary-Jane responds positively to the clothes worn by Mercado. Again, it seems as though Mary-Jane's sense of self and the way she chooses to project herself to the world is mirrored in *Nordstrom's* ad. Previously in our interview, Mary-Jane had spoken of her fondness of wearing 'bright' clothes in public as a way of projecting her personality.

> It's like a rock-chick or something, is it? I really like that… [the shadow cast behind Mercado] it's just adding depth to her character. It's making her more 3D or 4D or whatever D you want. It's showing she has substance.

From her response to *Nordstrom's* ad, it seems that Mary-Jane prefers more 'edgy' representations of disability, for example, the subversive styles shown by Viktoria Modesta and Jillian Mercado. One of her first responses to the *Kenneth Cole* ad featuring Aimee Mullins is that it appears to have a 'mainstream' attitude and approach.

> See I think this is a double edged sword this one. I think this is a very acceptable picture. This is very mainstream to me. This is a very powerful

woman, a very beautiful woman. And why shouldn't disabled women be powerful and beautiful? Absolutely fantastic but, umm… it's not just that she has prosthetic legs, it's how she is using them as well – the shape of them is very, the fact that she's got one of them coming out at this angle and the other one is very straighter… is it quite sexy? It's quite dominant, you know? I think that they're trying to show that disabled women can be sexy, can be smart, can be intelligent and, you know, physically busy and accomplished.

Although Mary-Jane feels that the ad positively shows that disabled women can have positive attributes, she later comments that the ad 'stereotypes disability in a way disability isn't'. Mary-Jane explains this point by explaining, 'I know loads of disabled women but I don't know any disabled women who look like that [Mullins]'. It seems as though Mary-Jane feels the extent to which the ad can be representative of a broad variety of disabled women is limited due to its reliance on 'mainstream' aesthetics'.

As our interview develops, Mary-Jane focuses more on familial relations. She begins by recounting how her parents perceive her abilities and identity in a very different manner than she does. Mary-Jane's admiration of the portrayal of disabled women as risky leads on to her description of the frustration she experiences when other people view her as passive:

I mean my parents have an extreme sort of, ridiculous view of who I am. A ridiculous view, so got absolutely no resemblance as to who I am as a person. It's… it's hugely painful for me because I like them – although I'm getting a bit fed up of them at the moment [laughs]. But, you know, all they do is want

to make sure that I am doing nothing. They would like me to sit at this table all day and be safe rather than live a life.

It is interesting how she uses the term 'safe' when describing how she feels her parents want her to live. This directly contrasts with her earlier enthusiasm for the 'outrageous'. Mary-Jane continues to explain how other people have viewed her in a different way to how she views herself. In the below excerpt, Mary-Jane particularly focuses on her experience of being a disabled woman and being undermined by other people:

…they [health professionals] did everything possible to make life as awkward and difficult for me, as a disabled mum. So, for example, I would say things like, 'oh it'll be okay, I've had a baby before – I know what to do'… [Imitating health care professionals] 'Ah but you've not had a disabled baby, a premature baby before'… They're little examples but they did things like, they reported me to social services because they believed I was going to… 'pull the baby upstairs in its car seat' when I had said what I would do was put the baby in its car seat and sit it on my stair lift and hold her because she would feel safer and it would be much more comfortable for her… Another one… they decided they wanted to come and inspect my house before I'd be allowed to take her home… umm… so I said 'well you can come' – they said they'd come sometime on Tuesday morning, I said 'well you're welcome to come sometime on Tuesday morning, you'll give me a time – you'll least be polite enough to give me a time when what you're saying is that you may not let my baby come home dependent on your, you know, subjective decision and judgement? And I want a time and my solicitor will be there and I'm going to film it because you don't do this with anybody else'. And they said they wanted to make sure I had

got clothes that were the right 'season' – she had a little wardrobe at the end of her cot that had so many clothes in it, it was just ridiculous… they thought disability means inability to make decisions or look after a human being… as a parent I am visible – I have been reported to social services twice since then. Both times nothing, absolutely nothing has come from this – there is no neglect, no abuse, absolutely, in fact it's the opposite, you know?...

Mary-Jane's early experiences of being a disabled mother seem to underpin what Thomas (1997) calls the perceived 'risk' felt by medical professions when women with impairments are pregnant. As Thomas describes from her own encounters with expectant mothers who identify as disabled, Mary-Jane shares her experience of being undermined as a mother and unfairly judged by others. It seems that she has experienced a lack of faith in her abilities from both medical professionals and her parents. Both seem to want Mary-Jane to take perceived 'safer' routes, against her own desires.

6.6 Penelope

Penelope is a graduate, in her 30s, living in London. She self-identifies as having mobility impairment. During our interview, Penelope merges her analysis of the ads with her own perceptions surrounding her identity, namely, as a 'white disabled woman'. Penelope's deep level of self-reflection is extremely valuable as it enables a nuanced perspective into her experience of being a disabled woman. Additionally, by sharing her personal experiences and views, Penelope brings to life the understanding that stereotypes visible in everyday life become tropes in cultural representation (Garland Thomson, 1997).

… as a white disabled woman, I'm not seen as a sexual – I'm not seen as

sexual… I'm not seen as particularly attractive. Maybe pretty or whatever…

it's never been a thing for me… like, being seen as sexual, I suppose and I

think that's do with the way that, that disability and gender interact…

Disability degenders quite a lot. It degenders people… It's not that I'm not

seen as a woman but I suppose in some ways I'm not really. Like, or the shape

of my womanhood is so much entangled with my other markers, the other

markers that I carry that you cannot separate them and that's the issue, isn't it?

So, for me, I don't see myself, it's not that I don't see myself as a woman,

personally I do very much see myself as a woman. Um, but that I don't think

I'm really seen as a woman by other people. Particularly I'm not seen as a

sexual woman, I suppose.

In the above reflection, Penelope highlights a personal paradox: although she

intrinsically feels like a woman, she believes that society does not fully accept her

womanhood. Penelope remarks that disability and womanhood are not viewed as

mutually compatible by society. She carries the impression that her identity as a

woman is socially 'marked' by her identity as disabled. In particular, Penelope says

she feels society cannot accept her as a 'sexual' being due to her identity as a disabled

woman. Additionally, Penelope suggests she is 'not seen as particularly attractive'.

Penelope focuses on the portrayal of disabled women as sexual in *Channel Four's* ad.

For Penelope, the makers of the ad do not approach eroticism and sexuality in a

progressive manner.

…it's quite sort of sexual and in some parts quite erotic. So, it's, but it's

buying into all that postmodern, kind of 'we can do what we want to do and

everyone's body is fluid'… I don't think that representations like that… I don't

think they are progressive because the context of that is that we are, like, it's

trying to critique something but it's actually buying into this whole thing of an

individual can do what it wants to do and a body can be how it wants to be,

um, kind of thing.

My interpretation of Penelope's critique is that she feels the ad does not effectively

address the social inequalities and influence that oppress women with impairments.

Rather, she feels the ad provides a kind of 'fantasy' that suggests women with

impairments do not face real, social barriers and it is up to their personal capabilities

to be exactly how they wish.

Penelope highlights the theme of 'risk' in *Channel Four's* ad and suggests that the

makers of the ad could have handled this theme more progressively in relation to

disability and gender. She believes that the ad is not particularly empowering on a

personal level, as she does not see herself reflected in the ad's narrative and comments

that it supports individualised empowerment, rather than collective empowerment of

disabled women:

> … the idea of risk, to me, like is really problematic. I don't think it's very
>
> empowering. Although, although, I get it. Like, in terms of an individual, in a
>
> very individualistic kind of way. Some people are born to take risks [caption
>
> used in advertisement], kind of like, you're embodying the risk. So I
>
> understand that – that could be empowering for individuals, but I don't see that
>
> idea as an empowering idea… it's in the context of a postmodern interpretation
>
> of risk and resistance which is very much individualised and aestheticized,
>
> taken out of the context of oppression as a structure, so taken out of any

context. What it's doing is, the advert, to me, is trying to change the idea that disabled people can't take risks, they're 'pathetic' [participant gesture added], or 'charitable', or whatever, but the thing about disability is, it doesn't just work like that. It kind of has this double-edged thing. So, I think they do quite well. They don't buy into this 'evil' idea, but the main concentration is about this individual being like an icon for resistance and risk and I don't think that's, like, yeah, like, the prosthesis, I found it very aesthetically pleasing in the context of the advert… It's like empowering of the body and the individual, but to me, we have to look at, to me, I don't find it empowering because it was still very much aesthetic. It was very particular, actually a very beautiful white woman, the only impairment that is visible is her prosthesis and then they put on this very aesthetically challenging and pleasing prosthesis. So, it's not actually challenging the context of a gender norm, yeah? It's not actually challenging that because it's still buying into a beauty myth, in a sense… I mean it's still buying into that norm because it's drawing, saying that the way we do things is we can empower our own bodies. And that is really important… but it individualises empowerment. And for certain women, it's very important, but when you look at the representation of that woman [Viktoria Modesta], she's a very particular woman who just happens to have an impairment which can be beautified, actually.

Moving on to *Kenneth Cole's* ad featuring Aimee Mullins, Penelope similarly perceives that the makers of the ad do not progressively and realistically represent disability and womanhood. When asked to summarise the narrative of the ad, Penelope frequently refers to an over-reliance on 'norms':

…it's a woman, a white woman going to work in a suit, or walking down the street. It's kind of a "normal" situation, in quotes… Again, she's a very particular and pretty woman. Even though she doesn't have long hair and all that, but, like, it's very particular aesthetics, so everything is kind of normal within that context. Obviously she's just a normal woman, but then she's got this quirkiness about her which can then be commodified and they can say 'we all walk in different shoes' and that's to sell the shoes. So, it's a safe quirkiness again, a very safe quirkiness.

For Penelope, Mullins' character and impairment is presented in a 'safe' manner that does little to challenging 'normative' standards of beauty. Penelope also mentions Mullins' 'quirkiness… which can then be commodified'. It seems as though Penelope is sceptical towards the extent to which bodily diversity can be promoted in ads, due to the underlying aim of advertisers to sell goods and attract potential consumers. She returns to the theme of commodification at another point in our interview:

Advertising itself conforms things, so how non-conformist the advertisement is – it is commodifying it. So it's commodifying the non-conformity, so that's what advertising does because it's trying to sell something, it's trying to sell a commodity. So, the body is a commodity, that's the whole point of advertising. So when the advertisement's saying 'we all walk in different shoes', 'we think outside the box/non uniform thinking', it's commodifying that non-uniformity, in a way. It's saying 'I think outside the box and we can sell that and we can sell disabled people's bodies, look at what we can sell', and that's the problem. That's why it's not positive.

Mistrust of the advertising industry is evident throughout Penelope's views. From her perspective, the capitalistic nature of advertising means that the body and 'non-conformity' is transformed into an object that aims to attract consumers and, ultimately, increase the revenue of a company or institution. As Haller (2010:194) signals, ads can raise awareness about 'the kinds of people businesses believe will sell products'. In terms of disability, this is significant in terms of analysing the extent to which people with impairments are recognised as a 'credible' and noteworthy part of society.

When exploring the final ad in my sample, produced by *Nordstrom,* Penelope appreciates the simplistic and relaxed way Jillian Mercado is presented. In particular, Penelope seems to feel that the ad represents Mercado as whole person, rather than focusing solely on her impairment.

> Well, I don't know what the white space does. It's quite interesting, like, it's not a white space but the shadow… basically you focus on her, so there's no distraction, there's nothing else there. And I think that's quite good. Um, and she's not, there's nothing to emphasise anything much… if you look at the Amy Mullins advert, you can look at where the thing is 'we all walk in different shoes', the text is positioned to draw your eyes down to the prosthesis. Whereas, this, there's nothing to draw you anywhere. So you are looking at her as a trendy young woman… When I wear certain clothes, particularly my leather jacket, for some reason, I feel like that. So I guess, yeah, clothes do make a difference to my confidence levels and how I feel about myself.

Penelope appreciates the simplicity of the ad; for her, Mercado is presented in a way that does not make grand assumptions surrounding disability and womanhood. Instead, the relaxed and 'trendy' portrayal encourages Penelope to reflect on her own sense of self and the way she projects her character to the world. Penelope goes on to highlight a 'normative' juxtaposition that she feels is an on-going theme in the sample of ads:

> What I find interesting is when you look at adverts the thing that they're picking out is impairments that are not normative, everything else is very normative. So, they have to draw the attention to that impairment in a sense or they're framing that impairment as the main thing. So, I guess that that's the thing about representation of disabled people, disabled women, is like, we're still looking at particular types of white disabled women, so to me that's the main point I think – one of them.

From Penelope's perspective, the ads present a parallel between impairment and 'normative' standards. Penelope's view suggest's that advertisers are using bodily impairment as a point of 'difference' or an aspect that unsettles normative expectations. In one sense, an affirmation of bodily impairment as a symbol of natural and valued human diversity is progressive. However, there also remains a risk of suggesting that impairment is the 'antithesis' of normativity. Additionally, as acknowledged by Penelope, it seems as though the ads selected for analysis do not do enough to challenge normative standards as 'safe' options are often chosen and the disabled women selected are a 'particular type of white disabled women'. In this sense, Penelope appears to criticise the ads for failing to offer an authentic appreciation of diversity. Instead, she hints that the representations of disability are more tokenistic.

6.7 Conclusion

The narratives of five women who identify as having mobility impairments have been presented in this Chapter. I have sought to make sense of participants' explorations of ads and the ways in which they connect personal stories and experiences to advertising representations. In the next Chapter, I will explore the narratives of participants who identify as having mental health issues.

7. Chapter Seven: Narratives of Women with Mental Health Issues

7.1 Introduction

This Chapter contains the narratives of women I interviewed who identify as experiencing mental health issues. Each individual narrative is presented separately. Participants in this category analyse ads produced by *Mind/Rethink, Wellbutrin XL* and *SAMHSA*.

7.2 Chris

Chris lives in the North of England with her family and is a support worker. She has an undergraduate degree. She is in her 50s and experiences mental health issues, specifically depression and anxiety. During our interview, Chris refers to the notion of support on a number of occasions. In particular, she describes her own experiences of not asking for support when going through difficult times. Additionally, Chris highlights that when she sees other people in distress, she automatically offers support and empathy.

Chris focuses on her experiences of giving and wanting to receive support, when analysing *Mind/Rethink's* ad featuring Trisha Goddard. Chris suggests that the ad is trying to 'bring about awareness [of mental health issues] and change the situation'. She follows on by talking about what she feels the current 'situation' actually is. In particular, Chris mentions that many people feel as though they have to 'hide' their mental health issues. Chris refers to the term 'hide' five times in the following passage; it seems as though Chris perceives her mental health issues as a private and personal matter. She alludes to creating an outwardly positive and strong image and seems to believe that her social identity would be tainted by admittance of mental health issues. Chris uses proverbs to distance her 'internal' and 'external' identities,

such as, 'put their best foot forward', 'played the clown' and 'hides a multitude of sins'. Lauhakangas (2007) finds that proverbs are often used in narrative to excel reasoning and make links with cultural values and attitudes. Here, it seems that Chris reflects on her decision to 'hide' her mental health status through resonating with traditional cultural values of portraying strength and hiding any signs of 'weakness':

> I've suffered from depression myself – on and off – and I do keep it a secret because you know, even though people say it's more acceptable, it's not something I am comfortable about spreading around. It's not a sign that I want to wear on my head, because everyone wants to put their best foot forward and there's certain things that you want to hide… depression's something you want to hide. I think a lot of people don't want to advertise it so it's something - you know, I've always played the clown and that hides me behind that type of thing, which, you know, it is real – I have got a sense of humour but it does hide things, like make-up hides things, it hides a multitude of sins.

Chris seems to positively perceive her own experiences surrounding mental health reflected in the ad – it seems as though Chris believes the ad is giving voice to the issues of stigmatisation and isolation that she experiences. She reverts back to the idea of 'hiding' mental health issues, as she uses the term, 'a real big mystery' to describe mental health. Chris also uses another everyday expression, 'kick yourself up the backside', when discussing how she has felt unable to talk about her depression through feeling it would not be taken seriously by others. Chris' use of expressions/proverbs could be seen as a technique she has developed in order to make meanings from the views of others that have been difficult to process.

Yeah, I've sort of personally and indirectly seen a hell of a lot what she's talking about… especially in the West, if people have an illness, especially if it's physical, there is a lot of support and everybody's really concerned but if it's something that's not physical, that people can't do anything about and it is to do with the mind, people don't know what to do – they're fearful of it because maybe it reminds them of ourselves or whatever it is, it is a real big mystery. So I recognise what she's saying, people do run away from depression… I understand how she sort of coped with cancer, a lot more than she would with mental illness. I've been through the same again… when my dad was diagnosed with cancer and when [partner] was diagnosed with cancer, it was difficult for me. It was difficult for all of us and I didn't go to a counsellor even though I was offered to because one of the things which I kept on saying, and I look back now and think what was I thinking about? I was offered someone to talk to at the time because it was a pretty bad time and I was thinking, no, no, no – they're the ones who have got the cancer – why would I go and sit there and make it about me? I couldn't justify that – they've got something serious, all I've got is, you know, I'm emotionally unfit, I'm depressed because of what's happened, so it's no big deal. It's just like that old-fashioned, 'get up, get on with it – kick yourself up the backside'.

In the above passage, Chris reflects on a period when her father and partner were diagnosed with cancer. It seems as though she felt pressure to fulfil the role of supporter at this time and believed her mental health issues were less important than her father and husband's cancer diagnoses. This period in her life appears to have been pivotal in her perception of depression and anxiety as private issues that need to be kept 'secret':

…when he got the cancer himself and I was falling to bits, he was saying –

'you know, it's me that's got it, you're not coping very well… just get on with

it'. I'm thinking, yeah, yeah, it would almost have probably have been better if

I had got the cancer because I would have got a bit of help, but that way there

was nothing physically wrong with me – I was in the background, I was

unimportant, you know, what are you whinging about sort of thing – you're

way down the list, type thing… I dealt with it secretly, just going home and

having a glass of red wine and no-one to talk to and just getting on with it

myself, just staying in the room and, I don't know how I got through it to be

honest with you. Looking back now, emotionally, really, really emotionally

unfit.

My belief is that Chris uses a story from her past as a way of making sense of her

current behaviour, namely, keeping her mental health issues 'secret'. In the above

passage, Chris uses a provocative statement as a device to draw attention to the way

she has been treated in the past - 'it would almost have probably been better if I had

got the cancer…' In her story, Chris portrays herself as a person who has had their

needs and emotions pushed aside. She described herself as the only person she could

rely upon. Phrases, such as, 'getting on' and 'got through it', create a figurative

'journey' that Chris has travelled through alone. She also describes herself as a person

who has 'sacrificed a lot' and never put her own 'life choices and life experiences

first'. Chris' story not only speaks of personal experience; her memories of feeling

isolated and less important on the basis of having what is often referred to as a 'hidden

impairment' also sheds light on the socio-cultural context (Kohler-Riessman, 2002).

When analysing *Wellbutrin XL's* ad, Chris' focus turns from past reflection to thinking

about the future and how, for her, the ad suggests that life can 'change'. Her

immediate reaction to the ad was one of interest towards the product and its purported benefits:

> You're buying into an idea and buying into a belief that your life's going to change. Straight away, I'd want to be getting the name of that [pointing to ad] and buy it straight away. I'm thinking 'here's a way out – I might not have to have the red wine now'... Her face is selling it and the water is selling it and the fact that she's found an answer. She's found it… she's smiling, there's the water, the blue sky, you have the yellow – giving the impression of the sun… They've found a cure.

From Chris' perspective, the makers of this ad have developed a powerful marketing strategy. She remarks that her first reaction is interest in buying the medication advertised; for Chris, the ad promises a 'cure' for depression. For Chris, being 'cured' of depression seems to be a positive and promising move forward. Her perspective may have been influenced by the lack of empathy and emotional support she has received in the past when experiencing mental distress.

For Chris, the ad carries a 'positive' message of transformation and looking towards the future. She suggests that she feels inspired and motivated by the advertising slogan, 'I'm ready to experience life again'. However, further into her analysis, Chris takes a more critical approach to the ad. For Chris, the extent to which the ad can be empowering in its representation of mental health is limited, due to its underlying, consumerist aims:

> I mean I'm cynical again because it's like another trap into spending big money and making multi-national companies into millionaires on the promise that they're going to get rid of your depression – which I don't really believe

that they would – through tablets. That's not empowering is it, when they're trying to make money out of you? Out of your insecurities and your depression and things like that.

Finally, Chris engaged with *SAMHSA's* ad. She responds very positively to the ad's focus on friendship and promoting support in relation to mental health. Again, Chris relates her experience of giving and receiving (a lack of) support to the ad. Significantly, she suggests that her reluctance to ask for support stems from a feeling of low self-esteem and wellbeing:

> … instead of asking for support, I didn't. That was a mistake, now I know… It's a low self-esteem thing, its low value; low value for myself. But if anyone else was feeling like that I'd be there, knocking on the door. I wouldn't let them go until it was sorted.

Interestingly, Chris only starts to directly address why she has been reluctant to ask for support from other people towards the end of our interview. At this point, she seems to search for a resolution as to why she has experienced a lack of support from other people in her life thus far. Chris appears to blame herself for the lack of support she has received – 'I hope I'd not do it again. Didn't ask for support and that made a big impact on my life'. At earlier stages in her narrative, such as the story regarding the isolation she experienced when her father and husband both had cancer, Chris could be construed as facing marginalisation and being undermined by others. However, at the end point of our interview, Chris portrays herself as the main protagonist for the lack of support she has received.

7.3 Isobel

Isobel, a woman in her late forties, lives in the North of England with her family and identifies as having mental health issues, specifically, depression. She works in higher education and has direct experience with disability studies theory, research and education. A key theme running through the stories Isobel shares revolves around support. It seems that Isobel perceives giving support as a core aspect of her identity and an important part of her role as a friend, partner and mother. During her analysis of *Mind/Rethink's* ad, Isobel focuses on the ad's message relating to a lack of support and conversation for people experiencing mental health issues. She, too, explains how she has experienced a lack of support when going through mental distress:

> I have a lot of lovely friends who come to me with problems but they really
> don't want to hear mine because I'm the one who helps them… they really
> don't want to admit that perhaps you are not the person they thought you
> were… I think when you actually come out and admit you've got depression,
> you sort of breaking that... ideal persona you've lived up to all of these years.

Isobel's experiences surrounding a lack of support from her friends can be seen as providing an insight into wider socio-cultural attitudes towards people with mental health issues. Interestingly, Isobel criticises the ad's approach to support for people with mental health issues; she suggests that the ad rests on a notion of 'guilt-tripping' people who do not provide support.

Further on in our interview, Isobel switches from reflecting on her experiencing of not receiving support to focusing on her position as an educator – a person who has taught people about the realities and gains of mental health issues. I interpret Isobel's 'narrative switch' as a largely unconscious technique used to move her position from

recipient to giver. In this sense, Isobel is able to impart knowledge on how she sees herself and her place in the world. Namely, as an empowered individual who has the capability to change her surroundings and experiences. A key way Isobel demonstrates this belief is through sharing her story of 'educating' her husband and transforming his attitudes towards mental health issues:

> [Husband]… actually admitted it that he can see the change in me just from my face and he panics that I'm going to throw myself off a building and that was his black and white way of looking at it… I think that is the moment when I really started to think that I've got to educate him… educate him on what the reality is of it… I've just educated [husband] and when I've actually said to him 'but I wouldn't be who I am without it', he completely accepts it and now he calls me mad and I say, 'well you're mad'… 'mad and proud'. And it's wonderful, but it took… well we've been together twenty years and we're talking only possibly since I was forty that it really got to be me educating him – in that being part of me [participant emphasis]. And why he loves me! And I wouldn't be this person without it and now he gets it and it's sort of got to that… well we freely use the word 'mad'. I freely admit it and love it and absolutely identify with it, completely.

Here, Isobel shares her belief that embodied experience of mental health issues can help to challenge other people's absorption of stereotypes and assumptions. In the above story, Isobel positions herself as a character in a position of power; she fulfils the role of 'educator' and succeeds in changing her husband's misinformed views. Isobel's husband takes a unique position within her narrative – he is the only character who shows acceptance of her mental health issues and comes to see them as 'part of'

her. Contrastingly, Isobel positions her mother as a character who exacerbated Isobel's past tendency to conceal her mental health issues:

> I remember my mum saying it to me I should snap myself out of it, and I must have been about thirty, and I've never spoken to her about it since… I look at that now, as a mum and knowing that I couldn't talk to my mum about my mental health. And my mum reacted to it in a way I should've completely expected then because I would expect it now. She just said she was ashamed and she worried what the neighbours would say. So that was my last moment of trying…

Due to her mother's negative reaction to Isobel's disclosure that she had depression, it seems that Isobel consequently buried her mental health issues as she had gained the understanding that other people could not tolerate knowing this information. Watermeyer and Swartz (2008:603) highlight that disabled people frequently learn to obscure their impairments or mental health issues as they do not wish to affect the emotional wellbeing of people close to them – this is described as 'a distortion of psychic boundaries'.

Isobel goes on to suggest that the level of support and emotional strength others expect from her are steeped in gendered assumptions. For Isobel, *Mind/Rethink's* ad does an, in her words, 'okay' job at addressing mental health stigma. However, she suggests that it does not address the complex reasons why people may be reluctant to support friends or family members experiencing mental health issues. Explaining her point further, Isobel focuses on the expectations impressed upon women, i.e. women are expected to 'pull themselves together' and 'have this strength… for your family, for your kids'.

In the following extract, Isobel explores societal expectations of what a mother *should* act like. Interestingly, at other points in our interview, Isobel speaks of embracing mental health issues as a valuable aspect of human identity. However, when talking about her relationship with her children, her position appears to change and she speaks of a need to hide her mental health issues:

> I think when you come out and say depression it frightens people as they need you. I could never dream of telling my kids. Never, because they need me. They need to think I am strong even if I'm not. Just to have that strength in their heads, of their mum being a strong person and being there for them when things go wrong or whatever, whatever. That's more important for me than them misinterpreting my mental health and making up their own version of it.

As our interview progresses, Isobel begins to illustrate her experience of living with depression as multi-layered and complex. She alludes to depression as having both positive and negative impacts on her life and subjective wellbeing. Isobel suggests there are undeniably problematic aspects of depression that are not socially constructed and are directly caused by her mental health issues, something Thomas (1999) would term as 'impairment effects'. However, Isobel highlights that living with depression also enhances her sense of self and the way in which she experiences the world:

> The way my head functions, it can be it bad sometimes, but it also has a lot of good points. And it makes me the person I am… I really do believe that. Obviously, when it gets very bad you need perhaps need help. But, I honestly do believe that this is a part of me that makes me good. That makes me

different and good at some things that other people aren't good at… but I don't think it would ever be looked at like that.

