The schizoid construction of Miley Cyrus: Reframing media sexualisation discourse and media effects on children

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This thesis is presented as part of the requirements for the Masters Degree in Communications Management at Murdoch University 2017
DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own account of my personal research and contains as its main content work which has not been previously submitted for a degree at a university or other tertiary institution

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ABSTRACT
This thesis examines the media sexualisation debate in Australia and the potential effects that sexualisation has on children’s identity formation. It analyses pop culture images via semiotics, to gauge the subjectivity inherent in the media’s representation of identities. Via the theoretical work of Rosi Braidotti, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, this thesis locates an emerging human equipped with multiple identity subjectivities, surpassing the limits of the organic body. Subsequently, the body that is dangerously sexualised is only one potential signification among many, that exist simultaneously within texts. This research questions societal concerns about the impact of sexualised media on children’s identities.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Kathryn Trees for her guidance during the process of completing this thesis. Kathryn helped me to develop my ideas and provided me with so much encouragement during the writing process. Her writing and thesis structure tips will be forever etched in my mind.

A special thanks goes to my four-year-old son Arloe, who continually inspires me to better myself everyday. I will never forget his patience as I completed this project. Thank you Craig for listening to me go on about my ideas as I tried to make sense of my research. Also a big thank you to my mother Vicki, who helped me with Arloe when I was on deadline.
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Introduction

Whether increasingly sexualised images of people in the media are harmful to young people’s sense of themselves, has been contested by parents, academics, psychologists and others since the new millennium. Academics alarmed by what they identify as dangers of these images, have spurred multiple moral panic discourses. Yet simultaneously, other academics have critiqued the moral panics, creating a division; for instance between some in psychology and media studies. Differences of opinion signal the need for further research, to examine and understand the effects of sexualised images on young people’s identity formation. Currently, the effects remain unclear.

Moral panics and media sexualisation

The debate surrounding media effects of the sexualisation of children in Australia, was intensified when public policy research group The Australian Institute (AI), released a report in 2006 named Corporate Paedophilia: The sexualisation of children in Australia. ‘Corporate Paedophilia’ is a metaphor coined in 1995 by The Australian columnist Phillip Adams, to describe the selling of products to children before they can understand the advertising, and consent to the process of corporate led consumption (Rush and La Nauze 2006, 11). The metaphor draws a parallel between two things: the use of children for adults’ sexual pleasure and corporate use of children to financially benefit adults (Rush and La Nauze 2006, 11).
By conducting a content analysis of images across three types of cultural material, advertising (print and television), magazines and television programs (including music videos), researchers produced evidence that children are being sexualised at increasingly younger ages (Rush and La Nauze 2006, 7). They cited concern with the pressure on girls under 12 years to adopt certain forms of adult sexuality (Rush and La Nauze 2006, 11). The analysis revealed that girls are sexualised to a greater degree than boys.

The report noted that in the past, sexualisation occurred through exposure to representations of teenagers and adults in popular culture (Rush and La Nauze 2006, 11). However, Rush and La Nauze (2006, 11) found children were directly sexualised through modelling adult sexual behaviour, across media platforms, using clothing, accessories, long hair and cosmetics. Affrica Taylor (2010, 50), whose research focuses on geographies of education and childhood, identified that as marketers increasingly target children and as media becomes increasingly important in their lives, sexualisation has a compounding effect.

The AI report galvanised public recognition and was immediately criticised by several sources. The report used images from David Jones’ advertising to highlight its claim that sexualisation of children is damaging. David Jones responded by threatening to sue Clive Hamilton, the director of the AI, over its use of images from David Jones to claim that advertising eroticised and exploited children (Taylor 2010, 50). David Jones later dropped the case.
Competing opinions led to the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) debating the issue on the show *Bratz, bras and tweens* and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s (ABC) *Sex sells – but at what cost to our kids?* (Taylor 2010, 50). Channel 9’s *Sixty Minutes* program aired *Little Women* and Channel 9’s nightly show aired the *Sexualisation of Children* (Taylor 2010, 50). Taylor (2010, 50) pointed out, an online public lobby campaign called *Kids Free 2B Kids* launched by Melbourne mother Julie Gale, emerged in 2007. The lobby group succeeded in pressuring the Government to launch a senate inquiry called *The Sexualisation of Children in the Contemporary Media* in 2008. The senate committee’s report recommended further research and increased education (Taylor 2010, 50). In 2010, a sequel paper by the authors of the AI report, *Let Children Be Children: Stopping the sexualisation of Australian children*, was released (Taylor 2010, 49).

According to Taylor (2010, 51), media and journalism academic Catherine Lumby criticised *Corporate Paedophilia* soon after it was released, for linking child sexual assault to marketing. Lumby argued the term ‘corporate paedophilia’ was irresponsible and that it was counterproductive to link abuse with media, as the term reiterates what was to be prohibited (Taylor 2010, 51). Lumby argued having the conversation risks creating a new type of problem, by continually anticipating the paedophile’s gaze at children’s bodies (Taylor 2012, 51).
Lumby’s warning is relevant in specific contexts. The Advertising Standards Committee received a spate of complaints proclaiming that nappy adverts sexualise babies and should be banned (Taylor 2010, 51). Taylor (2010, 51) noted that Lumby was concerned that by talking about babies’ bottoms in nappy adverts as potentially attracting the peadophile, we paradoxically view the advertising through the paedophile’s gaze. Taylor (2010, 129) linked Lumby’s view to Judith Butler’s essay *Excitable Speech* (1997), in which she wrote that enraged protests about subject matter we seek to prohibit, ends up reiterating that which is so appalling.

Like Lumby, cultural and media theorist Rosalind Gill highlights the importance of subjectivity when individuals view media products. Gill (2012) pointed out that most psychological data “rely upon a conception of meaning of sexualisation that is singular and readily identifiable in images” (488). Levels of meaning and alternative interpretations are left ignored and researchers do not divulge much about the exact images they are examining (Gill 2012, 488). Gill (2012, 488) argued this kind of elision in research is problematic since coding is an entirely subjective practice. For me, Lumby and Gill provide insightful critiques that bring sexualisation of children by the media back to broader issues of *representation, identity* and *subjectivity*.

**Representation**

*Representation* refers to the use of language and images to create meaning about the world around us (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 12). It is the act of
portraying, depicting, symbolising or presenting the likeness of something (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 356). Language and media are systems of representation that function to depict and symbolise aspects of the real world (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 356). We know and understand the world through language and representation, yet a complex relationship exists between representation and reality (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 40).

Film theorist Richard Dyer (1993) pointed out there is no such thing as unmediated access to reality (cited in O’Shaughnessy 1999). He argued one could accept and apprehend reality through representations of text, discourse and images, yet representation never really gets reality (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 40). According to Dyer, reality is always more extensive and complex than any system of representation could imagine (cited in O’Shaughnessy 1999). The term *media* reflects Dyer’s assertion as it literally means *middle*. Representation does not reflect our existing reality but organises, constructs and mediates our understanding of reality (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 13). Representation is bound up with or interrelated to *subjectivity* and *identity*.

**Identity and Subjectivity**

Identity and subjectivity affect how media representations are perceived. O’Shaughnessy (1999, 171) used both terms to refer to the way we are (identity) and the position from which we look at and understand the world (subjectivity). Schirato and Yell (2000, 192) incorporated power relations into their definition of subjectivity, describing it as the cultural identities produced
through discourses and ideologies. Early ideas about subjectivity were strongly influenced by philosopher Rene Descartes’ views (Schirato and Yell 2000, 89). Further work on how subjects are produced was driven by psychoanalysis through the work of Sigmund Freud (Schirato and Yell 2000, 89). Philosopher Michel Foucault critiqued Freud’s view, arguing that culture produces subject positions through institutionally sanctioned discourses (Schirato and Yell 2000, 92).

Rene Descartes argued that the human subject was a rational, reasoned and self-conscious entity, whose identity was made certain by his self-consciousness (Schirato and Yell 2000, 88). Descartes (1596-1650) coined the phrase “I think, therefore I am” (19). Sigmund Freud critiqued Descartes’ work claiming that the human subject was not in control of itself because behaviour is influenced by the subject’s unconscious desires (Schirato and Yell 2000, 88). Freud asserted the key contributing factors of subjectivity are gender relations and sexual identifications of the child’s environment (Mansfield 2000, 31). Freud (1977) argued in his work that “Anatomy is Destiny” (320).

Foucault explained subjectivity differently. In Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1978), he argued sexuality was a key issue in understanding and evaluating self and identity (Schirato and Yell 2000, 92). He understood that the 19th century was “a time when the most singular of pleasures were called upon to pronounce a discourse of truth; the discourse of science” (Foucault 1978, 64).
Foucault (1978, 68) referred to the discourse of truth as *scientia sexualis* where sexuality became pathologised. Scientia sexualis is a form of *bio-power*, which Foucault (1978) referred to as “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (140).

The views of Descartes, Freud and Foucault bring into question whether an essential self exists. Do humans exercise free will or are we, as O’Shaughnessy (1999) questions, “cogs in the machinery of biology, psychology, history and culture?” (172). The ‘essential self’ might never be completely understood. Western culture glorifies the self through discourses of individualism. Conversely, academics including Freud and Foucault identified the individual as being subject to forces, unconscious and conscious, which shape identity and subjectivity (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 172). To me, both views have significance. The word *subject* relates to us having power and conversely, to *subject someone to something* is to have power over them (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 172). Consequently, it is useful to define *subjectivities* as our actions that are both subject to our autonomy and those that are predetermined (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 172). When something is *subjective*, it refers to the particular view of the individual that is personal, specific and imbued with the beliefs of that person (Sturken and Cartwright 2000, 367). Subjectivity relies on a range of available meanings and this is where it interconnects with social semiotics.
Social Semiotics

*Social semiotics* is derived from linguist M.A.K. Halliday’s work, which draws on communication as a system of signs that provide a range of potential meanings to users (Schirato and Yell 2000, 106). Schirato and Yell (2000) wrote “social semiotics sees meaning systems as never closed or finite but open, dynamic and changing as we recreate the system of possible meanings through our communications practices” (107). Critical theorist Kaja Silverman (1983), described the ideal text as consisting of a “triumphant plural of signifiers which would float above the signified, refusing to be in any way anchored down or constrained” (32).

