

# **The Fashion Show Offs**

An interview-study comparing and exploring the female representation in the lingerie fashion shows of Victoria's Secret and Savage X Fenty

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### ABSTRACT

In November 2019 the Victoria's Secret lingerie fashion show was cancelled for the first time since its televised debut in 2001. The pop culture phenomenon, over the years, had received increasing criticism in the media for the hypersexualized nature of its female representation and its lack of diversity. The premiere of the Savage X Fenty fashion show in September 2019, which was celebrated for its inclusivity, further amplified the scrutiny of the Victoria's Secret show and ultimately led to its annulment. This occurrence, in the age of the digital wave of feminism that emphasizes the unequal and stereotypical representations in the media, draws importance to the topic of audience perceptions of female representation in mediated lingerie fashion shows. This thesis explores *how young adult women give meaning to the female representation in the mediated lingerie fashion shows of Victoria's Secret and Savage X Fenty?* It does so by drawing on interviews with young women aged 18-29, living in the Netherlands and Flanders, in which it has been discussed how they perceive the representation of women's bodies, femininities and sexualities in the two distinct lingerie fashion shows. The findings revealed how the participants took a critical feminist outlook on the female representation as they emphasized the stereotypical or non-stereotypical conceptualization of beauty and femininity that the brands promoted through the female representation, as well as the realistic or unrealistic standards that they set onto women in society. The Savage X Fenty fashion show was, overall, viewed as contemporary, inclusive and feministic due to its embrace of diversity in the female representation, whilst the Victoria's Secret fashion show was seen as having misaligned morals that aim to mould and pressure women into traditional patriarchal norms. As a result, the interviewees were more inclined to support and buy from the Savage X Fenty brand, than the Victoria's Secret brand which showed the relevance of feminist consumerism in the lingerie industry and the way in which fashion shows can be effective forms of femvertising.

**KEYWORDS:** *Female representation, Lingerie, Feminism, Victoria's Secret, Savage X Fenty*

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# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 A cultural shift in the lingerie industry**

The Victoria's Secret fashion show, which has been annually televised since 2001, is a branded piece of entertainment that managed to become engraved in global mainstream popular culture, and changed the lingerie industry forever. However, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 2019, it was publicized by various leading public opinion sources, such as the *New York Post*, *Fortune*, and *Colombus Business First*, that the annual glamorous Victoria's Secret (VS) lingerie fashion show would not be taking place in 2019. This was allegedly due to the online criticism that the show had received, which accused it of being stereotypical due to its hypersexualized nature and the lack of diversity in the female representation. The discourse that these audiences instigated on the topic of female representation in lingerie fashion shows is what makes this phenomenon particularly interesting and relevant for research in today's world.

The significant meaning that audiences gave to the female representation in the VS lingerie fashion show, and why its cancellation marks such a symbolic moment in time, is due to the large influence that the VS company has in the lingerie industry, as well as in the media. Victoria's Secret, established in 1977 and now owned by the parent company L-Brands, is a world-leading lingerie brand that holds 24% of the market shareholdings in an industry that is worth over \$9 billion (Abdallah, Ayouche, & Subiñas, 2019; Ibis World, 2018). It initiated global trends such as the padded push-up bra, and, most significantly, innovated the mediatization of lingerie fashion shows which remains a remarkable and widely-used method of branding to this day (Abdallah et al., 2019; Rocamora, 2016).

In 2001, VS became the first lingerie brand to mediatise its fashion show, which it did after the popularity that its non-televised fashion shows were getting since 1995, during New York fashion week. The mediatized lingerie fashion show, which featured the hottest supermodels, grandiose décors, and trending pop artists, became a yearly nationally televised event in the United States of America (USA) (Pinchera & Rinallo, 2019; Robson & Pitt, 2018). This televised event offered millions of viewers the potential to indulge on VS' latest lingerie collection worn by leading supermodels as they strutted down the catwalk in Bryant park, New York City, for 45 minutes (Pinchera & Rinallo, 2019). For the years to come, the VS fashion show would expand globally as TV networks all around the world fought for the rights to televise this pop-culture phenomenon that would even come to take place in cities all

around the world, such as Paris and Shanghai. The VS fashion show mainstreamed female media representations that centred around femininity, sexuality, and pleasure, which was previously regarded as taboo and controversial (Attwood, 2015). This boomed women's lingerie consumption, as could be seen in the continuous rapid growth of the overall lingerie industry (Attwood, 2015; Ibis World, 2018).

The Victoria's Secret fashion show over the years had become known for its tall, thin, and exposed models, which were branded as "angels" and regarded as being the ideal feminine beauty in society (Chrisler, Fung, Lopez, & Gorman, 2013). Though this may have sensationalized television audiences in 2001, when the show had a record amount of 12.4 million viewers, by 2018 the show only attracted 3.3 million viewers, down from 4.98 million in 2017. This decrease in popularity can be correlated with the increasing digital activism that was occurring on social media, and in media outlets, which shamed VS for its objectifying anti-feministic female representations, and its continuous disregards for inclusivity and diversity (Abdallah et al., 2019; Chrisler et al., 2013; Pinchera & Rinallo, 2019; Robson & Pitt, 2018). Victoria's Secret was even subject to boycotting throughout 2019 after the chief architect of the VS fashion show, Ed Razek, stated in an interview with *Vogue* that the brand had no intention on diversifying with plus size, or transgender models (Phelps, 2018; Pinchera & Rinallo, 2019). As a result of the negative press and audience perceptions of the fashion show on social media, seventeen years after its initial debut, in 2019, VS cancelled its annual fashion show for the first time ever.

As VS's popularity decreased, other lingerie brands that did set their focus on diversity, comfort, and feminism rose (Abdallah et al., 2019; Robson & Pitt, 2018). Savage X Fenty (SXF), established in 2018 by pop artist Rihanna, entered the lingerie market and rapidly became a fierce competitor of VS. The narrated rivalry between the two brands in the media began after SXF's 2018 New York fashion week show which included a highly diverse casting of models with a wide variety of ethnicities, and body sizes, even including pregnant women (Abdallah et al., 2019). This representation became a trademark for the brand's inclusive and diverse vision on feminine beauty, which VS lacked.

The comparison and rivalry between the two brands in the media reached an all-time high in September 2019 when Savage X Fenty embraced the method of branding which VS innovated and popularized, namely the mediatized lingerie fashion show, and premiered its 50-minute fashion show episode on the streaming service Amazon Prime, which additionally

features a behind-the-scenes making of the fashion show. The SXF fashion show adhered to VS' classic fashion show features by also including grandiose production décors, celebrity models, and major top of the chart artists, which made the two shows so comparable and similar in the media. However, the female representation in SXF's mediated fashion show included women of all colours, shapes, sizes, abilities and sexualities, such as transgender models. The media interpreted SXF's female representation as scorning VS' previous announcement to never expand its fashion shows with plus size or transgender models (Pinchera & Rinallo, 2019). In addition, in the Savage X Fenty show, instead of women simply walking down the runway such as in the past VS shows, the models held a dynamic choreographed performance centred around fierceness and female empowerment. On social media, the SXF brand was praised for its inclusion of all different women, as well as its non-stereotypical portrayals of women, and female sexuality. News outlets such as *Forbes*<sup>1</sup>, *Insider*<sup>2</sup>, and *Elle*<sup>3</sup> headlined SXF's success in increasing the lingerie market competition, and the potential it has to take on Victoria's Secret as the market leader, as SxF's fashion show amplified the scrutiny that the VS fashion show was receiving and had an indirect influence on its cancellation.

## 1.2 Research problem

Changes in the representation of women in the lingerie industry, such as a stronger focus on body diversity and self-empowerment, are occurring rapidly (Abdallah et al., 2019; Attwood, 2015; Chrisler et al., 2013; Ouellette, 2019; Robson & Pitt, 2018). Between the rise and fall of the Victoria's Secret fashion show, and the entrance of the Savage X Fenty brand and fashion show, there is an opportunity to examine the discourses on female representation and inclusivity that lingerie consumers as well as fashion show TV audiences take part in. The uproar of digital feminist activism that emerged in the media in response to the various fashion shows demonstrates the discourse that audiences are instigating on this topic, making this subject increasingly interesting for research (Clark, 2014; Chrisler et al., 2013; Matich, Ashman, & Parsons, 2019; Pruchniewska, 2019). It is for these reasons that the research question (RQ) for this thesis is as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Hale (2019) wrote an article about how "Rihanna helped kill Victoria's Secret's fashion show business" on Forbes.

<sup>2</sup> DiValentino (2019) addressed Savage X Fenty's position as a fierce competitor of Victoria's Secret in her article "The Victoria's Secret fashion show may be canceled, but it never held a candle to Rihanna's Savage X Fenty runway" on Insider.

<sup>3</sup> Bailey (2019) documented model perceptions of the fashion shows in her Elle article "Bella Hadid says Fenty's show, not Victoria's Secret's, was "first time" she felt sexy modeling lingerie".

*RQ: How do young adult women give meaning to the female representation in the mediated lingerie fashion shows of Victoria's Secret and Savage X Fenty?*

This qualitative research question aims to unpack how women perceive the female representation in the Victoria's Secret (2018), as well as the Savage X Fenty (2019) fashion shows. The main concept of female representation comes under study, and lays focus on the representation of the bodies, femininities, and sexualities of the women in the fashion shows. These are three important parts of a woman's self-conceptualisation and identity which is why their representation in the media will be distinctively investigated as a part of the main concept of female representation (Karimova, Rassilbay, & Sauers, 2017; Mager & Hegelson, 2009; Martin, 2016; Ouellette, 2019). The method of in-depth semi-structured interviews will be used as it offers a personal and intimate approach to the research investigation. This will allow for a deeper exploration of the attitudes, thoughts, and feelings of the 14 young adult women aged 18-29, living in the Netherlands and Flanders, two regions where these shows are streamed, that participated in this study.

Furthermore, the two mediatized fashion shows in question, VS and SXF, originate from two different decades, VS is namely from 2001 and SXF from 2019. According to Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, and Oishi (2017) generational differences cause "differences in perceptions and attitudes" (p. 46), thus suggesting that, as a result of this, the VS and SXF fashion shows could have differences in the way they represent and conceptualise women on stage. This research thereby also aims to distinctively investigate the ways in which the participants perceive each lingerie fashion show, in order to better compare the two and come to more wholesome understandings of how young women view their gendered representation in mediated lingerie fashion shows.

A focus will be set on mediated lingerie fashion shows which are fashion shows organized by lingerie brands that are staged and produced with the purpose of being viewed online or through televised media such as broadcasting networks or streaming services (Rocamora, 2016). The VS 2018 fashion show was available on broadcasting networks in over 190 countries, and remains available for streaming on Youtube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)) (Gables, 2018). Whilst the SXF 2019 fashion show is available for streaming through the streaming platform Amazon Prime ([www.primevideo.com](http://www.primevideo.com)).

### **1.3 Scientific relevance**

Previous work on the representation of women can be found particularly in feminist research, which has a history of addressing topics that centre around female representation in the media (David, 1997). Most often, however, these have focused solely on bodily representations (Milillo, 2008), or representations on social media (Dobson, 2015). In addition, studies on female representation mainly apply to the cosmetics industries (Radzi & Musa, 2017), as well as the sports industry (Hardin & Shain, 2005). It is for these reasons that this study aims to fill the gap in academic literature on female representations in televised media, in the lingerie industry.

Feminist audience studies in the field of lingerie are under-researched. Chrisler et al. (2013), did start paving the way for audience studies of fashion shows by examining Twitter users' responses to the 2011 VS fashion show. Though their study brought insights into the type of discourse that active users take part in online, it does not offer a deeper, more meaningful understanding of how the lingerie fashion show is experienced and perceived by individuals. In particular, individuals who are not intrinsically motivated to share their thoughts online. In this way, through interviews, this study can continue and strengthen the strain of academic research that aims to understand audience's attitudes and feelings about globally televised lingerie fashion shows.