Isobel's overall approach to her experience of depression supports Swain and French's (2000) 'affirmative' approach to disability and impairment, wherein impairment is viewed as a positive aspect of an individual's identity. When viewing *Wellbutrin XL's* ad, Isobel is frustrated with the suggestion that taking medication can enable women to 'experience life' once again. From Isobel's perspective, this message contributes to the societal assumption of 'what women want to be and what they want to look like'. Through Isobel's short story regarding how she has educated her husband to embrace the term 'mad' and her embodied experience of mental health issues as a 'normal' and, sometimes, enriching part of life, a theme of accepting mental health as a valuable aspect of identity emerges:

> Depression is not an illness… And I've been told I'll be like this for life. And that's absolutely fine. But I don't ever think of it as an illness… Yeah but you know you've got to accept it as part of you as well. You are never going to accept breast cancer as being part of your self [participant emphasis added]. You might not accept the experience of breast cancer as what shapes you as a person, but my mental health shapes me as a person. So, to call it an illness – apart from saying that it is something that can be cured, which it can't be, in my case – I'm absolutely adamant about that. I don't think medication does me any good – I do take it, because I'm told. But I do think I'd be exactly the same without – maybe placebo effect… I don't think of it [depression] as an illness – I do think of it as a difference… I would want a more empowering message saying 'you know well, that's why I am who I am and that's what makes me the caring I am or the 'mad' person I am or whatever or the creative person I

am'… whatever way you want to put it but not that I'm ill. I don't want to be thought of as ill.

From Isobel's perspective, depression is something that must be accepted as 'part of you'. This message is a key influence in Isobel's responses to each of the three ads; for Isobel, it is more helpful to think of mental health issues as a part of life, rather than searching for 'cures' and ways to 'recover'. When exploring the final ad, produced by *SAMHSA,* Isobel explains that she resists the notion of recovery as she does not want to be thought of as ill: '…that's the one thing I would hate people to think – that I was ill'. She follows this point by coming back to the notion of 'accepting' mental health issues as another aspect of identity and life.

7.4 Mary

Mary is currently studying at postgraduate level and has direct experience of disability studies theory. During our interview, Mary, who experiences mental health issues, uses her subjective experience to both challenge and support various advertising messages. Mary also frequently refers to inter-personal relations during her stories. By recalling past experiences with partners, friends and family members, Mary discusses how relationships with other people can influence her experience of depression in complex and, sometimes, challenging ways.

When discussing *Mind/Rethink's* ad featuring Trisha Goddard's personal experience of depression, Mary focuses on people's attitudes and reactions to mental health issues. Interestingly, Mary immediately links people's perceptions of depression to core aspects of her subjective wellbeing, namely, her 'locus of control':

> I guess I do worry about how people perceive it a lot and that advert does capture that, in a sense, because she's reflecting on people's perceptions of her

illness, in the same way. I think I've always had issues with, do you know the term, 'locus of control'?... it's whether you think that you exert influence on the world or whether the world does things to you and you're a passive person without power. And it varies between people and it can be linked to self-confidence. I found it really interesting to think about in relation to myself because, for a long time, I have been quite passive and assumed that things will just happen if I do the right things.

Later on in our interview, Mary further discusses the pressure and judgements she feels come from other people as a result of her mental health issues:

I mean my choice to have a break from my work at the moment is still in the back of my mind, like, you're being pathetic about it, you should just get it done. Which I've had said to me by a couple of family members when I was really struggling, 'get it over with, it'll all be done when you've got it over with'. And I can't physically write.

Mary says she has made a 'choice' to take a break from work commitments, her use of the active verb is interesting when considering her earlier discussion of 'locus of control' and not wanting to become a 'passive' person. It seems that Mary's choice and exertion of control over her work commitments is challenged by members of her family. Reeve (2002) draws on Foucauldian notions of 'technologies of the self' to describe how individuals may exercise autonomy and resist power structures. Reeve also recognises that the extent to which individuals can exercise power over their own life choices is often restrained by other people, as shown in Mary's experience with her own family.

It seems that Mary approaches representation of mental health in advertising in a pragmatic manner. For Mary, it can be unhelpful to become immersed in language choices surrounding mental health. Instead, she calls for more of a 'balance' between medical aspects and disability rights. From Mary's perspective, it seems that the traditional, sometimes 'stoic' social model approach towards disability and impairment is somewhat limited. Mary suggests that the nature of 'suffering' should be incorporated into disability studies conversations. Aligning with Hughes and Paterson's (1997) call for greater recognition of inward and personal experiences of impairment, Mary believes that the inner-world of mental health should be addressed more openly.

> …you've got to use language that they [general public] understand without giving them an hour's lecture on how language is used around disability and stuff, so you've got to walk a line and you've also got to think that… something I keep on going back to in disability studies is that a lot of hidden disabilities and stuff have to deal with the fact that it is a horrible experience sometimes, then you have some campaigners who want to disassociate suffering from the notion of disability completely and that's not really realistic and I think it's more useful to think of a balance between the role of medical intervention and disability rights and stuff.

It becomes clear that Mary feels 'suffering' and medical interventions surrounding mental health should be addressed from an empowering and responsible perspective. When analysing *Wellbutrin XL's* ad, Mary is sceptical of the approach to medication:

It's almost saying, 'right, I'm ready to take responsibility for my illness so I'm going to start taking medication and be a pro-active, responsible woman for society and start my life again – because it stops when you're ill' [laughing].

Mary feels that the ad has a 'beautiful' background that purposefully clashes with some realities of depression. It seems that she finds the ad's representation of depression unrealistic and binary. The message that medicine 'cures' mental health issues is portrayed. In Mary's personal experience, the misconception of medicine as the 'saviour' is commonly perpetrated.

…they've used the beautiful scene with the tree behind her and stuff. I think I said before, it contrasts with the reality of depression which is, being in a room, in your bed, for months on end. So that might be quite attractive. It's almost saying, 'take this and you can be outside again and doing the things you used to enjoy'… And, again, I refer back to what I said early about her being ready to take control and responsibility because often the perception is that you're just malingering when you're depressed, so it doesn't really do much to help that image… people assume that she'll just snap out of it and be back to normal or will it do what it did for me, like just make it a bit more bearable so you can think about other things and start to get your life back together. It doesn't say she might be on it forever, there might be years when she relapses, there might be times when she gets it or is in such a state that she decides not to take it anymore and there's a chance she might get blamed for not taking her medicine.

Mary also dislikes the ad's idea of medication equalling 'change' as she feels mental health issues are part of her life and embodiment:

Yeah, the idea of it [medication] changing you and you not being yourself anymore. I think a lot of people worry about that as well – I'm sure I've read that. It's scary – losing yourself. As horrible as mental illness is, it is an ever present part of your life, so it's like, who would I be? [Laughing] Which sounds silly because it's something that you think you'd want to get rid of.

When analysing the final ad, produced by *SAMHSA,* Mary begins to focus more deeply on the role of personal relationships in her experiences of mental health issues. Similarly to *Wellbutrin XL's* ad, Mary feels that unrealistic messages are perpetrated in the ad. For Mary, *SAMHSA's* ad places too much pressure on imagined 'best friend' of the model experiencing mental health issues.

I think it's quite idealistic and puts quite a lot of pressure on the best friend. The language that she used is almost like, unconditional support that is expected… I think it's fair to expect a certain level of support from your friends, but you can't go out and put everything on them because people just aren't capable of dealing with that on top of their own lives, in my experience. So, I hope it's not saying to people, 'oh, go out and bug everyone for all the support and make them feel really bad if they don't support you how you think they're meant to. It's a difficult one really, because obviously I really appreciate having my boyfriend and a couple of friends who are brilliant but I'm still aware that I don't want to impose on them too much. It's difficult.

Sparked by the theme of friendship and support in *SAMHSA's* ad, Mary recalls feeling as though she couldn't openly discuss her experiences of depression whilst at school. Mary discusses an early experience of sharing her 'inner world' with a close friend. Mary decided to tell her friend about her experiences as a way of gaining confidence

in order to speak to her parents about mental health. This story illustrates how Mary has experienced negative reactions and stigmatisation, from a young age, following disclosure of her mental health issues. Or, in her words, the 'non-reactions' she has perceived from other people upon sharing her mental health status.

> I do remember, aged around fourteen or fifteen, I told my very best friend that I thought, maybe there was something wrong and how I was really scared about telling my parents – which is probably what I should of done straight away, but never mind. And she didn't really ever mention it again, she didn't bring it up and we kind of drifted apart after that. Not because of that – lots of different things happened, but, yeah... And, I had a lot of friends a lot of time at school who became quite impatient with me. Almost like, I don't know what the word is… 'disenchanted' with me? Like sometimes I'd be fine and then I'd be back down again and they'd be like, 'oh god, not again'… I guess I just call it the 'non-reactions' of so many people in my life who maybe didn't know what to do or didn't take it seriously or had the perception that is was something that I was making up, or whatever they thought. Um, so maybe this might have helped some of them recognise that… I think what these adverts want to do though, well this one in particular, is legitimise mental health problems, like make people realise that this organisation is saying it's real too so it's giving it more of a reality in the same way that, yeah, more legitimacy so they feel like, a) they know what to do and it's real and lots of people experience it.

Mary credits the ads with the core aim of raising awareness surrounding the 'reality' of mental health. Mary acknowledges this aim in a positive light, she believes that the makers of the sample of ads want to inform wider society about mental health issues

and the importance of support. By using the expression 'what these adverts *want* to do' [emphasis added], it may be argued that Mary is suggesting the ads carry certain intentions (in this case all of which are positive). However, the actual outcome is more complex and interchangeable according to the life-stories and personal values held by the observer.

7.5 Melody

Melody lives in the North of England with her children. She is in her late thirties and is currently studying at postgraduate level. Melody identifies as having mental health issues. She describes taking an 'open' approach to mental health and suggests that she talks to other people about her mental health issues and does not try to 'hide it'. Melody also describes herself as 'quite a positive person' and talks of how she regularly posts about mental health on social media.

For Melody, *Mind/Rethink's* ad carries a positive message and 'solution' for societal stigma surrounding mental health. In her view, the ad would prompt someone who has not experienced mental health to 'stop and think' about the realities of mental health issues. Melody appreciates the ad's attempt to raise awareness regarding mental health as she has often been made to feel 'guilty and ashamed' about her mental health issues in the past. Whilst analysing the ad, Melody draws upon her past experiences of feeling unsupported and receiving a lack of empathy from family members when she experienced mental distress:

> Yeah, because even with my own family, if I, like, I used to cut myself – I
> know that's part of mental illness – if I'd cut myself, they could see it. They
> understood it. Then if I got stitches and that, they could see it. But I'd try and
> explain to them what was going on in my head and it's like 'Melody, just pull

your socks up' or 'it's all in your head, you're just attention seeking'. Do you

know what I mean? And they wouldn't be as sympathetic. Well not

sympathetic, because they wouldn't be sympathetic to cutting but, I don't

know, you can definitely tell the difference between someone being able to see

something than not to see something.

I believe that Melody relates her past experiences to *Mind/Rethink's* ad in order to

bolster her support of the ad's aim to increase awareness and challenge mental health

stigma. For Melody, the advertising message is one that resonates with her on a

personal level as it chimes with her past experiences. Melody also shares more recent

experiences of feeling under supported by her peers in university:

I don't know some of my class, because I'm quite full on in my class and do

loads of stuff. And some of them in my class are dead supportive when they

see me going down-hill and say 'Melody, you need to slow down' but some of

the others are just laughing, like 'well I knew it was coming' and it's like, well

did you not think to speak to me then and go 'hello'? Do you know what I

mean?

Further on, Melody draws upon a specific experience to describe how she has

experienced similar feelings of isolation articulated by Trisha Goddard in

Mind/Rethink's ad:

Oh, I just hit the deck. Like I had a bit of a breakdown sort of thing… some of

them who I've been close to didn't know how to speak to me, you know, like,

when I was going a bit, well not 'loopy' but I wasn't well. So they weren't as –

I could see them distancing themselves away from me. Not because they

wanted to, I think they just felt awkward, do you know what I mean? I could

see the awkwardness. But I'm quite like 'I'm sick', I'm dead open about it, I don't try to hide it. I make a joke of it, when really, as someone who has fought mental health, I shouldn't make a joke of it. I should be really like 'this is debilitating'. But even I find that, personally a bit hard, being the person that I am.

Melody often uses a humorous approach when discussing both positive and negative aspects of her mental health. I believe that Melody frequently uses humour in order to negate unpleasant experiences and oppressive attitudes she receives from others on the basis of her mental health issues. A strong example is found in Melody's re-telling of her past visits to mental health hospitals. Melody begins by describing how she always feels 'weak' when experiencing mental health distress. She goes on to describe how past experiences with mental health professionals have exacerbated this feeling of weakness and feeling as though she is perceived as less than human:

I just felt they weren't helping [hospital staff]. It was just 'take the medicine and comply'. Rather than, 'I'm a human being here, you know?'… I was in therapy once and I got 'oh, you stupid little girl' off one of the staff. One of them called me a 'bitch'. I was like 'okay, I'm a stupid little girl and I'm a bitch – but you're stuck with me' [laughing]… I'm just 'stupid and I'm a bitch' [mocking voice] but I wasn't well so…

Here, Melody talks of verbal abuse she has received from staff working in a hospital she stayed in when experiencing profound mental health issues. When asked about her levels of subjective wellbeing, Melody mentions feeling 'worthless' and feeling as though she has to hide such emotions in front of others:

…I know I'm strong but I also know, my confidence is like 'I'm worthless, I'm worthless, I'm not enough'. To me, I'm not valuable sort of thing, but I pretend that I think I am. Do you know what I mean, just to fit in with others?

Interestingly, Melody refers to having lowered levels of subjective wellbeing. However, in order to 'fit in with others', Melody suggests that she deliberately creates the impression that she has strong levels of self-esteem and confidence. Contrastingly, when Melody analyses *Wellbutrin XL's* ad, she displays stronger levels of self-esteem, as she talks about rejecting socio-cultural expectations of women and asserts that she still experiences life when going through depression. Melody takes a critical approach to the ad's suggestion that their tablets do not have weight gain and low sexual libido side-effects:

> … are we [women] all still sexual objects, do you know what I mean? We might not want sex, we might not mind being fat [laughing]. Like you'd be worried about sex and your weight if you were depressed. 'I'm ready to experience life' [repeating term used in advertisement] – well you are experiencing life when your depressed.

At another point in our interview, when analysing *SAMHSA's* ad, Melody also refers to feeling positive:

> I think the big words are good, like 'let's do it together'… Because it's positive and I'm quite a positive person. And I think it's empowering, like, it gives you – you know you're not alone. It takes away – as soon as you think of mental health you think of someone sitting alone in a corner… straightaway, do you know what I mean? Or white coats or something? And this is quite positive, with the big words and all that.

In my view, the transformative nature of Melody's subjective wellbeing reflects an important dilemma surrounding measuring wellbeing, as I discussed in my literature review. Melody's case aligns with Fisher's (2008) view of wellbeing as a reflexive process. For Fisher, disabled people do not simply react to events or experiences in a positive/negative way. Rather, emotional responses are evaluated and change throughout time. Melody's changing perspectives in regards to her subjective wellbeing signify a 'plot twist' in her narrative. Thus, Melody demonstrates how different advertising representations can metaphorically 'speak to' different parts of an individual's selfhood.

In a similar vein, at the beginning of our interview, Melody speaks of past experiences wherein she has felt isolated from and stigmatised by family members, on the basis of her mental health issues. However, towards the end of our interview, when she analyses *SAMHSA's* ad, Melody begins to reflect positively on support she has received from some people in her life:

> …when I go to uni, [friend's name] is like my little rock. I've only known her for a year but she is so not judgemental, she's got me straight away. She knows when I'm going downhill. I wouldn't even call my family before I called her, do you know what I mean? Like one day I had a massive panic attack, she was in class and I was somewhere down the road trying to get home and I'd had to get off the bus because I'd had a massive panic attack and I just phoned her and she come and got me. She left the class and everything.

Here, Melody positively responds to the advertising message that friends should support each other, particularly when one friend experiences mental distress. Comparatively to *Mind/Rethink's* ad, Melody responds well to the sharing of personal

experience. It appears that Melody prefers ads that advocate communication and sharing experiences, rather than ads with a medical nature (such as *Wellbutrin XL's* ad).

The various stories Melody shares are dominantly connected by the way in which she positions herself alongside other people, i.e. family members, health professionals and friends. Towards the end of our interview, during her analysis of *SAMHSA's* ad and exploring the notion of support, Melody introduces more characters into her narrative, namely, her children and their father. Melody begins by affirmatively describing how she feels connected and truly supported by a close friend. However, her narrative takes a sharp turn when she begins to reflect on her role as mother and societal expectations relating to this role:

> It was just [friend's name] being there. And that one time, looking back I think 'fucking hell, I have got a friend', like, she will come. Which made me feel safe. Do you know what I mean - not alone. Because sometimes I feel as a parent I'm not allowed to be sick, because I'm the mum. I've got to be strong and keep it all together… If I got really sick… and that's my other fear as well, whenever I get really sick I try to push myself out of it dead quick but I end up making myself worse… I've got to be dead careful about what I say in case social services rock up at my door. Which I know they probably wouldn't, but that fear, because I am the carer, the primary care-giver. Because that's what society is, isn't it? The woman gives the care, I'm not allowed to be sick and if they are, it's like, 'get a grip, your kids need you', do you know what I mean? Rather than, 'can I just spend five minutes on me because I really can't be doing with the kids right now'. There's no way I could have gone to the dad and said 'can you help me?' because he would have just ripped me to pieces

and said 'you're a shit mum, you're a weak mum', so I wouldn't have been

able to do that.

In the above excerpt, it is significant to note how Melody begins to dig deeper into personal realms and shares her fears in relation to being a mother who experiences, at times, mental health issues. Melody's narrative here demonstrates how socio-cultural representations, such as ads, can spark textured narratives and multi-layered responses in individuals. Significantly, Melody reflects on her role as care-giver and highlights the gendered expectations she faces in regards to the dominant societal expectation of what constitutes a 'good' mother.

7.6 Susanna

Susanna has previously worked in further education and is currently an active member of a disabled people's organisation. She is in her 50s, lives in the Midlands and identifies as experiencing mental health issues and Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME).

Susanna begins her analysis of *Mind/Rethink's* ad, by highlighting the inaccessible font. Susanna, points out that small, italicised text used in the ad can be very hard for people, especially individuals who have visual impairment, to read. From Susanna's perspective, the ad's positive message of challenging mental health discrimination is lost due to the levels of inaccessibility. Susanna's criticism of the ad fits with the last category, 'exclusion', within Bolt's (2014) 'ableist advertising aesthetic'. Bolt uses this category to describe the paradox by which certain ads representing disability cannot be accessed by disabled people due to a lack of consideration regarding accessibility.

Moving on, Susanna begins to relate her own experiences of mental health issues to Trisha Goddard's, as shown in *Mind Rethink's* ad.

…it's really hard and I think it's hard to talk about because I don't think, when

you're in the middle of something yourself, you quite understand it yourself.

So you're kind of like dealing with it - I mean I'm very good at covering up, I

think a lot of people with mental health issues are [laughing]. You know, I'm

very good at pretending I'm really well and that, you know, because I've got

ME as well, that I've got energy and I do drink lots of cups of coffee when I

need to and it generally keeps me going and afterwards I just tend to crash.

In the above excerpt, Susanna talks of 'covering up' her mental health issues and

draws links with 'pretending' to feel well and have energy, despite her ME diagnosis.

Packhankis (2007) suggests that the process of concealing aspects of the self that are

likely to be devalued by others, for example, mental health issues or any other traits

that are socially stigmatised, presents a traumatic experience for individuals that is

highly likely to negatively impact on their wellbeing.

As our interview develops, Susanna also speaks of feeling undervalued, on the basis of

her mental health status, within the social model of disability framework:

…not everyone finds the social model very relevant to them if they've got

mental health issues. I do think it's relevant but people have differences of

opinions. I think there's the hierarchy of disability, you know, it's an unspoken

hierarchy where wheelchair users are most visible and kind of recognised and

supported and then mental health and people with learning difficulties come

near the bottom really.

In the above excerpt, Susanna acknowledges the argument that the social model tends

to bear greater relevance to external and material barriers and does not give enough

credit to emotional and psychological oppression. However, Susanna goes on to say

that the social model should not be perceived as a 'description of disability'; instead, it focuses on the way 'disability is dealt with by society'.

Over the course of our interview, Susanna reflects a great deal on how mental health issues are viewed and dealt with by society. When analysing *Mind/Rethink's* ad, Susanna dislikes the equation of mental health issues with 'mental illness':

> Yeah, 'get well soon', it's positive in the sense that people are thinking about you, but it's negative in the sense that you don't get well soon if you've got mental health issues. You've probably got it for life… I think mental health issues might be better than illness, because it kinds of makes the assumption about people. But I like the spirit behind it. Mental illness… yeah… it's as though it can be cured.

From Susanna's viewpoint, the ad's 'get well soon' tagline is double edged. From one perspective, it could be perceived as encouraging empathy and support; however, it could also be interpreted as positioning depression as an 'illness' that requires a 'cure'. During our interview, Susanna also comments that she has a warm response to the ad as she can relate her own experiences of mental health issues to Trisha Goddard's narrative. However, Susanna then goes on to say that the extent to which she can appreciate the ad's message regarding support and communication is hampered because she finds the dense text excerpts and italicised font inaccessible.

When analysing *Wellbutrin XL's* ad, Susanna comments that the stereotype of mental health issues as an 'illness' is supported. Susanna's reaction to this ad is immediately negative; she especially does not like the main tagline, 'I'm ready to experience life' and suggests it is patronising and 'soppy'. Susanna also finds the advertising concept

that taking medication will enable individuals to fully 'experience life' deeply

problematic:

> …well it's kind of assuming that it's up to you to sort it out and I don't think
>
> it's very helpful in making people understand how mental health issues affect
>
> you on a day to day basis.

It seems as though Susanna is frustrated by the inference that it is the individual's

responsibility to 'sort it [depression] out'. From Susanna's viewpoint, individuals can

lead 'fulfilling' lives if their surrounding environments are inclusive – this should be

the aim instead of focusing on ill-informed notions of 'curing' people with mental

health issues. Further to this, Susanna describes the ad as 'patronising' and 'soppy'.

One of Susanna's key issues with the ad appears to be its unrealistic portrayal of

everyday life:

> Well, it's not very relevant to most people to have a person on a desert island
>
> type beach with the sea is it? Not many people live like that [laughing]. You
>
> know, even if you go to somewhere like Brighton. It's a bit stupid really, not
>
> stupid but… I mean, actually, you could probably feel loads better if you were
>
> on a desert island, you could probably cope quite well [laughing]. No, no, it's
>
> not very relevant for most people. It's supposed to make you feel calm
>
> probably. It doesn't for me, it just annoys me.

Here, Susanna demonstrates how the intentions behind ads, in this case to supposedly

support the idea that the advertised medication provides a pathway to a calm life, are

not passively accepted by individuals. Rather, individuals engage in a complex and

critical process of evaluation. Susanna draws upon her everyday life and embodied

experience of mental health issues in order to provide a counter-narrative to the one offered by the ad.

Moving onto the final ad, produced by *SAMHSA,* Susanna returns to her critical view of the portrayal of mental health issues as 'illness' by criticising the ad's suggestion that individuals can 'recover'. Susanna also begins to position mental health issues as a natural part of human life and experience. Significantly, Susanna uses her story of experiencing mental health issues since her teenage years, as an educative and counter-narrative to the theme of recovery supported in *SAMHSA's* ad:

> I think if you've got depression and anxiety, and I'm sure I've got anxiety issues as well, you don't recover from it. You deal with it and sometimes you deal with it better than other times, sometimes you do push it way behind you. You know, when I was a teenage I thought, you know, you do recover and I've been to this workshop and group and I'm okay now. But, I know throughout my life that there are some pressure points and I'll revert to some kind of mental health issues. So, I mean I went through a few difficult years were I went under some real pressure from somebody… It was extremely stressful but I kind of did cope with it. It was afterwards, as I've said before, that it kind of affected me. So, I think everyone knows how to deal with it. And, I think, that as a young person, maybe you shouldn't be told about recovery. Maybe you should be talking about… maybe this is a bit new-agey… but you should be told this is part of who you are. You don't have to feel this bad all the time.

Additionally, *SAMHSA's* ad prompts Susanna to talk about her ex-husband and the ways in which their relationship exacerbated her mental health issues. Whilst talking about the process of talking through mental health issues with friends, a core focus in

the ad, Susanna mentions, 'yeah, it would be nice to have someone you could share it [depression] with I suppose'. She follows this point by introducing her ex-husband into her narrative for the first time:

>…I couldn't really do that with my partner who I'm not married to anymore. He wasn't very good at talking about things… when I got married, I kind of knew really, looking back that he wasn't ideal, but we had three children and that was brilliant… but no, he was one of the problems that created all of my mental health issues. When he had an affair, well a number of affairs, but when he had the last one, he stopped talking to me. So, instead of being really nice and trying to make up for it with flowers and chocolate as some people do, he just didn't talk to me which was really bad… There was so much going on then that I had to deal with all of the practical issues… When I first realised I had mental health issues, when I was at university, actually I stayed in my room the whole time, but I had a boyfriend at the time and I went out with him and I didn't talk to him about it but it definitely kept me in touch with things and after I got raped that's exactly what I did, I actually had a boyfriend, I did talk to him about it and he was, like, really supportive and that helped me through it as well. So, I definitely think people help you through situations. It just depends where you are in life and who's there.

Susanna refers to her ex-husband's numerous affairs and follows this point by discussing how he stopped talking to her, instead of 'trying to make up for it with flowers and chocolates as some people do'. At this moment in her narrative, Susanna asserts a claim regarding how she believes things *should* be (Fraser, 2004). She goes on to reflect on an earlier relationship, during a time when she first experienced mental health issues, and talks of how her partner was a strong support mechanism during a

very traumatic period. At the end of this story, Susanna sums up a complex mix of memories surrounding marriage, betrayal, support, trauma and mental health by sharing a simple life-lesson, '…people help you through situations. It just depends where you are in life and who's there'. Susanna uses her stories and reflections on past relationships as part of a larger, more unconscious process of building knowledge of herself and the surrounding world (Singer, 2004).