According to Sturken and Cartwright (2001, 46), meanings people derive from images are informed by a context in which the image is seen. Schirato and Yell (2000) defined *contexts* as “the particular environments in which the communications, text and meaning making occur” (109). Contexts can include age, class, culture or gender (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 47). Schirato and Yell (2000, 107) identified that meaning is also subject to *access*, where various dispositions and literacy levels affect a person’s access to all meaning potentials. Access and context open up differing conceptual dimensions within a cultural product (Schirato and Yell 2000, 110). As O’Shaughnessy (1999) pointed out, “it is impossible to make full sense of a text in isolation” (53).
Semiotics enables me to draw out multiple meaning potentials within media texts in this thesis. Diverse meaning potentials may reflect the lack of clarity on media effects that fuels debates within the field. In this view, media sexualisation may better be defined as a theory rather than a fixed representational construct (Duschinsky 2013, 257). I analyse images of pop star Miley Cyrus to support my argument.

**Miley Cyrus**

Cyrus is an American singer, songwriter and actress who began as a child actor in a serialised television show *Hannah Montana* in 2006. The musical comedy series was aimed at children, predominantly pre-teen girls. In *Hannah Montana*, Cyrus’s character led the secret life of a pop star, a striking contrast from her life as a girl on a Midwest farm. Later Cyrus’s image rapidly transformed into a hyper-sexualised celebrity, signalled by a provocative MTV performance in 2013, that evoked widespread outrage and disgust (Jackson et al. 2016, 548). The performance saw Cyrus emerge from a giant teddy bear in an infantilised fashion with her tongue out. Cyrus mixed infantilised sentiments with explicit dancing and lyrics in her song. In making this rapid identity shift, Cyrus may have succeeded in keeping the fans she attracted during her ‘virtuous’ *Hannah Montana* days.

My reasons for choosing to focus on Cyrus in this thesis are two-fold. Firstly, she is a potent example of a hyper-sexualised media figure, for as Jackson et al. (2016) identified, “her performances dip into a deep well of societal anxiety
about the possibilities of precocious sexuality among pre-teen girls” (548).
Secondly, upon analysing qualitative data about sexualised media effects, I found that Cyrus dominated discussions about celebrity influence, making her a pertinent focal point in this research.

Chapter One of this thesis highlights the division in schools of thought regarding the media’s ability to negatively influence children. I examine several key concepts in the field of media sexualisation and summarise findings in quantitative and qualitative research data.

In Chapter Two, I explain my methodology. I define semiotics and outline contributions from three semiotic theorists: Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Peirce and Roland Barthes. I identify the similarities between three semiotic systems and explore the role of social myths.

Chapter Three applies semiotics to two images of Cyrus, to investigate the identities she uses in her brand. I explore the possibilities of Cyrus representing multiple identities simultaneously. I aim to logically progress from simplistic identity subjectivities and gradually move to complicated identity subjectivities of the post-human.

Chapter Four summarises key findings and provides recommendations for future research. Using the findings in Chapter Three, I examine the body under classical humanism, comparing it with representations of the body
under postmodernism. Additionally, I draw on Foucault’s theories of power to explore the potential negative impact moral panics can take.
Chapter One: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review outlines several key definitions and theories that are useful to frame the media sexualisation debate. I draw on psychological research and media and cultural studies research, in order to illustrate opposing points of view in relation to cultural sexualisation of children. As this thesis focuses on Miley Cyrus as an example of a hypersexualised cultural figure, I have selected research data that also focuses on Cyrus. Upon identifying research gaps, I suggest further semiotic study of visual culture which is discussed in Chapter Two.

1.1 Defining key terms

This section introduces key theories and concepts that are routinely used in the context of the media’s sexualisation of children. I define the sexualisation of culture, hyper-sexuality, sexualisation of children, hyper-femininity, moral panics, the direct media effects model, the post-feminist masquerade and the double entanglement.

Gill (2012, 483) describes the sexualisation of culture as the way Western societies have become saturated by sexual representations and discourses, so that pornography has become increasingly influential and normalised. Her definition reflects the psychological definition of hyper-sexuality, defined as “a dysfunctional preoccupation with sexual fantasy often in combination with an obsessive pursuit of casual sex, pornography, compulsive masturbation and
objectified partner sex” (Psych Central 2017). Similarities exist between the psychological definition of hyper-sexuality and the nature of sexualised pop culture aimed at young girls.

The report Corporate Paedophilia assigned a fixed, representational meaning to the term sexualisation of children. The report broadly defined sexualisation as the act of giving something a sexual character. The sexualisation of children captures the slowly developing sexuality of children and moulds it into stereotypical forms of adult sexuality (Rush and LeNauze 2006, 11). Marketers have penetrated this space by capturing tweens as a consumer group, defined as pre-adolescents who are between childhood and teenage pursuits (Rush and LeNauze 2006, 13). Rush and LeNauze (2006, 11) argued the sexualisation process manifests most strongly through representations in popular culture.

Contrary to the AI report’s fixed definition of sexualisation, social scientist Robbie Duschinsky (2013, 256) argues sexualisation has no one agreed definition. Duschinsky (2013) argued the term is a portmanteau, referred to as blending two words together (‘sexual’ and ‘socialisation’) to create a hybrid that “articulates together different streams of cultural production” (257). According to Duschinsky (2013, 257) sexualisation should not be viewed as a representational concept that maps certain coherent phenomena. Instead, it should operate as an interpretive theory.
As Corporate Paedophilia drew possible comparisons between child sexualisation to paedophilia and potential health problems, it legitimised a moral panic based on direct media effects. Cultural and feminist theorist Angela McRobbie (1994, 199), defined moral panic as an emotional strategy used by the right as a means of attempting to discipline the young through terrifying parents. She referred to it as ‘deviance amplification’ used in order to secure popular support for conservative values and policies (McRobbie 1994, 198). Media moral panics rely on the assumption of a direct effect, better known as the Direct Effects Model. This model focuses on media content as the most important explanation for media influence, where effects are immediate, uniform and consistent (Perse 2000, 29). The direct effects model ignores the role of the audience in the media effects process, as they are viewed as incapable of countering the media’s impact (Perse 2000, 29).

Writers and filmmakers turned the dangers of sexualisation into a myriad of books and documentaries alerting parents to the risks. The media was identified as a key site of sexualisation (Gill 2012, 484), that catalysed ‘porno-chic’ and ‘raunch-culture’ aesthetics, that are specifically gendered and hyperfeminine (Jackson and Vares 2015, 482). Murnen and Byrne (1991), who designed the Hyper-Femininity Scale, defined hyperfeminine as “the exaggerated adherence to a stereotypic gender role” (cited in McKelvie and Gold 1994).
McRobbie (2007, 720) too, argued the media is a key site for hyper-feminine discourses which she referred to as the *post-feminist masquerade*. The masquerade is overshadowed by the rhetorical tropes of ‘empowerment’ and ‘freedom’ now attached to young women (McRobbie 2007, 720). This process stems from *post-feminism*, a process by which the gains of the 1970s and 1980s feminist movements came to be undermined, yet contradictorily encompass the co-existence of feminism (McRobbie 2004, 254). McRobbie (2004, 254) recognised the contradiction as a *double entanglement* where neo-conservative values (gender, sexuality and family) and liberalisation (choice and diversity) co-exist. Reality show *The Kardashians*\(^1\) is an example of the post-feminist masquerade and double entanglement, in which four sisters and their mother embody hyper-feminine archetypes.

### 1.2 Quantitative studies: sexualised music culture

In this section I discuss hyper-sexualisation within celebrity pop music culture. Quantitative studies reveal an increase in sexualised themes in music culture, which exist alongside an increase in media consumption and the availability of new technology. Studies may assist in logically drawing conclusions as to the probability of children being exposed to sexualised pop culture and it affecting their identity.

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\(^1\) The Kardashians are a family of reality TV stars. Robert Kardashian was a prominent figure on OJ Simpson’s defense team during his trial. Interest in the family was further catalysed when a sex tape of Kim Kardashian (daughter of Robert) was released in 2007. This was followed by a global reality TV show *Keeping up with the Kardashians* appearing on channel *E!* (Kerr and Pierce 2017).
Andsager (2006) noted a shift in music videos over the past 20 years where sexual content was often implied rather than blatant as it is today (cited in Gill 2012). Jackson and Vares (2015, 482) too, described pop music videos as conduits for expressions of gendered, sexualised porno-chic and raunch-culture that have become mainstream. Quantitative studies support these claims. In 1986 Greeson and Williams conducted a quantitative analysis of music video content and identified 47% of sexualised themes were present in music videos (Ey and McInnes 2015, 59). In 2010, Walter conducted a quantitative analysis of music video sexualisation and found 85% of music videos viewed in the study contained sexual imagery and dance and 71% of women were sexualised, compared to 35% of men (Ey and McInnes 2015, 59).

Pop music is a highly significant part of many pre-teen girls’ everyday lives and music celebrities play a key role in some girls’ identity (Jackson and Vares 2011, 136). According to Ey (2014, 147), from ages 9-12 years self-identity becomes multi-faceted at a time when girls evaluate the ‘self’ by comparison to others. This according to Ey, highlights the significance of environmental influences in identity making. Russel (1997) argued music socially impacts dress, self-presentation, attitudes and emulation of behaviours exhibited by idols (cited in Ey 2014). Wall (2003) argued music is not separate from identity but a part of identity making (cited in Ey 2014). Dines and Hamilton (2010) also wrote of the effect that mainstreaming pornography had on encoding gender and sexual identities in young people (cited in Ey, 2104).
The American Psychological Association Task Force Report (2007) highlighted the increasing significance of media within young people’s lives, and how children are spending more time with entertainment media than with any other activity apart from school or sleeping (Gill 2012, 487). Australian statistics mirror this claim. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2003) recorded 98% of children aged from 5-14 years spent 11 hours per week watching television. In 2007 the Australian and Communications Media Authority (ACMA) found Australian children aged 8-14 years spent four hours and 49 minutes per day consuming media (Ey and McInnes 2015, 59), indicating an increase in media consumption over four years. ACMA (2007) found young people frequently use iPhones, iPads and the Internet that supplement the traditional modes of media, such as television and radio, to access music (Ey and McInnes 2015, 59).

Statistics also suggest children and young people interact frequently with music videos. The Children’s Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities study in 2009 reported that in Australia, 61% of 5-11 year old children had listened to or downloaded music from the Internet. Of this percentage, 18% were aged 5-8 years and 43% aged 9-11 years (Ey and McInnes 2015, 60). According to ACMA (2010), Australian children aged 8-17 years watched music videos for seven minutes a day (Ey and McInnes 2015, 60). Ey and McInnes (2015, 60) argued that given the statistics and research into highly sexualised media content, children are likely to be exposed to sexualised content.
1.3 Psychological effects of sexualised media consumption

This section outlines views from Corporate Paedophilia and psychological research and links it to young women’s health and well being. Although the dominant psychological view assumes girls are subject to direct media effects, there is emerging psychological evidence to suggest otherwise. This epistemological break suggests a need for further research to acknowledge children’s agency and ability to resist, critique and actively make choices about media messages.