Furthermore, it is crucial to invest in research that focuses on audience perceptions regarding an industry that is profoundly based on traditional gender ideals, such as women wearing lingerie, as a progressive contemporary society continues to grow (Grau & Zotos, 2016). It is particularly of importance to do so in a society which, with its emerging generations, is unafraid of challenging the traditional conceptualizations of gender and sexuality, as can be seen with the expanding LGBTQ+ and feminist communities (Abdallah et al., 2019; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Stewart et al., 2017). Research in academia should aim to understand the social movements that blur the lines on gender and sexuality, and aspire to come to an understanding of audience views concerning these concepts that lay central in every individuals self-identity (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). Commercial industries, which are key to society's structure, should be primary fields for investigating perceptions surrounding these topics.



## 1.4 Societal relevance

The media has a strong influence on the sense of self-worth and gender identity of women as they set the standards of beauty and behaviour, and normalize these through widespread portrayals (Wood, 2016). Western societies strive towards equality and the wellbeing of all, thus making it a societal concernment that the media should promote representations that have positive effects on its audiences (Robbins, 1994). According to Chrisler et al. (2013), Wood (2016), and Gill (2009) however, the media's female representations have a history of enhancing negative feelings of the body, as well as marginalizing female gender identity diversity. Lingerie brands, VS in particular, have been subjected of portraying such representations due to their frequent use of idealistic feminine beauty and behaviour (Attwood, 2015; Chrisler et al., 2013; Wood, 2016).

Over the years however, more and more lingerie brands have been reconceptualising their representations of women after witnessing a large quantity of digital feminist activism that spoke out about the issue. With an increase in lingerie brands' distinctive female representations it becomes of importance to come to an understanding of which female representations elicit positive reactions amongst the targeted audiences (Chrisler et al., 2013). Thus, investigating female audience's perception of two different contemporary mediated lingerie fashion shows, namely VS and SXF, is of high societal relevance.

Moreover, as women's consumption of erotic products, particularly lingerie, continues to significantly increase, it becomes of increasing importance to investigate the ways in which these products are being marketed to audiences and the ideologies they abide by. According to Attwood (2015), who examined the ways in which erotic products are marketed to female consumers, the marketing of lingerie, and other sensual products, is hegemonic in the way it describes female sexuality, thereby limiting the scope of understanding of female sexuality that is being commercially offered. Attwood (2015) suggests that the scope of female sexuality being represented in lingerie marketing, for example, should be investigated, which is why this research aims to unpack the ways in which women feel about, not only the current discourse surrounding femininity, but also that surrounding female sexuality in commercial media.

## 1.5 Thesis outline

The theoretical framework is the next chapter of this thesis. This chapter will present and discuss the relevant theory for this research, which will focus on stereotypes and female representation in the media, particularly advertising media. The third chapter is the methodology which will elaborate on the methods of research used for the collection and analysis of data, as well as the research techniques that were implicated in the execution of this research project. Then, the results chapter will present the thematized findings of the research investigation. Finally, the concluding chapter will answer the research question, “*How do young adult women give meaning to the female representation in the mediated lingerie fashion shows of Victoria’s Secret and Savage X Fenty?*”, and offer insights into valuable directions for future research.

## **2 Theoretical Framework**

The main phenomenon examined in this research project is female representation in the media. Therefore, the development of advertising in the media and the importance it came to hold in society will be explained first. Second, the abundance of stereotypes in the media and advertising will be addressed, as well as the impacts these have on female audiences and why. Then, the link between female representations in the media and societal ideologies will also be explored, and the significance that the feminist movement has on these changing representations and ideologies will be described. Finally, these explorations will allow for an understanding of the traditional and contemporary female representations in the lingerie industry, including the rising trend of “femvertising”. This will help answer this thesis’ main question, namely to explore and compare the meanings that adult women give to the female representation in the mediated lingerie fashion shows of Victoria’s Secret and Savage X Fenty.

### **2.1 Interpreting media and advertising**

Advertising in today’s world comes in all shapes and forms (Dyer, 2008). From a poster in the street, to a commercial on TV, to a pop-up on your computer screen. Advertisements do not distinguish between a working or social environment, or between night and day. Advertising never sleeps. It continuously pervades people’s lives and targets them as consumers, to show them what they could own or experience, and how much their lives could benefit from it (Dyer, 2008). Advertisements paint a perfect picture of their product in the hopes that the consumers conceive the product positively and gain a desire to purchase it (Doyle, 2009). The art of advertising, however, is nowadays challenged by an increasingly diverse society, as an individual’s unique knowledge, perspective, and background effects the way they interpret media messages (Hall, 2001), which in a diverse cosmopolitan society means that many different people can interpret messages from advertisements in many different ways (Gill, 2009).

Hall (2001) established the encoding/decoding model in communication through television media, which describes viewers as having agency in the way they interpret and come to understand media messages, as they can have dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings of messages in television media. This process seems to also be highly relevant in the field of advertising, since a negotiated or oppositional reading of an encoded message means that a misunderstanding or a wrongful understanding is made, which in advertising can harshly lead to one less consumer for the product (Dyer, 2008). This is why such a high

importance is laid on what is shown in an advertisement, for example which people, and why it is carefully considered, as this is what guides the message that will be communicated with the consumer (Dyer, 2008; Gill, 2009; Sadjacholapunt & Ball, 2014). Marketers who address large and diverse audiences now therefore carefully find ways to make sure that every passing individual understands the message of the advertisement in the way that they intended it to by carefully choosing the content that is included or excluded in the advertisement (Grau & Zotos, 2016). It is in this way that advertisements, which have become so abundant and omnipresent in modern cosmopolitan societies, no longer solely encompass an economic function as they ensure the continuous consumption of products and services, but serve an ideological function too, as will be further discussed later on in this chapter (Dyer, 2008).

Furthermore, ever since the rise of digital media, advertising has managed to cultivate an even more personal and ubiquitous path into people's lives (Dyer, 2008). No longer restrained to static displays, digital media has enabled advertisements to develop into dynamic forms of visual media (Simola, Hyönä, & Kuisma, 2015). It has birthed strategies such as product placement and branded content in everything from video games, to movies and even televised fashion shows, where products are incorporated within entertainment narratives in order to appeal to consumers (Herrewijn & Poels, 2015). The reason why advertising strategies, such as branded content, have become so popular in creative industries is that they have a unique impact on consumers. In the field, it is referred to as experiential marketing, since the engagement that the consumer takes part in with the branded content leaves a positive experience that then becomes more memorable and satisfactory (Muthiah & Suja, 2013). In the case of mediated fashion shows, which are the focus of this research, entertainment in co-existence with product placement is used as an input to leave the consumer with a pleasant and wholesome encounter with the brand.

## **2.2 Stereotypes and the prevalence of gender stereotypes in the media**

According to Gill (2009), who examined the shifting representations of women in advertisements, and Sheehan (2014), who looked into the effects of advertising on audiences, there is a tendency for advertisements to utilize presentations of stereotypes, and conventional behaviours so that audiences are quick to recognize who and what is being addressed. This is because a stereotype "sets the stage for messages" (Sheehan, 2014, p. 76) which means that it provides a pre-existing narrative that does not need to be explained, and thereby offers an anecdote that advertisements can exploit to communicate their message in a shorter period of time. The limited time and space of advertisements are what restrict representations to a

minimum and thus only validates a stereotype (Sheehan, 2014). Stereotypes are caricatures of social categories that are constituted of how they are perceived and understood by the larger society (Grau & Zotos, 2016). Stereotypes are neither true or false, however, when used abundantly in society, engrain a distinct perception of a social group into the mindsets of audiences (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Sheehan, 2014). Grau and Zotos (2016) who examined previous research on gender stereotypes in advertising, found that advertising, still to this day, widely utilizes traditional gender roles in their representations, which has led to these presentations becoming stereotypes that support an ideological understanding of both genders.

The consistent idealized, and stereotypical gender portrayals that can be found in fashion, as well as product and sports advertisements, have led to the subconscious shaping of people's perceptions of the world and what to expect from it (Dyer, 2008; Gill, 2009). Building on Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli's (1986) work on the cultivation theory, which is used to explain how visual media can be a form of socialization, repetitive mass-produced patterns of representation that are observed in visual media can lay the foundation of how reality is then perceived according to what is shown in the media. This means that as one comes in daily contact with advertisements that all employ stereotypical portrayals, one can come to believe that the representations in the advertisements, including their communicated values and beliefs, are how society is in real life as well (Sheehan, 2014). It is in this way that stereotypes become parts of ideologies, instead of just caricatures.

The widespread use of stereotypes in the media is the most harmful to those who are capitalized upon, as these individuals, who feel that they are reflected in the media as a social group, internalize what is represented in the stereotype as what is expected of them in society (Sheehan, 2014). Sheehan 2014 made a link between Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory, which explains that representations in advertisements reinforce expectations in society, and the effects of modern-day media stereotyping, by suggesting that stereotypes limit perceivable opportunities for individuality and self-expression. Through the expectancy theory, stereotypes influence the social reality of individuals and moulds them into distinctive social groups that are only defined by the behaviours that are represented in the stereotype (Sheehan, 2014; Vroom, 1964). Stereotypical expectations are built and reinforced in society that brings about a self-fulfilling prophecy as individuals from a social group are socially pressured to behave and think in the ways that are described by the stereotype (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Sheehan, 2014).

Stereotypes that have been widely used in society, and still are to this day, are gender stereotypes (Eisend, 2010; Gill, 2009; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Kumar, 2017; Sheehan, 2014; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). Gender stereotypes assume a differentiation in behaviour, body, roles, and occupations between the male and female gender on the basis of conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity (Eisend, 2010; Grau & Zotos, 2014; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). Traditional conceptualizations are embedded within societal structures, and institutions and are thereby exploited by advertisements in the media in order to approach an audience that is assumingly familiar with the traditional conceptualizations of gender (Eisend, 2010; Gill, 2009; Sheehan, 2014; Zotos & Tschla, 2014).

A mirror versus mould debate on gender stereotypes in advertising exists (Eisend, 2010; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). This debate goes back and forth between the understanding that advertising in the media either reflects the existing cultural beliefs on gender in society in order to create content that audiences can relate to, or moulds the values and beliefs of its addressed audience in its representations in the media in order to show what they believe audiences want to see, and aspire to (Eisend, 2010; Doyle, 2009; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack, & Zahid, 2018; Zotos & Tschla, 2014).

The use of stereotypes in the media, including advertisements and marketing campaigns, has several effects on audiences. This is due to the ways in which stereotypes used by the media shape what is viewed as socially acceptable by the larger society (David, 1997; Sheehan, 2014; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). As a result, individuals' sense of self-worth and confidence is undermined as they find themselves to be inadequate for society's expectations of them (Chrisler et al., 2013; Pennell & Behm-Morawitz, 2015; Rudman, 1998; Sheehan, 2014; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). A lack of comfort with one's body, self-identity, and/or behaviours can all come at the cost of society's socially accepted gender representations as young women, for example, partake in constant body- and self-surveillance (Chrisler et al., 2013; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). Young women believe that by resembling what is represented in the media, they will be a more recognized and significant part of popular society (Chrisler et al., 2013).

In addition, stereotypes restrict the opportunities of people from different social groups as it limits their socially perceived capabilities (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). When it comes to gender, gender roles categorize one gender as characteristically better for particular occupations than the other and thus socially restricts or hinders the opportunities for individuals to pursue desired occupations and expressions of self-identity (Hesmondhalgh &

Baker, 2015). Stereotypes hegemonize gender role ideologies that then restrict the understanding of individuals independently from their gender identity (Zotos & Tsihla, 2014).