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented narrative analyses of five participant interviews. Each individual narrative analysis has demonstrated the ways in which participants share stories and reflect on past, embodied experiences as a key way of navigating advertising representations. Moving forward, the following chapter presents narrative analyses of five participant interviews with women who identify as having visual impairment.

8. Chapter Eight: Narratives of Women with Visual Impairment

8.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the narratives, obtained through interviews, of women who identify as having visual impairment. I present each narrative individually and provide my narrative analyses. In each narrative, my aim is to elucidate the ways in which participants respond to advertising representations of women with visual impairments and to explore whether and how participants link their personal experiences and subjective wellbeing to the ads.

8.2 Alice

Alice is in her twenties and lives in the Midlands. In recent years she has completed a Masters degree and currently volunteers for a charity organisation. Alice also identifies as having visual impairment.

Alice firstly explores *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's* ad and initially responds by suggesting it is 'fairly positive' and explains how the association between disabled women and fashion is a particularly positive aspect:

> I think that there isn't really a lot of tendency for disabled women, especially blind women, to be associated with the fashion industry and stuff like that. I think, you know, this perspective of Haleemah being part of that was kind of quite normalised really, it wasn't anything – it wasn't really made into anything special, it was just, you know, showing how someone has… kind of got their confidence back I suppose.

However, she goes on to highlight that the ad is in print format, thus meaning it is primarily accessed through visual means. For Alice, this is 'ironic' as the ad focuses on the story of a woman with visual impairment. Alice's point here resonates with the category of 'exclusion' in Bolt's (2014) ableist advertising aesthetic. Bolt uses the term exclusion to describe how some ads featuring people with impairments are not actually accessible for disabled people.

Alice goes on to focus on the theme of fashion she perceives in the ad. Alice comments that Haleemah is portrayed as an 'inspiration' for running her own fashion show. Alice also explores the media representation of disabled people as 'inspirational' and reflects on a time when she was portrayed as an 'inspiration':

> … when I got my A-Level results I was in the paper… I got straight A's… I think a lot of it was, you know, there weren't a lot of disabled students – there were none in our school or blind students in our area and it was just a bit of… one of those 'inspirational' [participant emphasis] stories – there were a lot of people who got straight A's in my year group and none of them got in the paper or anything… I mean, I suppose it's similar with the Haleemah story. I think what she's done is great but I don't think necessarily it needs that kind of attention because… there are a lot of people studying fashion that are equally as good probably and, you know, it's one of those things – it's nice in one way but a bit patronising in the other… I suppose it's an expectation that goes along with inspiration that, you know, you've got to have done something really great and all disabled people are inspirational. When actually most of us are quite normal, we have normal lives, we go to work or we don't go to work and we just do normal things. I think it's that thing that you have to be inspirational in order to be validated… actually I don't think most of what we do is

especially inspirational – we're just kind of being, getting on with our lives. I

think inspirational is actually quite an alienating term, actually, when I stop

and think about it.

In the above extract, Alice emphasises that people with visual impairment are 'normal': '…most of us are quite normal, we have normal lives… we just do normal things'. She feels that representing disabled people as 'inspirational' underpins a problematic 'them' and 'us' binary that is 'alienating'. Alice's reflection on being included in the local newspaper due to her A-Levels success is interesting as she explicitly links this story to her identity as a disabled woman. For Alice, being portrayed as an 'inspiration' is a key way in which she has felt 'othered' by society and as though she needs to prove her own worth in order to be 'validated'.

Further on in the interview, Alice continues to discuss the theme of societal expectations and suggests this is a key barrier facing people with visual impairment. When I ask Alice to explain the types of expectations she is referring to, she chooses to use a personal story to illustrate her point:

I went for a job interview and I kind of wanted the job quite a lot – didn't get it – but I prepared quite a lot and I travelled quite far. And it was to be a coordinator for young people in this hostel place. You know, it was somewhere I didn't know actually – I'd never been there before and, you know, I got there and I left at 5 in the morning and I was putting a lot of input into what were my expectations of the job and the role and stuff and I was being quite animated about it and then the interviewer asked me, when I'd sort of finished talking, he said, 'how will you manage the stairs?' and then my heart just kind of, sank right down. I just felt so disheartened… could he not just have asked me

something relevant? … I thought, 'well how do you manage the stairs? I manage the stairs the same way you do'.

The above story demonstrates Alice's frustration that the way she understands herself – as capable and strong – is undermined by another person's attitude towards her, seemingly underpinned by his 'expectations' of her as a woman with visual impairment. Through telling this story, it seems as though Alice is trying to make sense of *why* and *how* her identity as a disabled woman is sometimes misunderstood and undermined by society. I did not ask Alice directly to share a story in this instance, instead I asked her to clarify what she means by societal expectations of disabled people. Therefore, it is noteworthy that Alice decided to employ personal story to answer my question. Possibly, Alice chose to tell a story about her own experience in order to highlight that societal expectations are a pressing and *real* issue that affect the everyday lives of disabled people. Furthermore, by sharing this story, I believe that Alice is trying to impart the understanding that societal expectations and assumptions are inherently problematic, whether they are focused on disabled women as 'inspirational' or less capable.

Moving on, Alice explores *The Guide Dog's Association's* ad. Alice reacts strongly to this ad and the way a woman with visual impairment is represented:

> You've got Emma and it's made out that before she had her dog, she wasn't able to function at all. You know, the boy says, 'my mum found it really difficult' and there's that sort of thing that unless you've got a dog, actually you can't be a functioning human… that's really irritating… at the moment I don't have a dog and I'm perfectly capable of doing – probably more than Emma does to be honest. I don't think it's a big deal that I can walk

somewhere or go to the shops… I found it so infuriating… I think she should have more self-respect than to go on an ad and say, you know, 'to support a life like mine', like blindness is some sort of disease. It's really bad – I would never do that. I know obviously it's funding for guide dogs – great, but it's kind of like begging, it's horrible. I find it just really degrading the way it's portrayed her and like she needs to be guided. It's almost like… if you haven't got a man to guide you, you need a dog to guide you because you couldn't possibly manage on your own as a woman. I find it… just repellent. Honestly I feel so strongly about it… I think it's really awful.

Alice clearly sets herself apart from, in her opinion, the problematic advertising representation. By saying, '… I don't have a dog and I'm perfectly capable…' and 'I would never do that', Alice creates a clear division between her life as a woman with visual impairment and the ad's portrayal. Later on in our interview, Alice comments that the ad has an 'infantilising' narrative and suggests that audiences will believe that 'all blind people' are dependent on guide dogs. Alice takes the themes of infantilisation and lack of agency further by suggesting that Emma is shown as a 'victim':

> …she's being victimised – made to be a victim of her circumstances… having the little kid there is very cute but just having her there at the end is, 'oh, I can't say very much, I can't speak for myself'… and the boy sort of saying, 'oh, this wasn't easy for her and her eyes don't work properly'. She's blind – that's what she is and you can just say it… it's like creeping around the issue…

A key issue, from Alice's perspective, is that the ad uses Emma's son as the narrator, rather than Emma herself. Alice mentions this may be 'cute', however, it has the effect

of portraying Emma as lacking in personal agency. Another issue for Alice is the language used to describe visual impairment. It seems as though Alice would prefer direct language and terminology rather than vague metaphors, such as, 'her eyes don't work properly'. This could be explained by Alice's pride in her identity as a woman with visual impairment; her impairment is not an aspect of her identity that she wants to be obscured.

When exploring *Vanda Pharmaceuticals'* ad, featuring a woman with visual impairment talking about her experience of having 'non-24', Alice makes another interesting point surrounding the woman's 'voice':

> I think they should have been a bit more focused on the statistical angle… I think that would have been better for… people to understand the ad a bit better… I don't see why – it's almost like the woman could have said that herself – I don't know why the voice-over guy needed to do that at the end. It's almost like, 'I'm in charge of statistics and facts – you're just a poor blind woman'.

A key concern for Alice seems to be the extent to which ads represent disabled women as in charge of their own lives. It seems as though Alice uses the ads as a means of reaffirming her own strength as a disabled woman. When Alice highlights problematic narratives of visual impairment, she makes it clear that this is *not* who she *is*. Through sharing personal stories and experiences, Alice brings to life the reasons why she finds certain portrayals problematic. A key purpose of Alice's stories seems to be outlining that society often underestimates the capabilities of women with visual impairment. Alice also seems to feel as though the three ads dominantly undermine her subjective knowledge of disabled women as strong and in control of their own agencies.

8.3 Annie

Annie is currently studying at undergraduate level – she is in her twenties and from the Midlands. She identifies as having visual impairment. Throughout our interview, Annie draws attention to stereotypes surrounding people with visual impairment in advertising and society in general. From Annie's perspective, it is important to question disability stereotypes supported in ads due to the ubiquitous presence of advertising in society:

> They're [advertisements] so widespread – you can't really get away from advertisements – they're on TV, they're on billboards, they're on the internet. Everywhere you look there is an advertisement.

Annie goes on to discuss common misconceptions surrounding visual impairment, most specifically, that individuals are either 'seeing' or 'blind'. When exploring *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's* ad featuring Haleemah, a young woman with visual impairment, Annie begins by describing the ad as 'positive' because it does not support dominant stereotypes. However, Annie goes on to suggest that the ad implies visual impairment is something that may hinder success:

> I think that it is positive… because… it's not really conforming to any sort of negative stereotypes of the visually impaired/visually impaired people… I don't really understand how being visually impaired would actually stop someone from doing that. I mean, I know it's positive because she's achieving things but it would be positive for anybody to achieve that… it's very positive that she's done it but I thought it was positive before I read the text below. I didn't like the fact that it said 'she may be visually impaired, but [participant emphasis]', that implies that is a huge hindrance, like, that stops people from

doing things but it really doesn't. I don't like that perception… The biggest issue I've found is people not really understanding visual impairment, as opposed to, like, trying to help too much or whatever. They don't really understand that there's a whole spectrum of sight impairment. A lot of people think it's just you can see or you can't see anything. There's a lot of 'oh, if you're blind then how do you read?'

In the above extract, Annie reveals her frustration relating to the problematic portrayal of visual impairment as a 'problem' in a person's life. Annie feels as though visual impairment is often understood in simplistic terms and the varied spectrum of visual impairment is ignored. This discussion prompts Annie to reflect on a time when she felt her visual impairment was automatically perceived as a 'problem' she faced:

…when I went abroad volunteering, people were like, 'oh my god – that's amazing'. Like, the guy who was my airport assistance asked where I was going and I said, 'oh, I'm going abroad to teach for a few weeks' and he was like, 'oh my god, you're visually impaired and you're still doing it?' and I thought, yeah but I want to do it. My visual impairment isn't stopping me doing it. Maybe it's hindering my confidence a little bit because I was going to a third world country where the resources aren't as good but that's kind of making me more excited to go.

Annie uses the above story as a way of conveying how she feels about outsider presumptions surrounding her capabilities as a woman with visual impairment. She seems irked by the suggestion that she leads an 'extraordinary' life as she has visual impairment. Annie pursues this thread further and comments that she is happy to

challenge stereotypes other people, such as the airport assistant, have surrounding disability.

Throughout our interview, Annie frequently revisits the idea that ads should aim to destabilise and challenge disability stereotypes. When viewing *The Guide Dog's Association's* ad, Annie becomes frustrated, as she perceives a reinforcement of stereotypes surrounding people with visual impairment:

> I'm not a great fan of Guide Dog Association advertisements full stop. I feel like they are very, very patronising. They make it look like blind people can't do anything without the help of an assistance dog. That's, sort of, encouraging harmful stereotypes… As soon as I saw that you had sent me a Guide Dog's Association advert I cringed. I thought that I'd have a lot to say about this. I think Guide Dog's representation of visually impaired people is absolutely dreadful. It's, like, patronising and… it makes me cringe. I'm thinking of, again, "normal" [quotes signed] watching those advertisements and thinking, 'oh, those poor blind people'. I think that's what Guide Dog's are going for though – the sympathy…'oh, these poor blind people, they can't do anything without their dogs'.

When Annie describes how she feels about *The Guide Dog's Association's* ad, she begins by suggesting that, in general, she feels their ads are 'very, very patronising' and mentions feeling '…betrayed because this organisation that is supposed to be representing visually impaired people is portraying them as useless essentially.' During my interview with Annie, she comes across as a strong-minded and intelligent woman who leads a busy life; her conversation is animated with stories of her partner, family members, friends and her love of travelling, in particular, a recent occasion

when she taught English abroad. It seems as though her strong sense of identity clashes with the passive and 'poor' representations of women with visual impairments she identifies in the ads.

From Annie's point of view, the makers of ads should concentrate on portraying people with visual impairments as strong and capable of leading fulfilling, active lives. She positively responds to the portrayal of Claire, a woman with visual impairment, as a parent. For Annie, this is an important representation as it challenges the disablist assumption that disabled people are 'unable' to parent. However, she finds some of the language used problematic, for example, the narrator's [Emma's young son] expression 'help mum be mum'. From Annie's perspective, this phrase contributes to the stereotype of people with visual impairments as in need of 'help'.

The parenting rights of disabled people is an issue Annie feels strongly about. Later on, when exploring *Vanda Pharmaceutical's* ad, Annie suggests that the portrayal of the main character as a mother makes her think of her own concerns surrounding becoming a parent in the future and potential reactions from other people. In the below excerpt, Annie demonstrates how advertising representations can impact on individual subjectivities in complex ways. For Annie, engaging with a portrayal of a woman with visual impairments as a mother, prompts her to reflect on the representation of disabled people more broadly:

> Although I'm not a parent, I feel very strongly about disabled people being parents. I hear a lot, 'oh, it's cruel for disabled people to be parents because they put so much responsibility on their kids'. There was an incident a few years ago where a blind couple were refused adoption of a child because they were blind and another one, only about a year ago, a couple in America who

were totally blind had their new-born baby taken off them… I'm concerned about being a parent. Obviously, I'm only young so I'm not thinking about having kids yet, no, no, maybe in ten years' time? But, um… when I do I'm concerned about what people say because I see so much hate in the media towards disabled parents, like, 'oh they shouldn't be parents' and all this stuff that I've said before. I'm more worried about what people are going to say to me and about me then my abilities as a parent. It's not really related to the ad as such but it's made me think about it.

Further on, Annie suggests that the main character in *Vanda Pharmaceutical's* ad, a woman with visual impairment, could be shown as working, as opposed to staying in the home and carrying out house-work:

I'd rather she'd be working… I think that would be more representative of visually impaired people because, unfortunately, it's really hard to find a job if you're a partially sighted person. I read an article the other day that said 9 out of 10 businesses in the UK would not employ a visually impaired person.

Annie develops her opinion by suggesting that many people in society do not try to interact with people who have visual impairment; she mentions that many places in the world view visual impairment as 'frightening'. Illustrating this point, Annie shares a story from her time spent teaching English to school-children in Africa:

… a lot of the kids kind of stared… at the second school I went to… a kid said something to another kid… there was a group of children standing with me and one of the boys said something to another boy and the other boy turned to me and said, 'he said you're…' and an older girl standing behind him gave him a smack and she just said, 'don't listen to him'… I just shook it off. Like, it's a

cultural thing. Visual impairment has always been something people are scared of… you hear people saying, 'I don't know what I'd do if I lost my sight – I don't know what I'd do without it'.

Throughout our interview, Annie constructs a self-image defined by strength and independence. It seems as though these two qualities are important to Annie; she recurrently criticises the portrayal of people with visual impairment as 'useless' and dependant on assistance in the ads. Additionally, she presents herself as a person who is aware of prejudicial attitudes, yet she is able to reflect on them in an objective and intelligent manner: 'I just shook it off. Like, it's a cultural thing'. Instead of detailing her emotional reactions to problematic and offensive events, she uses them as an opportunity to impact her argument that visual impairment is misrepresented in many societies and cultures. As Wortham (2000:3) describes, Annie uses such stories as a way of 'reinforcing' the type of person she is. For example, in the above story, it could have been possible for Annie to focus on the unpleasant and problematic aspect of the situation involving herself and a group of school-children. However, instead of taking this approach, Annie presents herself as 'rising above' the situation and comments on the macro implications, namely, the influence of cultural stereotypes.

8.4 Fran

Fran is in her twenties and works in healthcare. She is also currently studying at postgraduate level and is based in the Midlands. Fran's responses to the ads tend to be quite abstract; although she briefly touches upon her own personal experiences, she does not introduce any specific characters into her stories. During our interview, Fran mentions how her sense of inner confidence, specifically relating to her identity as a woman with visual impairments, has grown over the years. In the below extract, Fran

reflects back on earlier years and feeling less secure about her identity as a disabled woman:

> When I was younger I would have people that would come and help me at school and I did have people from a charity that would help me walk to school and help me find a route to school and show me how to cross a road safely and stuff because I couldn't I see very well and I wanted to walk to school with my friends and be a bit more normal. I do remember, like, I guess as a child you sort of rebel from that kind of thing and you don't want to be pointed out as, like, being different in any way and I remember being offered things, like they would say, 'if you want to, to get to school, we can give you a cane or whatever to help you walk' and I was like, 'oh my god, no, I'm not having a cane' [laughing]. There's definitely a worry when you're younger, and you have a disability, of how you're going to appear, and you don't want to appear different because that's not cool to be different and you wanna be like everyone else.

Fran describes how her younger self was concerned about appearing 'normal' to the outside world and she was anxious about appearing 'different' to others. Using Goffman's (1963:2) 'stigma' theory to analyse Fran's experiences, it seems as though she felt an assistance cane would be perceived as a 'negative' attribute by the rest of society. For Fran, this would mean her 'virtual social identity' – how she is viewed by others – would clash with her 'actual social identity' – how she perceives herself. Fran wanted to be seen as 'normal' and similar to her friends when she was younger; therefore, she avoided overt signs of impairment and disability.

When exploring *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's* ad, featuring Haleemah, a young woman with visual impairment, Fran begins to reflect on how her confidence has grown over the years. On the right side of the ad, 'My double gold/Lost my fear/Found my flair' is written in large, white, bold font. Fran suggests that the ad's message surrounding the loss of fear, resonates with her own sense of wellbeing:

> I think the advertisement has a positive message and, I guess, a positive effect on how I would define my subjective wellbeing because I think it's, sort of, speaking to the part of me that knows there are certain things that make me anxious with regards to my disability… I think now that I'm older, I don't feel so much, like, the fear that I did when I was younger because of my disability. Things that I know that have given me anxiety in relation to my disability, in the past, have been going to meet people in a public place. I worry that I'll get there and I won't be able to find them or see them and if I'm going somewhere new I'll worry about trying to get around… the fear element of that advertisement is something I could relate to from when I've been younger and now that I'm older, my present feelings about it, I think I've, like, grown accustomed to those kind of things. So, I'll still, like, worry, 'oh, I might not be able to see this person', but I'll think, 'oh well, I'll find them or they'll find me'. So it's less a part of my life now than it used to be.

Closely analysing the aesthetics of *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's* ad, Fran outlines a dissonance between the 'empowering' theme of losing fear and the dark colour tone used in the background:

> It being in grey – it's kind of a bleak colour for an advertisement that is supposed to be empowering. The wording of it, I think is empowering. If

people know that, the way it's saying about losing your fear, I think if people see that advertisement and they can relate to it in a sense of, oh I'm not the only person who feels like this and if other people have these disabilities and feel this way and they can overcome them, then maybe I can overcome them as well. Like, I think the message behind it is empowering and I guess the reference to 'double gold' and 'gold medals' and stuff – that's empowering. But I do think it's probably a bit of a bleak looking advertisement.

The next ad Fran turns to is produced by *The Guide Dog's Association.* This ad features Emma (a woman who has visual impairment), her young children and Jess, her guide dog. Fran's immediate reaction to the ad is positive, as she details how it explores the support that guide dogs can offer. However, Fran seems frustrated that the ad only represents a certain group of disabled women – those who are mothers:

> I guess it's positive, it's a positive message, sort of saying how having a guide dog could change someone's life who is blind and how they could do a lot of things that they couldn't do before. I guess, like, it's a bit more difficult to say because that one doesn't directly relate to me, as such… I think it is a positive message but, maybe, it might not speak to all disabled women because not necessarily all disabled women who are blind are mothers. It seems to be more related to how this woman can carry out her duties related to being a mum rather how she can live her life as a human…

When I ask about the extent to which she found the ad empowering or disempowering, Fran uses the term 'patronising' twice in her answer. She also refers to the term 'cute' on two occasions. Fran's analysis of the ad resonates with a common disability studies critique of the limited ways in which people with impairments are represented across

the media. The category of 'distortion' in Bolt's (2014) 'ableist advertising aesthetic' further develops Fran's critique of the 'disempowering' elements of the ad. Bolt suggests that people with impairments are frequently represented in 'distorted' ways in advertising; instead of showing the realities of disabled people, advertisers often create contrived representations. Such representations of disability promote emotive responses from the audience, instead of showing aspects of everyday life. As Fran mentions, the makers of ads may not have direct experience of disability or a particular impairment. Therefore, the opportunity to present embodied and realistic representations is severely limited. Charity advertisers may especially follow such a route as one of their key focuses is to raise money, as Fran highlights:

> …I don't know why but I found that advert quite patronising, in a way… it was kind of a bit cutesy – I guess it was because they were trying to get people to donate money… so they're like, 'look how cute the puppies are – give us some money'… it was just a bit patronising I thought. Maybe it wasn't so empowering… yeah. I'd say that advert was a bit more disempowering… I do think that it is quite common for people to probably have a patronising approach to disability because I think that sometimes people try to be too nice and maybe over-egg the whole, 'you can do whatever you want to thing'. But I think that advert in particular was very, 'ooh, these poor blind people can't do this and they can't do that' and someone might be sitting at home thinking, 'well actually, I can't see but I can do these things' and I don't think people like to be told that they can't do things that they feel they can. They probably feel that they're being defined by somebody who doesn't understand the position they're coming from.

When analysing *Vanda Pharmaceutical's* ad, Fran comparatively criticises the representation of a woman with visual impairment as a mother who is doing housework. Fran's focus on the limited ways in which women are represented, illustrates the ways in which ads reflect socio-cultural values and distributions of power (Cortese, 2016):

> So, once again, it was a mother, not really having a job, I'm sure blind people do have jobs, I'm sure there are plenty of jobs that blind people can do but I feel like that's not really represented in the adverts… I do think that you need to advertise and represent, a bigger range of people. As a woman with a disability, I don't ever really plan on just sitting at home and doing the laundry and welcoming my kid's home. Despite not being able to see, like, well not being able to see very well, I've been able to do my education, get a degree, get a job, and those are the kind of things that I've wanted to do, I've not done them in spite of the fact that I'm disabled, as if to say 'well, I can be like everyone else'. Those are the things that I've wanted to do and I think, in a feminine way I don't think it's very empowering to just show disabled women who are staying at home. It's kind of like, I don't know, it's a bit stuck, it's a bit patriarchal in the way it's been represented I guess. It doesn't really represent me, as a woman, or as a disabled woman, I'd say.

In the above excerpt, Fran challenges the gendered representation of a disabled woman carrying out housework by asserting her own experience and achievements. Fran does not passively accept stereotypical representations of women with visual impairment. Rather, instead, she takes the opportunity to challenge such portrayals and affirms her identity as a strong and successful disabled woman.

8.5 J.K.

J.K. is a woman in her forties, living in England. She works in museum education, has a Masters degree and identifies as having visual impairment. J.K. presents herself as an adventurous person who wants to 'live life'. Throughout our interview, J.K. talks of the pleasure she gains from travelling and her academic achievements. When exploring *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's* ad, J.K. suggests that the ad reminds her of what she has achieved:

> I was declared legally blind before… I went to university and got a bachelor's degree and a certificate and both of those – I didn't realise before – had a lot of reading… And I got my masters and that also included a lot of reading and fieldwork so getting out and going places… I want to live my life – I don't just want to sit around and wait for something to happen… [the ad] reaffirms what I think that despite what is termed a disability, I've travelled to Mexico, Australia and New Zealand and I've completed fieldwork and done a Masters and I've done all that even though I can't see everything around me at one glance.

In the above extract, J.K. approaches her life as an adventure – she speaks of the places she has travelled to and states, 'I want to live my life – I don't just want to sit around and wait for something to happen'. J.K. positions herself as an assertive person who actively steers the direction of her life.

At one point during our interview, J.K. and I share stories relating to why we both identify as feminists. J.K. asks how I became interested in feminist disability studies research and I reply by describing how my identity as a feminist disability studies researcher was initially borne from my love of disability studies and subsequent

conversations with my tutor regarding the intersections of feminist and disability studies theory. I also share the information that I identify as a disabled woman so I also feel as though I have a personal connection with feminist disability studies aims and values. I briefly mention that my identity as a feminist disability studies researcher has evolved in recent years. Comparatively, J.K. mentions that she did not identify as a feminist in earlier years. After she discloses this information, I ask how she came to embrace feminism:

> I think a lot of it just has to do with growing up and having men, normally, assume I wouldn't or couldn't do something because I was a girl. And I was working in a retail store and being considered for a position as manager and, uh, my name had been put in a hat by my manager at the store I was working at and I met with the district manager who said that my salary would be based on what I was earning now but they would double it and then throw in a little extra money and that wasn't how they did manager salary for anyone else and I knew that. So I told my manager who called the district manager and yelled at him. And I'm not as tall as a lot – I don't know if that played into it and a lot of times when I look at people I have to look up and I was seen as the dainty, short girl. That's how I felt they were looking at me… Um, it has helped, my mother's side: my mother, my aunt, my grandmother, were all – I don't know if I would call them feminists – but they were all very strong women, with their own identities. I think having the positive influence helped a lot, but my dad's sister has been a homemaker – she worked a few years as a teacher – but when she got married and started having kids she stayed at home. So there have been different influences with strong women and beliefs on both sides.

Her assertion that the women in her family 'were all very strong women' is another referral to strength of character and self-direction that appears to be a recurring theme throughout J.K.'s narrative. In the above excerpt, J.K. demonstrates how an individual's sense of self frequently rests upon storied accounts. J.K. refers to two different stories in the above: firstly she describes a situation where she was underestimated in work, and secondly, she introduces various female family members into her discussion and describes them as a 'positive influence'. J.K. begins by sharing a story that highlights *why* she holds feminist values as important in her life and then follows by describing *how* she has come to absorb feminist sensibilities.