Rush and LeNauze (2006) in Corporate Paedophilia argued that sexualisation of children in media has the capacity to negatively affect children’s healthy body image and self esteem. They draw links with sexualised media to increased incidences of eating disorders at young ages (LeNauze and Rush 2006, 13). The general sexual and emotional development of children can be affected along with the beliefs that women are objects and sex is a commodity (Rush and LeNauze 2006, 12). Director of the Institute of Psychiatry Dr. Louise Newman, added to Corporate Paedophilia that the premature sexualisation of girls grooms them for paedophiles (Taylor 2010, 50).

Despite Corporate Paedophilia’s health warnings, the latest psychological research suggests otherwise. A United States research project led by Dr. Christopher Ferguson (2016), who investigates links between sexualised media and behaviour, concluded that after examining data from more than 22,000 children under 18 years, exposure to sexualised material does not
impact sexual conduct. Ferguson, Nielsen and Markey (2016, 356) argued correlating sexualised media with behaviour is based on weak data. They concluded that sexualised media might affect attitudes, yet the study suggested attitudes did not carry over into behaviour (Ferguson, Nielson and Markey 2016, 356). The research also recognised that no previous studies had ever checked for unreliable or mischievous responding (Ferguson, Nielson and Markey 2016, 356). They argue that without these checks the validity of correlations between sexualised media and behaviour is unknown (Ferguson, Nielsen and Markey 2016, 356). Ongoing research is required.

Although new research is emerging, much psychological research favoured a modernist approach to cultural sexualisation. Modernism is characterised by a sense of knowing and one truth (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 251). This view implies the media works under a patriarchal lens where all women and girls are objectified for male viewing pleasure only. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey (1975) coined this as the male gaze (cited in Gauntlett 2008). Psychological research is also founded on what Michael Warner (1991) defined as heteronormativity, “where pervasive and invisible norms of heterosexuality are embedded in society”. Media and cultural studies provide an alternative view, adding a postmodern dimension to the discussion.

1.4 Girls as critical and sophisticated media consumers

This sections highlights media and cultural studies perspectives on media sexualisation. I outline key findings from qualitative research regarding young girls’ opinions of Miley Cyrus’s image. This research shows girls to be
media literate and empowered, contrary to moral panic discourse. Yet I make the point that the girls’ resistance was not a straightforward process, which complicates any clear understanding of media effects.

Buckingham and Bragg (2004) conducted qualitative research into young people of all genders aged 9-17 years and their relationships with sexualised media. Their research revealed that children are not naive or incompetent media consumers. Instead, evidence illustrates they are media literate and highly critical consumers (Gill 2012, 489). Buckingham and Bragg (2004) presented children as autonomous, calculating and self-regulating entities in control of their quest for knowledge. Overall they regarded children using media as a positive resource to fashion a sense of self (Buckingham and Bragg 2004, 90).

Jackson et al.’s (2011, 2015, 2016) research into sexualised media effects supported Buckingham and Bragg’s conclusions. Jackson et al. conducted qualitative research in New Zealand over four years and summarised results to understand how pre-teen girls, aged 11-13 years, made sense of Cyrus’s image. Findings revealed girls significantly negotiate meanings of celebrities. Jackson et al.’s (2016) data further suggested that through girls’ capacity for media critique, a more complex picture emerged “wherein critical awareness interweaved with influence and desire” (549). This enabled girls to remain a fan of Cyrus even though they judged her as an out of control, ‘train wreck’ celebrity (Jackson et al. 2016, 556).
Girls made use of disgust and moral condemnation to position themselves apart from Cyrus the ‘bad’ celebrity. For instance, strong responses were evoked when discussing Cyrus posing naked for a photo shoot for *Vanity Fair*. They frequently used the words *slut* and *ewww* to describe their disgust and awareness of what Jackson and Vares described as a paedophilic gaze (Jackson and Vares 2011, 144). Nakedness was the signifier connoting Cyrus as a ‘slut’ and ‘bad role model’. When Cyrus violated heterosexual norms, discussions were punctuated with *ewww* (Jackson and Vares 2011, 141). Disgust was a useful strategy for girls to anchor their sexual identities as heterosexual as they navigated displays of sexuality that crossed normative boundaries (Jackson and Vares 2011, 141).

For girls who Jackson et al. interviewed, the shift from Cyrus’s virtuous behaviour in her show *Hannah Montana* to hypersexual pop star signalled a violation of appropriate femininity. Role model discourse was central to the ways girls constructed Cyrus in discussions (Jackson et al. 2016, 552). They evaluated Cyrus in reference to the ‘good role model’ image Cyrus previously portrayed (Jackson et al. 2016, 552). Girls spoke of their anger, disappointment, disaffection and almost a sense of betrayal, organised around the expectations of Cyrus as a permanent ‘good girl’ (Jackson et al. 2016, 552). According to the girls interviewed, Cyrus was now a ‘bad girl’ signified through hypersexual performances, drug use and drinking (Jackson et al. 2016, 552). Jackson et al. (2016, 561) explained the girls’ responses as
Cyrus being a failed neoliberal subject who abused her post-feminist freedoms by violating the norms of acceptable femininity.

Jackson et al. (2016, 561) found the moral panic benchmark can problematically determine girls’ sexuality as illegitimate, but it was the same tool girls use to police Cyrus’s sexuality. Researchers noted the girls’ resistance to Cyrus might be a façade, as the girls in the focus groups were aware of the authoritarian gaze of adults. Moral panic discourse can require girls to navigate space for agency between girl power rhetoric, moral panics and neuroses of anxious parents (Jackson and Vares 2015, 250). For Jackson and Goddard (2015, 247), the use of the word *awkward* signified the anxiety girls felt when watching sexualised music videos in front of younger children and parents.

Although girls are capable of resisting celebrities, discussions revealed some contradictions. This occurred where the ‘bad girl’ was not always condemned as such and the meaning of ‘slut’ was regarded by girls as positive. Research found the condemned celebrity could also recuperate her tarnished reputation in a subsequent media viewing (Jackson and Vares 2011, 144). Jackson and Vares (2011) described this as a “knotty intertwining of resistance and regulation” (144) within the girlhood sexualisation discourse. Jackson et al.’s (2016, 549) findings also concluded within negative judgements of Cyrus there was still space to admire and desire other aspects of her. They also found that if girls were Cyrus’s fans, this influenced the girls’ tolerance for
her transgressions. Girls would more likely accept the transgression if they enjoyed the music (Jackson et al. 2016, 549).

Conclusion

Debates about the sexualisation of culture and its perceived effects are polarising. Much of the psychological literature convincingly suggests the media’s capacity for negatively affecting girls’ self image and health. Media and cultural studies research has provided an alternative dimension, asking us to consider girls as media literate. Yet qualitative findings also revealed contradictions within resistance, so any media effects remain unclear. I argue the need for further study into the composition of Cyrus’s media identity that may enable researchers to identify multiple subjectivities. Subjectivity within Cyrus’s image may reflect the subjectivity within sexualisation debates.
Chapter Two: Methodology

Introduction
To further explore the legitimacy of moral panics, this study draws on semiotics as a methodology to deconstruct two images of Cyrus sourced from the Internet. This section defines semiotics, outlines the history and contributions from three contributors in the field; Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Peirce and Roland Barthes.

2.1 Semiotics: definition and history

Here I define semiotics and recognise the role culture plays in generating meaning. As I rely on this work in my analysis, I provide a brief history of semiotics, its early stages in linguistics and locate the key contributors to the field who link semiotics to visual culture.

*Semiotics* put simply, is the science of signs (O'Shaughnessy 1999, 64). It is concerned with the way things - words, images and objects - are vehicles for meaning within cultural contexts (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 366). In other words, signification or meaning is defined by the cultural system that generates it (Silverman 1983, 3). To generate meaning sign systems contain certain rules and codes in order to be understood (O'Shaughnessy 1999, 64).

Although the origins of semiotics date back to the work of Plato and Augustine, it most strongly emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in
the writings of Charles Sanders Peirce and linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (Silverman 1983, 3). Semiotics began as a method for analysing language systems and is applied now to all sign systems, including those present in the media (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 64). Extending on Saussure and Peirce’s contributions, Roland Barthes’ writing on semiotics shifted the focus away from language towards visual culture such as pictures, art and film.

2.2 Ferdinand de Saussure

In this section, I describe Ferdinand de Saussure’s contribution to semiotics including his focus on signs in language systems. I define Saussure’s terms the sign, signifier and signified. Saussure argued that words and language were the fundamental sign systems, and called for an application of semiotic principles to all aspects of culture (Silverman 1983, 5). He provided a firm foundation for other theorists to extend on semiotics.

According to O’Shaughnessy (1999, 64), language is the dominant and most important sign system for humans. In Saussure’s *A Course in General Linguistics* written in the early twentieth century, he conceived language as a system of signs that express ideas (Silverman 1983, 4). Saussure explained the linguistic sign as a unit consisting of the signifier and the signified (Barnard 2001, 146). The signifier refers to the meaningful form and the signified is the concept the sign evokes (Silverman 1983, 6). Saussure stressed the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign as no natural bond exists between the signifier and signified (Silverman 1983, 6). For example, the word *dog* can only elicit
meaning from an English speaker or the word is meaningless. Meaning relies on cultural codes and conventions embedded in language.

Saussure argued linguistics was the master pattern for all branches of semiology (Silverman 1983, 8). Yet in Saussure’s manuscript *A Course in General Linguistics*, he called for the application of semiotics to extend to all aspects of culture (Silverman 1983, 4). Semiotics was revived in 1958 in Levis-Strauss’ *Structural Anthropology*, where he applied Saussure’s principles to primitive cultures (Silverman 1983, 3). The semiotic field now encompasses languages, mass communication, visual culture, medicine, para-linguistics, zoology, anthropology and psychoanalysis (Silverman 1983, 5).

2.3 Charles Sanders Peirce

Charles Sanders Peirce was another key contributor to semiotics. Here I briefly describe Peirce’s contribution, which identified two interlocking semiotic triads that involve complex interactions between the *sign*, *interpretant*, *object*, *icons*, *indices* and *symbols*. I draw on these tools in Chapter Three.

Peirce wrote about semiotics prior to Saussure yet his work was assimilated much later (Silverman 1983, 4). He argued that language and thought are processes of sign interpretation (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 28). For Peirce, meaning does not reside in the initial perception of the sign, but rather in the interpretation of the perception and, subsequent action based on that perception (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 28). Peirce’s view was elucidated in
his semiotic model, which saw signification depending on two interlocking triads that relate to each other in complex interactions (Silverman 2001, 14).