Hegemonic gender role ideologies, such as women having to always look attractive or men having to be tough, continue on to promote sexist behaviour in society, whether it be in the workplace or in one's social environment, effecting both men and women (Clark, 2014; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). This can be in the form of women being harassed in the workplace as they are sexually objectified (Gutek, 2013), or men being bullied for being vulnerable due to the standards of toxic masculinity (McCann, Plummer, & Minichiello, 2010). Restricted or misrepresentations in the media push people, in their everyday lives and actions, to undergo inner struggles on how to present themselves in accordance with the perceived socially accepted behaviour of their gender (Rudman, 1998). With men, the male ideological gender roles that are socially learned through the media, for example, disapprove of male vulnerability and result in increased depression and help-seeking attitudes in men (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010). Many more conceptualizations of traditional toxic masculinity persist in society and negatively affect the male population (Addis et al., 2010; Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2019). However, due to the significantly higher numbers of stereotypical female representations in advertisements, opposed to smaller numbers of stereotypical male representations and a higher diversity in male representations (Clark, 2014; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Kumar, 2017; Sheehan, 2014; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014), this research will focus on female representations in the media, and in particular media for marketing purposes, such as promoting or selling lingerie.

### **2.3 Female representations in the media and their effects on audiences**

The media, and in particular advertising media, aims to reflect the values and beliefs of gender roles in society. Eisend (2010), conducting a study on gender roles in TV- and radio-advertising, found empirical support for the previously introduced mirror argument (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). He suggests that gender-related illustrations in advertising media follow the perceived values and gender-based ideologies in society, rather than oppose them (Eisend, 2010). This analysis resonates with the findings by Grau and Zotos (2016) who assimilated and examined existing research on gender stereotypes in advertising and settled that advertising practitioners claim to be reflecting reality. However, according to a multitude of studies (Attwood, 2015; Clark, 2014; Matich, Ashman, & Parsons, 2019; Munro, 2003; Pruchniewska, 2019), this modern-day society still promotes a patriarchal

social order that advantages men over women, and the Caucasian race over people of colour, hence a consistent reflection of patriarchal gender role conceptualizations in the media persists (Eisend, 2010; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Zotos & Tschla, 2014).

In addition, Van Hellemont and Van den Bulck's (2012) research on the perceptions of the impacts of negative stereotypes in advertisements, indicated that advertising and marketing (A&M) professionals perceive negative stereotypes, these being stereotypes that negatively describe the social groups represented, in ads as less unfriendly, and that they are significantly more tolerant of these depictions than non-A&M professionals. It was also identified that men perceive negative stereotypes as less unfriendly, and are more tolerant of them than women (Van Hellemont & Van den Bulck, 2012). Since advertising practitioners control advertising content, and in this modern-day society men still dominate the field of advertising (Bronstein & Lambiase, 2018), there is an inclination for advertising content to continue to use and promote patriarchal gender stereotypes in the media (Gill, 2009; Grau & Zotos, 2016). Patriarchal gender stereotypes are stereotypes that stem from patriarchal ideologies (Chrisler et al., 2013; David, 1997). As the man is perceived as the provider, and the woman as the bearer, in patriarchal social structures, men are stereotyped as being more competitive, strong, and independent, meanwhile women are stereotyped as being caring, submissive, and fragile (Addis et al., 2010; Andersen, Ertac, Gneezy, List, & Maximiano, 2013; Gill, 2009; Kumar 2017; Talbot, 2003; Wood, 2016).

One predominant female representation in the media, that is also abundant in lingerie advertising, is that of the woman as an object (Attwood, 2015; Chrisler et al., 2013; David, 1997; Kumar, 2017; Matich et al., 2019). The woman is objectified and sexualized in the media in order to exploit her sexual appeal (Gill, 2009; Wood, 2016; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). Sexual objectification occurs when a person's body is "separated from their identity, reduced to the status of mere instruments ... for the use and pleasure of others" (Fredrickson, Roberts, Noll, Quinn, & Twenge, 1998, p. 269). In the everyday media, such as advertising, women's bodies are thus nakedly, and passively displayed, with sexual connotations (Gill, 2009; Ouellette, 2019). There is a complete disregard of who the woman is, and why she is presented in such a way, her only use is to look sexually appealing (Attwood, 2015; Mulvey, 1999). The use of women's sexuality in media representations is justified through sale and marketing purposes (Attwood, 2015; Clark, 2014), claiming that a woman's body catches the attention of consumers, and redirects them to the product being advertised (Dyer, 2008; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). This theory is accorded to the male gaze which suggests that sexual



imagery provokes hype and “to-be-looked-atness” (Mulvey, 1999, p. 346) (Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). The male gaze defines a patriarchal perspective on women that perceives them according to their traditional role in society which is to please the man (Mulvey, 1999). However, an increasing amount of literature has actually opposed the theory of sex-sells in advertising, suggesting that sexual imagery distracts the consumer from the branded content (Samson, 2016) and damages the perceived corporate social responsibility (CSR) of a brand (Bongiorno, Bain, & Haslam, 2013).

The sexual objectification of women in the media has many negative effects on audiences, particularly on women. According to Pennel and Behm-Morawitz’s (2015) work on the impacts on women from watching sexualized female characters in superhero films, women that are exposed to sexualized representations in the media have significantly lower body esteem, as well as a low recognition of competence and self-perception. This can be linked to Mager and Hegelson (2009) who explain that both men and women gaze upon female sexualization according to the male gaze and then internalize patriarchal female gender ideologies that the woman’s main role is to please a man.

Moreover, another omnipresent female representation in the media is that of the ideal woman (Chrisler et al., 2013; Gill, 2009; Martensen et al., 2018). The media most often presents women that are contemporarily beautiful and glamorous as they are tall, thin, young, have long hair and are predominantly light-skinned (David, 1997; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Perse & Lambe, 2016; Robson & Pitt, 2018). Women in the media are focused upon for their looks and the way they take care of their appearance whether it be through dieting, exercising, cosmetic surgery, skin care or hair routines (Berberick, 2010; Gill, 2009; Harris-Moore, 2014; Ward, 2016). The image is nearly impossible to meet by most women and does not reflect the average woman in society (Chrisler et al., 2013; Harris-Moore, 2014). This is because objective beauty in the media is hegemonized, predominantly according to Western standards, and thus marginalizes other forms of beauty that exist, since beauty is merely a subjective concept that varies per person and culture (Poran, 2002).

According to Chrisler et al. (2013), who analysed Tweets about the 2011 Victoria’s Secret fashion show, most users upwardly compared themselves to the models in the show, and expressed negative self-imagery as they found themselves inadequate. This is because so-called ideal beauty that is normalized in the media sets a personal standard for the everyday woman which they try to meet through body and self-surveillance but is nearly impossible, and thus results in low self-esteem, and mental illnesses such as depression, and eating

disorders (Chrisler et al., 2013; Martin, 2016; Perse & Lambe, 2016; Wood, 2016). Mental illnesses and low self-esteem caused by upward comparison with women presented by the media is “common in adolescent and young women in Western countries” (Chrisler et al., 2013, p. 648). In advertising media ideal images of women are used in order to get consumers to feel aspiration towards the represented image that they will then associate with the brand and motivate them to buy its products (Doyle, 2009). The beauty industry as a whole in fact relies on women’s consumer behaviour motivated through appearance surveillance. It is worth hundreds of billions of dollars and would decline drastically if idealized female beauty standards were not crazed in society (Chrisler et al., 2013; Gill, 2009; Johnston & Taylor, 2008; Shahbandeh, 2020; Wood, 2016).

Furthermore, a pervasive female representation in the media is that of the woman in a subservient role (Gill, 2009; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Sheehan, 2014; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). This role is traditionally centred around the familial home, and portrays the woman as a happy housewife with a demure, dependent, and inferior attitude (Gill, 2009; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). This representation in advertising media is justified by the assumption that women are the main users of domestic products, and that they want to present images that their target audience can relate to (Grau & Zotos, 2014). Since the 1960’s, to this contemporary day and age, women have increasingly entered the work field, yet advertising has not followed this shift in occupational roles and continuous to underrepresent working women (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Sheehan, 2014; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014).

The impact of the underrepresentation of working women, is that women might come to believe that what is expected of them in society is to stay at home, and that they will be discredited as noble women, mothers, or wives, if they do not (Sheehan, 2014). This may then lead to everyday dilemmas on how to present and perceive oneself, either in accordance to or against the expected gender roles, as not all women want to occupy the roles of mothers or housewives (Rudman, 1998; Sheehan, 2014). Rudman (1998) who examined women’s motivations for self-promotion in the work field, found that “women pay a price for counter stereotypical behaviour, even though it may be required for a successful career” (p. 642), since self-promotion requires attitudes such as confidence and competitiveness, which are stereotypically associated with men and viewed negatively for women. Thus, showing how gendered stereotypes restrict women’s working opportunities (Grau & Zotos, 2016).

Despite the large, domineering abundance of stereotypical female representations in the media, a slow shift in female representation in the media, especially fashion media, has

been occurring which aims for diversity (Grau & Zotos, 2016; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). This is because consumers are desiring and actively speaking out about their seek for fair and varied representations, showing an increase in audiences that hold egalitarian gender ideologies and favour positive change that counters stereotypical narratives (Abdallah et al., 2019; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017; Robson & Pitt, 2018). Social movements, such as feminism, were primal in initiating legislative changes in advertising, such as in the European Advertising Standard Alliance (EASA) where, since 2008, advertising requires equality between men and women (Grau & Zotos, 2016). According to Zotos, and Tsihla (2014), who analysed female stereotypes in advertisements, social institutions inherently still upheld non-egalitarian attitudes, though changes in the EASA (European Advertising Standard Alliance), for example, show a progressive change in the attitudes of social institutions.

#### **2.4 Feminism and its impact on advertising in the lingerie industry**

Feminism is a political and social movement that advocates the belief system that men and women are equal (David, 1997; Gill, 2009). It stands by the belief that no matter one's gender, all people should be treated equally, have equal rights and equal opportunities (Burn, Aboud, & Moyles, 2000). Feminism started as a political movement to oppose the unequal distribution of human rights in society (Snyder, 2006), as, up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Western countries were patriarchally structured societies where “men possess ownership of the land and have power over household monetary decisions” (Andersen et al., 2013, p. 1439), and men were also the only ones allowed to vote and have political power (Munro, 2013). This explains why patriarchal gender ideologies are rooted in social institutions and advertising as the female gender has historically been oppressed.

Feminism, as a social movement, has exerted its influence onto society in numerous ways, but most relevantly by altering how audiences may perceive and give meaning to gender representations in the media (Grau & Zotos, 2016). This is because the feminist movement cultivated the ‘critical feminist perspective’ which creates a reflective and critical mindset that recognizes taken-for-granted societal and cultural power structures that stem from, and reinforce, patriarchal ideologies (Daley, 2010; Neuendorf, Gore, Dalessandro, Janstova, & Snyder-Suhy, 2010; Sulé, 2014). This perspective, which first became a divergent lens through which to execute research (Mansfield, Welton, & Grogan, 2014), has now, through its wide-spread and popularized use in research, become increasingly adapted by

individuals in society at large who then form audiences which take critical feminist outlooks onto society's structure and cultural artefacts (Daley, 2010).

In the 21st century, where media and technology are central and new modern parts of society, audiences increasingly exude their critical feminist outlook on media phenomena and content (Clark, 2014; Daley, 2010; Jane, 2017; Pruchniewska, 2019). This gave rise to never-seen-before forms of feminist activism that were directed towards media representations, and were advocated on online digital platforms (Matich et al., 2019; Munro, 2013). Jane (2017), in her examining of a case of feminist digilantism<sup>4</sup> in Australia, found that the rise in user activism online was due to the fact that users felt that more awareness needed to be raised, and actions needed to be undertaken about gender inequalities or injustices, since these problems were being disregarded by, for example, media regulators. This form of digital feminist activism became termed the “fourth wave”<sup>5</sup> of feminism which was characterised by the online advocating of beliefs on gender equality, and the pointing out of sexist phenomena in society online (Matich et al., 2019; Munro, 2013; Pruchniewska, 2019). The Victoria's Secret fashion show is exemplar of a media phenomenon that became abundantly subjected to this form of fourth-wave feminist activism on social media, and ultimately caused Victoria's Secret's 2019 fashion show cancellation (Abdallah et al., 2019; Chrisler et al., 2013; Robson & Pitt, 2018). This occurrence shows the extent to which (female) audiences have become critical of female representations in media contents, such as lingerie fashion shows, as they also increasingly take part in digital vigilantism to initiate debate and demand for change in media representations which too often still stereotype and limit gender role representations (Clark, 2014; Jane, 2017; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Pruchniewska, 2019).