When viewing *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's* ad, depicting a woman with visual impairment who has held a fashion show, J.K. responds positively and perceive herself in the narrative of strength and success. Although, J.K. points out that whilst the ad carries a positive message regarding visual impairment, ironically, it may not be accessible to some people who are visually impaired:

> … the only thing I didn't like about the ad is that it is all grey… it wasn't as easy to pick out differences in the shades… when it's in shades of one colour it's difficult, for me, to tell the difference sometimes.

J.K. not only talks of her own empowered identity, she also relates to other people with visual impairment as strong. From J.K.'s perspective, society carries many harmful and misleading assumptions that belittles her embodied knowledge of feeling fulfilled and strong as a woman with visual impairment. In the below excerpt, J.K. shifts from using the personal pronoun to identifying collectively with other people who have visual impairment:

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…. we don't just sit at home and do nothing …I know very independent people – people who are completely blind and live by themselves… and… can do everything from cook and clean, to make a bed and sew a button onto a shirt.

From J.K.'s perspective, all of the three ads provide progressive representations of visual impairment and support the narratives of strength and independence that appear to be integral to her own sense of self. However, J.K. notes that two of the ads, produced by *The Guide Dog's Association* and *Vanda Pharmaceuticals,* are not as progressive in their representation of women:

'I did find it interesting that both [*The Guide Dog Association* and *Vanda Pharmaceuticals*] ads steered more towards housewife, not someone working. But… okay. That might take a while yet and I understand that. There is a non-24 ad with a gentleman who is walking through with a guide dog and he lost his vision in Iraq or Afghanistan – I can't remember, but it showed him as being more professional than the one with the woman and I thought that is a little sexist…'

Despite this, J.K. talks about *The Guide Dog Association's* ad in positive terms. Again, J.K. focuses on the portrayal of Claire, a woman with visual impairment, as independent. J.K. suggests that this ad 'reinforces' her self-identity as a strong, visually impaired woman.

I think it's positive because it is the child talking. Because this is everything I get to do with my mum because she has the service dog… she can do things with her son – she can drop him off at school and pick him up. And they go and do this so she is a more alert mother. That would be – and it's almost a negative that they would portray a woman that she has to be a proper mother,

but I still think the overall message is positive because it shows that she can go out and do things and be independent... because of this guide dog she is able to be more present in her life.

In J.K.'s opinion, *The Guide Dog Association's* ad is attempting to portray Emma as a person who can be independent and 'present in her life', largely due to the assistance she receives from her guide dog. For J.K., the focus on the guide dog, Jazz, as a key aspect contributing to Emma's independence is not an issue. J.K. seems to react positively to the portrayal of women with visual impairment receiving assistance or 'help'. However, at a later point in our interview, J.K. begins to explore the notion of 'help' more deeply and suggests that some members of the public try to 'force' her to accept their help, despite the fact that she has not requested or does not need assistance. When people pressure J.K. into accepting their help, this goes against her deep-rooted assuredness of strength and empowerment. Following on from this reflection, J.K. mentions that ads should focus on representing assistive technologies used by people with visual impairment:

> …showing the situations of, 'hey this person is completely blind but by using this technology, you know, she can still earn a living and support herself'. I think that's also important, that I think maybe some prejudices of some people are, you know, 'my taxes are affording you to live in this area or do something', which isn't really true, you know, just informing that, 'hey, we have our own technology, we can work, we can do anything you can do'.

The main purpose of the above extract is seemingly to support focus on assistive technologies for people with visual impairments in ads, in the hope that individuals can be shown as independent and in control of their own lives. However, the second,

underlying issue raised by J.K. in this extract illustrates her frustration and anxieties with common societal stereotypes attached to disabled people. J.K. alludes to the common media portrayal of disabled people as 'helpless' and 'burdens' on so-called non-disabled people (Barnes, 1992). Interestingly, at this point, J.K. describes herself and other people with visual impairment as 'we' and refers to people who do not identify as disabled as 'you'. It seems as though J.K. feels compelled to defend herself and other people with visual impairment from the dominant, ableist attitudes in society.

Turning to *Vanda Pharmaceuticals'* ad, J.K. similarly uses it as a prompt to reinforce her view that women with visual impairment are capable of leading full and independent lives:

> I found it positive… It showed a woman just living everyday life, like everyone else and she was doing laundry and whatever in the house just to make things liveable – for her or her family… it shows a woman just living her life. She's ordinary. Although the circumstances make what she's doing more extraordinary, she's no different from the person who lives down the street.

From the above extract, it is clear that J.K. appreciates the link between disability and 'ordinary/everyday life'. She responds positively to the ad's portrayal of a woman with visual impairment as 'no different from the person who lives down the street'. Here, J.K.'s intention is not to deny bodily diversity – she refers to the 'extraordinary' element of the disabled body – rather, she values the representation of disabled women as having 'ordinary' capabilities.

8.6 Lily

Lily is in her twenties, lives in the North of England and is currently studying at postgraduate level. She has direct experience of disability studies and identifies as having visual impairment. Our interview begins by discussing *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's* ad, featuring Haleemah, a young woman with visual impairment. Lily believes that the ad is a positive representation of disability. However, Lily questions the dark and grey-scale colour scheme used in the ad:

> I think it's positive, I just think the colours are quite… not depressing, but almost dark colour, you know, not a positive message even though the actual message coming across is positive.

Kandinsky (1977) suggests that colour has 'direct' value and 'associative' value. The former describes the instant response evoked by a certain colour and the latter is used to explain particular emotions or feelings attributed to colours. It is interesting, then, to reflect on Lily's point that the ad's positive message contrasts with the darker, grey colour scheme. It could be said this contrast symbolises a problematic, ableist binary between *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust* (positive/optimistic) and visual impairment/disability (negative/dark). However, Lily suggests that the colour scheme is used as a positive means of encouraging the viewer to 'focus' on Haleemah and the positive text and ensure that they both 'stand out'.

Moving on, Lily begins to reflect on how her personal experiences chime with the ad, in particular the theme of 'achievement':

> I think almost, like, my own education because in school it was always, 'well you've got a disability there's no expectation for you to achieve anything and you're just there to bide your time because it's compulsory and that's what you

have to do'. But when you come to university and make that decision and you achieve at the same level of your peers - you've got a disability but it's viewed so differently in the two educational environments. It's almost like a double-edged sword in that how can you go from being labelled as almost 'no hope', 'low expectations', 'low achiever', to doing well... coming out with a first, distinctions... high level grades. When really, the odds weren't in my favour previously. How does that change?

In the above extract, Lily focuses on her transition from school to university; it seems as though she feels her 'social identity', to use Goffman's (1963) term, has undergone a form of metamorphosis. During her formative years, she was used to disabling attitudes and low expectations from people at school. However, during her university career, she feels that other people have positioned her as a high-achiever and characterise her as a person who is highly competent. A key question is, whether and how this transition has affected Lily on a personal, internal level. Although Lily does not directly address this question during our interview, she begins to discuss her sense of identity and visual impairment when relating her own experience to *The Guide Dog's Association's* ad:

> ...going to the park... was always something I enjoyed doing when I was little. My mum used to take me to the park - we'd go out for the day and go to the park somewhere. It was just one of those things that we always did. I think one thing was always clear though, because of my visual impairment I didn't like the playgrounds in the parks... the swings and climbing frames and the slides, because there's all kids running around everywhere or parents chasing around after their kids, trying to pick them up or whatever, and I couldn't cope with the perception of depth, judging how far away they were from me, running

around all over the place. It was just something that I couldn't – I was almost

scared of, but you know, I know why, when I was younger, I was brought up to

be just like everyone else - not someone with a disability.

Further on in our interview, Lily describes how 'disability' was disassociated from her

childhood; 'I was brought up to be just like everyone else. Not someone with a

disability'. It seems as though the concept of 'disability' carried some negative

connotations during her childhood. This could be possibly due to the oppressive and

patronising attitudes Lily has mentioned facing whilst at school. In her earlier years, it

seems as though there was an emphasis on Lily's ability to 'fit in' and not identify as

'someone with a disability'. However, when Lily begins to discuss her time at

university, she begins to incorporate disability as a positive part of her identity:

…I know more now about my visual impairment and how it affects me through

being in that [disability studies education] environment and doing my degree

and accepting myself for who I am. It's like, yeah okay, I've got a visual

impairment, but so what?

A significant component of Lily's narrative is the desire to challenge the common

equation of disability as 'abnormality'. Throughout our interview, Lily communicates

that people with visual impairments can lead everyday lives. Her phrases, such as,

'just like everyone else', 'I've got a visual impairment, but so what?' and 'still able'

contribute to the view that people with visual impairments do not lead lives that differ

to the perceived norm. Lily repeatedly fixes together visual impairment and 'real life'.

In doing this, she is trying to fight the disablist assumption, as expressed by Koch

(2005:124), 'to be disabled is to have a lesser endowment, to be unable to experience

the world in a way similar to that of other, similarly discrete individuals'.

When discussing *The Guide Dog's Association's* ad, Lily suggests that by using a child as the narrator, the makers of the ad have managed to lessen 'negative connotations' surrounding visual impairment:

> I think he said something like, 'because my mum's eyes don't work'. I thought it was quite cute in a way because obviously he's a little boy and that's how he knows his mum, as like, 'she's my mum, her eyes don't work'. It's almost like people, little kids, like him, it's like they don't have any awareness of the impact of visual impairment or the negative connotations. It's just like, 'yeah, she's my mum and her eyes don't work. So what? She's still my mum, she's still able to take me out and do stuff'.

For Lily, the innocent and child-like way that visual impairment is described, supports a progressive and realistic account of disability and impairment. Lily places importance on the perception of visual impairment as an ordinary aspect of life, one that does not define the whole person. Towards the end of the ad, an older, female voice starts to narrate. She begins by saying, 'every hour in the UK, someone goes blind'. Lily is critical towards this description of visual impairment; in particular she problematizes use of the term 'blind':

> …blind isn't blind for the majority of people. I think it's something like two percent of people who are 'blind' have got nothing at all, they have got no light perception, no vision. The majority of people who are 'blind' have some degree of vision. So they might not be able to see, to read a book or magazine or something, but if they were in the kitchen, they could still see what things were, what they were cooking maybe. They have some perception, even if it's limited, and I think that's kind of problematic because people don't realise,

unless they're working in that environment or have got a visual impairment

themselves – that blind doesn't necessarily mean total loss of vision.

In the above excerpt, Lily suggests that 'blind' is a totalising term and does not

account for the broad spectrum of visual impairment. Her perspective is supported by

Bolt (2005) who suggests that use of the term 'blind' can lead to a homogenising view

of a diverse range of people who experience visual impairment. From Lily's

perspective, it seems as though she would like the makers of ads to portray visual

impairment as an aspect of ordinary and everyday life. In her words, 'I think it's

putting out there that actually, they're just the same as everyone else'. From Lily's

responses to the ads, it appears that she appreciates links between women with visual

impairments and everyday activities. In the below extract, she focuses on *Vanda*

Pharmaceutical's ad:

> I think it was positive because, well, she was just leading a normal life, you
>
> wouldn't know, unless she said she was blind. She was doing her washing –
>
> we all do that… when she was touching the door, to see if it was open, to let
>
> the dog in – because I would do the same. It's a glass door, unless it had some
>
> marking on I wouldn't know whether it was open or closed.

It could be interpreted that Lily's view of the portrayal of women with visual

impairment as 'normal' and 'just the same as everyone else' as progressive is

influenced by her experience of a child as being brought up as though she was 'not

someone with a disability'. From a disability studies perspective, the notion of treating

people with impairments 'like everyone else' can be problematic insofar as the

inherent value of diversity is underestimated. However, for Lily, the portrayal of

disabled women as similar to 'everyone else' seems to be positive as it diminishes the

misinformed idea that people with visual impairment lead inherently different lives to those without visual impairment.

Lily also positively perceives the ad as 'awareness raising'. For Lily, ads can have a progressive and influential role in raising societal awareness of various impairments and issues that some individuals may experience. She suggests that advertising content that aims to raise awareness of a particular issue or impairment may positively impact upon the lives of some disabled people:

> I think it's quite good to see, actually. It's an awareness raising thing… someone I know, her child does have the same problem and she was there, on the internet, researching and asking other people and medical professionals and asking what this problem was – why her daughter wasn't, at ten o'clock at night, going to bed – why this eighteen year old was never wanting to sleep and all that sort of thing. And I think by advertising it, by having it on TV or whatever, it could help people like her. Because obviously, I don't think many medical professionals would realistically know about it.

8.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented individual narrative analyses from interviews with women who have visual impairment. The participant narratives demonstrate how individuals respond to advertising representations in complex ways and uniquely tie advertising messages to their own subjectivities.

The following chapter encapsulates the core themes I have identified across all participant narratives. The purpose of the following chapter is to outline the most pressing and reoccurring theme across participant narratives from all impairment

groups. In doing so, I make the participant data more digestible for the purposes of the discussion of findings, presented in Chapter Ten.

9. Chapter Nine: Core Themes from Participants' Narratives

9.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies core themes emerging from the data collected by applying narrative analysis to each individual interview – shown in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight. Firstly, themes relating to the ways in which participants navigate cultural tropes in advertisements are discussed. This is followed by discussion of the themes of 'disabled women, sexuality and desirability' and, later, 'disability and gender roles: normative influences'. Following this discussion, the impact of psycho-emotional disablism on participants' levels of subjective wellbeing is explored.

Personal stories and experiences emerge as indistinct from participant responses to the ads and discussions of cultural tropes. For the women I have interviewed, the ads were used as prompts for evaluating personal beliefs, stories and aspects of relationships with other people. In the diagram below, I show how participant evaluations of cultural tropes in ads and reflections on their personal experiences and stories are interwoven and fluidly impact on an individual's level of subjective wellbeing – a theme frequently referred to in this chapter:
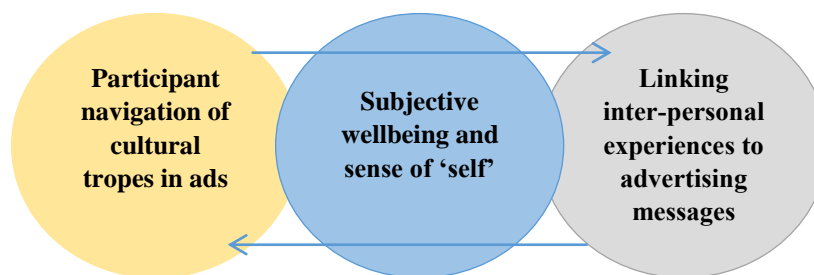
Figure 1: Diagram showing the interconnected nature of core themes from narrative analyses, with 'subjective wellbeing/sense of 'self'' as central element.

9.2 Participant navigation of cultural tropes in ads:

9.2.1   Bodily impairment and mental health issues as 'pathological' issue

A core theme running throughout multiple participant narratives – in all impairment categories – is rejection of advertising representations that pathologise bodily impairment or mental health issues. The most explicit narratives rejecting pathological portrayals come from participants who experience mental health issues. In this section, I cross-compare participant responses to themes of pathologisation in ads. In the next chapter, my 'discussion of findings', I will further explore this theme and participant responses, by making links to relevant literature.

Isobel, a participant who experiences depression, responded to *Mind/Rethink's* ad (featuring Trisha Goddard) by suggesting that she does not see her experiences of depression as illness, nor does she want other people to perceive mental health issues in this way. Isobel used her embodied experience and understanding of depression as a part of her identity to disrupt the link between illness and depression in the ad. Similarly, another participant with mental health issues, Susanna, found the link between depression and illness in *Mind/Rethink's* ad problematic. For Susanna, 'mental health issues' would have been a more appropriate term than 'mental illness'. She believed that the word 'illness' suggests that depression can be 'cured'. In a similar way to Isobel, Susanna suggesteds that people have mental health issues 'for life'. It seems as though Isobel and Susanna recognise mental health issues as a lasting aspect of their lives and identities.

Lily, a woman who has visual impairment, also rejected the pathology stereotype by describing her impairment as part of who she is. For Lily, completing a university degree (involving disability studies theory) led to her 'acceptance' of her disability

identity. In her words, 'I've got a visual impairment, but so what?' Here, Lily marked her visual impairment as a firm part of her identity. She directly showed acceptance of her impairment, however, she does so in a way that does not make visual impairment her dominant character trait (Bolt, 2013). In the subjective wellbeing area, self-acceptance of one's identity traits is a major aspect associated with positive levels of wellbeing and self-regard (Ryff, 1995; Ryff and Keyes, 1995; Deci and Ryan, 2008; Linley *et al.,* 2009).

Comparatively, Alice, a woman with visual impairment, when analysing *The Guide Dogs Association's* ad, identified a similar, pathologised portrayal of visual impairment. In Alice's opinion, the ad presented an extremely problematic representation of women with visual impairment. Particularly, she thought that the ad supported the stereotype of disabled women as less independent. Alice also suggested that the ad portrayed blindness as 'some sort of disease'.

In a similar way to Isobel and Susanna, Alice challenged the pathologisation of visual impairment in *The Guide Dogs Association's* ad by setting it apart from her own personal experience and identity as a disabled woman. By saying, 'I would never do that', Alice defined her own sense of self in a way that is personally significant and helps others to understand who she *is* (Bolaki, 2014). Alice also mentioned that the ad has undertones of 'begging' – she appears frustrated by the removal of power and agency from Emma who is, in her view, positioned as a passive recipient of help.

Mary, who identifies as having mental health issues, similarly perceived a link between the pathologisation of impairment/mental health issues and passivity in *Wellbutrin XL's* ad. From Mary's perspective, the ad supports the 'malingering' stereotype often attached to people experiencing depression. During our interview,

Mary referred to personal agency and control on numerous occasions. At the beginning of our interview, when exploring *Mind/Rethink's* ad, Mary mentioned that she is very interested in the concept of 'locus of control' and feels as though she has been 'quite passive' in recent years. Mary continued to explain the pressures she has felt from other people, for example, being judged for taking a break from work. Therefore, when Mary commented, '…the perception is that you're malingering when you're depressed… there's a chance she [female character in *Wellbutrin XL's* ad] might get blamed for not taking her medicine', it seems as though Mary used the ad as a prompt through which she works through events which have negatively impacted upon her subjective wellbeing.

Chris, a woman who experiences anxiety and depression, also identified the theme of 'curing' depression in *Wellbutrin XL's* ad. Chris' response to the ad is unique insofar as she says her immediate reaction is to want to purchase the product. Chris explained her reasoning behind this by saying, 'they've found the cure'. She feels the makers of ads are 'trying to make money out of you… out of your insecurities and depression'.

Turning to *Channel Four's 'Born Risky'* ad featuring Viktoria Modesta, Helen, who identifies as having mobility impairment, believed that the ad pathologises impairment and disability. When responding to the ad's portrayal of Modesta as 'risky', Helen suggested that the notion of society responding to 'difference as so much of a threat' is ultimately problematic as it suggests that diversity will never be viewed as part of everyday reality. Another participant with mobility impairment, Louise, criticised the repeated use of the term 'prototype' in the ad. From Louise's perspective, this term suggests that Modesta is 'not perfect' and is being 'worked on' – an idea that underpins the problematic stereotype of disability as a sign of pathological 'difference' or 'defect'. However, *Channel Four's* ad in particular prompted divergent responses

from participants. In my discussion of findings – Chapter Ten - I discuss how some participants positively responded to the ad.

9.2.2 *Disabled women, sexuality and desirability*

A key theme arising from the narratives of participants with mobility impairments surrounds advertising portrayals and personal experiences of sexuality, disability and gender. Interestingly, only participants with mobility impairments contributed to this theme. In my discussion of findings – Chapter Ten – I discuss this finding with reference to a potential 'hierarchy of impairment' within the ads.

The majority of participants with mobility impairments highlighted a theme of 'sexuality' in *Channel Four's* ad, featuring Viktoria Modesta. One participant, Helen, used the ad as a prompt to reflect on her own sexual identity and explained how, as a disabled woman, she does not believe that society recognises her as a sexual being. Helen also mentioned that the ad 'reminds me of… a BDSM [bondage and discipline/sadism and masochism]… eroticism of the dominant'. It seems as though Helen is unable to connect with the ad largely because she does not resonate with the 'overt approach' to sexuality portrayed. Helen linked her response to the ad's theme of sexuality with her own personal experiences, namely, a time when she felt her mother refused to recognise her sexual agency. Helen recalls how, when asked by a family friend if she had a boyfriend, her mother immediately interjected with, 'Helen isn't interested in boys yet!' In her view, this story illustrates how parents can often try to 'infantilise' disabled children, even when they are of adult age. I would also suggest that this story is significant in terms of Helen's engagement with the ad. It may be that Helen chose to share this particular story in order to illustrate how she has had to defend her identity as a sexual being. When Helen perceived an 'overt approach' to

sexuality embodied by Viktoria Modesta, she may feel as though her sexuality is being misrepresented and recast once more.

Similarly, Joanna, a woman with mobility impairment, also disliked the portrayal of disability and sexuality in *Channel Four's* ad: '… there was an awful lot of imagery surrounding the disabled person as sexual fetish… I think it's okay if it's desirable because it's curious but… if that's the only reason it's desirable then you've got a problem'. From Joanna's perspective, the makers of the ad are positioning disability as a point of curiosity in order to catch the audience's attention. She also suggested that the merging of disability and sexuality in the ad was not handled in a responsible and realistic manner, instead, Modesta is portrayed as 'sexual fetish'. Joanna explained that the ad does not have a positive impact on her subjective wellbeing and, in fact, left her feeling alienated from the ad's idea of how a 'desirable' disabled woman looks and behaves. When analysing *Kenneth Cole's* ad, featuring Aimee Mullins, Joanna responded in a similar way by saying, 'Here we have a woman who looks like Marilyn Monroe, who is standing there quite provocatively and that isn't how I look'.

Over the course of our interview, Joanna shared several stories relating to her experience of growing up with parents who made it obvious that 'they didn't want a disabled child'. Joanna's formative years, in particular being made to feel 'different' from her non-disabled sisters, seems to be instrumental in her feelings of being alienated from the advertising representations of 'desirable' women:

> …I had absolute miserable teenage years and because of hospital treatment that meant I couldn't leave the house without my father driving me anywhere, and he wouldn't drive me anywhere. It meant I grew up as a teenager with no friends… I never did the whole dressing up, going out, wearing make-up

thing… I have sisters and was differentiated from them. They got to do things and I didn't and it was because I was disabled. So, they could wear makeup, I couldn't.

In the above excerpt, Joanna reveals information that helps to explain her feelings of alienation from, in her words, the 'desirable' and 'sexual' women who can 'do glamour'. Joanna shares distressing memories of feeling isolated and unable to take part in bonding rituals, such as experimenting with make-up and joining social activities, in the same way that her peers may have. When Joanna explains that she was not able to do 'the whole dressing up, going out, wearing makeup thing', it seems as though she is outlining a cultural ritual that she was denied access to as a direct result of her disability identity.

Significantly, Penelope, another participant who has mobility impairment, shared a similar response. She suggests that 'disability degenders people', whilst stating that she is not seen as a 'sexual woman'. In Penelope's view, the ad focuses on Modesta's '… expression of her sexuality and the kind of weird sexual dynamic'. She mentioned that the ad does not address a 'real-life narrative', meaning that she did not feel it was empowering, as she is unable to perceive herself in 'that type of fantasy'. It seems that both women feel as though the ads produced by *Channel Four* and *Kenneth Cole* portray disability and sexuality in ways that exacerbate their feelings of alienation, rather than trying to promote more realistic narratives of disabled women's relationships with their sexuality. I will further explore this point in the following chapter – my 'discussion of findings'.

9.2.3 *Disability and gender roles: Normative influences*

For many of the women I interviewed across all impairment categories, the extent to which ads can empower disabled women is limited due to an overreliance on normative concepts of bodily appearance and behaviours. When viewing *Channel Four's* ad, Penelope commented that the makers of this ad are trying to break down stereotypes surrounding disabled women as 'pathetic' and unable to take risks. However, she does not feel that this aim has been actively supported due to the portrayal of a 'very particular… very beautiful white woman [Modesta]' who uses a 'pleasing prosthesis'. Penelope seems sceptical of ads that assume 'non-conformist themes', for example, the 'Born Risky' tagline in *Channel Four's* ad:

> Advertising itself conforms things, so how non-conformist the advertisement is – it is commodifying it… that's what advertising does because it's trying to sell something, it's trying to sell a commodity. So, the body is a commodity, that's the whole point of advertising. So when the advertisement's saying 'we all walk in different shoes', 'we think outside the box/non-uniform thinking', it's commodifying that non-uniformity, in a way. It's saying 'I think outside the box and we can sell that and we can sell disabled people's bodies, look at what we can sell', and that's the problem. That's why it's not positive.

From the above extract, it appears as though Penelope is unconvinced with the ability of ads to dismantle cultural norms and truly embrace subversive ideas. Another participant, Helen, shared a similar sentiment when responding to *Channel Four's* ad: '…she [Modesta] still very much subscribes to normative notions of aesthetics… being thin, white, wearing lots of make-up and expensive clothing… I don't feel like it's a very radical challenge of normative beauty standards…' Furthermore, Helen also challenged the ad's portrayal of disability and impairment as 'risky' by sharing

her lived and personal experience of disability as 'mundane': 'impairment is the mundane for me, it's not the extraordinary. I see how other people don't view it as the ordinary, but in my everyday life, it's my normality'. Here, Helen tells a simple story about impairment: unusual for society, yet, usual for her. In this storyline, Helen positioned herself as separate from 'other people' – this could be read as a metaphor for the division between embodied understanding of impairment and more objective, societal understandings.

When engaging with *Kenneth Cole's* ad, Mary-Jane, who has mobility impairment, firstly reacted very positively by praising the representation of a 'very powerful, very beautiful' disabled woman. However, she then commented that the representation is a 'double edged sword' due to a reliance on traditional and normative beauty standards. It seems as though Mary-Jane believes that the extent to which she can connect with the ad is limited due to an over reliance on 'mainstream' beauty standards: 'This is very mainstream to me… she's just so thin and skinny and so together… I think it stereotypes disability in a way that disability isn't… I know loads of disabled women and I don't know many disabled women at all who look like that.'

Mary-Jane's scepticism surrounding the 'mainstream' tone of *Kenneth Cole's* ad is taken further by another participant with mobility impairment, Joanna, who suggested that both models [Modesta and Mullins] have 'quite normate bodies'. In Mary-Jane's opinion, advertisers should strive to create more 'outrageous' representations of disabled women. In contrast to Helen's focus on impairment as 'mundane' and concerns about portraying disabled women as inherently 'different', Mary-Jane appreciated 'risky' approaches to disability representation. In particular, she admired the tagline 'Born Risky' in *Channel Four's* ad, as she believed that such a bold statement has the ability to 'build people up… disabled women especially'.