Peirce split the idea of a sign into three types in the first triad (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 68). He identified them as the sign, the interpretant and the object, with signification involving all three in a complex interaction (Silverman 1983, 14). The sign elicits a concept which is the interpretant, defined as the mental effect or thought generated by the relationship between the sign and the object (Silverman 1983, 15). The object is what the sign stands for (Silverman 1983, 14).

The second triad accounts for the different types of signs that human consciousness can interpret. Peirce coined them icons, indices and symbols (Silverman 1983, 19). An iconic sign refers to signs that resemble that which they signify such as icons, including paintings, photos or sculptures (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 68). Indexical signs occur when a sign indicates or points to something else, such as smoke signifies fire (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 68). It is a sign of its object by virtue of being connected to something (Silverman 1983, 19). The symbol is a sign that has no resemblance to the signified such as a road sign, languages or mathematical symbol (O’Shaugnessy 1999, 68). The sign’s relationship to the object is arbitrary and evokes an association of ideas interpreted as referring to the object (Silverman 1983, 20).
2.4 Roland Barthes

Here I introduce literary theorist and semiotician Roland Barthes and his contribution to semiotics. To address subjectivity within signs, Barthes coined the terms denotation and connotation which I define here. I also consider the naturalisation of cultural connotations that Barthes described as myth. I correlate myth to ideology and power in society.

Roland Barthes offered a useful contribution to extend on Peirce’s work, as he introduced first and second order signifying systems to deal with the subjectivity of the signified (Silverman 1983, 25). Barthes’ first order system is *denotation* and his second order is *connotation* (Silverman 1983, 26). At the level of *denotation*, an image conveys a non-coded, literal or objective meaning, for example a rose is a flower (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 352). *Connotation* relies on the social, cultural and historical meanings added to the literal meaning. In the case of a rose, the denotation of flower connotes romance and love (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 353).

The dividing line between denotation and connotation can be ambiguous (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 19), as both can have naturalising effects. Naturalisation occurs when the spectator does not need to know very much to understand the sign (Barnard 2001, 150). Barthes recognised that denotation and connotation can become naturalised through *myth*, where a hidden set of codes, conventions and rules are made to seem universal (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 19). Barthes in *Mythologies* (1973) wrote that
myth is “a system of communication that is a message” (109). Lavers (1982) argued that “myth is a fictitious story which gives poetic form to an unsayable truth” and “myth is a message sent in code” (105). Myth extends on connotation and is the third focus of inquiry for image analysis (Rylance 1994, 49).

In anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss’ work where he examined the role of myth in primitive cultures, he observed that myth dealt with the central problems within a culture in story form (O’Shaughnessy 1999, 137). Barthes’ work connected wider social myths to ideology, described by O’Shaughnessy (1999) as “a set of social values, ideas, beliefs, feelings, representations and institutions by which people collectively make sense of the world they live in” (159). Barthes (1973) believed everything can be subject to myth, describing the universe as being “infinitely fertile in suggestions” (109).

Myth stems from an openly professed capitalist society Barthes argued, where bourgeois’ ideology spreads over everything such as theatre, art and humanity (Barthes 1973, 138). Barthes (1973, 138) defined the bourgeois as the ruling social class that does not want to be named; yet they merge themselves into the nation where meaning flows out of them until their identity is unnecessary. Barthes (1973, 143) recognised in Mythologies that social order, economics and myth interconnect as he highlighted the economic value of ideology.
Myth smooths out contradictions in society by reducing artefacts to privileged signifieds (Silverman 1983, 30). Myth thus ensures the analogy between meaning and concept is only partial, dropping multiple meanings to enhance the probability of signification (Barthes 1973, 127). Barthes (1973) argued that “myth prefers to work with poor, incomplete images where meaning is devoid of substance” (127). In other words, myth recognises difference in society and attempts to collapse diversity into homogeneity through vague significations. It thereby operates to capitalise on the arbitrariness of the motivated sign, cashing in on the multiple networks of association (Rylance 1994, 49).

2.5 Similarities between three semiotic schemes

Saussure, Peirce and Barthes developed differing semiotic schemes yet similarities exist among them. I predominantly draw on Barthes’ theories in this thesis, however I use supporting concepts from Saussure and Peirce’s schemes. Here I describe the similarities between them so I can use them collaboratively in Chapter Three.

Saussure’s idea of the signifier correlates with Peirce’s concept of the icon, which is defined as a real thing. The icon is not dissimilar to Barthes’ idea of denotation, which is the face-value meaning of a sign that evokes Peirce’s interpretant or Saussure’s signified. At this first-level signifying system the relationship between the signifier and the signified is undisputed, yet Saussure’s scheme highlights that expressions of the signified across cultures is entirely arbitrary (various languages express the words differently).
Barthes’ definition of *connotation* and Peirce’s *indices* and *symbols* strongly intertwine. Peirce’s description of *indices* where a signifier hints at something, intersects with Barthes’ second-order signification system of *connotation*, where cultural knowledge is required to understand the signified. Connotation also correlates with Peirce’s definition of the *symbol*, which is culturally defined and understood. Although Saussure focused on language in his model, definitions of connotation, indices and symbols support his assertion that the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary (culturally defined).

**Conclusion**

In this section, I defined semiotics and provided a brief historical overview and definition. I drew on three prominent theorists in the field whose concepts I use in Chapter Three. Saussure’s semiotic scheme provides a foundation for Peirce and Barthes’ theories. As a result of Barthes’ contribution, semiotics can be used to analyse language and visual culture. Myth allows for the exploration of images in relation to social power, which I outlined here. Though I predominantly use Barthes’ semiotic scheme and draw strongly on the role of myth in visual culture, I summarised similarities between all three schemes so that I may use them collectively in Chapter Three.
Chapter Three: Analysis

Introduction

In this chapter, I apply semiotics to two Miley Cyrus images to determine if her identity is hyper-sexualised. Image 1 (Appendix 1) is an album cover from her song BB Talk and Image 2 (Appendix 2) is a photo shoot for Paper magazine. I predominantly use Barthes’ tools of denotation, connotation and myth, while drawing on supporting ideas from Saussure and Peirce’s schemes.

This analysis begins with a discussion of denotation in the BB Talk album cover and Paper magazine images. Connotation is the second focus in this section. I read the images of Cyrus as representing the sexualised-infant, the sexualised-infantilised-woman, the gender fluid body, the post-human and the cyborg. For me, these identities exist simultaneously in the text. They reveal multiple potential subjectivities that merge organic (biology) and non-organic (social and technical).

Furthermore, I explore the myth of individualism, drawing on concepts including schizoanalysis, the hybrid body and the normate to clarify my view of Cyrus representing an ‘emerging’ human. Braidotti’s work on the post-human is a useful framework to understand identities as products of complex

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2 Paper is a New York City-based independent magazine focusing on fashion, pop-culture, nightlife, music, art and film. Paper was founded and launched in 1984 by editors Kim Hastreiter and David Hershkovits (Linkedin 2017).
assemblages of subjective components (neoliberal individualism). I also investigate the post-human’s relationship to myth and capitalism.

3.1 Denotation

Here, I apply denotation to two images representing Cyrus. Peirce and Saussure’s semiotic principles (icons, interpretants, signifiers and signified) are useful to decipher denotative meanings within signs. Denotation is useful to draw out or expose naturalised meanings of Cyrus, while providing the foundation for further consideration of connotation and myth.

For Image 1 using Saussure’s model, illustrates how the sign (album cover) uses signifiers that denote ‘infant’ to communicate the signified, infant. The sign features the singer in a white one-piece baby suit, blonde pigtails tied with white bows and a bottle. The signifiers enable ‘infant’ as the interpretant as the bottle, pigtails, hair bows and infant clothes act iconically and evoke the mental image of infant. The image is operating at the first-level signifying system of denotation, to show that a baby is a baby. ‘Baby’, a newly born infant, is a universal being which requires minimal cultural knowledge to understand.

The image further denotes ‘infant girl’ through the naturalisation of signifiers that denote female. Signifiers that conjure the interpretant as ‘girl’ can be read as denotation (literal) but simultaneously intersect with connotation (girl as a social construction). The infant theme is expressively gendered as ‘girl’
through long hair and hair bows that traditionally signify female in Western society. Signifiers representing girls are repeatedly used and naturalised in Western society so they may seem literal. Yet signifiers that denote girl can also be recognised as indexical as the relationship between them and the infant is causal and not given (Barnard 2001, 148). According to this view, society decides the appropriate signifiers that demarcate what girls are; for example, girls wear pink. ‘Girl’ as a social construction (connotation) is explored in a later section.

In Image 2, Cyrus is using signifiers of shapes (pyramid), colours (blue and pink), body parts (legs), and nudity (female body) to signify the object, a photo shoot for Paper magazine. It is an eccentric image denoting avant-garde art described as at the forefront of artistic experimentation (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 350). The eccentricity could prompt viewers to extract a literal meaning of simply ‘art’, as the complexity may not elicit any fixed meaning given the sign distances itself from representing reality. Cyrus is using nakedness as a signifier to denote the female body. Therefore the literal meaning of this sign is art composed of a naked female standing next to a pyramid with two pairs of legs emerging from it, surrounded by pink, blue and various shapes. Denotation is useful to signify certain objective truths.

The line between denotation and connotation can be ambiguous (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 19). Barthes used the term myth to describe naturalised meanings subject to connotation which may appear as denotation. The
signification of ‘girl’ in Image 1, highlights the blurring between denotation and connotation, foregrounding the idea of gender as a social construct and thereby, to Barthes’ idea of myth. Given the limits of denotation, Barthes’ connotation and Peirce’s indexical and symbolic signifiers are useful semiotic tools to appreciate cultural contexts that denotation can conceal.

3.2 Connotation

In this section, I use Barthes’ idea of connotation and Peirce’s indices, symbols, signified, and signifiers to examine diverse cultural identities. I begin with identities of gender fluidity followed by multiple subjectivities that represent the post-human. Finally, I consider the post-human’s role in increasing identity subjectivities by merging the organic with non-organic components available for identity construction.

3.2.1 The gender fluid body

In this section, I identify signifiers in Image 1 and 2 that connote androgyny. Androgyny enables a critique of the hyper-feminine and hyper-sexualised ideals that moral panics are concerned with. Judith Butler’s gender theory and Homi Bhaba’s idea of the hybrid body, are useful for understanding androgynous significations and the social landscape in which gender operates.

Cyrus’s nakedness in Image 2 can be de-coded as sexualised while simultaneously connoting androgyny. Androgynous significations juxtaposed with sexualisation, form a conflated binary. Cyrus’s persistent use of
sexualised signifiers in pop culture (nakedness) is contributing to her status as an iconic sexualised pop star and a symbol of sexual liberation. Despite Cyrus denoting ‘female’ and connoting ‘sexualisation’ both signified through nudity, her hair is short. Short hair is not iconic in hyper-sexualised and hyper-feminine texts (which normally favour long hair); rather short hair is traditionally a symbol connoting masculinity. Cyrus may use short hair for a variety of reasons, one of which may be to connote a post-feminist rebellion or rejection of the male gaze.