Despite the advocacy of the abundant feminist activism, a disregard of gender inequalities still occurs in many institutions as it is assumed that society is in a state of post-feminism, which is a point in time where it has reached gender equality, and men and women are allowed to express and present themselves as they desire (Martin, 2016; Ouellette, 2019; Wood, 2016). Post-feminism embraces female empowerment and normalizes it, showing how women and men have “autonomy and choice” (Martin, 2016, p. 1421) in how they present and identify themselves. Though gender discrimination in, for example, the working industries has decreased, there still are wide gaps between the equal treatment of men and

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<sup>4</sup> Jane (2017) coined the term ‘feminist digilantism’ to describe the digital feminist vigilantism which audiences begun taking part in.

<sup>5</sup> Three phases of feminism preceded this fourth wave of feminism.

women, and thus a post-feminist society has not been reached (World Economic Forum, 2016; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014).

According to Burn et al. (2000), who studied feminist consciousness and its impacts on activism in American societies, the positive social and political impacts of the feminist movement on society, which aim for gender equality, can increase if the size and recognition of the movement increases in society. It is for this reason that, if people desire more egalitarian changes in media policies, such as the mentioned changes in the EASA (European Advertising Standard Alliance) (Grau & Zotos, 2016), it is crucial that the feminist movement becomes unified and positively perceived (Burn et al., 2000). Society's positive perception of feminism is debatable however as, according to Lind and Salo (2002) who quantitatively analysed the "representation of feminists and feminism" (p. 211) in electronic media, the feminist movement is seldomly positively discoursed in the media, if at all, and when it is, feminists are demonized<sup>6</sup> and given an overall negative connotation. Due to the negative stigma that the media gives to feminism, people are thereby less motivated to self-identity as feminists, even though they may support feminist ideals and the movement (Burn et al., 2000; Lind & Salo, 2002; Zucker & Bay-Cheng, 2010). This is because, through the cultivation process (Gerbner et al., 1986), media audiences can come to believe that the negative media representation of feminists and the feminist movement are real. The lack of self-identification with feminism hereby prevents the growth and positive impact of the feminist movement.

The resurgence of feminism in popular culture, through the recent fourth-wave of feminism, has however brought back compelling importance to the cause (Matich et al., 2019; Munro, 2013; Pruchniewska, 2019). Though not a direct testimony to the movement's growth, the erotica industry, which Matich et al. (2019) say "plays a significant role in directing and shaping" the feminist movement, has witnessed a significant economical increase (Abdallah et al., 2019; Attwood, 2015; Martin, 2016). The growth in the erotica industries, such as the lingerie industry, is explained to be due to brands' shift in female representation in their advertisements which normalized women's consumption of erotic products in society, as they increasingly presented women as empowered sexual beings who have autonomy in their active sexuality (Attwood, 2015; Martin, 2016; Wood, 2016). Ouellette (2019), who studied the female representation in Victoria's Secret catalogue images from 1996 to 2006, illustrated this shift in lingerie advertising's representation as the models went from being passively

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<sup>6</sup> Digital media portrays feminists as unmundane women who are "man-hating", "family-wrecking", and "radical lesbians" (Lind & Salo, 2002, p. 218).

portrayed in the older catalogues, to being actively sexually portrayed in the more recent images. He noted the active representation of the women as sexual beings from the models' "pouts, glares, and stares of defiance" (Ouellette, 2019, p. 6). This counters the more traditional patriarchal perception on women's sexuality in society which frames women's sexuality as taboo, virginal, and compliant, and thereby does not view women as active sexual beings (David, 1997; Dildar, 2015; Johnston & Taylor, 2008; Matich et al., 2019; Ouellette, 2019).

Even though a post-feministic conceptualization of female sexuality in lingerie advertisements could be assumed, based on lingerie advertisements' now active representation of women as sexual beings, just as men are (Martin, 2016; Ouellette, 2019; Wood, 2016), numerous scholars criticized the post-feminist perspective on lingerie advertising as advertising portrayals still relied on women's sexual objectification to attract consumers (Gill, 2009; Mager & Hegelson, 2009; Ouellette, 2019). Hereby, still complying with the male gaze which sexually objectifies women (Mulvey, 1999). In addition, scholars such as Martin (2016), who explored the "changing sexual address to women" by analysing the "marketing of sex products to women in erotic boutiques" (p. 1421), challenged the post-feministic perception on active sexual female representation as she criticised that advertising media exploit empowering feminist beliefs in their representations in order to encourage women to consume sexual products, which also implies that women need to consume products in order to "construct a 'sexual identity'" (p. 1423).

Furthermore, the fourth wave of feminism and audience's digital vigilantism, stimulated the strengthening and popularizing of feministic ideals in society, which is why feminist activism has slowly been taking new forms (Attwood, 2015; Clark, 2014; Matich et al., 2019; Munro, 2013; Pruchniewska, 2019). Clark (2014), who examined the 2014 pre-Super Bowl campaign #notbuyingit on Twitter, showed not only that digital users are increasingly criticizing sexist or misrepresenting advertisements online, but that feminists are boycotting brands that take part in sexist/misrepresentations in their advertisements. This shows the feminist consumer's new found empowerment in their conspicuous consumption. Meaning, feminists are increasingly aligning their consumption habits with their social egalitarian ideals, which Johnston and Taylor (2008) coined the term 'feminist consumerism' (Clark, 2014).

The rising trend of vigilant feminist consumers caused the emergence of a new form of advertising, namely 'femvertising' (feminist advertising) (Drake, 2017; Grau & Zotos, 2016).

This advertising strategy aligns brands and products with feminist ideals in order to cater to the conscious consumption habits of feminists, as well as women who support feminist moral beliefs (Drake, 2017). Women feel empowered from femvertising which includes female representations that break through stereotypes that are based on patriarchal gender conceptualizations as it shows a control over their own image, a “self-possessed” woman (Attwood, 2015, p. 8) (Matich et al., 2019).

Lingerie stores and brands are particularly focusing on the concept of femvertising as there was a predominance of lingerie brands that centred around the traditional conceptualizations of femininity and female sexuality in the past (Wood, 2016). The traditional conceptualization of femininity and female sexuality, as previously mentioned in this chapter, are that women are careful, fragile, soft-spoken, complying and selfless (Abdallah et al., 2019; Attwood, 2015; Connell, 1987; Robson & Pitt, 2018; Wood, 2016). This type of femininity was described, and named as the “emphasized femininity” by Connell (1987, p. 183), who explored and developed theories on gender and power in society. Connell (1987) claimed that there are many different types of femininities amongst women and men in society, however that one type of femininity is emphasized and hegemonized in Western society. This emphasized femininity being the femininity which upholds patriarchal ideologies by being a femininity that necessitates and subordinates to a man (Connell, 1987). Lingerie brands widely used and normalized the image of a woman according to the conceptualization of the emphasized femininity, that is stereotypically beautiful, thin, and feminine (Abdallah et al., 2019; Attwood, 2015; Robson & Pitt, 2018; Wood, 2016). Their stores and advertising focus was therefore on girliness and the attractiveness of the female body (Martin, 2016; Wood, 2016). There was thus a gap of brands in the lingerie industry that focused on diversity and inclusivity, which is where femvertising found the potential to deviate from hegemonic media representations and find a contemporary way of addressing targeted audiences.

As femvertising became increasingly popular and successful in recent years, more and more lingerie brands started accustoming their advertisements and even their whole brand images to the concepts of diversity and inclusivity (Abdallah et al., 2019; Calkin, 2016; Drake, 2017; Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017; Robson & Pitt, 2018). More diversity and acceptance of different female bodies, sexualities, and femininities, in media representations which addresses a wider audience is crucial in the lingerie industry as every woman constructs her feminine identity differently (David, 1997; Johnston & Taylor, 2008; Karimova

et al., 2017). This promoted a new contemporary understanding of female beauty that did not exclude particular body types, sexualities or femininities (Kotler et al., 2017). Though some women do relate to the traditional conceptualizations of femininity, others do not, or are speculative, according to the critical feminist perspective, of the oppressing gender role identities that are being promoted (Clark, 2014; Daley, 2010; Munro, 2013). This is because women increasingly recognize that homogenous portrayals in the media of women's bodies, sexualities, and femininities "act as normalising forces" (Wood, 2016, p. 13) that inaccurately represent the real diversity of women in society, and marginalize women who do not fit traditional ideal femininity and beauty.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Overall, this theoretical framework addressed the agency that exists in shaping mediatic representations (Hall, 2001), however this agency is undermined by the media's aims to either reflect the real life society or portray what society preferably wants to see (Eisend, 2010; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). It was shown that the media is prompted to use stereotypes in its representations due to the narratives that these evoke (Sheehan, 2014), however the stereotypes used hold a bias towards a societal ideology that is deemed unequal and discriminative of different social groups, such as women (Clark, 2014; Grau & Zotos, 2014; Kumar, 2017). The most common female representations in the media are that of women being sexually objectified according to the male gaze (Attwood, 2015; Chrisler et al., 2013), women being ideally, and almost unrealistic, represented in order to generate feelings of aspirations within audiences (Chrisler et al., 2013; Doyle, 2009; Martensen et al., 2018), and finally, women being presented in subservient roles that abide by patriarchal conceptualizations of women's roles in society (Andersen et al., 2013; Gill, 2009; Grau & Zotos, 2016).

Through the critical feminist perspectives, and the fourth wave of feminism, these homogenic female representations are increasingly being critiqued by both academics and digital activists that desire fair and equal portrayals in the media (Clark, 2014; Pruchniewska, 2019). This gave rise to new trends such as feminist consumerism and femvertising in, for example, the lingerie industry which thereby now sees an expansion in brand images and female representations that contradict the previous conceptualizations of femininity, female sexuality and idealism in the industry (Connell, 1987; Drake, 2017; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Johnston & Taylor, 2008).



### 3 Method

In this chapter the methodological decisions and measures taken to complete the collection of data and the analysis of the data are described and explained. This starts by explaining why qualitative interviews are chosen as the method to conduct this study. Moreover, the sampling procedure is elucidated, along with a description of the 14 participants of this research. In addition, the research question is operationalized to illustrate how the concept under investigation, namely female representation, was rendered observable. Finally, the detailed method of analysis is outlined, along with the measures that were taken to ensure trustworthy and rigorous findings were conceptualized.

#### 3.1 Qualitative interviews as chosen method

In media studies, qualitative research explores how people create meaning from the messages that are communicated through mass media products (Brennen, 2017). This is because qualitative research shares the widespread assumption that reality is a social construct which is shaped through discourse, and media products are key contributors to the communicated environment of individuals (Brennen, 2017; Gerbner et al., 1986). Qualitative research is very distinctive from quantitative research in this way, as it does not aim to generalize findings on a population but rather, come to understand how individuals create meaning (Brennen, 2017; Wood, 2016). Qualitative audience research offers insights into the ways in which members of a particular social group, or audience, perceive a particular media phenomenon, which can better the understanding of the meaning that particular media products hold in socio-cultural contexts (Brennen, 2017).