Turning to the ads representing visual impairment, one participant, Fran, focused on the way she feels two of the ads emphasise normative and gendered expectations. Engaging with ads produced by *The Guide Dog's Association* and *Vanda Pharmaceuticals,* Fran suggested that both ads portrayed women in traditional, caregiver and domestic roles. When exploring *Vanda Pharmaceuticals'* ad, Fran challenged the stereotypical and gendered way the female character, who has visual impairment, is portrayed. In doing so, Fran described how her life and plans for the future are markedly different:

> So, once again, it was a mother, not really having a job, I'm sure blind people do have jobs, I'm sure there are plenty of jobs that blind people can do but I feel like that's not really represented in the adverts… I don't ever really plan on just sitting at home and doing the laundry and welcoming my kid's home. Despite not being able to see… well not being able to see very well, I've been able to do my education, get a degree, get a job, and those are the kind of things that I've wanted to do… I don't think it's very empowering to just show disabled women who are staying at home… it's a bit stuck, it's a bit patriarchal in the way it's been represented... It doesn't really represent me, as a woman, or as a disabled woman...

In the above excerpt, Fran chronologically lists events that she perceives as key to her self-agency and wellbeing: 'I've been able to do my education, get a degree, get a job'. Here, Fran recaptured past experience (Labov, 1972), in order to recapitulate her point that disabled women are fully able to thrive in education and the workplace. I suggest that Fran focused on this knowledge as she perceives its absence from the ad. J.K., a woman who also identifies as having visual impairment, responds to the ads produced by *Vanda Pharmaceuticals* and *The Guide Dog's Association,* in a similar

way. Specifically, she problematized the way both women with visual impairments are shown in more 'housewife' roles, as opposed to focusing on a career angle. Annie, another participant who has visual impairment, also mentioned that she would rather the makers of the *Vanda Pharmaceuticals'* ad portray the main female character as working. For Annie, such a portrayal would be 'more representative of visually impaired people'.

Interestingly, Lily, a woman with visual impairment, appreciated *Vanda Pharmaceuticals'* portrayal of a woman with visual impairment carrying out domestic tasks. For Lily, this portrayal promotes the message that people with impairments are capable of carrying out 'everyday tasks' and are not inherently 'different'. She believed that the makers of ads should represent disabled people as 'the same as everyone else'. Over the course of our interview, Lily referred to people with visual impairments as the 'same' as people who are not visually impaired on several occasions. At one point, Lily shared a story about visiting the park as a child and feeling uneasy whilst in the playground, as she was unsure of the distance between herself and them. Lily then comments, 'but you know… when I was younger, I was brought up to be like everyone else – not someone with a disability'. Therefore, by contextualising Lily's response to *Vanda Pharmaceuticals'* ad, it seems as though challenging stereotypical attitudes towards disabled people as 'different' is a key part of her subjectivity.

Lily's emphasis on representing women with visual impairments as capable of carrying out 'everyday tasks' was similarly discussed by Alice, a woman with visual impairment, who says, '… most of us are quite normal, we have normal lives… we do normal things'. Alice took her discussion of normativity in a different direction by

challenging the common 'inspiration' stereotype attached to disabled people, which she feels is supported in *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's* ad:

> … When I got my A-Level results I was in the paper… I got straight A's…there weren't a lot of disabled students… in our area and it was just a bit of… one of those 'inspirational' [participant emphasis] stories – there were a lot of people who got straight A's in my year group and none of them got in the paper… I suppose it's similar with the Haleemah story. I think what she's done is great but I don't think necessarily it needs that kind of attention… there are a lot of people studying fashion that are equally as good probably… it's one of those things – it's nice in one way but a bit patronising in the other… it's an expectation that goes along with inspiration… you've got to have done something really great and all disabled people are inspirational. When actually most of us are quite normal, we have normal lives… and we just do normal things. I think it's that thing that you have to be inspirational in order to be validated… I think inspirational is actually quite an alienating term.

Here, Alice described how the 'inspirational' stereotype often attached to disabled people actually serves to 'alienate' individuals and perpetuate the misconception the 'them and us' attitude that established disabled people as 'other'. In critiquing this stereotype, Alice emphasised the lives of people with visual impairment as 'normal'. In my view, both Lily and Alice's focus on the 'normality' of visual impairment is key to their 'sociological voice' (Thomas, 2008:426). Both women challenge the, often unquestioned, ableist dichotomy that fixes disabled people in the category of 'abnormal' and non-disabled people as 'normal'.

In our interview, J.K. resisted a deficit approach to disability and impairment; in her narrative she references personal achievements that carry high levels of cultural value, for example, gaining a Masters degree. The crux of J.K.'s argument appears to be that she has shaped a successful life for herself, despite societal assumptions that construct impairment as a 'barrier' in an individual's life. J.K. also perceived this message in *The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's* ad, thus indicating that she has a connection with the ad's underpinning ethos. Furthermore, by prefacing her academic achievements with 'I was declared legally blind before…', J.K. positioned her success in tandem with her disability identity. In the above extract, J.K. illustrates her disability identity and visual impairment as a 'normal' part of life – something that does not necessarily impede on an individual's capabilities.

I would argue that despite uneasiness surrounding the term 'normal' in disability studies, for some of the women I interviewed, reclaiming the right to be viewed as 'normal' is empowering. In the cases of Lily, Alice and J.K. it seems as though they want to be viewed as 'normal'. It is not to say that all three women are supporting the idea that a certain type of person, i.e. a white, middle-class, university educated male represents 'normalcy' (Davis, 1995). Instead, they appear to want recognition that what constitutes a 'normal' life is subjective and applicable to disabled women. One participant, Mary, who experiences depression, added to this collective narrative strand by sharing the fear that medication can lead to 'you not being yourself anymore'. Mary's point nicely sums up the idea that 'normal' is what the individual makes of it and the dominant, societal approach to 'normalcy', i.e. avoiding certain behaviours and emotions by taking medication, can actually be detrimental to an individual's perspective of their 'normality'.

9.3 Linking inter-personal experiences to advertising messages:

9.3.1 The effects of close relationships and cultural representation on subjective wellbeing and disability identity

One participant, Annie, who has visual impairment, outlined the prevalence of ads in society at the very beginning of our interview: 'They're so widespread – you can't really get away from advertisements – they're on TV, they're on billboards, they're on the internet…' During our interview, Annie seemed to react most strongly to *The Guide Dog's Association's* ad, featuring Claire, a woman with visual impairment, her children and Jazz, the guide dog:

> I'm not a great fan of Guide Dogs Association advertisements full stop. I feel like they are very, very patronising. They make it look like blind people can't do anything without the help of an assistance dog. That's, sort of, encouraging harmful stereotypes… I think Guide Dog's representation of visually impaired people is absolutely dreadful. I'm thinking of, again, "normal" [quotes gestured] watching those advertisements and thinking, 'oh, those poor blind people'. I think that's what Guide Dogs are going for though – the sympathy…'oh, these poor blind people, they can't do anything without their dogs'… I feel a little bit betrayed because this organisation that is supposed to be representing visually impaired people is portraying them as useless essentially.

Here, Annie illustrates the potent ways in which portrayals of disability in advertising can impact on the subjective wellbeing and disability identity of the people they are supposed to represent. During our interview, Annie shared stories about her travels, including teaching English as a foreign language. When discussing her experience of

teaching in a foreign country, Annie mentioned how a member of the public described her as 'amazing' – a concept she rejected as she felt her visual impairment is not something that would hinder her capability to travel and teach. It seems as though, from Annie's perspective, one of the most problematic stereotypes attached to disabled women is that they have 'lesser' capabilities and are, in some way, 'dependent' on others. Therefore, when Annie perceived this stereotype in *The Guide Dogs Association's* ad, it negatively impacted her on a personal level and clashed with her self-knowledge of her own capabilities.

Another participant, Alice, perceived a theme of 'dependency' in the ad; throughout her exploration of the ad, she refers to the message that Claire, the woman with visual impairment, is portrayed as 'dependent' on her guide dog. In our interview, Alice described how this portrayal clashes with her self-identity as a capable and self-reliant person. Indeed, a key point of contention for many of the women I interviewed was feeling as though they were represented in a completely different way to how they perceive themselves. Alongside this, some women also focused on how family members and friends perceive them in a different way to how they actually view themselves.

Explaining the clash between public perception of 'self' and actual perception of 'self' further, an over-arching theme expressed by participants who identify with mental health issues is a perceived pressure from other people to construct a 'brave' exterior that does not expose any aspects of their mental health issues. Some of the women I interviewed told stories of moments when their mental health issues were undermined and, in some cases, viewed as a character flaw by either friends/family or health professionals. One participant, Isobel, explained her mother's unsupportive response when Isobel disclosed her mental health issues:

I remember my mum saying… I should snap myself out of it… I must have

been about thirty and I've never spoken to her about it since…She just said she

was ashamed and she worried what the neighbours would say.

After Isobel described her mother's unsupportive response to her admission of mental

health issues, she articulated how this traumatic event caused her to stop talking about

her mental health issues: 'So that was my last moment of trying to, erm…' In this

moment, Isobel briefly paused and vocally hesitated, this can be read as significant

when considering that narrative pauses may signify feelings of anxiety or can be used

purposefully to emphasise importance (Oliveira, 2002). Following on from her story

regarding a distressing incident involving her mother, Isobel started to reflect on how

she has positively educated her husband on the realities of depression. Isobel's story of

changing her husband's beliefs could be read as an analogy for the potential of

personal and lived understanding as a vehicle for raising awareness on the reality of

mental health:

I've just educated [husband] and when I've actually said to him 'but I wouldn't

be who I am without it', he completely accepts it and now he calls me mad and

I say… 'mad and proud'. And it's wonderful, but it took… well we've been

together twenty years and we're talking only possibly since I was forty that it

really got to be me educating him – in that being part of me [participant

emphasises this part of sentence].

Interestingly, Isobel used the word 'freely' twice after explaining how she has

educated her husband to the point that he now values her 'mad' identity and pride. Her

use of this word could be interpreted as a hint towards feelings of personal liberation

she experiences as a result of transforming her husband's perspectives and knowledge

of mental health issues. I interpret both of Isobel's stories as key to her reactions to the ads.

Another participant, Melody, also discussed past experiences of feeling undermined by family members when attempting to discuss her mental health issues: '… I'd try and explain to them what was going on in my head and it's like 'Melody just pull your socks up' or 'it's all in your head, you're just attention seeking…' Comparatively, Chris, who experiences depression, discussed how she has felt, in the past, unable to talk to family members during periods of mental distress (see Chris' narrative – Chapter Seven). Chris interspersed her analysis of *Mind/Rethink's* ad, in particular, her discussion of the ad's emphasis on raising public awareness of mental health issues, with references to 'hiding' her experiences of depression:

> I've suffered from depression myself – on and off – and I do keep it a secret because you know, even though people say it's more acceptable, it's not something I am comfortable about spreading around, it's not a sign that I want to wear on my head, because everyone wants to put their best foot forward and there's certain things that you want to hide… depression's something you want to hide… I've always played the clown and that hides me behind that type of thing, which, you know, it is real – I have got a sense of humour but it does hide things, like make-up hides things, it hides a multitude of sins.

In the above short passage, Chris describes on six occasions how she 'hides' her depression. She also illustrates depression as her 'secret' and describes it as a 'sign' that is best concealed. The use of idioms in Chris' narrative is particularly interesting as it facilitates insight into the ways in which she is navigating cultural discourses (Rechtman, 2000).

Idioms arise out of embodied experience and interaction with cultural backgrounds (Kleinman, 1988). In Chris' narrative, it seems as though cultural stereotypes surrounding depression as a negative experience have influenced her expression of depression as something to 'hide'. When using the idiom, 'make-up hides things, it hides a multitude of sins', it may be interpreted that Chris has come to view depression as a source of shame and stigmatisation – a 'sin'. In a similar way to Isobel, Chris also described feeling ignored and undermined by a close family member when sharing that she experienced depression. From her experiences of psycho emotional disablism, it appears that Chris absorbed the problematic attitude that mental health issues should be 'hidden' and not shared with others. Interestingly, however, Chris strongly welcomed advertising portrayals of mental health issues that have open and honest approaches. For example, when engaging with *SAMHSA's* ad, Chris commented that the 'real issue' surrounding depression is progressively focussed on. Specifically, suggested that the 'real issue' is about '…being caring and empathetic… really understanding'.

A strong example of how individuals can challenge problematic and oppressive attitudes from other people can be found within Mary-Jane's narrative. When discussing her parents' over-protective attitudes towards her life and capabilities as a woman who uses a wheelchair, Mary-Jane showed defiance by calling their behaviour 'ridiculous' and positions their view of her as passive as far removed from true reality. Earlier on in our interview, Mary-Jane responded very positively to *Channel Four's* ad featuring Viktoria Modesta – she particularly liked the notion of 'big statements' in the ad, i.e. 'Born Risky'. Mary-Jane seemed to feel that Modesta is presented as strong and creative; a portrayal she connects with due to her love of dancing and creative writing. Therefore, it becomes clear that the 'passive' way in which Mary-Jane

believes her parents approach her clashes with the strong and creative way in which she perceives herself.

An illustration of psycho-emotional disablism as a result of relations with parents is also found in Joanna's narrative. Similarly to Helen and Mary-Jane, two women who also identify as having mobility impairment, Joanna explained that her parents have reacted to her mobility impairment in problematic ways. However, whilst Helen and Mary-Jane seem to illustrate their parents' behaviour as unintentionally harmful, Joanna spoke of experiencing deliberate inter-personal oppression. Joanna explained how her parents 'didn't want a disabled child and made that quite clear'. It seems as though Joanna's earlier experiences of being made to feel inferior on the basis of her disability identity has impacted on the way she currently feels about being a disabled woman. For example, when analysing *Nordstrom's* ad featuring Jillian Mercado, Joanna remarked that Mercado appears very comfortable and confident. This seemed to make Joanna quite sad as she shares her frustration at not being able to feel as 'comfortable in my own body'.

9.4 Conclusion

To finish, this chapter has outlined overarching themes from the fifteen, individual participant narrative analyses. Significantly, I identified the underpinning notion that participant responses to ads/representations of disabled women are interconnected with personal stories regarding inter-personal interactions. The stories participants share regarding relations with other people inform and, at times, explicitly feed into their responses to ads. Furthermore, both components actively relate to participants' perception of 'self' and levels of subjective wellbeing. If participants believe an ad represents disability and gender in a way that clashes with their lived experience or

reinforces negative attitudes they have experienced from family members/friends, they are more likely to respond negatively to the ad.

The following chapter – my discussion of findings - builds upon the core themes identified from participants' narratives by examining the extent to which themes correlate or challenge key ideas found within relevant literature.

10. Chapter Ten: Discussion of Findings: Highlighting areas of progression and regression in advertising representations of disabled women

10.1   Introduction

In this chapter, my main objective is to weave my data sets (Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight), with the existing knowledge base explored in Chapters Two and Three. I explore ways in which my findings extend existing knowledge. Furthermore, I argue that my findings demonstrate how individual responses to advertising representations, and socio-cultural stereotypes more broadly, are inherently interwoven with an individual's sense of self and embodied experiences. In doing so, I provide a rationale for greater visibility of personal experience in the social model framework - an underpinning belief within feminist disability studies research.

Additionally, in this chapter I explore my findings reflexively. I am particularly interested in analysing points of contrast between my views and participants' views in order to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals' beliefs and the meanings we take from cultural representations are tied to our subjectivities. I focus on the ways in which our identities, cultural contexts and past experiences infiltrate the process of navigating advertising representations.

I begin this chapter by discussing my findings in relation to participant subjectivity as a key influencing factor in individual responses to ads. I track the ways in which some participants use problematic advertising representations as an opportunity to challenge stereotypes surrounding disabled women. However, for some participants, certain advertising representations prompt reflection on negative past experiences and the stories they share are reflective of psycho-emotional disablism (Thomas, 1999).

The next section focuses on the extent to which bodily and mental health diversity is authentically embraced in ads. I draw on my research findings to explore whether and how portrayals of disabled women in ads support authentic or tokenistic appreciation of diversity as a natural, and valuable, human quality. Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of inclusionism and Davis' (2013) critical approach to diversity are particularly relevant within this section. My findings support both concepts, as I discuss how the makers of ads often *presume* to be representing human diversity. Here, I also find Heiss' (2011) term 'naïve integration' particularly useful when examining the ways in which ads often superficially recognise diversity.

Furthermore, I track the emerging theme of disability as 'risky' within some ads and explore the extent to which risky portrayals of disability can be useful in challenging societal stereotypes (Haller and Ralph, 2006). I discuss the comparative and contrasting views between my own analyses and participants' perspectives regarding the portrayal of disabled women in ads as risky. In the next section, I move onto the representation of disabled women's sexuality in ads. A key element of discussion in this section is whether and how disabled women are sexually empowered or objectified by advertising representations. I also focus on the extent to which representations of disabled people's sexuality are framed by ableist and disablist narratives.

The following section covers the theme of bodily impairment and mental health issues portrayed as pathological issues in ads. I explore how this theme is navigated by disabled women in complex ways. Moving onto the last section, I critically discuss the extent to which disabled women are progressively presented as strong and autonomous in ads.

10.2　The binding of advertising representations and cultural tropes to personal narratives and subjectivities

A key focus in my 'core themes from narrative analysis' – Chapter Nine - is the interconnected nature between participant responses to ads and their personal subjectivities. Uncovering the ways in which navigation of cultural stereotypes are deeply embedded in an individual's past experiences and life-stories is significant because it suggests that individuals do not respond to cultural/advertising representations in binary ways, i.e. this representation is positive or negative. Rather, individuals display much more complex reactions to representations. I stress the term *individual* as although participants and myself share the identity of being disabled women, their responses to ads and my own opinions contrast on multiple occasions.

Through the analysis of participant data, the nuanced ways in which disabled women react to advertising representations is revealed. Interestingly, my analyses of ads – shown in Chapter Five – demonstrate, at times, significant contrasts within the responses and opinions of participants. Overall, my analyses of ads are more critical than participant analyses. Significantly, this finding indicates to me that my feminist disability studies approach may be too dogmatic, at times. Moreover, participants demonstrate how individuals in everyday, 'real-life' circumstances may perceive ads. A strong example of this difference is found in participants' analyses and my own analysis of *Channel Four's* ad featuring Viktoria Modesta. Although I believe that the makers of the ad intentionally aim to challenge stereotypes of disabled women as 'passive' and 'pitiable', I interpret the dominant themes of danger and risk as troublesome and potentially fostering more stereotypical attitudes. Some participants, particularly Helen and Penelope, responded to the ad's focus on 'risk' in a similarly critical style. However, Mary-Jane and Louise's analyses instead discussed the risky

representation of a woman with mobility impairment as potentially empowering in its ability to challenge preconceived notions of disabled women.

Furthermore, divergent participant responses are particularly found in regards to *Channel Four's* ad. Some participants who have a disability studies background – Helen and Joanna – took a critical approach, comparative to my own, and highlighted the risky/sexualisation themes as problematic. However, another participant, Mary-Jane, who has engaged with an extent of disability studies theory in her studies, responded to the ad in an overwhelmingly positive manner. Mary-Jane described the ad as creatively and artistically inspiring. It is interesting to recognise how Mary-Jane underpinned her positive response to the ad with her own identity as a creative woman (see Mary-Jane's narrative in Chapter Six). From my position as a feminist disability studies researcher actively engaging with a reflexive approach in my thesis, it is important for me to bring attention to the moments wherein my analyses of ads contrasts, either in nuanced or pronounced ways, with participant analyses.

Significantly, cultural conventions and beliefs are referred to throughout all participant narratives. Within participants' personal stories, covert and overt references to cultural practices and 'norms' are evident (Smith and Sparkes, 2008). This finding indicates that cultural contexts *do* impact upon an individual's sense of self and their response to external stimuli, such as, advertising representations. At times participants directly referred to cultural beliefs and, occasionally, I interpret participant stories as unconsciously shaped by socio-cultural expectations. Three examples of covert socio-cultural ideologies influencing participant thought processes are found in Melody, Isobel and Alice's narratives. Melody and Isobel (who experience mental health issues) both discussed the pressure they perceive from society to conceal their periods of mental distress, in order to perform their roles as mothers. As Melody described,

'…as a parent I'm not allowed to be sick, because I'm the mum. I've got to be strong and keep it all together…' Similarly, Isobel mentioned, 'I could never dream about telling my kids [about her experiences of depression] … they need to think I'm strong…' In a comparative manner, Alice (who has visual impairment), spoke of her concerns of being a disabled mother in the future – due to the amount of negative media and societal attitudes towards disabled parents she has witnessed.

For the majority of participants, their perception of problematic stereotypes and representations in ads did not automatically lead them to describe negative emotions or prompt them to negatively reflect on their feelings of self-esteem and worth. Rather, participants tended to use stereotypical and problematic representations as an opportunity to share stories and experiences that deconstruct such representations through narratives of strength, personal empowerment, self-acceptance, or pride in one's identity and capability. Here, Seligman's (2002) approach to individual mastery in regards to wellbeing is supported. For Seligman (2002:5), perceiving individuals as 'passive' respondents to outside stimuli is unhelpful; rather, individuals take the role of 'decision-makers'.

From a feminist disability studies perspective, the notion of 'individual mastery' when engaging with cultural representations is important as it outlines individuals' agency. Rather than passively responding to cultural narratives and advertising portrayals, my findings demonstrate that individuals undergo complex navigations and challenge cultural tropes. A strong instance is Isobel's response to *Mind/Rethink's* ad, where she perceived the problematic portrayal of depression as 'illness'. Prompted by this portrayal, Isobel positively asserted that she does not believe depression is an illness and explains how, in her experience, it can be a natural part of self, adding value to one's identity.

The participants in my study clearly displayed self-directed navigation of wellbeing, as Seligman (2002) describes. Adding to Seligman's perspective, I suggest that a key way in which individuals self-direct their responses to external stimuli, such as ads, is by drawing upon personal stories and experiences. I suggest that individuals re-tell past stories and events as a way of enacting and embodying their personal values and beliefs about the world and their own selfhood. Throughout my interviews with participants, personal stories consistently underpinned their responses to ads.

Amongst the women I interviewed who identify as having mental health issues, there are substantial differences between self-acceptance of mental health issues and personal narratives/experiences of shame and rejection from others. Some participants used problematic portrayals as a means of sharing counter-narratives of mental health that focus on acceptance and mental health issues as a positive part of their identity. In doing so, participants challenged and contradicted cultural tropes through sharing their embodied realities. However, some participants dominantly responded to advertising representations of mental health by evoking past experiences of stigmatisation and distress, on the basis of their mental health issues. In my analyses of ads representing women with mental health issues, I uncover problematic discourses relying on themes of pathologisation of mental health experiences and an emphasis on recovery from mental health issues. Some of my participants identified similar themes and, in their analyses, connect advertising representations with traumatic past experiences and feelings of low self-worth.

For example, one participant, Chris, highlighted a theme of recovering from mental health issues in *Wellbutrin XL's* ad – this prompted Chris to feel frustrated and upset that the makers of ads are seemingly trying to profit from, in her words, people's 'insecurities'. During our interview, Chris frequently alluded to lowered levels of

subjective wellbeing, particularly in the aspects of self-care and self-acceptance of mental health issues. At times, Chris directly discussed low levels of wellbeing: '… [regarding not asking for support with mental health issues] it's a low self-esteem thing… low value for myself'. Rather than drawing upon narratives of self-acceptance or positive self-identity in order to challenge stereotypical representations, Chris linked negative and traumatic experiences with the advertising representations.

Chris' responses to the ads are emblematic of psycho-emotional disablism (Thomas, 1999). Thomas' (1999:47) concept describes how inter-personal relations and 'socio-cultural processes' may constitute disabling barriers in an individual's life. Over the course of our interview, Chris referred to situations where her mental health issues have been undermined by family members and she was made to feel less important than others (see Chris' narrative in Chapter Seven). Her story fits well with Watermeyer and Swartz's (2008:603) concept of 'distorted boundaries'. As Watermeyer and Swartz describe, Chris has learnt to devalue her own emotions and experiences of identifying as a disabled woman, due to a learned duty to protect the wellbeing of others, over her own self-care. Chris' story advances the concepts of psycho-emotional disablism and distorted boundaries by demonstrating how the effects of both can be, to an extent, inescapable when living in a society that frequently reinforces stereotypical representations of mental health and disability.

Another participant, Joanna, displayed similar internalisation of negative attitudes she has received from family members. In my 'core themes from narrative analysis', Chapter Nine, I discuss Joanna's response to the sexualised and glamorised representations of women with mobility impairments in advertising. Analysing the ads prompted Joanna to reflect on her own selfhood, in particular, her identity as a woman with mobility impairment. Joanna explained why she feels she is unable to do 'the

whole feminine thing' by re-telling her experiences as a disabled adolescent who was oppressed by her parents.

Joanna's response to the ads and stories regarding her oppressive experiences with family members are demonstrative of Shakespeare and Watson's (2001) approach to disability as a 'complex dialectic of biological, psychological, cultural and socio-political factors' (Shakespeare and Watson, 2001:22, in Thomas, 2004:574). Joanna's perception that she cannot be feminine is, in my view, inextricably entrenched in the feedback she gained from her parents at a young age. From the traumatic experiences Joanna faced, it is possible that she may have developed a view of herself as 'different' to her sisters. It could be argued that this view has developed into a belief that because she is disabled, she is 'different' from other women in general. Moreover, her belief is confounded by dominant socio-cultural narratives that dictate how women should perform femininity.

10.3   Do representations of disabled women in Anglo-American advertising represent human diversity in authentic or tokenistic ways?