Cyrus’s lack of heavy makeup, a common signifier in hyper-sexualised images, further suggests that attracting the male gaze is not her sole purpose. Rather, indexical and symbolic signifiers connoting androgyny point to Cyrus partially embodying the interpretant of ‘male’. Signifiers connoting androgyny allow for a critique of the hyper-sexualised identities represented in Western culture. Cyrus thus shifts away from the hyper-sexualised woman packaged under the guise of post-feminism. Instead, she connotes gender fluidity, although this connotation is not operating exclusively.

It is useful here to consider the normate. Garland-Thomson (1997) described the normate as “the subject figure of the cultural self, a figure outlined by an array of deviant others” (8). She further explained it as a narrowly defined profile that describes only a minority of people trying to fit into this subject position (Garland-Thomson 1997, 8). The normate has been referred to as the American-Californian body-beautiful ideology (Ponterotto 2016, 135).
Ponterotto (2016, 135) identified the highest expression of the normate is found in *Barbie*\(^3\) as the doll has long blonde hair, blue eyes, tanned skin and ‘perfect’ body proportions. The normate, which favours Euro-American aesthetic norms, is universally performed through Western media such as fashion magazines, advertisements and cinema (Ponterotto 2016, 135). Yet Cyrus resists hyper-femininity in Image 2, as she does not wholly signify the normate. Similarly, Cyrus signifying a comical infant in Image 1 could be read as a shift away from the normate identity.

Pink and blue in Image 2 denote colour yet connote the traditional interpretant of gender difference. The equal use of both colours could indexically hint at gender equality and merging of gender. Gender equality is further signified through the pyramid – connoting hierarchy and power – which is half pink and half blue. Cyrus has pink and blue paint on each eyebrow, connoting the ability to see the world through masculine and feminine perspectives. Pink and blue paint on various parts of Cyrus’s naked body symbolises gender fluidity. The pink bricks painted on Cyrus’s leg, is an indexical signification that her polyvocal identity rests on the foundations (connotation of bricks) that she is organically female (connotation of pink). Braidotti (2013, 94) argued that even though the ‘self’ can be ontologically polyvocal, the self still rests on a plane of consistency including both the real that is already actualised (female biology) and the real that is virtual.

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\(^3\) The Mattel toy company in America developed the Barbie doll in 1959. The doll has curvy proportions and platinum blonde hair. Mattel has now made subtle changes to the doll’s body and face over time and has three new body types; tall, petite and curvy (Lull and King 2016, par 1).
In Image 1, a critique of ‘girl’ can be identified through connotations of blue. Powder blue is used in the background juxtaposed against Cyrus as a comical infant girl. Powder blue is an indexical signifier as it is traditionally used for infant boys’ nurseries and baby goods. The colour used in this way hints at gender unification as it elicits an interpretant of ‘infant boy’. Juxtaposed with indexical signifiers that traditionally connote ‘girl’, it may signal the merging of genders and blurring of traditional gender roles in contemporary society. This is a subtle signification and less explicit than Image 2.

In Image 2, Cyrus more clearly represents unification of masculine and feminine principles which may represent identities of the lesbian or feminist. Brooks (1997, 192) draws on the work of gender theorist Judith Butler (1990), who argued gender difference was simply the articulation of repeated cultural performances. An example to reflect this statement is the idea that girls always wear pink. Cyrus has embodied signifiers of both genders which could be a nod to Butler’s (1992) model of identity, where “genders can neither be true nor false nor real or apparent” (489). Her image refutes naturalised conceptions of female gender essentialism and could be a cultural marker of new forms of identity construction.

Butler’s gender theory can be supported by the idea of the hybrid body. Homi Bhabha, a postcolonial and cultural theorist, (1994) described the hybridised body as “a channel of negotiation between, or outside, of the boundaries and
binaries that frame identities and cultures” (cited in Ponterotto 2016). It is the right to negotiate one’s identity and to move freely within the many masculinities and femininities of the gender order (Ponterotto 2016, 146). Cyrus embodies the hybrid body in both images through connotations of pink and blue, short hair and minimal makeup that signify androgyny. Additionally, in Image 1 the hybrid body can be further realised as she is composed of woman and infant. The hybrid body allows Cyrus to resist a dominant male gaze. Instead she signifies a new body marked by plurality, difference and hybridity, all useful tools for resistance (Ponterotto 2016, 142).

Arguably, ambiguous indexical significations exist in both signs that critique the connotation of the gender fluid hybrid body. My personal subjectivities determine the signifying relationships decoded in this analysis. Despite Cyrus resisting the male gaze she is nonetheless still sexualised. Significations of female (nakedness), pink bricks (foundations) and infant, may still attract a male or paedophile’s gaze. Her nakedness in Image 2, could signify normate sensibilities as Cyrus is toned, fit and female. Despite her signifying an infant in Image 1, she may represent a portion of the normate through representation of her body in the costume. Similarly, Cyrus’s short hair may not be indexically coded as masculine. These points of contention provide the possibility of a hypersexual reading of the text.
3.2.2 The sexualised-infant and sexualised-infantilised-woman

Here I consider two identities of the sexualised-infant and the sexualised-infantilised-woman. I relate these identities to moral panic discourses as they have the potential to re-inscribe a male gaze and normalise a paedophilic desire. I explore these re-inscribed sexualised identities via the theory of the schizoid double pull and make links with the political economy.

Identity subjectivities can be gleaned through indexical signifiers on Cyrus’s costume in Image 1. The infant clothing Cyrus wears has been appropriated with a g-string back which signifies sexualised adult underwear. The g-string is not explicit but rather suggested via the high-cut leg, which acts indexically to signify ‘g-string’. The unification of ‘infant’ with ‘intimate adult’ connotes a paedophilic sexual innuendo. A viewer could bypass this suggestion however as the g-string is not an iconic representation. The paedophilic connotations are further enhanced by the buttoned crotch, signalling the female infant is sexually available. Conversely, it denotes a common feature on baby clothes for ease of nappy changing. Yet juxtaposed with the high-cut leg and indexical nature of the g-string, Image 1 connotes sex or sexuality at the expense of the representation of ‘infant’. The size and placement of the bottle can enhance sexualised connotations. The bottle is oversized and white and positioned near her mouth, connoting a phallic and sexual gesture. This bottle as phallic is subjective yet when combined with the other indexical signifiers, it works to strengthen the sexualised-infant as the signified.
When one signifier in Image 1 connotes the sexualised infant, another operates against this interpretation. To clarify, the whiteness of the image denotes colour yet connotes purity, innocence, cleanliness and virginity, critiquing my analysis of the sexualised-infant. Simultaneously this could connote the ‘virgin as the desired bride’, lending support to those concerned with paedophilic desire. Cyrus may also be viewed as signifying humour and cartoonish-fun rather than the sexualised-infant, securing a more innocent gaze. The sexualised infant is only one identity of many possible identities available in Image 1. I argue a multiplicity of meaning exists simultaneously within the text and its relevance depends on the viewer.

Adult significations existing alongside signifiers denoting infant can result in a connotation of what feminism, sexuality and gender researchers Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose (2011, 393) have referred to as the sexualised-infantilised-woman. This identity is manifest when sexiness and innocence cohere; for example when a woman poses as a young girl, hugging a teddy for adult magazine Playboy (Renold and Ringrose 2011, 393). Cyrus draws on innocence and sexiness via ambiguous signifiers that represent infant. The buttoned crotch hints at Cyrus being sexually available and the g-string back highlights sexual connotations that signify adult themes. The phallic connotations of the oversized bottle can also strengthen the sexualised innuendo. Given Cyrus is objectively an adult reiterates the sexualised-infantilised-woman. Overall, Image 1 represents multiple pushes and pulls of what Renold and Ringrose (2011) referred to as “sexual innocence versus sexual knowingness.” (392).
Rosi Braidotti’s *schizoid double pull* (Renold and Ringrose 2011, 392) is useful for discussing gender and sexual norms. Braidotti, whose theoretical work focuses on feminist and gender theories, described the schizoid double pull as the displacing and re-fixing of gender and sexual norms in late capitalist societies (Renold and Ringrose 2011, 393). Subjects can disengage themselves from sexualisation while later re-inscribing it in their identity. Image 1 represents a schizoid dynamic where Cyrus neither appears to be a baby nor a woman, but there is the possibility of encompassing both. Image 2 operates in the same way as Cyrus’s representation of gender and sexuality is blurry. As a result her gender and sexual preferences are difficult to read, which Braidotti identified as a key feature of the schizoid double pull.

Identity diversity and capitalism collide in Western society. Gender and sexual diversity can be celebrated without discrimination and traditional norms constraining the oppressed subject (though this of course is not always the case). Simultaneously this fracturing of identities become valuable, marketable commodities in globalised cultural economies (Renold and Ringrose 2011, 393). Strong correlations exist between the schizoid double pull and Barthes’ ideas of myth, as both reiterate economic opportunism secured through ambiguous significations. Braidotti theorised this trend as the *Global Incorporation of Otherness* where the ‘other’ is mainstreamed for profit (Renold and Ringrose 2011, 391). For Sturken and Cartwright (2001, 361), the *other* is the symbolic opposite to the normative category; it refers to the category of subjectivity that is set up in binary opposition to dominant
subjectivity. For example, homosexuality is other to heterosexuality. In Image 1 the other’s gaze is the paedophile’s, who is identified as marketable. In Image 2 otherness is apparent as Cyrus signifies multiple identities of the lesbian, feminist or trans-person, all of whom are other to heteronormativity.

Lavers (1982) wrote that “signs benefit from the interplay between the cultural meaning and the reserve of the natural plenitude of denotation.” (110). To clarify, Images 1 and 2 can still operate through literal meanings if the cultural identities I identified are not noticed by the reader. Capitalising on denotation is an opportunistic strategy to maximise the sign’s capacity. For example, young children, teenagers and adults who simply enjoy Cyrus’s music may read the images as just Cyrus the ‘celebrity’. Lavers (1982, 112) argued signs are products of multiple causalities and are viewed from an infinite number of points of view, determined by satisfactions of needs and use value. Therefore, a denotative reading still serves a purpose.