With the popularization of branded lingerie fashion shows, and the omnipresence of lingerie advertising which comes from the unavoidable continuous growth of the lingerie industry, it becomes crucial to develop an understanding of the meaning that female representation in lingerie advertising holds in the eyes of female audiences. This research, as an audience study, thereby aims to explore and compare *how young adult women give meaning to the female representation in the mediated lingerie fashion shows of Victoria's Secret and Savage X Fenty*. For this qualitative research, which aims to gain deeper, personal, and more valuable insights into participants' meaning making processes of female representation in lingerie advertising media, interviews are the most effective method of data collection (Hermanowicz, 2002; Silverman, 2014). This is because they offer one-on-one and face-to-face interaction, which increases the odds of participants revealing "intimacies, thoughts, and personal perspectives" (Hermanowicz, 2002, p. 482). It is through such

revelations that the topic of female representation in lingerie fashion shows, which in today's world holds more significance in the eyes of audiences than more standard forms of lingerie advertising, can be better understood.

According to Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley, and McKenna (2017) who systematically compared the efficiency of focus groups and interviews in disclosing information, participants are more comfortable disclosing deep and extensive personal information when in an intimate context with a researcher of a similar background, such as of the same gender. Since this research centres around visceral topics such as lingerie, femininity and female sexuality, a research method that confidentially encourages private disclosures is key. This is why interviews were chosen, over focus groups, as the method of data collection.

Semi-structured interviews are based on pre-established sets of questions that are standardly asked to participants and thereby guide the direction of the interviews (Silverman, 2014); however they also leave room for spontaneous probing that can allow for further explanations, clarifications or examples on the addressed topic to be made (Brennen, 2017; Silverman, 2014). This interview form, while being minimally structured and standardized, allows for rapport to be made with the interviewees as a personal, more active listening and communicative approach is taken (Silverman, 2014). Moreover, visual techniques- in the form of four visual fragments of the lingerie shows- were utilised during the interview to "stimulate further thoughts on the interview topic" (Comi, Bischof, & Eppler, 2014, p. 111). Two clips were taken from the Victoria's Secret (VS) 2018 fashion show, as well as two clips from the 2019 Savage X Fenty (SXF) fashion show. The showing of the clips throughout the interview was key in allowing the participants to reflect on the cases and express their thoughts and feelings. According to Comi et al. (2014) who explored the advantages of using visual techniques such as video projections in qualitative interviews, visual techniques can also aid in building rapport between the participant and the researcher, guiding interviews, as well as evoke deeper and more directed answers.

### **3.2 Participants**

The criteria of the sample for this research were that all participants had to be female, between the ages of 18 and 29, be proficient in English, as well as living in either the Netherlands or Flanders, in Belgium. Participants were purposively sampled, meaning they were uncoincidentally selected, for this research project based on their accordance to the sampling criteria (Sarstedt, Bengart, Shaltoni, & Lehmann, 2018). Women were a key

criterion for the sample as the aim of the research is to investigate how women themselves give meaning to their representation in lingerie branded media. This is because lingerie is an “exclusively female item” according to the gender identity representations in society and the clothing’s affordances (Karimova et al., 2017, p. 2). Additionally, men were excluded since, for one, they experience representations in the media differently due to the highly diverse male representations that exist in the media (Grau & Zotos, 2016), and secondly, they most often interpret female representations in advertising from the perspective of the male gaze (Gill, 2009; Mulvey, 1999; Ross, 2010).

In addition, this research aimed to investigate the perspectives of young women specifically. This choice was made because young women, defined as women of 18 to 29 years of age (Perrin, 2015), are most often the ones being represented in the lingerie industry and thus young female audiences are quicker to feel represented in, for example, lingerie advertising, and construct social meanings from these representations than other ages (Drake, 2017; Gill, 2009; Perse & Lambe, 2016; Wood, 2016). According to Robson and Pitt (2018) who explored the lingerie marketing environment, young adult female consumers are also perceived as the audience with the most growth potential in the industry and thereby are mainly targeted towards by lingerie brands. As this research aims at investigating how individuals within the targeted audience of lingerie fashion shows construct meaning from the representations young women were the chosen subjects of study.

Furthermore, participants living in either the Netherlands or Flanders (Belgium) were chosen as these regions are commonly grouped for research in the field of media due to their similarity in language and mediatic exposure (Kuppens, 2009; Kuppens, 2010; Van Meurs, Hendriks, & Sanders, 2017). According to Kuppens (2010), who examined the consequences of foreign-language media consumption, English language media is omnipresent in the media environment in the Netherlands as well as in Flanders which incidentally nurtures English proficiency and international culture in these regions. Van Meurs et al. (2017) links this to the positive regard to Anglo-American media artefacts that is present in the Netherlands and Flanders, making these regions favourable for this research project as foreign (American) content, namely the VS and SXF fashion shows, are central topics under investigation. Moreover, the fashion shows are accessible digitally in both of these regions. The VS fashion show is available on Youtube ([www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)), whilst the SXF fashion show is available for streaming via Amazon Prime ([www.primevideo.com](http://www.primevideo.com)). Sampling participants that reside in the same regions ensures that they are exposed to relatively similar media environments (Delli

Carpini, Keeter, & Kenamer, 1994). The participants were required to be proficient in speaking the English language as the interview would be conducted in English, as well as the video clips to be shared were English-spoken. If participants were not proficient enough in English there was the possibility that they would struggle to express themselves or their point of views, which would decrease the richness and accuracy of the information shared (Borodistky, 2011; Welch & Piekkari, 2006).

The snowball sampling method was used to sample the participants of this study. Snowball sampling consists of participants referring the researcher to other potential participants (Karimova et al., 2017). The pre-existing network of the researcher was taken advantage of to come in contact with a primary number of eligible participants who then, through the snowball sampling method, brought the researcher in contact with other potential participants. One of the advantages of snowball sampling relevant to this research is that trust is gained from participants as they were referred to via, for example, friends whom they already trust. This ultimately enables “participants to share information during the interview that is more intimate” (p. 3), as Karimova et al. (2017) noticed in their interviews about lingerie and morality with Kazakhstani women.

Participants were sampled and interviewed until a point of saturation was reached. Saturation is reached when new data does not offer new findings (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). This resulted in a total of 14 participants to be sampled and interviewed (N=14). The participants were all female, and living in either the Netherlands (N=8) or Flanders (Belgium) (N=6). The participants were of various nationalities such as Belgian, German, Croatian, and French (see Appendix A for full overview of the participants). Their ages ranged from 20 to 27 with the average age of the participants being 22/23-years-old. The majority of the participants were currently still students (N=10), most of them being university students (N=8), however some were working (N=4) and held jobs like social media marketer, or restaurant manager. All of the participants were familiar with the Victoria’s Secret brand, and only one participant was not familiar with the Savage X Fenty brand, however she was familiar with Rihanna<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, unintentionally, all of the participants that were sampled had a background of higher education, ranging from university of applied sciences, to university. This may be a result of the snowball sampling method, which limits the network of potential participants to ones that are in relative close social proximity with the

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<sup>7</sup> Rihanna is the founder and ambassador of the Savage X Fenty brand.

researcher (Karimova et al., 2017) and “leads to a degree of ‘sameness’” (Wood, 2016, p. 12) with the researcher who also has a background of higher education. The aim of the research, however, is not to make a representative sample, but to explore the different or similar ways in which women give meaning to female representations in lingerie fashion shows.

### **3.3 Operationalization**

The main concept under investigation in the research question is female representation. Female representation, in visual media, is understood as who and what is being depicted and associated with the female gender (Lumpkin, 2009). As previously mentioned in the theoretical framework, gender identity is socially constructed and most often distinguished between one’s component masculinity or femininity, with femininity being the traditionally characterized behaviour, sexuality, and self-expression of women (Burn et al., 2000; Karimova et al., 2017; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). To operationalize female representation in lingerie media, and render participants’ interpretation of female representation observable in their discourse, the concept will be broken down into discourse about the representations of femininity, body-diversity, and female sexuality.

Femininity, for this research, is operationalized as the self-expression of women that can be observed through their body language, as well as their behaviour and clothing (Karimova et al., 2017; Schippers, 2007). Body-diversity is operationalized as the physically apparent differences in the women represented in the fashion shows, such as their ethnicity, height, body weight, abilities, and bodily features<sup>8</sup> (Abdallah et al., 2019; Robson & Pitt, 2018). Finally, female sexuality is operationalized as the perceived female sexual autonomy, assumable sexual orientation, and their active expression of pleasure, observable from their body language and behaviour (Martin, 2016; Schippers, 2007).

### **3.4 Interview guide**

The interviews conducted were semi-structured interviews. This means that for each interview the same interview guide, which encompassed essential questions and potential probes, was used. The interview guide’s structure was inspired by Karimova et al. (2017) who split their interview into two parts, allowing, first, for the participants to express their views on femininity, and then to respond to visual stimuli about lingerie. For this research project, foremost, the interviewees were asked warm up questions that would allow for the researcher

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<sup>8</sup> Bodily features are for example hair, eyes, and bone-structure.

to establish rapport with the participant and build the “tone of the conversation” (Brennen, 2017, p. 34). These questions inquired about the participant’s clothing style, and their social media environment (see Appendix B for the full interview guide).

Then, the first half of the interviews were structured around participant revelations about their contemporary perception of female representation in the media, their views on feminism, their conceptualisation of femininity and female sexuality, and lastly, their thoughts and feelings towards lingerie. The second halves of the interviews presented the participants with two video clips per fashion show. First the participants were shown the VS fashion show clips, followed by questions about their feelings, thoughts, and perceptions of the female representation, including the represented femininity, body diversity, and female sexuality, in the lingerie fashion show. Thereafter, the participants were shown two clips from the SXF fashion show, followed by the same set of questions asked after the VS clips, though there was room for spontaneous probing.

The overall aim of the interview was to explore the participant’s views on past, current, and changing female representations in the media, and how they give importance to female representation with regards to (in)equality in society. Interrogating the participants on their impressions of the female representation in the lingerie shows then allowed for an exploration of how the female representation cohered or deviated from their primary perception of female representation in the media.

### **3.5 Data collection process & the impact of COVID-19**

All of the interviews were conducted via Zoom ([www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us)), which is a video communications platform that is available in both Belgium, and the Netherlands. The use of the Zoom platform allowed for online face-to-face video calls to be made. Initially the interviews were supposed to be conducted face-to-face in real life, however due to the circumstances as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic this was no longer possible. Prior to the interview meeting, participants were advised to use their laptops, instead of their phones, and find a remote location that they could conduct the interview in, to avoid disturbances. Originally, the video clips were going to be shown by the interviewer, however, now that the interviews were being conducted online, the participants were forwarded the video clips and asked to watch them on their own whilst the video call continued. A benefit from the digital conduction of the interviews is that it “reduced some burdens on participants” (Neilson, 2018, p. 151), such as the efforts of meeting with the researcher at a particular location which as a

consequence makes the interviewees' participation even more time-consuming (Brennen, 2017), while maintaining the potential rapport that can be built between the interviewer and the interviewee through face-to-face interaction (Neilson, 2018).

The interviews all followed the structure of the interview guide that was previously described, although, in the starting phase, after the first two interviews, some of the interview questions were slightly adjusted to better suit the structure of the interview. The interviews ranged between 40 to 60 minutes (the shortest 41 minutes, the longest 59 minutes), including the showing of the four video clip fragments of the shows. All of the interviews were both audio and visually recorded, to allow for verbatim transcripts to be made. These recordings were carried out via the affordances of the Zoom platform which allowed for video and audio recordings to be made and downloaded at the end of each call.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

Interviews are highly personal methods of data collection and therefore require a lot of ethical considerations (Brennen, 2017; Hermanowicz, 2002). It is of high priority that the participants are not physically or emotionally harmed (Brennen, 2017). From the participation, to the recordings, particular measures have to be taken in order to guarantee that the research is completed on ethical grounds. Initially interviewees were going to sign consent forms prior to the interviews, agreeing to their participation, and permit the recording of the interaction. However, since the interviews were conducted through online video calls, consent forms could not be signed. This is why, when beginning the interview on the video call, participants were given a brief introduction about the research purpose and process (see Appendix B). Their right to stop or leave the interview was made clear, as their participation is voluntary. They were informed about the recordings to be made of the interview, and how these recordings were going to be used in the research, namely for the transcripts. In addition, the confidentiality of the interview content was emphasized, as well as the anonymity of the interviewee. Consent for the registration of their first name was requested, and if this was not granted a pseudonym would be used in the transcript and thesis. However, for this research all participants agreed to register and use their first name in the thesis. After these explanations and instructions were given off the record, the participants were asked to give their consent on the record once the official interview recording would start.