My analyses of ads – detailed in Chapter Eight - suggest that the makers of ads frequently have a tendency to *presume* that they are portraying an ethos of empowerment and diversity. The verb 'presume' is significant here, as I found that some ads promote 'empowerment' and 'diversity' in limited ways. An example is found in *Kenneth Cole's* ad, featuring Aimee Mullins, whom uses prosthetic legs. The ad carries the tagline, 'We All Walk in Different Shoes'. From a feminist disability studies perspective, I find this tagline problematic due to the ableist assumption that 'we all walk'. I would argue that this assumption is reductive as it fails to recognise the various ways that individuals are mobile. Arguably, the makers of *Kenneth Cole's* ad are attempting to promote diversity by including a model wearing prosthetic limbs

in their advertising campaign and creating a 'play-on-words' tagline to suggest that we all experience life differently. However, I believe that the opportunity to embrace diversity is limited in this instance due to ableist undertones: Mullins' prosthetic limbs are partially obscured as they are the same skin tone as her flesh and, on one leg, the hem of her skirt covers the top of her prosthetic limb. My findings here strongly support Mitchell and Snyder's (2015:4) concept of inclusionism, particularly, the suggestion that neoliberal 'inclusion' of disabled people is founded upon a process of making impaired bodies appear 'normal', and within this process, 'unapparent'.

The ad's tagline, 'We All Walk in Different Shoes', is interesting when explored through Davis' (2013) critique of diversity. Davis (2013:13) explains how dominant interpretations of diversity are undertaken within a fixed, neoliberal paradigm:

> There is a built-in contradiction to the idea of diversity in neoliberal ideology, which holds first and foremost each person to be a unique individual. Individualism does not meld easily into the idea of group identity. And yet for neoliberalism it must.

Through Davis' perspective, the ad's tagline could be read as a metaphor for individualisation. By suggesting that 'we all walk in different shoes', the value and solidarity of shared experience is juxtaposed and diminished; we may be 'we', however, 'we' are 'all *different*' [emphasis added]. The tagline, 'We All Walk in Different Shoes', is also problematized by Helen, who explained that the suggestion that 'we all walk' does not promote an inclusive ethos. In her analysis of *Kenneth Cole's* ad, Helen remarked that simply incorporating impairment into 'special' advertising campaigns, rather than consistently showing bodily variation in ads, is unlikely to challenge societal attitudes towards disabled women in the long-term.

Furthermore, in regards to *Channel Four's* ad, Helen proposed that bodily impairment is portrayed problematically as Modesta's 'very artistically emphasised prosthetic' is shown as something other people 'feel threatened by and scared of'. Helen's analysis here fits well with Mitchell and Snyder's discussion of inclusionism, wherein impairment may 'hyper-prostheticised' (2012:12) and hold 'transcendent capacity' (2010:117), rather than appreciated on its own terms.

Helen's analyses progressively extend Heiss' (2011) term 'naïve integration', used to describe limited representations of diversity that, in actuality, support mainstream notions of bodily 'normality'. At the root of Helen's criticisms of both ads, I believe, is the problematic notion of 'exoticism'. By highlighting how bodily impairment is used in 'special' ad campaigns and is dramatically portrayed in order to stimulate emotive responses, Helen questioned the use of impairment as an 'exotic' device, rather than a reflection of natural human diversity. Joanna, extends Helen's criticism by suggesting that the disabled body is portrayed as 'sexual fetish' in *Channel Four's* ad. When explaining how 'naïve integration' is present in *Dove's* campaign, Heiss (2011) highlights how the audience is encouraged to evaluate the models' bodies and suggests that the models representing diversity still conformed to dominant conventional beauty standards. Adding to Heiss' (2011) analysis, I also suggest that illustrating bodily impairment as exotic is a form of naïve and limited integration. Using Garland Thomson's (1997:34) term, impairment is 'culturally othered', as bodily impairment becomes the individual's most defining attribute.

In my analysis of *Channel Four's* ad – found in Chapter Five – I interpret the representation of gender and disability as holding both positive and negative aspects. Whilst I positively respond to the sexualised representation of Modesta – suggesting that it powerfully challenges the stereotype of disabled people as asexual, I believe

that many techniques used in the ad – such as sound and the spiked prostheses worn by Modesta – harmfully associate themes of fear and danger with women who use prosthetic limbs.

Contrastingly, some participants perceive the portrayal of Modesta's prosthetic limbs in a different, more positive, way. Mary-Jane suggested that Modesta's practice of using her body, whether it be her prosthetic limbs or other bodily parts, in creative and artistic ways is progressive as it enables her to 'show her personality'. Additionally, Joanna particularly liked the spiked prosthetic limb that Modesta wears during part of the ad. For Joanna, the scenes where Modesta dances whilst wearing her spiked prosthetic limb encourage ways of thinking about 'a different form of moving and of using the body'. The different mind-sets held by participants and myself is an important aspect of my discussion of findings. As the researcher, I have selectively chosen and focused upon excerpts of participants' narratives – during this process I have conscientiously aimed to uncover and highlight views that are different to my own and contradict my personal beliefs. Highlighting how some participants perceive an ad in a significantly different way to my own view is somewhat uncomfortable (Pillow, 2003). However, it enables me to uncover the manifold ways in which disabled women navigate advertising representations alongside their embodied knowledge.

When analysing *Kenneth Cole's* ad, Joanna, suggested that Mullins has a 'normate' body that looks very different to her own. Mary-Jane holds a similar sentiment and expresses that she does not know of many disabled women, in her day-to-day life, who look similar to Mullins. I interpret Joanna's and Mary-Jane's comments as a critical expression towards superficial appreciation of diversity in the ad. Another participant, Penelope, highlighted a tokenistic approach to empowerment and challenging

oppression in *Channel Four* and *Kenneth Cole's* ads. With regard to the former ad she describes Viktoria Modesta as '… a very beautiful white woman, the only impairment visible is her prosthesis… this very… pleasing prosthesis. So it's not actually challenging the context of a gender norm…' Comparatively, she comments that the makers of *Kenneth Cole's* ad have chosen a '…white woman… a very particular and pretty woman… she's just a normal woman, but then she's got this quirkiness about her which can be commodified… a safe quirkiness'.

Penelope's criticism of *Kenneth Cole's* representation of disabled women bears strong comparisons with Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of inclusionism. As Penelope highlighted how the makers of the ad commodify Mullins' impairment, Mitchell and Snyder (2015:12) comparatively criticise the way in which neoliberal contexts only accept the 'inclusion' of disabled people 'through administrative 'creaming' or hyper-prostheticization'. Here, both Penelope and Mitchell and Snyder effectively highlight the superficial manner by which 'diversity' is dominantly approached. Rather than recognising and valuing diversity as a natural part of human life, diversity is either toned down (as shown in *Kenneth Cole's* ad), or, 'hyper-prostheticized' (as shown in *Channel Four's* ad).

In Bolt's (2014) 'ableist advertising aesthetic' framework, reliance on ableist narratives towards disability in advertising is also highlighted. Bolt's (2014) framework consists of five categories that describe the most common ways in which disability is represented in advertising: distortion, alterity, disclosure, segregation and exclusion. The categories of 'distortion' and 'disclosure' fit well with my previous discussion of Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of inclusionism. To explain, the makers of *Kenneth Cole's* ad disclose Mullins' disability status by using flesh-coloured, subtle prosthetic limbs and partially hiding the top of one limb with the hem

of her skirt. Contrastingly, in *Channel Four's* ad, Modesta uses striking and embellished prosthetic limbs. I would argue that the makers of this ad use distortion techniques and present unrealistic images of mobility impairment.

Additionally, my findings suggest that another category used to describe the harmful cultural assimilation of bodily impairment and impairment aids, such as prostheses, would progress Bolt's (2014) advertising framework. My argument is that *tokenistic* approaches to diversity and integration of bodily impairment substantiate a powerful form of cultural assimilation. By approaching bodily diversity in a superficial manner and portraying prostheses in ways that are either concealing or deliberately unrealistic, the makers of ads *imitate* disability identity and culture without consulting the rich beliefs and realities of disabled people. As Mitchell and Snyder (2015:3) describe through the concept of inclusionism, disabled bodies are not offered as 'alternative maps for living' – instead, they are obscured.

Seemingly, the ads representing women with mobility impairment and visual impairment provide the most noticeable instances of cultural appropriation. In the ads produced by *Channel Four* and *Kenneth Cole,* prosthetic limbs – worn by some people with mobility impairment and part of disability culture – are presented in ways that are in-keeping with ableist culture. In the former, the various prosthetic limbs worn by Modesta are far removed from prostheses realistically worn on an everyday basis. One participant, Helen, suggested that Modesta's extravagantly adorned prostheses are emblematic of a materialist culture that detracts from disabled people's solidarity. For Helen, a key problem is that many disabled people would not be able to afford such prosthetics. Meanwhile, in *Kenneth Cole's* ad, Mullins' prosthetic limbs are not immediately noticeable and, at first glance, it appears as though Mullins' is not wearing prosthetic limbs. Many individuals who use prosthetic limbs are likely to

choose flesh coloured prostheses that are not immediately noticeable, however, my point is that within an ad that is supposed to promote diversity, the act of 'passing' a model with mobility impairment as 'non-disabled' is a form of cultural assimilation and ultimately hinders appreciation of bodily diversity.

A further participant, Isobel, who experiences depression, used her personal experience and reflected on her subjective wellbeing when exploring the idea of tokenistic empowerment and appreciation of diversity in ads. In particular, Isobel focused on *Mind/Rethink's* ad featuring Trisha Goddard and describes her adverse reaction to the ad's comparison between breast cancer and depression: 'Depression is not an illness… you've got to accept it as part of you as well… [referring to the ad] I would want a more empowering message… 'that's why I am who I am… the creative person I am'. Here, Isobel shared her view that authentic empowerment of people with mental health issues is not promoted in the ad, instead, the notion of tokenistic empowerment is prevalent.

However, not all participants held similar views in regards to the ad. Indeed, some participants, particularly Chris and Melody, interpreted the ad as positively enacting change relating to societal stigma surrounding mental health issues. In Chris' analysis of *Mind/Rethink's* ad, she described how the ad message, 'It's time to talk', authentically gives voice to her experiences of stigma and isolation she has experienced. Melody echoed Chris' view by explaining that she believes the makers of the ad are positively trying to raise awareness surrounding mental health issues. Although Isobel, Chris and Melody held differing opinions regarding the ad, their responses demonstrate the interlinked nature between lived experiences and reactions to cultural representations. All three women inextricably connected their own stories

to their beliefs about whether or not the makers of the ad are authentically or tokenistically empowering women with mental health issues.

In my own analysis of *Mind/Rethink's* ad, I concur with Isobel's view, as I identify themes of 'recovery' and 'pathologisation of mental health issues'. Later on in our interview, Isobel described how she finds some aspects of her depression as adding value to her life. She also said that she has re-educated her husband to view mental health issues in a non-stigmatising way and celebrate her as 'mad and proud'. In a similar manner to Joanna, I believe that Isobel's reaction to the ad inextricably links with her own positive sense of self and the positive value she associates with her experiences of depression.

Varying participant responses to ads, particularly relating to the extent to which advertising representations of disabled women can be considered tokenistically or authentically empowering are also found in regards to visual impairment. *The Guide Dog's Association's* ad sparked significant differences in opinions from participants – J.K. and Lily warmed to the ad, Fran shared more ambivalent views, whilst Annie and Alice held critical responses. For example, whilst Annie interpreted the ad's focus on a guide dog supporting a woman with visual impairment as patronising and promoting sympathetic audience responses, another participant, J.K., did not report any issues with this representation. For, J.K., the ad usefully demonstrated how guide dogs may enable a person with visual impairment to be more 'independent' (see J.K.'s narrative in Chapter Eight). The profound differences between participant responses shows that cultural representations of disabled women cannot be simply interpreted as 'positive' or 'negative'. Rather, cultural representations of marginalised identity groups are better understood as fluid, subjective and evocative of personal stories and meanings in individuals.

10.4   The presentation of disabled women as 'risky': To what extent is

the connection between disability and risk in advertisements progressive?

In my analyses of the ads produced by *Channel Four* and *Nordstrom* (both representing women with mobility impairments), I uncovered key themes relating to 'risk', 'danger' and 'fear'. My findings here contrast with Ganahl and Arbuckle's (2001) report that people with physical impairments are usually presented as less powerful than 'non-disabled' people in ads. In my analysis of *Channel Four's* ad – found in Chapter Five - I interpreted the connection between risk, fear and disabled women as problematic. My view is that the disabled woman featured, Viktoria Modesta, is presented as a spectacle-type figure at many times throughout the ad and she is often portrayed as a manifestation of fear and danger, as opposed to a woman with a real and multi-faceted identity.

One participant, Helen, also showed scepticism regarding the portrayal of risk and fear in the ad: 'the fact that she [Modesta] feels that society can perceive her difference so much as a threat, in itself, carries a negative message of 'people will never get used to this''. From Helen's perspective, Modesta's impairment is hyper-inflated in the ad and presented as a 'threat' – underpinning this portrayal is the troublesome notion that people with impairments are inherently 'other' and 'different'.

However, another participant, Joanna, interpreted the final scenes where Modesta dances whilst using spiked prostheses in a different, and more positive, way than Helen and myself: '…I loved the dance bit, involving the artificial leg with a spike on the end on the glass… I mean, how many ballerinas can smash a glass window or a glass floor?' Similarly, Mary-Jane positively commented that more 'outrageous' representations are more likely to challenge societal preconceptions of disabled women. Furthermore, one participant, Louise, highlighted the scene where Modesta

stamps on the ground using her spiked prosthesis as powerful. For Louise, the scene reminded her of moments when she is frustrated by oppressive attitudes and opinions.

The contrasting interpretations held between myself and participants signifies the way in which ads can lead individuals to reflect on their own subjectivities and personal values. For example, Louise immediately connected the advertising representation to her frustration with disabling attitudes. Additionally, by positively highlighting the 'outrageous' tone of the ad, Mary-Jane shared her personal beliefs regarding how disabled women should be presented in the world. Beth Haller, a key researcher in the field of disability studies and advertising, similarly suggests that ads taking 'more risky' approaches to disability are likely to challenge social assumptions and stereotypes surrounding people with impairments (Haller, 2010:203; Haller and Ralph, 2006).

Interestingly, both participants and myself only identified themes of risk in ads representing women with mobility impairment. This finding potentially indicates that different types of impairment are viewed differently in society and culture. The idea of risk bears connotations of fear and danger – if an individual is viewed as risky or they cause fear in others, it cannot be said that they are passive. The ability to cause fear means that an individual holds some kind of strength and power over others. Therefore, a potential interpretation is that women who have mobility impairment are viewed as 'stronger' by the makers of ads (and wider society) than women with other types of impairment. Additionally, a potential reason why themes of risk are not identified in ads representing mental health issues may be due to the historical problematic stereotyping of people with mental health issues as a 'danger' or 'risk' to society.

I perceived a more positive link between disabled women and 'risk' in *Nordstrom's* ad featuring Mercado. In my own analysis, I identified the theme of 'risk/rebellion' because the model, Jillian Mercado, has dyed purple hair, wears rock-style clothes and gazes self-assuredly into the camera lens. In this instance, I believed that the risky/rebellious tone of the ad works well insofar as Mercado is presented as a woman with a clear sense of confidence within her own style and personality. Additionally, the risky theme serves to challenge stereotypes of weakness and passivity that have been traditionally associated with disabled women. Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of 'antinormative' disability representations is apt here – Mercado is presented as comfortable with her own body, rather than depending on deficit-based approaches to the body with impairments.

All of the women I interviewed who analysed the ads featuring mobility impairment shared positive responses to *Nordstrom's ad.* Helen and Mary-Jane enthused that Mercado has a rock-star vibe, whilst Louise commented that Mercado looks 'happy' and Penelope mentioned that Mercado looks 'trendy'. However, another participant, Joanna, also remarked that Mercado seems very comfortable and confident but this aspect of the ad prompted her to reflect on her own personal feelings of insecurity, and not feeling able to be 'as comfortable in my own skin'. This reflection led Joanna to share her experiences of inter-personal disablism throughout her childhood and adolescence. Joanna's reaction demonstrates that it is not only 'negative' representations of disability in ads that lead to a discussion of lowered subjective wellbeing.

10.5 The portrayal of disabled women as sexual, desirable and glamorous: Sexual empowerment or sexual objectification?

Similarly to the theme of risk, myself and participants only uncovered references to sexuality in ads representing women with mobility impairment. This, too, added to the suggestion that women with mobility impairment are seemingly viewed as less passive than women with other types of impairments. When conceptualising ads as a window into socio-cultural attitudes, values and beliefs, it is significant that only women with mobility impairments are shown as sexual beings. This information indicates that, within my sample of ads, a hierarchy of impairment exists, wherein women with mobility impairments are viewed as particularly autonomous. My findings may also reflect socio-cultural progression in regards to the perception of women with mobility impairments as strong and self-reliant.

The most explicit references to sexuality are found in *Channel Four's* ad featuring Viktoria Modesta, a woman who uses prosthetic legs. In my analysis of the ad, I found references to love and sexuality in the background song lyrics: 'connecting hearts' and 'provocatively'. Additionally, throughout the ad, Modesta is frequently presented as a sexually active and desirable woman. From a disability studies perspective, I find this representation progressive because repressive societal assumptions of disabled people as passive, infantile and incapable of leading fulfilling sex lives are powerfully challenged. In relation to this point, I am supportive of Haller's (2010) belief that riskier representations of disability hold the greatest potential in challenging societal stereotypes.

Furthermore, from a feminist perspective I also found the portrayal of disability, gender and sexuality largely progressive. I perceived the scene where Modesta is shown to be naked and sexually involved with another female and male as

predominantly positive. Firstly, I believe that this scene subverts the traditional view that women's sexual experiences should be a source of shame, rather than enjoyment and pleasure. Also, the two other people who are sexually involved with Modesta appear to be 'non-disabled'. Thus, a disabled woman is shown to be sexually desirable to so-called non-disabled people. Therefore, the socio-cultural misconception of disabled women as asexual is powerfully refuted.

In contrast to my analysis of *Channel Four's* ad, some participants believed that the connection between Modesta and sexuality is problematic and sustains stereotypical attitudes regarding the sexual lives of disabled women. One participant, Joanna, described the ad's portrayal as bordering on 'disabled person as sexual fetish'. Another participant, Helen, compared the ad to the way in which some disabled people take a 'very overt approach to their sexuality'. Helen described feeling unable to connect with the ad's representation of a disabled women as she does not find it useful to take the same explicit approach to sexuality in her own life. My participant data suggests that approaching risky and shocking ads as useful in challenging societal preconceptions of disability is not altogether straightforward. There is a definite risk that some disabled people may feel risky representations are far removed from real-life situations and their own personal values.

Highlighting the dissonance between my reading of *Channel Four's* ad and some participant analyses is important for my reflexive development. Namely, by exploring the differences in opinion between myself and participants, I am able to better understand the diverse standpoints held by the group of disabled women I interviewed. Furthermore, recognising the differing opinions between participants and myself provides the opportunity to critically understand how individual responses to ads are bound within socio-cultural backgrounds and selfhood. I am thus able to understand

how my understanding of participant views and reactions to the sample of ads is partial and incomplete (England, 1994). In regards to the example of *Channel Four's* ad, I have discovered how two other women who identify as disabled and have direct experience of disability studies, hold different views to my own. From this, I have a first-hand opportunity to understand how individual navigation of socio-cultural realms is embedded within selfhood: our different upbringings, relationships, educations, social contexts and personalities filter through to our nuanced responses to advertising representations.

hooks (1994:91) uses the phrase 'patriarchal phallic imaginary' to explain how sexual relations and pleasure are dominantly conceived in ways that focus on male experience and pleasure. For hooks, the sexual liberation and autonomy of women is something that brings fear to the male-dominated culture we inhabit. Taking hooks' analysis further, my findings suggest that disabled people's sexuality presents anxiety to dominant society's ableist approach to sex. Some of my participants critically responded to the hyper-sexualised portrayal of Modesta in *Channel Four's* ad and commented that they cannot connect their own experiences and sexual identity to the ad's representation. Therefore, it seems as though the portrayal of a disabled woman's sexuality in the ad may be distorted or deliberately conceived as 'risky' as realistic representations of disabled women's sexuality are not taken seriously in dominant socio-cultural realms.

Kenneth Cole's ad also features a woman who uses prosthetic limbs, Aimee Mullins. The key theme of sexualisation and glamour emerged from my own analysis of the ad. Mullins gives an overall impression of confidence, power and desirability: she stands with her legs wide apart, hands on hips and she wears flashes of the colour red, on her top and as her lipstick. A few participants drew attention to Mullins' glamorous

appearance. For example, Mary-Jane described Mullins's as a 'very beautiful, very powerful woman'. However, she continued to suggest that the ad 'stereotypes disability in a way that disability isn't… I know loads of disabled women but I don't know any disabled women who look like that'. Another participant, Joanna, highlighted Mullins' provocative stance and described her as looking like Marilyn Monroe. For Joanna, Mullins' film-star looks and sexualised attitude made her feel detached from the ad: '… I can't do this whole feminine thing, that's what the ad would remind me of…' My findings here correlate with Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of inclusionism and Davis' (2013) critical understanding of dominant interpretations of 'diversity'. Instead of representing disabled women as valuable and sexual on their own terms, the advertising portrayals seem to be underpinned by the belief that normative bodies and sexuality should be emulated.

The comments made by Mary-Jane and Joanna express a similar sentiment to Helen's response to the overt portrayal of sexuality in *Channel Four's* ad. All three women referred to feelings of alienation from the representations of disabled women in ads. Therefore, it seems as though a similar process to the one Gill described in her (2008) research is taking place. Gill (2008) recognises that women are much more likely to be shown as sexually empowered in modern advertising. However, she also cautions that such representations are most likely to conform to male-centric views of sexual pleasure. Taking Gill's (2008) research further, I suggest that advertising portrayals of disabled women as sexual beings are likely to merge with stereotypical attitudes regarding disability and sexist expectations of how women should appear. As some participants described, the portrayal of disabled women as sexually desirable and active in ads produced by *Channel Four* and *Kenneth Cole* rest on narrowly defined and exclusionary narratives.

One participant who identifies as having mobility impairment, Penelope, took the critical discussion of disabled women and sexuality further: '… as a white, disabled woman, I'm not seen as sexual… I'm not seen as particularly attractive… disability degenders quite a lot…' I believe that Penelope's comments reflect her absorption of problematic socio-cultural attitudes towards women with impairments. Here, Penelope articulated her internalised belief created from dominant societal constructions of how disabled women *should* behave and appear (Thomas, 1999; Reeve, 2006). The ads produced by *Channel Four* and *Kenneth Cole* arguably counter-act the misconception that disabled women cannot be viewed as sexual and desirable as they both clearly connect the disabled women represented with themes of desirability, glamour and sexuality. However, as some participants discussed, such representations cannot be viewed as authentically empowering if they rely on mainstream and overt displays of sexuality that do not resemble the everyday realities of many disabled women.

10.6   The pathologisation of bodily impairment and mental health issues in Anglo-American advertising: To what extent do discourses of 'recovery' and 'overcoming' bodily and mental diversity impact upon disabled women's levels of subjective wellbeing?

Within my own analyses of ads portraying mental health issues, I identified explicit and repeated inferences that individuals should work towards 'recovery'. In *Mind/Rethink's* ad, as well as suggesting that individuals can 'recover', mental health issues are problematically described as 'mental illness'. *SAMHSA's* ad also directly mentions 'recovery' on two occasions, whilst *Wellbutrin XL's* ad approaches the notion of recovery in a more covert manner, with the tagline, 'I'm ready to experience life', alongside the advertised anti-depressants. By critically engaging with the idea of recovery, it is not to suggest that some people with mental health issues do not find

this term affirming and applicable to their own lives. Rather, my aim is to demonstrate that some participants view this term as distracting from their lived experiences and understanding of mental health issues as a natural part of their identities, and believe that the notion of 'recovering' from mental health is an ableist ideal.

The five women I interviewed who identify as having mental health issues, responded to the notion of 'recovery' in contrasting ways. Some of the women highly problematized recovery discourses, while other women demonstrated a more neutral response and did not find the idea of recovering from mental health issues problematic. Significantly, all participants with mental health issues explicitly referenced personal experiences when responding to the theme of recovery. Isobel, suggested that the ads representing mental health issues are problematic as they do little to acknowledge periodic changes in mental health as a 'natural' part of an individual. For Isobel, the reoccurring theme of 'recovery' from mental health issues in the ads could lead to people believing she is 'ill' – a normative presumption she strongly challenges.

Another participant, Mary, expressed a similar sentiment by suggesting that *Wellbutrin XL's* ad approaches depression in an overly simplistic manner by implying that people can 'snap out of it [depression]' and go back to 'normal''. Both Isobel and Mary's criticisms of the normative assumptions they perceived in both ads are foregrounded by their earlier stories of the inter-personal oppression they have experienced from family members. During their interviews, both women told me that various relatives have shown a profound lack of empathy in regards to both of their mental health issues. For example, Isobel described being made to feel as though she should be ashamed of her experiences of depression and Mary explained how some relatives believe she is 'malingering'. In doing so, Isobel and Mary present 'storied

selves' (Smith and Sparkes, 2008:18). They applied personal stories and recollections of experiencing stigma on the basis of their mental health issues in order to embody their criticism of the ads.

Isobel and Mary's responses to both ads provide a strong example of the inextricable link between participants' navigation of cultural tropes in ads, their levels of subjective wellbeing and sense of 'self' and inter-personal experiences of oppression. Additionally, this example also demonstrates my argument that the ways in which participants engage with ads is entwined in personal realms and invites frequent reflection on subjective experiences and sense of 'self'. Within this process, participants also undergo a process similar to hooks' (1989:12) concept of 'self-transformation', wherein individuals shift themselves from the position of 'object to subject' through sharing their personal experiences and thoughts. For example, in Isobel's case she was able to challenge the problematic and objectifying aspects of mental health representation by asserting her subjective experience and repositioning mental health as a 'natural' part of human life and diversity.

Two participants, Melody and Chris described past experiences of stigmatisation from family members and health professionals, in a similar style to Isobel and Mary. However, Melody and Chris generally perceived more positive messages and related more to the advertising content then Isobel and Mary. Despite their shared experiences of isolation and stigmatisation, all women did not interpret the advertising focus on recovery from mental health issues in the same way. Their divergent responses demonstrate the heterogeneous nature of disablement and development of self-identity. I suggest that their shared, yet different, responses to the advertising representations exemplify an enhanced need for focus on plurality of experience in disability studies. As Chodorow (1995:517) proposes that gender identity is comprised

of 'personal meaning', I suggest that identifying as a disabled woman is an individual process and involves the stitching together of personal life stories, lessons and values.