3.2.3 The post-human and the cyborg

In this section, I consider Cyrus signalling a shift towards more diverse identity subjectivities than the hybrid body. Cyrus’s robotic pose in Image 2, signifies the merge of organic and non-organic to generally signify the post-human and more specifically, the cyborg. I draw on Braidotti’s theoretical work of the post-human, to argue for Cyrus’s image as signifying a type of emerging human, who has the potential to re-define human identity construction.
In Image 2, Cyrus’s pose is tense and stiff with arms bent inwards which indexically connotes ‘machine’ or ‘robot’. The various shapes in pink and blue painted on her body connote heterogeneous parts assembled together, as a machine would do on a production line. Cyrus does not signify a complete human in this sign. She embodies organic matter (nakedness), with in-organic matter, as her rigid, unnatural pose connotes ‘robotic machine’. Her face conveys a perplexed expression or even discomfort. There is a futuristic tone to the image, signifying a new type of emerging human, which I discuss in Chapter 4.

Braidotti (2013, 89) wrote of the emergence of the post-human, in which the distinction between technology and human collide. She (2013) described the post-human as “a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences or ontological categories (the organic and in-organic), the born, the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous system.” (89). Cyrus signifies the post-human through the juxtaposition of organic human (nakedness) with robot (pose and facial expression). For Braidotti, the post-human foregrounds human consciousness with the general electronic network, which has prompted a shift in our field of perception, allowing humans to escape from the finite materiality of the enfleshed self (Braidotti 2013, 90). Cyrus has escaped the finite materiality of ‘human woman’, through signifiers connoting masculinity (short hair, minimal makeup and the colour blue) and robot (pose).
Escaping the finite reality of the ‘enfleshed self’ increases the range of subjectivities (organic and non-organic) a human can experience, which can be assembled together in infinite ways. Thweatt-Bates et al. (2012) offers a definition of the post-human which mirrors this. According to Thweatt-Bates (2012), “the post-human emerged as a way to describe a new and growing appreciation for the plasticity and flexibility of human nature spurred by discoveries of bio-technology, the virtual and information and communications technologies” (1). Cyrus’s identity plasticity and flexibility is signified in Image 2, through the heterogeneous shapes marked on her body and blurring of traditional gender and human norms. This dynamic appears in Image 1 through the displacement of Cyrus as an organic adult, in favour of Cyrus as a non-organic infant.

Thweatt-Bates et al. (2012, 1) wrote that the term post-human functions as an umbrella covering a span of related concepts, such as enhanced persons, artificial persons or androids, uploaded consciousnesses, cyborgs and chimeras. Cyrus’s machine-like assemblage signifies that of the cyborg. The cyborg was originally written about in Donna Haraway’s landmark essay *The Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) and used as a symbol of feminism (Thweatt-Bates et al. 2012, 5). Haraway (2000) described the cyborg as a creature in our post-gender world that was the “condensed image of both imagination and material reality” (292). The cyborg was a site where nature and culture were reworked (Haraway 2000, 292), while rejecting attempts to define identity on the basis of nature (Thweatt-Bates et al. 2012, 16).
The cyborg shows the possibility for shedding the problematic biological body for a virtual existence, or more durable artificial body (Thweatt-Bates et al. 2012, 5). This is significant for what Cyrus connotes in Image 2, as feminine, masculine and robotic signifiers coalesce to refute naturalised conceptions of ‘human female’. Cyrus does not represent a fixed or finite subject. Instead, the post-human and cyborg is about becoming and transforming, what Deleuze and Guattari referred to as *becoming machine* in their theory of schizoanalysis (Braidotti 2013, 91). The becoming machine can be usefully supported by Barthes’ idea of myth, which I discuss in the next section.

3.3 Myth

In this section, I explore the role of myth in relation to Cyrus’s identity construction. Barthes (1973, 121) argued myth is nothing but an association of denotation and connotation, which is why it is the third focus of this analysis. Many parallels can be drawn between the multiple identities Cyrus portrays and the characteristics of myth. I draw on evidence that suggests Cyrus represents multiple identities and subjectivities for economic gain.

Correlations can be drawn between myth and the post-human. Cyrus as embodying the neoliberal post-human, is not a finite reading. Similarly, the meaning of myth can never exist at ‘zero degree’ (Barthes 1973, 132). The post-human is not a fixed concept nor does it have a singular definition. Loosely defined, it is a way of describing “the unknown possible future and
altered identity of the human” (Thweatt-Bates et al. 2012, 1). This definition encompasses numerous identity subjectivities, which is increased by integrating non-organic social or technical elements. Herein lies the connection between myth and the post-human. Myth works to capitalise on multiple subjectivities through ambiguous significations, exactly as Cyrus has done by signifying the post-human, which works as an umbrella term for the multiple identities identified in this thesis.

Myth’s open-ended structure allows the cultural artifact to be maximally exploited, by capturing all possibilities for meaning potential (Barthes 1973, 133). Cyrus as the post-human devoid of a fixed identity, casts a wide net over a potential audience. Cyrus is neither male nor female, woman nor baby, heterosexual nor homosexual and neither human nor robot. She still however, represents a portion of these identities. Being ‘neither this nor that’ increases the probability of capturing heterogeneous meaning potentials from people who identify with the identity categories recognised in the analysis.

Cyrus may provide minorities with identity validation. Barthes (1973) wrote the “meta-language within myth and the relationship to the subject is based on use and depoliticised according to needs” (144). In this view, a homosexual person may resonate with the diverse sexualities that Cyrus signifies and so, may extract that signification as it validates their identity.
3.3.1 The becoming machine and body without organs

In the following section, I connect characteristics of Cyrus’s identity construction and myth to concepts derived from schizoanalysis. This section aims to provide a theoretical framework to help understand the proliferation of subjectivities available in Cyrus’s image, that interconnects the biological with the social.

Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s theory of schizoanalysis, complements the characteristics of myth and the post-human, as it recognises and legitimises multiple subjectivities and transversal relations between them. Guattari (1998) described schizoanalysis as “the analysis of the incidence of assemblages of enunciation among semiotic and subjective productions within a given problematic context” (433). Schizoanalysis opposes reductionism to simplify the complex, rather favouring process as a networked, relational and transversal way of being (Colman 2010, 233). Characteristics of the post-human and cyborg connotations, correspond with several concepts under schizoanalysis, such as *becoming, assemblages, becoming machine, and body without organs*. These concepts assist in clarifying my argument, that Cyrus is signifying the mutation of multiple subjectivities (organic and non-organic) of the post-human, that legitimise infinite assemblages available for identity construction.
Deleuze and Guattari used the concept *becoming* to describe an individual who can be transversed by multiple and apparently contradictory becomings (Guattari 2006, 415). For example, becoming-feminine can co-exist with becoming-child, masculine, machine or animal. In Image 1, Cyrus is an example of becoming-infant. The term *machine* is described as not just technical machines, but also theoretical, social and aesthetic machines, that never function in isolation but rather through assemblages (Guattari 2006, 417). *Assemblages* are heterogeneous elements on a biological, social, machinic or imaginary order (Guattari 2006, 415). Machines can engender themselves, choose themselves and open up new lines of possibility (Guattari 2006, 417). The *becoming machine* indicates and actualises a subject’s relational powers, that is no longer cast in a dualistic frame, such as gender categories of man and woman and their social productivity (for example, men work and women have children). Rather, the becoming machine connects with multiple others and merges itself with its technological environment, to release the body from social productivity (organised efficiency) (Braidotti 2013, 92).

Releasing the body from its socialised productivity (biologies of man or woman, adult or baby), enables the body to become what Deleuze and Guattari coined, a *body without organs* (BWO) (Braidotti 2013, 91). The BWO is described as the life we imagine underlying our forms of organisation. It is the undifferentiated (social) that underlies the differentiated organised bodies of life (biology) (Coleman 2001, 417). The becoming machine and BWO embodies what Cyrus has signified; her identity has merged together with
multiple non-organic others (man, infant and machine) to signify the lesbian, feminist, infantilised-woman or post-human and in doing so, she is somewhat released from her female adult biological role.

Overall, Cyrus signifies the reconfiguration of human subjectivity through increasing integrations of self and environment (Thweatt-Bates et al. 2012, 16). Her body is marked by multiplicity, signifying an assemblage of ontological and social categories. The various shapes painted on her body in Image 2, connote that her assemblage is a product of this increased integration of biology and technology, or social categories. Similarly in Image 1, the assemblage of infant signifiers – bottle, clothing and hair-bows – connotes the integration of biology (woman) with social (infant), to create the sexualised-infantilised-woman. Cyrus’s body is now defined by the relationship between these parts (the lesbian, feminist, trans-person, the post-human, infantilised-woman or a combination of all significations). The collapsing of biological and technological has created new modes of identity subjectivity, which Guattari recognised in schizoanalysis.

Guattari (1995), in his analysis of the collective existential mutations of subjectivity, called for a collapsing of difference between the autopoietic (biological and self organising) and the allopoietic (the social and technical machine produces the final product) (cited in Braidotti 2013). He called for autopoiesis to cover the machines and technological others, to account for organic and non-organic matter (Braidotti 2013, 94). Guattari used the term
*machinic autopoiesis* to describe the link between organic matter and machine, and proposed *autopoietic subjectivation* as another word for subjectivity (Braidotti 2013, 94). Cyrus connotes Guattari’s idea of machinic autopoiesis in both images, as she bridges the link between the organic and machine (technical and social) to signify the emergence of the post-human, which encapsulates the multiple identities explored in this analysis. In Image 2, Cyrus looks as though she has been on a production line of a machine assembling body parts, which signifies the collapsing of the distinction between autopoiesis and allopoiesis. Perhaps the connotation of machine in Image 2, is used metaphorically to refer to the social machine, as Deleuze and Guattari incorporated the social in their definition of machine.

Braidotti (2013, 94) argued that machinic autopoiesis help humans to rethink technology-mediated subjectivity, in ways that avoid scientific reductionism. She saw the tracing of transversal connections among material, symbolic, concrete or discursive lines of relations as, “the threshold to many possible worlds” (Braidotti 2013, 94). Whether this mutation of subjectivity is all positive, is questionable given Cyrus’s expression in Image 2, which denotes discomfort and confusion. Her facial expression could connote identity construction in contemporary society as overwhelming, as subjectivities proliferate and complicate. Yet her expression could literally denote the emergence of humanoid robots in society and their emerging social intelligence, as signified by Cyrus’s expression of confusion.
Conclusion

My semiotic analysis was successful in extracting multiple identity subjectivities within Cyrus’s image. While denotation showed literal meanings, connotation revealed a multiplicity of identities in both images. I further discovered that multiple identities are characteristic of the post-human. Some identities supported moral panics (sexualised-infant and the sexualised-infantilised-woman), yet they co-exist with lesser-sexualised identities of androgyny (lesbian, tomboy and feminist). Recognising new identities in the media, aside from the hyper-sexualised girl, is unaccounted for in moral panic discourse and deserves further consideration.
Chapter Four: Discussion

“If you do not like complexities then you will not feel at home in the third millennium.” Rosi Braidotti (2006, 7)

Introduction

This chapter of the thesis synthesises findings, draws conclusions and suggests areas for future research. I begin by drawing on concerns of Corporate Paedophilia and relate them to classical theories of humanism. To exemplify the shift of human subjectivity under postmodern conditions, I relate my research findings to an emerging post-human anthropology. I also consider the relationship between diversity and capitalism and the problematic role moral panics can play out, in terms of Foucault’s theories of power. This discussion concludes by identifying gaps in research and makes suggestions for further study in the field.