### **3.7 Reflexivity of the researcher**

As Guest et al. (2017) explain in their research, since demographic proximity between an interviewer and an interviewee aids in building trust, and thereby increasing the likelihood of full disclosure by the participants, it was beneficial to this study that the researcher was of the same gender and age. However, just as Munro (2013), Attwood (2015), and Connell (1987) mention in their research, every woman conceptualizes femininity differently, meaning that the researcher herself may have a distinctively different conceptualization of femininity than the participants. To avoid researcher bias or unintended influences from the researcher onto the participant, the researcher used different researcher techniques. For example, the researcher used reflexivity “to improve the rigour of the data collection” (McNair, Taft, & Hegarty, 2008, p. 1). Reflexivity entails that the researcher reflects on their own position towards a topic and assumes an outsider position, during an interview, to avoid giving leading questions (McNair et al., 2008). Reflexivity is commonly used in feminist studies as there is an awareness that diverse perspectives exist (Hermanowicz, 2002; McNair et al., 2008).

### **3.8 Method of analysis**

The method of data analysis used for this research is thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Thematic analysis concentrates on the finding of interpretive patterns and themes that are present in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It positions the researcher as an active interpreter of data, guided both by theory and the context of the data to identify themes that describe the empirical data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis thereby facilitates the analytical process as it gives agency to the researcher in finding data that links to the concept under investigation in the research question at a manifest as well as latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In research utilizing the thematic method of analysis it is therefore key to describe the process of analysis in order to ensure replicability and transferability through transparency and rigour in the interpretation of the data by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Mays & Pope, 1995).

The thematic analytical process of this research was structured by coding the transcripts of the interviews via the cumulative steps of open, axial and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Coding is the process of assigning a representative name (code) to a fragment of data which is relevant to the concept under investigation in the research question (Boeije, 2010). These codes can either be constructed deductively, meaning that a code is



made prior to the analytical process as it is drawn from past theory, or inductively, where a code is made based on emerging data relevant to the research findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For example, the code “emphasized femininity” was created deductively, based on the theory by Connell (1987), as theory suggested that this form of female representation is common in the media, and has significant meaning regarding power structures in society and the critical feminist perspective (Daley, 2010). An example of a code that was made inductively is the code “powerful sexuality”, as many interviewees described that the female sexuality expressed by the represented women was powerful, this code thereby emerged inductively through the data.

The primary analytical steps are initiated once the researcher starts emerging themselves in the data which is as soon as they start interviewing, and transcribing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, the open coding process requires the researchers to create, label, and assign codes to fragments throughout the data (Boeije, 2010). For this research project, the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti was used to facilitate the assigning and organization of the codes. After the inaugural open coding has been completed, all codes and data are once again checked for whether they are, for example, accurately assigned, rightly interpreted, and unrepitive, in order to ensure that the open coding has been executed rigorously and no data has been missed (Boeije, 2010; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Then, axial coding follows which aims to rearrange codes into coherent themes by merging, splitting, or regrouping different codes (Boeije, 2010). The final coding phase, selective coding, then aims to find overarching themes that reflect the axial codes and the overall findings from the data (Boeije, 2010). The whole process of open, axial, and selective coding delivers coding trees that reflect and structure the findings from the analysis. Through this thorough coding process four overarching themes were identified. These themes are discussed in the following chapter.

## 4 Results

In this chapter, the results of the qualitative thematic analysis of the interviews will be presented. The results are categorized into four overarching themes that are relevant in aiding to answer the research question: *How do young adult women give meaning to the female representation in the mediated lingerie fashion shows of Victoria's Secret and Savage X Fenty?* The themes which were identified from the thematic coding process are presented in light of answers that participants gave during the interviews<sup>9</sup>, in order to accurately reflect and describe their meaning.

The first theme addresses the ways in which the interviewees perceived the female representation in the lingerie fashion shows to be a reflection of the brands' conceptualizations of beauty and femininity. This was either perceived as stereotypical or non-stereotypical. Furthermore, the second theme observed the realistic or unrealistic standards and expectations that the young female participants perceived to be set on women in society due to the female representation in the fashion shows. The third theme described the message that the participants perceived the female representation to be sending. This ranged from the female representation attempting to sell the audience their anticipated desire for beauty and femininity, to a support for feminism and its ideals. Finally, the last theme documents the festive, and sometimes controlling ambiance of the female representation that the participants gave significant meaning to.

### 4.1 Brands' stereotypical and non-stereotypical conceptualization of beauty and femininity

One of the major themes was identified as the participants firstly heavily reflected on what they actually perceived as 'beauty' or 'femininity' and then on how the brands, Victoria's Secret and Savage X Fenty, represented these two topics in their female representation. Participants associated the way in which they perceived beauty and femininity to be represented in the lingerie fashion shows, with how the brands conceptualize beauty and femininity. From watching the female representation in the Savage X Fenty show, Karen (23-years-old, Lebanese, communication sciences student living in the Netherlands), for example, expressed how she could get a "very strong feeling about the brand". This is a strong feeling of how the brand conceptualizes female beauty and femininity.

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<sup>9</sup> Quotations used from the interviews are sometimes edited to improve their readability. These are, however, only minor changes that do not effect the meaning of the quotes.

How a brand conceptualizes beauty and femininity, is what they perceive and communicate as being beautiful and feminine. In the case of lingerie fashion shows, this is communicated through the particular women that are wearing the lingerie. This is because lingerie is a piece of clothing that is deeply associated with femininity and womanhood (Karimova et al., 2017), thereby the different women, including their different attractiveness, femininities, and female sexualities, that the brands decided to represent, are interpreted as reflections of what the brands conceptualize as beautiful, feminine, sexy, and worthy women. Beauty and femininity are subjective topics, which is why brands can differ in their conceptualizations of beauty and femininity (Poran, 2002). Based on the responses from the interviewees, Victoria's Secret's conceptualization of femininity and beauty was thematized as being stereotypical, whilst Savage X Fenty's was thematized as being non-stereotypical.

The interviewees cultivated their impression of the brand's conceptualization of beauty and femininity by observing the different bodies, expressed femininities, and expressed sexualities that were represented by the women in the lingerie fashion shows. Flavie, a 23-year-old French bar manager in the Netherlands, for example carefully observed the expressed sexualities and femininities of the women in the SXF show, stating that the represented women in the show did not "just feel like straight women, they could be queer, and trans" and the women have "very different, femininities, assuming different sexualities". Based on these observations Flavie reflected on the brand, expressing how the female representation brought about a "really strong notion of equality" in terms of what the brand conceptualizes as female beauty and femininity, which fits the pattern of SXF being non-stereotypical since Flavie, in the first part of the interview, described the media to typically "only include straight people" and therefore not be equal in their representation and conceptualization of female sexuality.

The participants perceived the lingerie brands as having agency in the different women they decided to include in their shows, which is why they gave significant meaning to the particular women that were selected to be in the shows, as these women were seemingly selected for a particular reason. This can be exemplified from Simay's (21-years-old, Russian/Turkish, working in social media marketing in the Netherlands) remark on the active efforts that Victoria's Secret was making to select what they perceived to be suitable women

for the fashion show, “they're [Victoria's Secret's]<sup>10</sup> *trying*<sup>11</sup> to include more skin colours and skin types but not necessarily body types”. VS' active disregard to include diverse body types, Simay reasons to be due to the fact that VS only endorses “stereotypes” of female beauty which she had antecedently described as women “needing to be skinny”, “hairless”, and “pretty”, amongst other things. Similarly, Céline (21-years-old, Belgian/Thai, studies linguistics in Flanders) also reflected on the agency that VS had in its casting of women, as it is “a really big brand” that has enough “money” and “contacts” to be able to “get well-known plus size models” in their show, but that “they *choose* not to” use diverse models. This agency is what clarified VS' stereotypical conceptualization of beauty and femininity as VS purposely only used “skinny” models, which Céline also used as a word to describe the stereotypical women that are presented in the media.

As a whole, there was a noticeable pattern in the participants' descriptions of the representations of the female body, femininity, and female sexuality in the Victoria's Secret fashion show as stereotypical due to its ideal and uncontemporary conceptualizations. In the beginning of the interviews, the interviewees shed light on what they perceived to be stereotypical portrayals of women in the media, for which most of them mentioned how women are objectified and unrealistically perfect. This can be illustrated through Karen (23, Lebanese) who, in the beginning of the interview, had explained that women in the media stereotypically “have to look a certain way in order to be presentable” and “always have to look their best”, showing how women are focused upon for their looks and expected to look perfect in the media. Likewise, in previous studies it was shared how women are stereotypically objectified in the media, and presented according to extremely high, and almost unrealistic physical beauty standards, through extreme exercising and dieting, or photoshop and make-up (David, 1997; Chrisler et al., 2013; Gill, 2009; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Martensen et al., 2018; Perse & Lambe, 2016; Robson & Pitt, 2018; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). Based on Karen's perception of stereotypical women in the media she felt negatively about VS' female representation in the show due to its exclusive, ideal and uniform female body representations which adhere to the stereotypical images of women in the media, “I feel like all I saw was the *stereotypically beautiful women*, like women who are *skinny*, who are *tall*, who kind of also *all look the same*”.

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<sup>10</sup> The insides of brackets are own contributions to the quotations to improve readability.

<sup>11</sup> Italics are used to emphasize what is considered an important part of the quotation.

The represented femininity in the VS show was also thematized as being stereotypically feminine due to the ways in which the women in the show were seen as being “very girly”, as Clara (25-years-old, German, clinical psychology student in the Netherlands) for example boldly stated when she mentioned the “bouncy walk”, “smiles”, and “flirt” of the models. The interviewees linked these expressions of femininity in the show to stereotypical portrayals of femininity in the media and society. Lena, a 25-year-old German business student in the Netherlands, made such a connection when she explained that the models were “portrayed as innocent” because of their angelic wings, with ‘innocent’ being a trait characteristic of the stereotype of femininity (see also Gill, 2009, and Grau & Zotos, 2016). Lena continued on to explain how this innocent portrayal alluded to “the old picture of a woman” which is a woman “being shy or being small, [...] soft and supportive”. This “old picture of a woman” refers to the stereotypically feminine woman which, as a stereotype, has already existed for a long time, thereby showing how Lena perceived VS’ female representation as outdated and uncontemporary. Connell (1987) had coined the term ‘emphasized femininity’ to describe this same stereotypical femininity which stems from patriarchal conceptions of a woman’s role in society, and therefore remains relevant as the dominantly perceived communicated femininity in the media, according to the interviewees.

That ‘emphasized femininities’ (Connell, 1987) are predominant in the media and society nowadays was explained by the large majority of the participants. The significance of this perception was that almost all of the interviewees described femininity, not as a single thing, but as a personal feeling, which can vary from woman to woman and therefore cannot be defined, which opposes the hegemonic and singular perception on femininity in the media. Elli, a 20-year-old Croatian fashion student living in the Netherlands, disclosed about her own struggles with feeling feminine in a society that narrowed the conceptions of what femininity can be to a particular stereotype. Elli described femininity as “a very private thing. It's a very broad thing and I don't think I'd have the right to speak for everybody and just say what it is because I don't know”. This “broad thing” that Elli mentions is by other interviewees, besides being ‘private’, also extended with notions like confidence (which Alice says), power (which Zilah says), and care (which Clara says). It is due to the fact that “the Victoria’s Secret show has *one specific template* of what is sexuality, and what femininity means”, as Elli mentions, that most of the interviewees viewed the VS brand negatively. This “one specific template” of sexuality and femininity, which was observed from the female representation, was perceived as a reflection of VS’ own narrow conceptualization of beauty and femininity. Giselle (22-

years-old, Belgian/South-African, law student in Flanders) explains this clearly as she explains that the “super girly” femininity in the show is a part of “their [VS’] image”, which VS is “afraid of letting go”.