Additionally, divergent participant responses to the ads representing mental health issues indicate that responses to advertising representations cannot be accurately pre-determined or mapped through a researcher's sole analysis. However, comparing how participant analyses conflict with my own is interesting because it demonstrates the extent to which feminist disability studies readings of ads is relevant and links with the values and beliefs of some disabled women. My own readings of the ads representing mental health issues both compare and contrast to the views of my participants. My main issue with the three ads is a lack of transgressing traditional and fixed ways of perceiving mental health issues, i.e. as an inherent 'problem' that individuals *must* want to recover from. However, as I have described, three of my participants' hold similar views to my own, whilst two do not outline the theme of recovery whatsoever.

In my 'core themes from narrative analysis' – Chapter Nine - I also highlight participant criticism to themes relating to pathology in ads representing visual impairment. *The Guide Dog's Association's* ad received direct criticism for drawing upon pathological discourses. A strong example is found in Alice's criticism of the ad: "to support a life like mine' [sentence used in ad], like blindness is some sort of disease'. In my own analysis of the ad, I did not explicitly highlight the theme of pathology, but drew attention to a theme of 'dependency'. Specifically, the notion that Emma (a woman with visual impairment) is dependent on her guide-dog, Jazz, is repeatedly inferred. My findings here support Bolt's (2015) suggestion that visual impairment is often linked with themes of pity and fear in advertising.

It is of note that the ads that have been identified by participants, or myself, as containing themes of 'pathology', 'recovery', 'illness' or 'cure' are overwhelmingly produced by charity foundations. Only one, produced by *Wellbutrin XL,* does not have any charity links – it is produced by a pharmaceutical company. Therefore, it is apparent that the type of ad, i.e. commercial ads for fashion, television, pharmaceutical as compared with charity ads, substantially impacts on the way in which disability and gender is represented. As noted in the literature, charity ads historically present impairment and mental health issues in 'tragic' or 'pitiable' ways as part of a funding mechanism (Doddington, Jones and Miller, 1994; Shakespeare, 1994; Barnett and Hammond, 1999). My findings suggest that although themes of tragedy are less apparent in my sample of charity ads, pathologised understandings of impairment and mental health issues prevail, thus supporting emotional responses of pity and fear.

Bonaccorso and Sturchio (2002) argue that pharmaceutical advertising problematically supports medicalised approaches to human health conditions and experiences. Bonaccorso and Sturchio's concern is evident in the two ads in my sample that are produced by pharmaceutical companies: *Wellbutrin XL* (focusing on depression) and *Vanda Pharmaceuticals* (focusing on 'Non-24' condition). In my analyses of both ads, I identified themes of medicalisation, recovery, impairment as 'deficit', and their focus on impairment as an individual's most dominant characteristic. Whilst I have drawn attention to participant criticism of the medicalisation of depression in the former ad, it is important to note that participants with visual impairment were far less critical of *Vanda Pharmaceutical's* ad. Two participants, J.K. and Lily, appreciated the ad's portrayal of a woman with visual impairment participating in everyday life. In contrast, other participants, Fran, Annie and Alice, concentrated on the portrayal of a

woman completing household tasks – from their perspective, this representation sustains traditional gender stereotypes.

10.7   To what extent are Anglo-American advertisers increasingly portraying disabled women as strong, empowered and autonomous?

Throughout all of the three categories of ads in my sample, themes of disabled women as strong and autonomous were uncovered. In my analyses of ads, I found that the ads most likely to contain narratives of strength and empowerment were those representing women with mobility impairment. Again, this solidifies my interpretation of a hierarchy of impairment within ads representing disabled women. *Channel Four, Kenneth Cole* and *Nordstrom's* ads similarily portray disabled women as self-confident, assured and strong.

The ad that appeared to gain the most positive responses from myself and participants, across the whole sample, is *Nordstrom's* ad featuring Jillian Mercado. One participant, Helen, particularly liked how Mercado is the only person present in the ad. She suggested that other ads aiming to promote inclusivity often integrate one disabled model in the image, in a tokenistic manner. Another participant, Mary-Jane, believed that Mercado has 'substance' to her character – she gained this impression from the shadow cast behind Mercado – a technique she interpreted as symbolising depth of character. Furthermore, I particularly liked the ad's simplistic and relaxed portrayal of Mercado. Her body faces the left side of the frame whilst her face and eye line is directed towards the camera lens. This gives the impression that Mercado has paused momentarily, whilst she is on her way somewhere. She returns the audience's stare, thus signalling that she is an equal partner in this communication and not simply a recipient of stares (Bolt, 2005).

A key factor within participant responses and my own analysis of *Nordstrom's* ad was the relaxed way in which Mercado is presented. She wears everyday clothes and her wheelchair is slightly rusty in places. Mercado does not appear to be carefully polished for the sake of the ad. Drawing upon Mitchell and Snyder's (2015:12) concepts of the 'able-disabled' and 'inclusionism', the straightforward and simplistic way in which Mercado is portrayed is progressively different to the common and neoliberalist approach of hyper-focus on impairment and natural diversity as a form of socio-cultural 'tolerance'.

Meanwhile, the ads representing visual impairment received mixed portrayals regarding the presentation of disabled women as strong and autonomous. Three participants with visual impairment, Annie, Alice and Fran, critically approached the traditional portrayal of women, looking after children and carrying out household tasks, in ads produced by *The Guide Dog's Association* and *Vanda Pharmaceuticals*. Alice took this theme further when analysing *Vanda Pharmaceuticals'* ad, as she highlighted how a male narrator takes the place of a female narrator when statistics relating to visual impairment are announced. From Alice's perspective, the power is removed away from the women with visual impairment when the male narrator takes over: 'I'm in charge of statistics and facts, you're just a poor blind woman'.

Similarly, in *The Guide Dog's Association* ad, I argued that Emma, who has visual impairment, is frequently positioned as a passive individual. Throughout the whole ad, her guide dog, Jazz, is the only character to be the sole focus in certain themes. Furthermore, the ad creates the impression that Emma's personhood is dependent on her guide-dog Jazz: at one point the narrator (Emma's young son) says, 'see Jazz help mum be mum'. Referring to the literature, Finklestein (1998) suggests that a binary opposition exists in society of disabled people as needy and so-called non-disabled

people as self-sufficient. Two of my participants also referred to the socio-cultural trope of disabled people as needy. Alice suggested that the ad portrays Emma as 'a victim of her circumstances' and Annie interpreted the ad as capitalising on the misleading stereotype that people with visual impairments are helpless without guide dogs.

One participant, Fran, did not directly refer to themes of passivity or neediness in *The Guide Dog's Association's* ad. Rather she positively commented on the portrayal of a woman with visual impairment leading a capable life and being a mother, with the support of her guide dog. However, Fran interpreted the ad as 'patronising' and, to an extent, 'disempowering': "look how cute the puppies are: give us some money". Additionally, J.K. responded in a mainly positive manner to the ad. However, she found the inference that a woman needs to be a 'proper mother' problematic. My concerns regarding this ad and my participant analyses correlate strongly with Hahn's (1997) analysis of 'acceptable' imagery in advertising. Hahn focuses on the role of ads in sustaining anxiety amongst women in regard to their appearances. From my findings, I suggest that some ads work to support anxieties amongst disabled people in regard to the extent to which they can capably fulfil their roles, i.e. as a parent.

The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust's ad is arguably more progressive, in terms of presenting disabled women as strong and autonomous, than the two other ads in the visual impairment category. Two participants, J.K. and Lily, contextualised their interpretations of the ad directly with their own stories and experiences of achieving success, despite the doubts of others. Furthermore, in my analysis of the ad, I highlighted themes including, 'strength', 'courage' and 'success'. My findings here demonstrate how ads powerfully impact on a micro level, i.e. on a person's sense of self, as well as on a macro level, i.e. societal attitudes. Arguably, J.K. and Lily

appreciated this ad as it linked with their everyday lives and identities as strong and successful women with visual impairment.

However, whilst themes of strength and empowerment were frequently interpreted by myself and participants in ads featuring women with mobility impairments, the sample of ads portraying women with visual impairment were more likely to contain themes of passivity and/or pity. The contrast between the portrayals of women with mobility impairments and women with visual impairments could be interpreted as evidence of a hierarchal approach to impairment in the world of advertising. However, it is also important to consider the types of ads in my sample. The three ads representing women with mobility impairments are produced by US fashion companies (*Kenneth Cole* and *Nordstrom*) and a UK television broadcaster, which has a legal remit to promote diversity (*Channel Four*). In contrast, the three ads portraying women with visual impairment are produced by charities/trusts (*The Guide Dog's Association* and *Dame Kelly Holmes Trust*) and a pharmaceutical company (*Vanda Pharmaceuticals*). Therefore, the ads featuring women with visual impairment are, arguably, more likely to promote medical model and pitiable images of disabled women.

10.8   Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented the key messages from my study of representations of disabled women in Anglo-American advertising. Specifically, these are, 1) the makers of ads frequently adopt misleading and superficial approaches to diversity; 2) participant analyses of ads share comparative and contrasting views to my own; 3) for some women, representations of disabled women in ads contain similar narratives to their own life-stories; 4) however, for others, some advertising portrayals threaten to diminish their positive identity as disabled women.

In my next and final chapter, the conclusion, I demonstrate how my research aims have been achieved and outline my key findings. I finish with recommendations for future research in the field and for the makers of ads who aim to inclusively represent disabled women.

11. Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

11.1   Introduction

In my thesis, I have uncovered the complex ways in which disabled women negotiate advertising representations and mobilise their own experiences, sense of 'self' and levels of wellbeing within this process. I have demonstrated that individual responses to cultural stereotypes cannot be understood in simplistic, binary terms, i.e. as 'positive or negative'. Importantly, I have suggested that research surrounding advertising representations of disability and gender is enhanced when incorporating the voices of those who are purportedly represented. In my first literature review chapter – Chapter Two - I critically highlighted that most of the existing literature in my research area focuses on the researcher's own evaluation of advertising representations. Therefore, the question of *how* advertising imagery and messages are negotiated in everyday, 'real-life' circumstances is insufficiently addressed.

Participant responses to ads (shown in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight) comprise a key way in which my research contributes to the existing research. I believe that generating knowledge regarding the complexities of individual responses to ads carries a greater message in terms of enhancement of the social model through a feminist disability studies understanding of embodied realities. Addressing my research questions: 'do the representations of disabled women in advertising impact, positively or negatively, on the wellbeing of the people whom they are meant to represent? What are the cultural tropes in play in such advertisements?' I have shown how individual reactions to oppressive socio-cultural attitudes and assumptions surrounding disability and gender are inextricably entwined with personal values, lived experiences and embodied beliefs. The effects that socio-cultural attitudes

towards disabled women have on individual subjectivities is most explicitly articulated in my 'core themes from narrative analysis', found in Chapter Nine.

In my first chapter, I highlight how the presence of disabled people in ads has rapidly grown since the 1990s (Lee, 2016). However, despite the growth in portrayals of disabled people in mainstream ads, I focus on the negative public response to *Mars/Malteaser's* ad focusing on the sexual adventures of a woman using a wheelchair, to highlight the role ads play in supporting or challenging dominant societal assumptions regarding disability and gender. I argued that traditional assumptions and stereotypes surrounding disabled people as 'asexual' underpinned the raft of public outrage prompted by the ad. I believe that this example powerfully illustrates the potential for ads to sustain or question dominant societal attitudes.

In my 'discussion of findings' – Chapter Ten – I highlight how themes of sexuality were only uncovered in ads representing women with mobility impairments in my data. Furthermore, I debate the extent to which portrayals of disabled women's sexuality in ads can be viewed as empowering for women with impairments, or, constrained by ableist concepts of sexuality. Specifically, my argument is that ads often appear positive, at first sight, due to their portrayals of disabled women as risky, confident, sexually empowered and successful – representations that have historically been overwhelmingly absent. However, when approaching ads from a feminist disability studies perspective, it becomes apparent that ads frequently rely on normative concepts of disability and gender, thus limiting the extent to which their portrayals are truly empowering and reflect participant subjectivities.

Finally, in this conclusion chapter, I suggest how the insights I have uncovered present an original contribution to existing knowledge. I also critically address the limitations

of my research findings. Furthermore, I discuss how my research findings can be effectively used by the makers of ads and how future research may lead on from my thesis. Lastly, I explore the extent to which key messages from my research can be generalised and transferred into broader areas of enquiry.

11.2   The representation of disabled women in Anglo-American advertising: diversity or 'diversity' and inclusion or inclusionism?

In response to the primary aim of my research, I have highlighted the importance of two theoretical concepts in disability studies literature: specifically, Mitchell and Snyder's (2015) concept of inclusionism and Davis' (2013) critical configuration of the term diversity in neoliberal contexts. By engaging with these two concepts, I have been able to deepen understanding of an over-arching theme in advertising representations of disabled women. Namely, advertising portrayals of disabled women typically rely on normative beauty standards and sustain ableist and sexist assumptions surrounding women with impairment. As I discuss in Chapter Ten, I believe that the makers of ads often *presume* that their portrayals of disabled women are championing social awareness and diversity. However, my participant findings frequently demonstrate that such portrayals fail to resonate with the everyday life experiences of the women who are meant to be represented. Developing Mitchell and Snyder's concept of inclusionism and Davis' discussion of diversity, then, is my exploration of the power of disabled people's subjectivities and embodied realities in deconstructing inclusionism and naïve approaches to 'diversity' in culture and society more broadly.

It is important to note the rich variety of responses to ads found in my participant data. In my 'discussion of findings' – Chapter Ten – I draw attention to the frequent disparity within participant analyses of ads and highlight the ways in which participant responses sometimes differ from my own views. In Chapter Ten, I highlight how

participants who identify as part of the same impairment category, or, who have engaged with disability studies theory, sometimes demonstrate markedly different responses to advertising representations. My finding here further supports the understanding of responses to ads as inherently subjective and unable to be assumed on the basis of an individual's identity, i.e. as a woman with mobility impairment or as a woman who identifies as a feminist.

By highlighting this information, my aim is not to suggest that the relationship between the world of advertising and realistic representations of disabled women is a lost cause. Rather, my main suggestion is that by actively listening to the opinions and experiences of a diverse body of women, the makers of ads can produce ads and advertising campaigns that play a useful part in disseminating social rights ideologies and challenge cultural stereotypes surrounding disabled women. From a feminist disability studies perspective, I suggest that, in doing so, ads would be able to play an active part in social transformation and the public dissemination of disabled women's rights. Whilst it is not known what levels of participation the makers of ads included, my data suggest that this was inadequate or incomplete and should be further expanded.

Furthermore, as I discuss in my second literature review - Chapter Three - by progressively including disabled people in their ads, companies can successfully open up new consumer markets (Haller, 2010). As Haller (2010) notes, a primary interest of advertisers is tapping into new consumer audiences. Therefore, if the makers of ads are beginning to recognise the potential of disabled people as a 'new' audience, my research findings indicate that if they actively listen to the lived and everyday experiences of disabled women, their ads and advertising campaigns are likely to be better received.

11.3 Subjective wellbeing: A continually contested concept

In Chapter Three I highlighted Dodge *et al's* (2012) view that a stable definition of subjective wellbeing is yet to be reached. I outlined my understanding of the concept as predicated by feminist disability studies values. Namely, an explicit recognition of subjective wellbeing as a fluid concept that does not automatically lower due to the presence of impairment in an individual's life. Furthermore, I also emphasised the power of the individual to articulate their own levels of subjective wellbeing, rather than relying on external tools as a means of measuring wellbeing.

Significantly, my participant data analysis, contributes to understanding subjective wellbeing as a concept that is continually contested and without clear definition. In regards to the extent to which advertising representations impact on the subjective wellbeing of disabled women, I found that whilst participants do not explicitly reference the term 'subjective wellbeing', I uncovered dominant themes in their narratives suggesting that advertising representations do substantially impact on wellbeing levels.

In Chapter Ten I suggested that the ways in which participants analyse and form opinions of advertising representations is always mediated by their own subjectivities and life experiences. In support of my view, I demonstrated how participant analyses of ads are frequently interspersed with anecdotes, life-stories and personal values. A key point in my argument is that perceptions of problematic advertising representations do not automatically result in lowered levels of subjective wellbeing. Rather, participants often use such instances as opportunities to provide counter-narratives to normative standards and expectations of disabled women. My findings here contribute to the existing literature surrounding disabled people's subjective wellbeing as I show how people with impairments may use problematic

representations and stereotypes surrounding disability as an opportunity to reassert their own self-empowering narratives.

11.4   Limitations of my research

A considerable limitation of my research relates to the demographic of my participant sample. As highlighted in my methodology, I recruited participants via academic mailing lists related to disability studies and feminist research. All of the participants who volunteered to take part in my research were university educated - I recognise that only including the voices of disabled women who are university educated is an important limitation of my research design. Taking my research further in the future, a key area I plan to focus on is working with a more diverse and wider participant sample, in regards to advertising portrayals of disabled women. I plan to do this by disseminating calls for participation throughout disabled people and women's activist, support and community groups.

I also recognise the fact that my ads only represent women with mobility impairment, mental health issues and visual impairment as a limitation of my research. I chose to only focus on these impairment categories as they were the most recurrent portrayals amongst the ads I uncovered in my search. However, in future research I aim to study more diverse representations of disabled women, for example, black disabled women, in order to gain a more in-depth and intersectional understanding. In future research I also plan to analyse ads portraying disabled women in broader character roles, not only as the main character. In doing so, I may have greater potential to explore the extent to which disability is presented as an 'everyday and 'normal' occurrence in ads. My research has uncovered how many disabled women believe that presenting disability as a part of everyday life is a helpful route towards realistic representation of disabled women's embodied experiences in ads.

11.5   Recommendations for future research and advertising practice

With regard to the makers of ads, my core suggestion is that women who identify as disabled need to be actively involved in the production and design of ads that portray disabled women. I make this recommendation because participants concurrently referred to the extent to which they could perceive themselves to be represented, and whether or not the advertising content was realistic in terms of their experiences and other disabled women they know. By following this recommendation, I suggest that the makers of ads can gain through developments on two main levels. Firstly, the makers of ads are able to promote social responsibility by portraying disabled women in ways that are well informed, realistic and responsible. Secondly, by producing ads that are relatable to disabled women, advertisers are effectively opening up a new audience by positively reaching out to an identity group that has experienced historical exclusion in the world of advertising.

Pivotally, my research has shown the nuanced and deeply personal nature of disablism resulting from advertising representations, and cultural attitudes and stereotypes more broadly. My participant data has indicated that responses to cultural representations of oneself, specifically in advertising, are never straightforward. Rather, individuals are highly likely to draw upon personal experiences and embodied knowledge in order to support or challenge aspects of representations. One potential way for the makers of ads to take this point further is by inviting disabled women to be directly involved and lead directing and creation of advertisements. In following this recommendation, I am not suggesting that the views of *all* disabled women will be reflected. However, authentic and lived realities of individual disabled women will be given a platform. As highlighted in my discussion of feminist disability studies values in cultural research –

Chapter Two – reflecting on how disabled women may 'take control' of cultural constructs of disability and gender is a key concern for researchers in the field (Morris, 1992:164).

Furthermore, I recommend heightened focus on interactions between the self and culture as an inherently complex and fluid process, in future research. In regards to research focusing on portrayals of marginalised identity groups in advertising, my suggestion is that researchers take note that their interpretations of ads are likely to substantially differ from individuals whom the ads are meant to represent. In Chapter Three, I drew attention to the lack of participant input in existing research on disabled women, and of disabled people more generally, in advertisements.

My second recommendation for future research relates more broadly to disability studies and the burgeoning development of feminist disability studies. As I highlighted in Chapter Two, I am supportive of Shakespeare and Watson's (2001) call for greater incorporation of embodied knowledge and experiences within the social model framework. Particularly in Chapters Nine and Ten, I bring attention to the ways in which participants frequently weaved in their personal experiences, stories and values when evaluating advertising representations. I argue that my research findings support Shakespeare and Watson's (2001) belief that future development of the social model needs to recognise the importance of personal realms when aiming to challenge and mitigate the effects of disablism.

In my view, my feminist disability studies analysis of representations of disabled women in Anglo-American ads has revealed that, despite the growing prevalence of disabled women being featured in ads (a point of celebration), portrayals are dominantly underpinned by hegemonic ideologies that insufficiently reflect the lived

experiences and personal beliefs of disabled women. I believe that the findings I have

uncovered are important for the work of researchers who are interested in unequal

power relations and the marginalisation of certain identity groups more broadly.

Specifically, through merging the voices of disabled women with the theoretical

concepts of 'inclusionism' (Mitchell and Snyder, 2015) and Davis' critique of

dominant interpretations of diversity, I have been able to demonstrate the importance

of approaching societal attempts to 'integrate' marginalised identity groups, in a

critically informed manner.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Participant Recruitment Letter (Image)

Health & Medicine | Lancaster University

Hello,

My name is Ella Houston, I am a PhD student in Health Research within the Faculty of Health and Medicine at Lancaster University. I am embarking on a research project for the requirements of my PhD, titled 'The Representation of Disabled Women in Anglo-American Advertising: Examining how cultural disability tropes impact on the wellbeing of disabled women'. My research background is mainly compromised of feminist disability studies research. In particular, I am interested in how the study of disability representations in culture may enhance society's engagement and appreciation of inclusion and bodily diversity.

I am currently recruiting for participants who may be interested in contributing and lending their time and efforts to contribute to my research study. Participants must identify as having a mobility or visual impairment, or mental health issues. The focus of the research is to analyse participant narratives (stories regarding life experience), reflection on a range of advertisements featuring disabled women who are portrayed as having the stated impairments and engagement with feelings of 'wellbeing', especially in relation to the ideas raised by the advertisements (sourced for television, magazines and newspapers). Participation in the research project will involve one interview (lasting between 90-120 minutes) in a convenient place chosen by the participant. The research study does not involve publication of any personal information. All personal details, including names will be anonymised.

Additionally, location is not an issue – I will travel to the proposed (UK based) setting of your choice. I am unable to offer reimbursements for your travel, however soft drinks and snacks will be provided.

I attach an 'expression of interest form' – if you are interested in contributing your time and efforts to my research project I would be very grateful if you could complete the attached form and return it to my email address e.houston@lancaster.ac.uk. If you have any questions relating to the research study please do not hesitate to contact me on this email address. By completing this form you will be agreeing to be contacted by myself, regarding participation in the research project, in the near future. Please be reminded that completion of this form is completely voluntary and in no way obliges participation within this research project.

Best Wishes,

Ella Houston

Appendix B: Expression of Interest in Research Participation Form (Image)

Health & Medicine | Lancaster University

Expression of Interest Form

By completing this form, I agree that the researcher, Ella Houston, may contact me in the near future to further discuss the research project details and my potential participation. I understand that by completing this form I am in no way obliged to participate with this research project. I understand that the information provided on this form will solely be used for the purposes of the research project and will be stored on a password protected computer accessed only by the researcher.

Name:

Age (Must be aged 18+ years):

Location:

Affiliation (would you like to declare any affiliations to universities, etc.?):

Do you self-identify as a disabled woman?

Please could you indicate whether you identify as having a mobility, visual or mental health impairment?

Email address:

Do you have any preliminary questions relating to the research project?

Thank-you very much, I will be in touch soon!

e.houston@lancaster.ac.uk

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate in Research Letter (Image)

Health & Medicine | Lancaster University

Dear

Thank you for replying to my email call for participants and expressing your interest in the research study: 'The Representation of Disabled Women in Anglo-American Advertising', conducted by Ella Houston, a Health Research PhD student in the Faculty of Health & Medicine at Lancaster University. I would like to invite you to participate.

If you are still willing to contribute your time and thoughts to the research study, I would be very grateful if you would respond to this email to confirm. Following your response, I will be in touch with further information relating to the research project.

Best Regards,

Ella.

Appendix D: Information Sheet for Participants (Image)

Research Title: 'The Representation of Disabled Women in Anglo-American Advertising: Examining how cultural disability tropes impact on the wellbeing of disabled women'.

I am asking if you would like to take part in a research project that involves participating in one interview lasting approximately between 90-120 minutes. During the interview you will be shown three advertisements and asked to discuss any responses you may have, drawing on how your own life stories compare or contrast to the events/ideas portrayed in the advertisements. Also, during the interviews you will be asked to reflect on how the representations of disabled women in the advertisements may impact your self-reflections surrounding 'wellbeing', i.e. how you feel about your life, in past, present and future contexts.

I will use the data collected from your interview to build my own understandings and interpretations of how representations of disabled women in Anglo-American advertisements compare and contrast to realistic life stories and situations. I am keen to deepen understanding of how our representation in culture, specifically advertising, affects personal feelings and 'wellbeing'. I will publish my findings and conclusions in a thesis, in support of my Health Research PhD programme at Lancaster University.

Before you consent to participating in the study we ask that you read the participant information sheet and mark beside each comment below with your initials if you agree. If you have any questions or queries before signing the consent form please speak to the principal investigator, Ella Houston.

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet and fully understand what is expected of me within this study

2. I confirm that I have had the opportunity to ask any questions and to have them answered.

3. I understand that my interview will be audio recorded and then made into an anonymised written transcript.

4. I understand that audio recordings will be kept until the research project has been examined.

5. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to four weeks after my interview taking place, without giving any reason, without my medical care or legal rights being affected.

6. I understand that once my data have been anonymised and incorporated into themes it might not be possible for it to be withdrawn, though every attempt will be made to extract my data, up to the point of publication.

7. I understand that the information from my interview will be pooled with other participants' responses, anonymised and may be published

8. I consent to information and quotations from my interview being used in reports, conferences and training events.

9. I understand that any information I give will remain strictly confidential and anonymous unless it is thought that there is a risk of harm to myself or others, in which case the principal investigator will/may need to share this information with his/her research supervisor.

10. I consent to Lancaster University keeping written transcriptions of the interview for 10 years after the study has finished.

11. I consent to take part in the interview as described to me.

Name of Participant:

Signature: **Date:**

Name of Researcher:

Signature: **Date:**

Appendix E: Interview Questions (Image)

Participants will be shown three multi-media advertisements (sourced from either television, magazine or newspaper contexts), each containing the same representation (either mobility, visual or mental health issues) that the participant self-identifies with. Participants with visual impairments will engage with TV advertisements or print advertisements with accompanying accessible audio descriptors produced by the same company. Participants will then be asked the following open-ended questions in relation to each advertisement. Advertisements will be played/viewed multiple times if necessary (at the individual participant request).

1) In your opinion, is the overriding message in x advertisement positive or negative? Please elaborate on your opinion.

2) Could you describe the situation or event depicted in x advertisement? Have you ever experienced a similar situation, if so, could you please articulate?

3) Do you think the words, terms or any other details surrounding the representation of [mobility, visual or mental health] impairment is empowering or disempowering – please explain why?