4.1 Moral panics and humanism

In this section of the discussion, I highlight how the debate surrounding media sexualisation can be viewed under classical humanism. I support this statement by linking humanism to findings in the analysis. While acknowledging humanism, I also refer to the multiplicity of identities that Cyrus draws on in her repertoire, that point to a cultural shift from humanism towards more complex conditions of post-modernity.
For those who adhere to moral panics and psychological discourses, sexualisation concerns rely on a standard representation of gendered stereotypes. Corporate Paedophilia’s main concerns of the hypersexual girl, can be understood through Braidotti’s distinction between humanism and post-humanism. Braidotti (2006) identified characteristics of the unitary subject within classical humanism, as “marked by the highly sexualised bodies of women, racialised bodies of ethnic or native others and the naturalised bodies of animals and earth others” (43). Humanism views ‘man’ as the measure of all things with ‘otherness’ viewed as the negative counterpart (Braidotti 2013, 13). The sexualised bodies that moral panics are alarmed by, can be seen to mirror humanism, where “the machinic body double was gendered and eroticised” (Braidotti 2006, 49), for the benefit of man.

In this thesis, semiotics revealed the possibility for Cyrus to be viewed under classical humanism. Sexualised signifiers existed in both images alluding to the subject as gendered and eroticised for the benefit of ‘man’. Resulting in possible connotations of the sexualised-infantilised-woman, the sexualised-infant (Image 1) and the sexualised female (Image 2). The point of interest however, was that the above-mentioned identities were not unitary representations. Semiotics revealed the multiplicity of identities co-existed as they awaited the possibility for signification. Multiple identities were manifest through Cyrus’s use of open-ended signifiers, to enable a wide meaning potential (social semiotics and myth).
Meaning potentials are dependant upon subjectivities. For example, I predict a young person without the knowledge of a paedophile, would not consider Image 1 as ominous. A more innocent gaze might view the image as humorous, potentially alleviating media effects concerns. Subjectivity in this case, would be constrained by *access* (knowledge of the dangers of a paedophile) and *context* (subject as a child). As moral panic discourse draws out the peadophile’s gaze, it then becomes a reality for the previously unaware child. This scenario echoes Lumby’s warning of the risks of repeatedly referring to children as paedophilic and interpreting them through the eyes of the paedophile (Taylor 2012, 51). In essence, while Image 1 of Cyrus indicates that sexualisation of infants exists in the text, it also conveyed the possibility for potential critique. This is unaccounted for in moral panic discourse.

4.2 Subjectivity and postmodernism

Deconstruction of various identities in Cyrus’s image, points to a shift of the body under humanism to more complicated conditions of postmodernism. I link evidence of multiple identities to the political economy of otherness, where minorities are no longer marginalised in popular culture. I also address the paradoxical and simultaneous return of re-inscribed sexual and gender norms, under the same postmodern conditions.

Multiple identities present in Cyrus is a key finding in this thesis and reflects Braidotti’s views on postmodern subjectivity. While Braidotti identified the conditions of the body under humanism, she identified a significant shift
under the impact of globalised post-modernity. Braidotti (2006) defined *postmodernism* as “the ambiguity of cultural diversity in the era of globalisation” (54). Instead of interaction from centre-periphery and same-other as humanism encoded, social shifts have disrupted linear models of opposition (Braidotti 2006, 44). The concept of ‘becoming’ now appears non-linear and contradictory, with less predictable patterns (Braidotti 2006, 44). Braidotti (2006, 44) argued the ‘other’ is now no longer marked by exclusion or marginality, but is positioned as sites of powerful and alternative subject positions.

Cyrus signals this shift in both images through the integration of a high-degree of otherness, signified through the lesbian, feminist, trans-person or infant-woman. Braidotti (2006) saw the integration of otherness as ‘sameness’ as a strategy to mark the body as a site of difference, to ensure maximum profit, “which triggers the consumerist consumption of others” (44). Various significations of otherness allows for the cultural product to be *axiomitised*, which operate by emptying flows of specific meaning in a coded context, and imposing a law of general equivalence in the form of capitalist gain (Roffe 2010, 41). When the text is axiomitised, signifiers or ‘markers’ can move and attach to various bodies for economic consumption (Renold and Ringrose 2011, 402).

As a result of this postmodern shift, Braidotti (2006, 49) identified that gender politics in contemporary society have undergone a paradoxical evolution.
While humanism gendered and eroticised the body, post-modernity has manifested chaotic subject positions through its mix of styles, where machines are figures of complexity, mixture, hybridity and interconnectivity (Braidotti 2006, 49). Braidotti (2006, 49) identified that bodies under postmodern conditions are not associated with either gender, nor are they particularly sexualised; instead, they are marked by sexual indeterminacy or transsexuality. Braidotti’s statement supports my assertion of Cyrus signifying multiple previously ‘othered’ identities, as a device to opportunistically profit from them.

French philosopher and sociologist JF Lyotard (1988), points out that blurring sexual difference is one of the key defining features of the postmodern condition, where the queering of identities is a dominant ideology under advanced capitalism (cited in Braidotti 2006). Much like Cyrus, American pop star Madonna in the 1990s used gender-bending tactics, to provide sexual minorities with visibility (Brooks 1997, 159). While cultural theorist John Fiske (1989) declared her a positive resource for young girls, film and media academic Simon During (1993), claimed Madonna was drawing on diverse sexualities to extend to larger markets (cited in Brooks 1997). Yet During was careful to note, the links with capitalism did not totally negate any positive effects that Madonna may have (Brooks 1997, 148). Like Fiske, Buckingham and Bragg (2004), whose research found a strong case that media disturbed gender stereotypes, saw the media as a positive tool to construct identities. They seem undeterred that within this range of subjectivity strong links with
capitalism exist. In their view, Cyrus may be viewed as a positive role model for young people. In some cases, this might be true.

The paradox is however, that while blurry representations of sexuality are obvious, so to is the return of sexual polarisations and stricter gender roles (Braidotti 2006, 49). Braidotti (2006) described this as the schizoid double pull, which I identified earlier, that “erodes the ground for empowerment of feminist political subjects” (49). I identified the schizoid double pull in both images where androgyny combined with female sexualisation. Nakedness and a thin figure in Image 2, marked the simultaneous interaction of androgyny with sexualisation. Similarly, the sexualised-infant’s clothing achieved this affect by combining virginal innocence with adult sexuality. Braidotti (2006, 50) argued it was challenging to keep both lines distinct while accepting the simultaneity of their occurrence.

4.3 The post-human and nomadic subjectivities

Here, I consider the proliferation of subjectivities available to construct human identity. I attempt to illustrate this increase in subjectivity, using Cyrus as an example, to reveal the merge of organic with the non-organic, resulting in nomadic subjectivities. I link the multiplicity of identities and non-linear relationships in Cyrus’s image, to the idea of the post-human and the political economy.

Although both images were different, the identities are all part of the post-human. Cyrus signified the proliferation of subjectivities, both organic and
non-organic, that legitimise infinite assemblages. Braidotti (2013) recognised that postmodern subjectivities have moved beyond the bio-power of Foucault. Instead, contemporary society is shifting towards nomadic subjectivities, which Braidotti (2006) defined as a “contested space of mutations” (3), that can actualise new concepts and subject formations (Braidotti 2013, 104). She explains nomadic subjectivity as non-unitary, dispersed and fragmented, fluid or hybrid (Braidotti 2006, 9).

Nomadic subjectivity encapsulates Cyrus’s brand as she transposes herself to suggest complex identity assemblages, disrupting linear notions of becoming-woman. For instance, she represented an infant, boy, lesbian, trans-person, all contrary to becoming-woman. Cyrus is an example of someone in transit, as she is no longer a unified subject as she may have been perceived in her *Hannah Montanna* days. She is the ideal subject for myth to capitalise on to perpetuate the myth of neoliberal individualism and profit from it. I argue, in agreement with Braidotti, essentially Cyrus’s incorporation of otherness is a device to secure capital.

Braidotti’s (2013) vision of empowering modes of subjectivity, seeks to be free of capitalism which she described as a “spinning machine that actively produces difference for the sake of commodification” (58). She saw the current political economy re-asserting individualism as the desired standard, while reducing it to brand names and logos (Braidotti 2013, 3). Braidotti (2013, 3) expressed concern that commercial profit determines the boundaries of
subjectivity. In this view, rather than Cyrus as a role model for the oppressed, she only represents difference for the purpose of commercial profit. According to Braidotti, Cyrus would offer less authentic forms of identity as capitalism determines and confines those subjectivities.

The quest according to Braidotti (2006, 125), was to re-define subjectivity against the forces that seek to essentialise it. She argued that the post-human should experiment with mobile subject positions, that resist profit-minded values of today (Braidotti 2006, 8). To achieve this, Braidotti (2006, 123) suggests humans should access the chaosmos, which references multiple becomings, unfolding virtualities and mutant values. The chaosmos manifests a virtual ecology, where transversal links are made between social, political and aesthetic dimensions (Braidotti 2006, 123). Guattari referred to the chaosmos as autopoietic subjectivation (Braidotti 2006, 125), which I referred to in the analysis. Braidotti (2006, 126) argued that the subject’s fundamental aspiration is to neither make sense nor conform to ideal models of behaviour. The subject is now capable of affecting and being affected by a multiplicity of others (Braidotti 2006, 126).

While Braidotti’s vision of subjectivity sounds liberating, I argue that Cyrus signified the integration of machinic autopoiesis, particularly in Image 2. Auto-poietic subjectivation was identified as Cyrus conveyed robotic sensibilities through her stature and shapes and colours that marked her body (assemblages of subjective parts). Yet according to Braidotti and Guattari,
autopoetic subjectivation is the non-profit mode of subjectivity. Cyrus is a celebrity, defined simply by cultural theorist Graeme Turner (2004) as “individuals developed to make money” (35). Cyrus is a contradiction as she represents autopoietic subjectivity, whilst remaining strongly linked with economics. In Braidotti’s view she cannot signify this mode of subjectivity. Alternatively, Cyrus could signify that any mutant subjectivity resistant to capitalism can never escape the free market. Perhaps Braidotti and Guattari’s views on mutant subjectivities are too idealistic. Additionally, the notion of capitalism as wholly negative could be viewed as a subjectivity of Braidotti and Guattari.