The belief that VS’ brand morals are misaligned was a common trend found amongst the interviews of the participants. The finding suggests that VS’ conceptualization of beauty and femininity is perceived as uncontemporary. This is because beauty trends change, and the mindset of audiences shift in parallel with growing generations and social movements such as feminism (Abdallah et al., 2019; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Kotler et al., 2017; Robson & Pitt, 2018; Stewart et al., 2017). Zilah, a 22-year-old social media marketer living in the Netherlands, who actually expressed to “like the brand”, when she was extending on her feelings of the VS brand, said that:

I think it's good that they ended the show, uh, even though they might not have really wanted to. Um, but for this time, like *in this period of time and this society* and in the 21st century, I think [...] it was making girls more insecure and kind of giving them *the wrong idea of what women should be like*, or women, or sexuality.

This quote really shows that Zilah perceives VS’ female representation in the show to be uncontemporary for this particular day and age as it is giving a “wrong idea of what women should be like” in society. This wrong idea of women alludes to an erroneous conceptualization of female beauty and femininity, in the eyes of the young female viewer, which VS has. The emphasis that the participants gave on VS’ incorrect conceptualization of beauty and femininity nowadays, suggests that their conceptualization of female beauty as being tall and skinny, and femininity as being girly and innocent, may have been aligned with viewers’ morals at some point in time, but not anymore. On that note, importance is brought to the age of the participants which were all young (20- to 27-years-old), and brings interest to older women, as they may have morals aligned with older female beauty trends (see Stewart et al., 2017, on the ideological differences between generational populations), and may thereby think differently about the female representation in the VS lingerie fashion show.

Even though the large majority of the interviewees conceived the female representation in the VS lingerie fashion show as a reproduction of the brand’s stereotypical conceptualization of beauty and femininity, remarkably, two out of the 14 participants mentioned that the stereotypical representation in the VS lingerie fashion show is just a means

to an end to sell to its target consumers. Flavie (23, French), after watching the two VS fashion show clips, explained why she believed VS made a stereotypical female representation in its show. She considers the show to be “[...] about selling, it’s business. It’s not an NGO about representation”. This shows that Flavie did not interpret the female representation in the VS fashion show as being a reflection of the brand’s conceptualization of beauty and femininity, but rather that it is a method of advertising, which links to the third theme that was identified, and will be discussed. However, it also points out VS’ assumption that stereotypical forms of beauty and femininity are that which audiences enjoy and desire most in advertisements, which was not the case for these participants as was previously established.

All of the interviewees had a completely opposite perception of the conceptualization of beauty and femininity of the Savage X Fenty brand, as it was seen as being profoundly non-stereotypical. This is because the female representation in the SXF lingerie fashion show was perceived as being highly inclusive, and diverse. This is a take away from the interview with Selin (23-years-old, Belgian/Turkish, communications student in Flanders), for example, who said that in the SXF show “you see all the kinds of shapes they [the models] have”, and that the SXF show has “something for every type” of woman. The highly diverse representation of body sizes, lengths, skin colours, and abilities which deviated from what the interviewees perceived as stereotypical representations in the media, is what gave the interviewees the impression that SxF comprehends beauty as something dynamic and subjective which cannot be uniform or specific. Thaís, a 22-year-old Argentinian psychology student in the Netherlands, explained how she felt that the diverse female body representation in the SXF fashion show reflected the brand’s diverse conceptualization of beauty. She stated how she felt that that is also the goal of SXF, “to make everybody be able to feel sexy no matter how they look. And I think they achieved that quite well by just having models that are every shape, colour and stuff”.

In addition, the represented femininity in the female representation of the SXF show was perceived as non-stereotypical as the interviewees mentioned that they did not see any forced uniformity in the behaviour or attitudes of the women. This can be exemplified with Elli (20, Croatian) who mentioned that the represented sexuality and femininity “for each and every one of those girls is different” in the SXF show. The interviewees thereby described the women’s femininity and sexuality in terms of the power (which Lena says), confidence (which Simay says), and enjoyment they were emanating (which Flavie says), which

conforms to how the interviewees defined femininity in the first place. These concepts contradict the stereotypical behaviours and attitudes that are typically associated with femininity, such as gentility and kindness, as previously mentioned (see Attwood, 2015, Connell, 1987, and Wood, 2016). The brand's perceived non-stereotypical conceptualization of beauty and femininity was by many interviewees perceived as feministic, as it embraces the different and unique female physicalities and personalities to be beautiful and feminine. Julia, a 23-year-old Spanish mechanical engineering student living in Flanders, explained why she believed the SXF brand to be "pretty feministic" based on its female representation, "cause you see [...] all these women who are dancers and slaying [...] and *not something sweet*. It just felt fierce of them." Here, Julia expresses how the female representation deviates from stereotypes as stereotypical femininity would encompass women to be 'sweet' (see also Connell, 1987, and Martin, 2016), while here the representation is actually "fierce".

Overall, the overarching theme shows that the young female adults in this study perceive the female representation in the mediated lingerie fashion shows as a reflection of the brands' conceptualization of beauty and femininity. Victoria's Secret's conceptualization of beauty and femininity was regarded as being stereotypical due to its stereotypically ideal and uniform representations of the female body, femininity and sexuality. This was most often perceived as an uncontemporary conceptualization of beauty and femininity, as its morals misaligned with the interviewees'. Savage X Fenty was perceived as holding non-stereotypical, feministic views on female beauty and femininity. This is because the female representation was perceived as aiming to include marginalized types of beauty and femininities, and empowering all women.

#### **4.2 Realistic and unrealistic standards set for women in society**

The second theme describes the standards and expectations for women's appearances, femininities, and sexualities in society that the young female interviewees perceived the female representation in the lingerie fashion shows to be setting. It is because the interviewees described the female representations as messages for audiences and society that they felt that the representations were aiming to establish their own conceptualized standards for women, which was discussed in the previous theme, onto others. This can be clearly understood from Simay (21, Russian/Turkish) who stated, about the VS show: "the show is nice, the message is not nice". With her then explaining that the uniformly ideal female representation in the show "creates this kind of thought [...] that all women [...] should look like that because



that's how you become beautiful”, which she explains is an unrealistic standard and expectation set onto women since “it's not real. [...] That's not how society is.” On that note, the standards set by the two distinct fashion shows were polar opposites as the female representation in the VS fashion show was seen as imposing high and unrealistic standards onto women in society. Meanwhile, the female representation in the SXF fashion show was perceived as setting realistic and representative standards.

It was the overall idealistic uniformity in the physical appearance and the behaviour in VS' female representation which made the interviewees feel as though the female representation was moulding the allowed or socially accepted appearance and behaviour of women in society down to a specific and unrealistic standard. For example, Zilah (22, Dutch) mentioned that the female representation in the VS show suggested that all women “should have a perfect body and look like that”, with ‘that’ being “very skinny” and “blonde with perfect long hair”, which is a specific standard that is very hard to reach for most women, and therefore “was making girls more insecure”, as she explains. This resonates with the ‘moulding’ argument in the mirror versus mould debate in the media (see Eisend, 2010; Grau, & Zotos, 2016; Zotos, & Tschla, 2014).

At least half of the interviewees actually expressed to disagree with the standard that VS' female representation was setting onto women because of the harmful effects it has on either themselves, other young adult women, or teenage girls. Clara (25, German) showed a clear disagreement with the narrow standard that VS was setting by “just showing one body type, and a body type that is not inclusive” as “it's not real that all women look like that”. She expressed: “I can train, I can lose weight and stuff, but *I could never look like that* [pause] and that's fine. *Now I know that. But it's dangerous* I guess for a lot of people.”, hereby showing how she perceives the unrealistic standard to be potentially harmful for young women through excessive body-surveillance, as she herself experienced this.

Similarly, Giselle (22, Belgian/South-African) expressed the negative effect that the female representation in the VS fashion show had on her when she was a teenager, “it would have made me feel inadequate and I would have started comparing myself to them”. Interestingly however, Giselle mentioned the way in which she now copes with the previous vulnerability of feeling inadequate: “*now* [...] *I feel secure enough* in my own skin that it doesn't bother me that I don't look like that”. This change in vulnerability was mentioned by numerous interviewees, such as Thaís who mentioned “*now* I don't feel bad looking at this” after expressing: “when I was young [...] I would see like snippets of it [the VS show] and

feel bad about myself”. This finding reveals the coping mechanism that these young women developed as they got older in order to be able to shield themselves from the abundant female representations that have negative effects on them. While Chrisler et al. (2013), and Pennell and Behm-Morawitz (2015) addressed the negative consequences on women’s mental and physical well-being due to unrealistically high expectations set from idealistic female representations, Chrisler et al. (2013), and Pennell and Behm-Morawitz (2015) did not address or identify the ways in which young women come to cope with these omnipresent images in their research.

The development of these coping mechanisms, such as self-assurance, in the conscious fight against widespread negative female representations in the media, creates an alarming conception that media policies may not be doing enough to protect, in this case, women, particularly young teenaged women, from media representations that have deeply obtrusive and impactful effects on them. This is concerning as idealistic female representations in the media continue to socially pressure them to take part in body surveillance, as well as confining their impressions on the adequate female behaviour that they feel is expected of them.

Furthermore, a major pattern identified within this theme was that the interviewees described the unrealistic beauty and femininity standards elicited from the female representation in the VS show to be standards that are catered to the eye of an audience, particularly a male audience. This suggests that the women in the show were acting and looking a particular way, namely stereotypically, in order to “please an audience”, as Thaís (22, Argentinian) said when she was explaining why she believes the women to be acting in a “way” which does not appeal to them, but rather “appeals to everybody else”. The interviewees negatively perceived the standards that are set onto women in order to please an outsider’s gaze as it objectifies women and only serves to increase their “to-be-looked-at-ness” (see Mulvey, 1999, p. 346). This can be exemplified from Céline (21, Belgian/Thai), who states that the models are “just portrayed as beautiful hot things to look at”, as they are not active in their behaviour or attitudes: “I don’t really see a personality coming through when they walk on the catwalk”.

Many interviewees associated VS’ unrealistically perfect female objectification to men’s typical expectations of women in society, which is why they viewed men as a foundational part of the audience of the VS fashion show. Julia (23, Spanish) had said “my brothers watched the show, which I find really weird. I feel like *more men watch the show*

*than women do.*” The fact that the female participants felt as though men were addressed as viewers of a show that was dedicated to women’s lingerie signifies a likeliness that the female representation abided by the male gaze (see Mulvey, 1999), which is why men were interested in watching the VS show. Relevance is brought to the beginning of the interviews where few of the interviewees, such as Natalia, who is a 21-year-old Belgian and Brazilian physiotherapy student in Flanders, explained that lingerie is still more commonly seen as “something that you will wear so that guys will find you more attractive” (also see Wood, 2016, and Karimova et al., 2017), whilst she actually sees lingerie as “something you wear for yourself”. This finding suggests that VS’ mainstream conception of the use of lingerie is translated into its female representation and was perceived as a message on how women should behave, look, and use lingerie. Karen (23, Lebanese) had clearly made this interpretation as she explained that the female representation in the VS show was suggesting that lingerie is “to appeal to men” and “look and dress the way men want you to”. Interestingly, in Karimova et al.’s (2017) study, Kazakhstani women expressed to wear lingerie at the request of their male partners, thus highlighting the importance of ethnicity and culture, since the participants of this study were all women living in Western countries (Netherlands or Flanders, Belgium), when it comes to the meaning given to lingerie, which may then determine the meaning given to female representation in lingerie fashion shows.