4) Do you feel that the makers of x advertisement could have included any other details or aspects of everyday life of a person who may identify with the represented impairment?

5) Could you reflect on your experience of living with [mobility, visual or mental health impairment] – can you think of any stories or experiences that you would identify as particularly defining experiences?

6) Can you define whether and how x advertisement impacts on your subjective wellbeing, that is how you feel about your life and value in the world – if so, in what ways?

Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC)
Lancaster University

Application for Ethical Approval for Research involving
direct contact with human participants

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1. **Title of Project**: 'The Representation of Disabled Women in Anglo-American Advertising: Examining how cultural disability tropes impact on the wellbeing of disabled women'

2. **Name of applicant/researcher**: Ella Houston

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3. **Type of study**

Includes *direct* involvement by human subjects.

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4. If this is a student project, please indicate what type of project by marking the relevant box:
PhD Thesis

Applicant Information

5. **Appointment/position held by applicant and Division within FHM** Student: PhD Health Research

6. **Contact information for applicant**:
E-mail: e.houston@lancaster.ac.uk

7. **Project supervisor(s), if different from applicant**: Professor Carol Thomas, Dr Lisa Wood

8. **Appointment held by supervisor(s) and institution(s) where based (if applicable)**:
Carol Thomas, Professor in Health Research, Faculty of Health and Medicine, Lancaster.
Lisa Wood, Lecturer in Lancaster Medical School.

9. **Names and appointments of all members of the research team (including degree where applicable)**
Ella Houston, PhD student in Health Research, Faculty of Health and Medicine, Lancaster University.

The Project

10. **Summary of research protocol in lay terms (indicative maximum length 150 words)**:

The primary aim of the research is to deconstruct the representations of disability in Anglo-American advertising from a feminist disability studies perspective, and to explore the impact that these have on the wellbeing of disabled women. I will select nine Anglo-American multi-media (newspaper, magazine and television) advertisements containing representations of disabled women who are shown to have either physical/mobility, visual impairments or mental health issues. Three advertisements will belong in each category. TA will be applied to the advertisements to identify disability tropes, this term denotes overriding and misinformed messages regarding impairment (Bolt, 2004). Through undertaking critical discourse analysis I will outline disability and gender discourses that construct representations of disabled women. The data will be organised in tables and will engage with the dominant advertising discourses. Multimodal discourse analysis will extend this method of data collection and analysis through critiquing the text layout, style, font and colour scheme. Semi-structured interviews, containing six open-ended questions, (see attached 6) will be held with a purposively selected sample of disabled women (n=15) who identify with the impairments represented. Participants will be asked to discuss each advertisement, outlining the meaning these have for them, and how the advertisements make then 'feel'. Their own stories concerning disability, impairment and public representations will be discussed. Data collected from the critical discourse analysis and the interviews will be analysed and compared. Findings will be critically connected with the existing literature on well- being and the representations of disabled women in advertising. Conclusions and recommendations for future research and advertising practice will be created through collating the literature review and data sets.

11. **Anticipated project dates (month and year only)**

Start date: April 2015   End date: October 2017

12. **Please describe the sample of participants to be studied (including maximum & minimum number, age, gender)**:

Fifteen participants who identify with three different broad impairment groups will contribute to the research: visual, mobility impairments and mental health issues. Each group will contain five participants who identify with the impairment category, namely, five women with visual impairments, five women with mobility impairments and five women with mental health issues. All participants will be aged over eighteen years, there are no upper age limitations in place. Only participants who identify as having English as first language will be invited to participate.

13. **How will participants be recruited and from where? Be as specific as possible**.

The participants will be recruited via academic mailing lists that are interested in feminist, disability, cultural studies and advertising (*University of Leeds, Centre for Disability Studies; University of Maryland, Women's Studies; Lancaster University, Centre for Gender and Women's Studies; Liverpool Hope University, Disability Studies*

Society; Advertising & Disability mailing lists). A generic e-mail will be forwarded to the members of each list (see attached). All correspondence will take place via my university e-mail address. I will introduce myself as a Lancaster University PhD student and the content will briefly mention the research context and theoretical background. I will ask for the help of any disabled women who identify with visual, mobility or mental health impairments. It will be stated that all participation is entirely voluntary and people who may be interested in taking part are invited to complete the attached 'expression of interest form'. By filling in this form and sending it to me participants are agreeing that I can contact them in the near future in order to discuss their possible contribution to a further extent. The form will state that by expressing interest they are in no way obliged to agree to participation.

An ethical issue outlined with the recruitment of research participants is that members of the mailing lists used may be known to me. One of the mailing lists that I will use is run by me and is for a disability studies society that I am president of. I defend my choice to use this email in the recruitment process as the members have a right to access information regarding research they may find interesting, indeed this is the reason that they have joined the mailing list. The issue of concern regards the possibility of members who are known to me expressing interest in taking part of the research. This lessens the extent to which participants may feel that their contribution is totally anonymous. Although I will ensure to take every possible step to protect their identities and confidentiality (see sections 21 and 22), the participants may shield private views or thoughts in the interview process as they do not want a person who is known to them to be privy to such information. However, this ethical issue is addressed by making my identity as researcher clear on the advertisement so that people who express interest in the research are already aware that I will be conducting the semi-structured interviews. The electronic consent form will state that all conversations within the interview context will remain confidential. Electronic consent forms and information sheets are used as they provide an accessible format for all participants (see attached).

14. **What procedure is proposed for obtaining consent**?

I have designed a generic email intended to recruit participants, this will also contain an attachment to an 'expression of interest' form (see attached 2 and 3). I will distribute this email to the afore mentioned mailing lists. On this form participants will enter their name and contact details. It is stated on the expression of interest form that the researcher will contact participants via email in the following two weeks to explain further details regarding the research. Following this discussion, the researcher will ask participants whether they would consider contributing to the research. If so, participants will be sent, via email, an information sheet and consent form to electronically sign. Electronic format is used in the aim of promoting accessibility for all participants, for example, those with visual impairments may use a screen reader to access both documents. Electronic format is chosen over hand-written consent forms as it is desired that participants have the opportunity to read the data first-hand, for example via a screen reader, instead of another person reading aloud the project information and consent details. All potential participants will be encouraged to make an informed decision whether they feel happy to contribute their time and efforts for the purposes of the research project. This decision will be based on the guidance in the information sheet, consent form and opportunity to discuss any questions/issues with the researcher. However, if I feel that a potential participant with mental health issues feels uneasy with

any parts of the information sheet/consent form or their 'capacity' to decide is compromised I will further discuss the possible effects that may arise from involvement in the research with the potential participant and, with their permission, key friends, relatives or support workers who are invested in the person's welfare (Mental Health Capacity Act, 2005:3).

Further to this, the information sheet will contain full details of the contribution that participants are invited to make, including the length of the interviews, an opportunity to specify any access requirements or to invite a chaperone to be present during the interview. Additionally, research aims and purposes will be outlined. The participants will be reminded before the information sheet and consent forms are delivered that they are under no obligation to consent to the research invitation. Consent forms will be stored in a password protected folder on password protected computer. All participant contact information used for obtaining consent will be destroyed after the interviews have taken place. Email addresses will be kept on a password protected computer, in a password protected email account to facilitate communication should participants wish to withdraw their involvement in the research (within the outlined amount of time to do so following the interviews).

15. **What discomfort (including psychological eg distressing or sensitive topics), inconvenience or danger could be caused by participation in the project? Please indicate plans to address these potential risks**.

It is not considered that any major psychological harm or distress will be caused by participation in the research. Indeed the methodologies of textual and narrative analysis are chosen due to their restorative qualities and ability to input participant voice directly into research. Although it is acknowledged that responding to representation of their self-identified impairments in advertising could possibly trigger uncomfortable or distressing thoughts and feelings. Also, re-telling of experiences and stories may cause upset for participants. These ethical concerns are addressed by researcher sensitivity; the semi-structured interviews each contain the same six open-ended questions (see attached 6) that encourage participants to lead the discussion in a way that addresses the issues that they feel comfortable reflecting upon. Participants are invited before the interview to bring along a chaperone if desired, although it is clarified that the chaperone will not be able to contribute to the discussion and can be invited into the interview room in order to promote the feeling of security experienced by the participant. Participants will be reminded in the information sheet and consent form that they have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time up to a month following the data collection period.

Participants will be reminded before and during the interviews that they will be able to take breaks and revisit questions at a later stage in the interview process if they so wish. Additionally, it will be clarified before the interview begins that any request to end the interview will be immediately granted. Should participants appear emotionally distressed during the interview, the researcher will invite them to take a break or finish the interview. All participants will be signposted to relevant support services following completion of the interview. Only one interview per participant is required (90-120 minutes each). The other forms of data collection are TA, specifically critical discourse analysis and narrative analysis. The methodologies are chosen, in part, as they require

standard time requirements from the participants for qualitative research interviews. A qualitative methodological approach is an integral part of the research as it is recognised that disabled people, as an identity group, may feel over-researched and objectified by traditional, quantitative-based research paradigms that can run this risk of objectifying and 'silencing' the voices of participants.

If I am aware that any participants experience stress or discomfort as a result of contributing to the research project I have identified relevant support services and groups and will pass on this information to the participants. Specifically, if any participants who experience distress are Lancaster University students/staff I will suggest visiting the University's counselling and mental health service. I will also provide contact details for The Samaritans counselling services, as suggested by Lancaster University's counselling webpage. Additionally, I will suggest that participants visit their GP to access specialist support services. Details of support services will be included in the information sheet (see attached 5).

16. **What potential risks may exist for the researcher(s)? Please indicate plans to address such risks (for example, noting the support available to you; counselling considerations arising from the sensitive or distressing nature of the research/topic; details of the lone worker plan you will follow, and the steps you will take**).

All correspondence relating to the research project will be via the researcher's university email address. This will enable all correspondence between the researcher and participants to be tracked and followed up safely, if necessary. When conducting the interviews, I will abide by the general guidelines as stated in the University's Lone Worker Policy.

The interviews will take place in an environment chosen by the participants. If a personal environment, such as the person's home is requested as the chosen setting I will discuss this with my research supervisors to assess the security of this. In line with established research practices within the Division of Health Research, before each interview takes place, the researcher will inform the research supervisor of the time, location and expected duration of each interview. A phone call from the researcher upon completion will be agreed. If an interview location is chosen that is not personal to the participant, the participant will be made aware of accessible fire exits.

Following the interviews, there is a potential risk that the researcher may feel upset regarding emotional stories/feelings shared by participants. Should this situation arise, the researcher will seek advice from the research supervisors. However, it is estimated that this risk is minimal.

17. **Whilst we do not generally expect direct benefits to participants as a result of this research, please state here any that result from completion of the study**.

It is hoped that participants may experience improved sense of wellbeing, specifically enhanced engagement with the value of their feelings and stories, as a result of sharing their lived experiences and views with the knowledge that they will contribute to moving the field of feminist disability studies research forward. It is thought that the

opportunity to contribute to research that directly involves cultural representations that impact you has the potential to be empowering, in some small way. Additionally, an indirect aim of the research is to share feminist disability studies knowledge and theory with disabled women who may not necessarily have come across such discussions beforehand. This will, hopefully, raise critical consciousness in regards to the way culture shapes the construct of disability and individual aspects of 'agency' and wellbeing (hooks, 1984).

18. **Details of any incentives/payments (including out-of-pocket expenses) made to participants**:

No incentives will be offered. Travel reimbursements are not offered as participants will be able to choose the location of the interview; the researcher will travel to meet each participant at a convenient place. Snacks and soft drinks, purchased by the researcher, will be available during the interviews.

19. **Briefly describe your data collection and analysis methods, and the rationale for their use. Please include details of how the confidentiality and anonymity of participants will be ensured, and the limits to confidentiality**.
This PhD will use qualitative research methods as follows:

1) I will search through Anglo-American newspapers, magazines and news websites to select nine advertisements that feature disabled women who identify with the chosen impairment categories (mental health issues, mobility and visual impairment). I will apply TA to the selected advertisements to familiarise myself with their content. The data will be analysed through coding of the discourse (using conventional analysis methods).

2) Critical discourse analysis will be used to analyse the coded data. I shall highlight any key words and terms that are used in the advertisement and relate to either disability, impairment, society, gender or the product, charity or service that is advertised. Extending this method of data collection, through multimodal discourse analysis I will identify the features of the text layout, colour scheme and fonts used. Analysis of the data will involve establishing shared meta-narratives, themes and concepts.

3) I shall conduct one-off, semi-structured interviews with fifteen disabled women, using purposive sampling methods to construct the sample in the Liverpool and Lancaster areas. The interviews will last approximately 90-120 minutes (a 15 minute break will be offered after 60 minutes). The interviews will be audio recorded, with permission, and later transcribed by myself. The participants will be shown the advertisements from their impairment category in order to prompt their reflection and views on their own experiences and reactions to the advertisements. The semi-structured interviews will be held at the convenience of the interviewee, and in comfortable and secure location requested by the participants. Six open-ended questions, for example, 'what are your initial responses to this advertisement and the portrayal of women who identify with x impairment?' are designed as prompts to discussion regarding the advertisements and the embedded messages therein about feminist disability studies issues (see attached 6 interview transcript). The interviews will be audio recorded following consent of the participants. Before the interview starts the right to withdraw from the research, and to finish the process immediately, will be reiterated. Participants

will be made aware (verbally) that the interview can be paused or terminated if emotional distress arises. The interviews are designed to last between ninety and one hundred and twenty minutes each. Notes will not be taken in order to maximise the informal and relaxed atmosphere of the interview. Additionally, if I feel that any participant omits information, within the interview, that potentially places themselves or others in positions of harm, I will be obliged to share this information with my supervisor. The participants will be notified of this limitation to confidentiality on the consent form and before the interview commences.

4) The last research objective consists of bringing the data sets together and interpreting meanings and understandings, alongside the literature review. This will be extended by drawing conclusions and suggesting ways in which future research may develop the findings from this study.

20. **If relevant, describe the involvement of your target participant group in the** *design and conduct* **of your research**.

In relation to the design and conduct of my research, I am guided by my supervisor, Professor Carol Thomas, who has extensive experience in researching alongside disabled women, in particular by using narrative methods to extend understanding of the sociological aspects of disability and feminist disability studies aims and issues.

I identify as a disabled woman and plan to discuss my research design with colleagues, friends and fellow researchers who also identify as disabled women. By sharing my plans, aims and research question with other disabled women, I hope to enhance the emancipatory and participatory potential of my research study. By receiving feedback from disabled women, I will reflexively consider how my research may better represent and, in some small way, empower the research participants.

21. **What plan is in place for the storage of data (electronic, digital, paper, etc.)? Please ensure that your plans comply with the Data Protection Act 1998**.

Timescale:
Personal details and names will be anonymised on all electronic data and participants are made aware and give consent to data storage on the Lancaster University server for a period of ten years which will finally be destroyed by either the researcher or the research supervisor.

Data Stewardship:
I will store data relating to the research study on the Lancaster University Server – this also means that my data will automatically be backed up every night. I will store the data on my 'personal filestore' (my H drive) – I am the only person who will access these files.

Data Security:
Participants are made aware from the beginning of the research process, via the information sheet, and are reminded throughout the research process by the researcher that every effort is made to protect their confidentiality. The researcher will reassure participants that all sensitive data, including their personal details and texts containing their interview data will be kept in a password protected folder within the secure

university server. Interview transcripts will be anonymised – names and information that could directly lead to identification will be replaced with codes known only to the researcher. I will also closely follow Lancaster University's 'Information Classification Document' in order to ascertain the right level of protection for the type of data I am working with.

Audio recordings will be transferred onto a file stored on the University server as soon as possible after the interviews have taken place and will then be deleted from the portable recording device.

Hard copies of research related documents will be securely locked in a storage unit (only accessible to the researcher) in a locked office. Hard files containing personal information of participants will be stored in a locked cabinet and only used for correspondence purposes. Further to this, participants have the option to choose their own pseudonyms that are used in the research write-up and any publications (this will be made explicit in the consent forms – see attached).

22. Will audio or video recording take place?   **Audio**

If yes, what arrangements have been made for audio/video data storage? At what point in the research will tapes/digital recordings/files be destroyed?

The interviews will be recorded via a portable audio recorder, following the consent of each participant. I will carry the audio recorder in a locked briefcase only accessible to the researcher during transportation to and from the interview setting and my office. At the soonest time possible after the interview, I will transfer the audio recordings onto files stored on the University server and delete all data from the audio recorder.

I will destroy the audio recording files following the submission of my research project. Following analysis and submission of the research project the data transcripts will be safely stored for ten years on the Lancaster University server – after this time period has elapsed either myself or research supervisor, Professor Carol Thomas, will destroy the data. The rationale for this time-scale relates to the understanding that participants may later wish to obtain copies of their own interview data and in order to evidence project analysis and/or conclusions should they ever be contested.

23. **What are the plans for dissemination of findings from the research? If you are a student, include here your thesis**.

Primarily, the main form of research dissemination will be through my completed PhD thesis. I plan to publish some papers in academic journals, with data suitably anonymised. I hope to build upon the findings of my PhD research in future research projects - as I find research on cultural disability tropes and the impact of wellbeing a largely unchartered and incredibly interesting and worthwhile field.

The main journals that I will submit publications arising from the thesis Chapters are: *The Journal of Literary and Cultural Disability Studies, Disability Studies Quarterly, Screen Bodies, Disability & Society, Body & Society, Feminist Review, Gender and*

Society, Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, Women: A Cultural Review, Journal of Advertising Research and *Discourse & Society*.

Dissemination strategies also include presentations and papers to relevant conferences and seminars, for example, the monthly seminar series held by the Centre for Culture and Disability Studies at Liverpool Hope University, seminars run by the Division of Health Research at Lancaster. Additionally, I plan to disseminate my research through relevant conferences, namely, the annual British Sociological Association conference.

24. **What particular ethical considerations, not previously noted on this application, do you think there are in the proposed study? Are there any matters about which you wish to seek guidance from the FHMREC**?

My decision to recruit and categorise participants within three 'impairment categories' could be perceived as slightly problematic in the sense of 'categorising' disabled people and creating parallels with 'normate reductionism', Bolt's (2012) term to describe the reduction of a complex person to their impairment. However, as the participants are asked in the recruitment process whether or not they identify with any of the three categories, this concern is addressed to some extent. Additionally, it is recognised that within a feminist disability studies perspective, impairment is recognised as a natural and necessary part of human life. This understanding means that collectively identifying with an impairment, in a research setting, forges new ways of thinking about disability as a positive identity and contextualising empowerment (Swain *et al.,* 2003).

Signatures: *Ella Houston*   Applicant: Ella Houston   Date: 24/02/2015

Appendix G: Ethics Approval Confirmation Letter

Research and Enterprise
Services Division

Lancaster University

Applicant: Ella Houston
Supervisor: Prof Carol Thomas
Department: DHR

01 May 2015

Dear Ella and Carol,

Re: The Representation of disabled women in Anglo-American Advertising: Examining how cultural disability tropes impact on the wellbeing of disabled women

Thank you for submitting your research ethics application for the above project for review by the Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (FHMREC). The application was recommended for approval by FHMREC, and on behalf of the Chair of the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC), I can confirm that approval has been granted for this research project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;

- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research to the Research Ethics Officer (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress);

- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to the Research Ethics Officer for approval.

Please contact the Research Ethics Officer, Debbie Knight (01542 592605 ethics@lancaster.ac.uk) if you have any queries or require further information.

Yours sincerely,

S.C.Taylor

Sarah Taylor
Secretary, University Research Ethics Committee

Cc Fiona Aiken, University Secretary, Professor Roger Pickup (Chair, FHMREC); Prof Stephen Decent (Chair, UREC).

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Appendix H: Table detailing search for advertisements

Date of search	Search engine and search terms used	Results gathered
7 January 2015	Google.com Disab*; disabled wom*; advert*; advertising campaign; UK; US	- http://www.channel4.com/info/press/news/channel-4-presents-worlds-first-bionic-pop-artist (Channel 4 blog post discussing new ad featuring Viktoria Modesta – release of ad coincides with viewings of The Paralympics). Ad will be included as it features Modesta, who wears prosthetic limbs, as main character. - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7gbB1tY89fE (Link to 'Audio Eyes TV' YouTube channel, featuring Vanda Pharmaceuticals advertisement on non-24 disorder, a condition that is purportedly experienced by some people with visual impairment). Included as the main character is a woman who has visual impairment. - http://people.com/bodies/target-ad-shows-girl-with-disabilities-in-halloween-costume/ (Webpage discussing *Target's* Halloween advertising campaign featuring a young disabled girl). Excluded – disabled girl, not woman, is featured. - https://blogs.babycenter.com/mom_stories/011615-15in2015-viral-ads-feature-disabled-children-target-mcdonalds/ (Webpage discussing disability representation in advertising). Excluded – only ads featuring disabled children are linked. - https://www.ilrcsf.org/blog/2011/10/love-the-arcs-new-ad-for-employment-of-people-with-disabilities-month/ (Webpage discussing new advertising campaign produced by *The Arc).* Excluded – ad features a woman with the Down's Syndrome, which does not fit into any of the impairment categories in the criteria.
7 January 2015	Bing.com Disab*; disabled wom*; advert*; advertising campaign; UK; US	- http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1321945/Handless-model-Tanja-Kiewitz-posing-bra-handicap-awareness-advert.html (Online newspaper article discussing *CAP48's* ad featuring Tanja Kiewitz, a model who does not have hands). Excluded – the organisation is Europe based (France and Belgium), therefore it does not fit the selection criteria. - https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/246532 (Online blog post discussing 'controversial' ads). Only ads featuring disabled men are referenced.

		- https://www.newstatesman.com/voices/2014/05/two-thirds-us-are-uncomfortable-talking-disabled-people-we-need-time-money-and-effort (Online newspaper article discussing *Scope's* 'end the awkward' advertising campaign). Excluded – ad features disabled man, not woman. - https://blog.scope.org.uk/2016/04/25/how-are-disabled-people-represented-in-advertising/ (Online webpage discussing the representation of disabled people in advertising). Excluded – no ads feature on disabled women specifically. - https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/461619030529067140/ Features *Nordstrom* ad with Jillian Mercado – this ad has been selected.
5 May 2015	Google.com Disab*; disabled wom*; advert*; advertising campaign; UK; US	- https://www.marketingweek.com/2010/04/14/frank-bruno-and-trisha-goddard-push-for-an-end-to-mental-health-stigmas/ (Online post discussing Mind/Rethink's recent advertising campaign, challenging mental health stigma). Link to Mind/Rethink ad featuring Trisha Goddard as sole character, discussing her experience of mental health stigma. Fits criteria – will be included. - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IW8PbN1djso (Youtube video published by The Guide Dog's Association. Features ad focusing on a woman with visual impairment and her guide dog). Included – main character is a woman with visual impairment. - http://www.thedrum.com/news/2014/08/28/dame-kelly-holmes-trust-promoted-through-first-brand-campaign (Website post discussing the new advertising campaign, 'Lost my fear, found my flair' launched by the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust). An ad featuring Haleemah, who has visual impairment, and is organising her first fashion show will be included – she is the sole character in the ad. - https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/05/disabled-people-super-bowl-advert-deaf-nfl-footballer-derrick-coleman (Online newspaper article discussing inclusion of disabled people in advertising). Excluded – no ads featuring disabled women are linked.
6 November 2015	Google.com Disab*; disabled wom*; advert*; advertising	- https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11954737/Target-advert-shows-girl-with-disabilities-as-Frozens-Elsa.html (Newspaper article focusing on *Target* ad featuring young disabled girl dressed as Disney character). Excluded as disabled girl, not woman, is featured. - https://www.wsj.com/articles/after-diesel-campaign-model-jillian-mercado-turns-up-the-gas-

	campaign; UK; US	1439330595 (Online article discussing Nordstrom's inclusion of Jillian Mercado, who has mobility impairment, in latest advertising campaign). Included as ad features criteria – sole character in ad is a woman with mobility impairment. - https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/disabled-and-thriving/201006/disabilities-in-advertising (Online webpage discussing
10 November 2015	Google.com Disab*; disabled wom*; advert*; advertising campaign; UK; US	- https://www.theguardian.com/media-network/2015/nov/04/ads-advertising-challenged-traditional-thinking (Newspaper article featuring paralympics ad). Excluded as ad features a mixture of disabled men and women). - http://media-dis-n-dat.blogspot.co.uk/2008/02/aimee-mullins-pictured-in-ad-in-ny.html (Blog post focusing on Kenneth Cole's recent advertising campaign featuring Aimee Mullins, a model who has mobility impairment). Included – sole character in ad is a disabled woman. - https://blog.themobilityresource.com/blog/post/10-epic-examples-of-big-brands-practicing-inclusion-in-advertising (Blog post discussing inclusion of disabled people in advertising). Two relevant ads are referenced – *Liberty Mutual's* 'Election' advertising campaign and *Debenham's* recent advertising campaign, both featuring women using wheelchairs.
10 November 2015	Bing.com Disab*; disabled wom*; advert*; advertising campaign; UK; US	- https://www.prowess.org.uk/best-marketing-campaigns-2015 (Online post discussing diverse advertising campaigns in 2015. Diversity is mentioned, however, no explicit reference to disabled women). Excluded. - https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-ad-campaign-launched-at-uks-first-disability-employment-conference (Government webpage discussing new advertising campaign to promote the employment of disabled people). Excluded – no explicit reference or focus on disabled women. - https://advertisinganddisability.com/2011/08/31/stepping-forward-advertising-the-amputee-athlete/ (Blog post discussing Loreal's 'True Match' cosmetic advertisement, featuring Aimee Mullins, a woman who has mobility impairment). Excluded – as an advertisement featuring Mullins has already been selected for inclusion in the sample. - https://advertisinganddisability.com/2011/07/14/quiet-confidence-with-no-bull-redbull-ashley-fiolek/ (Blog post discussing *Red Bull's* ad featuring Ashley Fiolek, a woman who has hearing

			impairment). Excluded as hearing impairment is not an impairment category used in the research category.
11 November 2015	Google.com Disab*; disabled wom*; advert*; advertising campaign; UK; US	-	https://wellbutrinusers.livejournal.com/ (Mental health forum, containing a link to Wellbutrin XL's ad for depression medication). Included – sole character is a woman discussing her experiences of mental health issues.
		-	https://www.ihs.gov/suicideprevention/campaigns/ (Government website, supplying information on mental health support for Native people. Contains link to SAMHSA's advertising campaign on supporting friends with mental health issues.) One ad selected – includes female as main character, accompanying text makes explicit reference to mental health issues she has experienced.