4.4 Panopticism and docile bodies

In this section, I draw on the links between autopoetic subjectivity and scientific reductionism. The possibility exists for moral panics and psychological discourse to problematically reduce the relationship between children and sexuality as negative. To explore this further, I consider the potential for moral panics to incite unnecessary concern, using Foucault’s theories of panoptic power and docile bodies.

Braidotti (2006, 124) argued that failure to recognise autopoiesis in post modern society, only helps the hegemony of scientific reductionism in Western thought. This claim is relevant to this thesis, as Corporate Paedophila reduced every potential sexualised signified to a negative psychological impact. Scientific reductionism in moral panics relates to two Foucauldian
concepts, panopticism and docile bodies, developed in his work on the relationship of power, discourse and human identity.

Foucault’s idea of panopticism orginated from The Penetentiary Panopticon, a building designed by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century, initially for a prison (Foucault 1977, 317). For Foucault (1977), the panopticon induced in the inmate “a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (201). In the panopticon, a central guard overlooked a circular set of prison cells with each cell fully visible from the tower (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 98). The building design causes prisoners to regulate their behaviour due to an authoritarian gaze (Sturken and Cartwright 2001, 98). The panoptic gaze of authority creates docile bodies, described by Foucault (1977) as the body “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (136). According to Foucault (1977, 138), discipline dissociates power from the body turning it into a relation of strict subjection (political obedience), yet at the same time seeks to increase its capacity (for economic labor).

Moral panics and psychological discourses can be seen as forms of panopticism, where the adult’s gaze carefully scrutinises the emerging sexuality of children to mould the ideal subject. Foucault recognised this type of regulation as characteristic of the eighteenth century, where parents, educators, families, doctors and psychiatrists took charge of dangerous sexual potential and pathologised it (Foucault 1978, 103). Under the gaze of anxious
parents, children modify their behaviour and bodies to match societies’
expectations of normative sexuality. These conditions were evident in the
focus group discussions with girls that I summarised in Chapter One. Girls
used the term ‘awkward’ when describing their feelings when watching
Cyrus with their parents. The discomfort is characteristic of girls responding
to an authoritative gaze, becoming docile bodies.

Considering Foucauldian power theories in relation to moral panics however,
can problematically ascribe sexuality as negative. Cultural critic Henry
Giroux in his work on child beauty pageants, described this uneasiness as the
adults’ desire to simplify childhood via the refusal to acknowledge the
existence of sexuality within innocence (Lamb, Graling and Wheeler 2013,
171). Giroux (2009, par. 2) claims moral panics rest on the “myth of childhood
innocence” where children are thought to live in a simple and pure world,
subject to adult fantasies. Giroux drew on Professor of Childhood Studies
Daniel Thomas Cook’s (2009, par. 2) view of childhood innocence, as “a
construct that hides a web of subordination to adults that many kids cannot
wait to escape from”. Cook’s view indirectly highlights the effects of
panopticism as constraining children’s actions, creating docile bodies.

Criticism of scientific reductionism via the acceptance of autopoiesis, can re-
frame fixed definitions of sexuality, as Duschinsky (2013) argued for. Aware
of the subjectivity in a person responding to the word ‘sexualisation’,
Duschinsky (2013) argued for the term to be seen as a theory rather than a
fixed, objective word. Given that this thesis unveiled the proliferation of subjectivity within the sexualisation of media and children (images and focus groups), I regard Duschinky’s view of sexualisation as a theory rather than a fixed definition, to be the most fitting and should guide further research.

4.5 Gaps in research and further development

This section of the discussion, provides an outline of gaps in the field of research and makes recommendations for further study. I draw on the need for cross-comparative research between qualitative data and visual culture, a schizo-analytic framework to analyse focus group discussions, identity-specific focus group questions and I highlight the lack of research of Cyrus’s influence within the LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transexual, Queer, Intersex and Asexual) community. Further study in these areas was beyond the scope of this study.

From my use of a semiotic/schizo-analytic framework to reveal subjectivities in Cyrus’s image, I suggest a similar schizoid approach could enhance the analysis of qualitative focus group data. Renold and Ringrose’s (2011, 392) research on digitised sexual and gender identities, developed *schizoid subjectivities* as a methodology to understand complications in young people’s identity construction online. Their analysis of three social media profiles of girls aged between 13-16 years, found a high degree of complexity in identity formation (Renold and Ringrose 2011, 403). Schizoid subjectivities used to analyse girls’ focus group responses is, I argue, an appropriate method that recognises contradictions inherent in identity formation.
There is the possibility of a causal link existing between visual culture and qualitative media effects research. There were no studies available at the time of writing this thesis, comparing focus group responses with the nature of media girls are viewing. Earlier, Gill (2012, 488) too wrote of this elision in research. A schizoid media landscape as directly affecting schizoid data conditions, has the potential to re-frame the debate. It may imply a direct media effect which is contrary to most media and cultural studies research.

Furthermore, any future focus groups about Cyrus’s influence on tweens, should ask identity specific questions (i.e. What identities do you see in this celebrity?) and relate what identities they extract to their sense of self (i.e. do any of the identities you see, reflect your own identity?). What currently exists in the field of research are broad sweeping questions about Cyrus. For me, more useful media effects information could be gathered by cross-referencing the identities girls see in Cyrus, and how they relate those identities to themselves.

Given the identity multiplicities in Cyrus’s brand, it is also surprising that girls dominate the field of media effects research. As Braidotti identified the global incorporation of otherness as a defining feature of post-modernity, then it is plausible to ask why no research exists concerning Cyrus’s effects on the LGBTQIA community. Only focusing on or identifying heterosexual girls as potential victims might be condescending. It implies young girls are powerless or in danger while other identities are not. I predict this angle of
research could evoke a wider range of results. As Cyrus heads a foundation called *Happy Hippie* that fights for the rights of the LGBTQIA community, she may be seen as a positive influence when examined in the context of minority groups.

**Conclusion**

This discussion has illustrated how Cyrus positions her identity as a non-linear mode of ‘becoming’. I explored the logical progression of Cyrus under humanism and compared it with the body under postmodernism. Evidence of visual culture’s fragmented bodies support moral panic concerns, but also highlights the co-existence of possible critique. While I do not entirely dispute moral panic concerns, Foucault’s theories of power suggested the risky consequences of reducing the relationship between sexuality and children as ‘bad’. Overall, this discussion recommends a schizo-analytic approach to understand focus groups in research on Cyrus’s effects and relate findings to Cyrus’s image; include identity-specific research questions in future focus groups; and consider further research within the LGBTQIA community. This would enable a broader perspective into the media sexualisation debates that goes beyond gender-centrism and perceived negative effects.
Conclusion

This thesis began by taking the media’s sexualisation of children and the available research and highlighted the high degree of conflicting opinion. Much psychological research relies on scientific reductionism, where girls are sexualised for men, leading to physical and mental health problems (a direct media effect). In contrast, media and cultural studies revealed the possibility of young girls being capable of resisting the hyper-sexualised female portrayed in media. Rather than add to an already divisive field of research, I took a semiotic approach to scrutinise media images in greater detail. For me, what was missing in the field was little to no detail about the types of images girls were viewing. Addressing this gap, may be the key to understanding why such diverse opinions exist within media sexualisation and effects discourses.

Moral panics rely on a fixed representation of the female body that is heteronormative and wholly biological. This inspired me to draw on semiotics as an analytical tool, to explore if the psychological discourse could be regarded as an objective truth. I applied semiotic principles to two images of Miley Cyrus, as she has been identified as a point of concern for young girls given her highly sexualised performances. As moral panics would presume, I found evidence of highly sexualised signifiers in Cyrus’s image in the form of nudity, phallic suggestions and sexualised costumes. A key finding in this thesis however, was that Cyrus’s sexualisation existed alongside other possibilities for identity construction. Alternative identities of
the trans-person, the hybrid body, lesbian and feminist enabled a critique of concerns as they could affect how sexualisation is perceived on Cyrus’s body. In this light, she may be regarded as a good role model. Yet I am careful to not reject concerns entirely, as negative affects of sexualisation was still a possibility. This finding could reflect the subjective conditions of the current sexualisation debate.

Myth was the third focus of inquiry within this thesis, which enabled me to link Cyrus’s representation to a broader social landscape of power and ideology. Cyrus’s open-ended identities permitted her to conjure the myth of neoliberal individualism, characterised by free choice and liberation when piecing together identities. By considering Braidotti’s views on the incorporation of otherness as a strategy to fuel capitalism, allowed me to connect the ‘liberated’ individual as Cyrus suggests, to social power. Braidotti saw the interconnection with capitalism as disempowering for subjects. For me, neoliberal individualism paradoxically empowers the subject by increasing subjectivities; yet it simultaneously disempowers subjects as capitalism determines the borders of subjectivity.

I further found that Cyrus represented an emerging type of human that integrates the biological with social subjectivities. Braidotti’s work on the post-human and concepts from schizoanalysis, helped in understanding the proliferation of human subjectivity in contemporary society. Braidotti’s work intersected with Guattari’s idea of machinic autopoiesis. According to
Braidotti and Guattari, the post-human and autopoiesis were empowering and non-profit modes of identity construction. My analysis revealed an interesting contrast; I recognised Cyrus signified the post-human, yet as a celebrity she is unreservedly tied to capitalism. In Braidotti’s view, she cannot be exemplar of the post-human. This contradiction perhaps points to idealistic visions of subjectivity being free of economics. Cyrus is a symbol that may connote that the subject will be forever entangled with the forces of capitalism, as it seeks to economise every aspect of organic and non-organic life. It is unclear whether identities connected to capitalism are any less valid than those that escape its grip. I am not convinced that escaping capitalism is even possible.

This thesis argues for an acknowledgement of the body as a multi-faceted site that is capable of contradictory becomings. Considering this view, might enable a shift from heteronormative gender-centric panics that currently weigh down debates. By doing so, more targeted and relevant data could be obtained in future focus groups, as the subject is recognised as a bio-social entity that is constantly in flux. Additionally, research data could be gathered from minority groups which may reveal an entirely different effect, a similar effect or a mix. While Cyrus reflected schizoid conditions, I argue the same conditions were available in qualitative focus group data. The effects of Cyrus could be better understood using concepts from schizoanalysis, which was beyond the scope of this study. Whether schizoid focus group data implies a
direct media effect is unclear, and may also be a point of reference for future research.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Image 1 album cover for Miley Cyrus’s song *BB Talk*

https://genius.com/Miley-cyrus-bb-talk-lyrics

Appendix 2 - Image 2 photo shoot for *Paper* Magazine