The way in which almost all of the participants interpreted the female representation in the VS lingerie fashion show as pleasing an audience, or the male gaze in particular, rather than focusing on the pleasure and empowerment of the women, shows the critical feminist perspective (see Daley, 2010) that the interviewees took on the female representation in the show. This is because they were vigilant of the gendered power structures that the female representation evoked, with women being distressed for their looks at the expense of the power of a male audience’s gazing, like Lena (25, German) explained: “men are addressed because they still have the powerful position”. Even the two young women (Zilah and Thaís) who did not describe themselves as feminists, “I’m not a feminist myself” (Thaís), or refused to label themselves as feminists, “I wouldn’t label myself like a feminist” (Zilah), showed feminist ideals when criticising the female representation in the VS lingerie fashion show. Zilah (22, Dutch) namely said “they make it seem like you can only be female if you walk in lingerie like that”, ‘with ‘that’ being “with a skinny body, and perfect hair”, showing how she criticises the marginalizing standard which the female representation is exerting onto women in society.

This alludes to the research by Zucker and Bay-Cheng (2010) which focused on the contradiction between women who support feminist ideals, but do not desire to identify themselves as feminists. Thaís, who did not identify as a feminist seemed to disregard the feminist label as she perceived it to have a negative connotation, “I've seen feminists take it to a violent extreme and *I don't want to be associated with them*”, thereby resonating with the research by Lind and Salo (2002) which quantitatively illustrated the negative stigma that is given to feminism in the media. Research by Burn et al. (2000) showed that positive social and political impacts in society by virtue of the feminist movement will increasingly take place if the movement grows in popularity and importance. On this basis, the negative stigma around feminism should be combatted so that a unified uncontested movement can grow which gives a voice to all women and men, who hold the same beliefs of gender equality. This will give weight to current issues, such as harmful media representations, and appeal for change.

Nonetheless, the female representation in the Savage X Fenty lingerie fashion show was seen as setting realistic standards and expectations for women in the eyes of the interviewees. This is because they expressed that the female diversity that is present in the show is an accurate reflection of the diversity in women that exists in society. Selin (23, Belgian/Turkish), who mentioned that the representation included “every type” of woman, said “that's just how our society is, we have all types of women”, which is interpreted as her implying that the female representation reflects the realistically diverse types of women that exist in society. The diversity was seen as a positive message that, for example, everyone can indulge in lingerie, just as Clara (25, German) stated “it [the diverse representation] says there's not just lingerie for the pretty ones, thin ones, that it's just for everyone”, which is how a realistic standard for women who want to wear lingerie is set, and all women can look or act however they want. This can clearly be understood from the interview with Alice, a 27-year-old Belgian and Thai restaurant manager in Flanders. Alice, when asked to describe how she felt after having watched the VS fashion show clips answered “like I'm fat”, whilst after watching the SXF fashion clips, she heartily stated:

I don't feel fat. I feel very good about myself. I feel very, mm. Like, you can even see I'm just smiling the whole time. [...] It makes me feel good about myself and it shows me that everyone just should feel good about themselves. [...] It's very empowering.

The manner in which Alice changes her perspective on herself from “I'm fat” after watching the VS show, to “I feel very good about myself” after watching the SXF show illustrates how

SXF's diverse female representation serves as a solution to the negative self-perception that Alice experienced as a result of the unrealistically high standards that the VS female representation set.

Interestingly, this finding became a notable pattern amongst many of the interviewees who personally emotionally and mentally benefitted from the realistic standards that they perceived were set by the diverse female representation, which was then coded as the female representation bringing about an 'empowering' feeling. Céline (21, Belgian/Thai) expressed to actually "feel good", "really hyped, and "really empowered" after watching the show due to its diverse representation, which she enthusiastically reacted to: "The representation was [claps] amazing. It was [kissing noise] Oh, it was so good. [laughs]". The relatability of the female representation, "you're bound to see someone that you can relate to", is what Céline expressed to have made her enjoy the show and feel empowered from. This illustrates how she emotionally benefited from watching the SXF show and observing its female representation. Simay (21, Turkish/Russian) for example also mentioned, when talking about the diverse female representation: "[the show] kind of gives me like a boost of confidence", and boldly stated that she feels "empowered" from watching the fashion show clips.

Whilst Chrisler et al. (2013), Pennel and Behm-Morawitz (2015), and the findings from VS' female representation, as discussed above, show how idealized female representation can have negative effects on women's sense of self-worth and confidence, the study of these participants' perception of SXF's female representation shows how diverse and more realistic female representations can make women feel less pressured to act or look a particular way and gives them a sense of empowerment. An increase in self-confidence in women, can have many positive impacts on society (see Rudman, 1998). These findings even assist the feminist movement which strives for equality in society, as they reveal how the women who participated in this research came to feel empowered from a media representation. While in the past, media representations had made them feel worse about themselves, to the extent that they developed ways to deal with the pressurizing female standards it evoked.

### **4.3 Selling beauty or feminism to the viewers**

The third overarching theme describes how the young female participants gave meaning to the marketing purposes of the female representation in the lingerie fashion shows. In the female representation of the Victoria's Secret fashion show the participants overtly

perceived the women in the show, and their particular representation, to be marketing the brand and its products, by selling the viewer what the brand believes is their desire, namely beauty (see Doyle, 2009, who explains that successful brands, in advertisements, associate their products with the aspirations and desires of their target audience). This can be exemplified through Julia (23, Spanish) as she discusses her feelings about the VS brand after having watched the fashion show:

*I know what they're trying to sell you. You know, like “these girls are amazing wearing this, you wear this and you're going to be amazing and feminine and pretty” and all that. I don't know for me it just doesn't really do it.*

Julia expressed how she recognised the efforts of the female representation in the VS show to convince her of the idea that she would look good and feel more desirably feminine if she were to wear VS lingerie. However, she did not appreciate this marketing message since she perceived the idealized female representation as moulding the standards of beauty and femininity (see also Abdallah et al., 2019, and Chrisler et al., 2013), as mentioned in the previous theme, which ultimately discouraged her as a buyer. The discouragement to support or buy from the VS brand after having watched the fashion shows, due to frustrations with its exclusive female representation, became a large trend amongst the interviewees. Elli (20, Croatian) had also clearly expressed that “I cannot stand by them [VS]” due to the fact that VS’ female representation creates an illusionary idea, “wishful thinking”, “that if you wear their product, that you will feel like one of those girls and maybe even look like one of those girls, but you won't.” The concept of the brand misleading women, is what turned Elli off as a supporter and customer of the brand.

This finding challenges Doyle’s (2009) marketing strategy of brands associating the content of their marketing campaigns with the desire of their audiences, since there was indeed a notable trend of participants expressing to wear lingerie for the purpose of looking good. Like Giselle (22, Belgian/South-African) who says, “it’s something that makes you look and feel good.” This suggests, according to Doyle (2009), that VS’ marketing approach, to make the brand wanted by representing women that adhere to the targeted audience’s desire to look good, was not inaccurate. However, the interviewees negatively perceived the female beauty that was represented in the lingerie fashion show as it was seen as exclusively dictating who is attractive as a woman. Ultimately, even though interviewees expressed a desire to look attractive whilst wearing lingerie, and that they recognised the women represented in the VS

fashion show to be highly attractive, it did not make them believe that by buying VS lingerie they would become more attractive too. Hereby challenging Doyle (2009), and suggesting that marketing approaches in lingerie fashion shows are more complex than in other advertising forms due to the multiple layers of meaning and interpretation that these participants proved to take part in, by caring not just about what is represented but also about how, and what the message of the representation is.

The way in which the larger part of the participants seemed to align their consumption habits, as Karen (23, Lebanese) expresses “I would never purchase from them”, with their morals, as she continues “I would never feed into what they promote” which she perceives to be, for example, “that you have to wear something [...] that doesn't really necessarily look the way you want it to look, just so you could appeal to an audience”, shows the ‘feminist consumerism’ (see Johnston & Taylor, 2008) which the interviewees take part in when it comes to lingerie. This resonates with Clark (2014) who showed the increasing trend of women aligning their feminist morals with their expenditures, which is what these interviewed young women were perceived to be doing. The interviewees expressed a desire and need for more diverse female representation in media representations, like Natalia (22, Belgian/Brazilian) who said that “it's important to have different body types and different ethnicities on ads and on social media in general”, which thus directed their motivations against supporting the VS brand as it did not include such diversity, as Selin (23, Belgian/Turkish) showed: “they more communicate you one type of woman”.

Differently, the Savage X Fenty fashion show was by the large majority of the interviewees not perceived as attempting to lure in consumers through its female representation. Rather, the SXF female representation was perceived as feministic and holding a feministic message of equality and empowerment. Natalia (22, Belgian/Brazilian) had said, about the SXF show: “I think *it's feministic*. There's different body types, they look less stiff. More comfortable, I have more *the message* that you can just be you and do what you think and look good as well.” As a result of this feministic message the interviewees expressed an interest in supporting the brand, with the majority of the interviewees also expressing an interest to purchase from the brand. Just as Alice (27, Belgian/Thai) stated: “I definitely, consider buying something. Yeah.” This shows the covert way in which SXF's female representation motivated the participants to buy or support the brands, due to its feministic representation.

An interesting finding in this research was therefore that the trend of feminist consumerism that was found in the participants' attitudes towards the female representation in the VS show, continues in the findings from the meaning that was given to the female representation in the SXF show. Apart from one respondent, the other interviewees (N=13) seemed to be encouraged to buy from or support the SXF lingerie brand as the female representation in the SXF show was perceived to be aligning with the interviewees' morals. This is exactly what Simay (21, Russian/Turkish) describes as she says: "I just want to go buy every collection they own because I know that I will have the confidence [smiles and chuckles], and I support what they stand for." With "women can be whatever they want" in terms of femininity, physicality, and sexuality, being what she stands for. This illustrates how Simay aligns her feminist beliefs with her consumption habits, as she wants to buy lingerie from SXF which is a brand that reflected feminist beliefs in its female representation in the lingerie fashion show. SXF's female representation was identified as highly engaging as the interviewees expressed that they "want to join in" (which Clara said) on the SXF show, to "wanna watch more" (which Flavie said) of the show, and support the brand by "following them [on social media]" (which Zilah said). This shows how the interviewees once again aligned their own feministic morals with their consumption behaviour (see 'feminist consumerism' by Johnston & Taylor, 2008).

Remarkably, many of the interviewees did not seem to be able to understand why they felt a significantly larger sense of engagement with the SXF show than from the VS show. This can be seen in the response from Céline (21, Belgian/Thai) to the question of whether the SXF fashion show clips make her want to buy its lingerie: "It honestly does. And I don't know why it's more like, it does more than the Victoria's Secret one, but like I, I want to buy anything from the brand [chuckles]." Céline, in the beginning of the interview, expressed that she considers herself an active feminist, and after watching the VS fashion show clips she expressed that she was "not necessarily" interested in buying lingerie, whilst she had previously disapproved of the VS fashion show in which "all the different kinds of body types are under-represented" and "there could be more women of colour as well". This hints towards the ways in which the young female participant regarded the female representation in the lingerie fashion shows from a feminist consumer standpoint, where an incentive to buy lingerie from the brands grew if the brands aligned their female representation with feministic ideals (see Johnston & Taylor, 2009, and Ouellette, 2019). The significance that feminism held in shaping the consumer behaviour of the young participating women is brought to light,



and gives increasing importance to the concept of feminist consumerism in the lingerie industry (see Johnston & Taylor, 2009, and Ouellette, 2019).

A widespread association was made by the interviewees between feminism and the female representation in the SXF fashion show, as can be exemplified from the following quote from Clara (25, German) about SXF's female representation: "I think it is also feministic in the way that they dance, and it's like really good dancers. So it is about something that they do and not about what they look like. And, that's good." This suggests that the SXF fashion show is a form of femvertising. Femvertising is a form of advertising that capitalizes on feminist ideals of equality and individual empowerment, as Drake (2017) discussed. The SXF fashion show, as a form of femvertising, was more perceived as a form of media content that contributed and stood by the feminist movement, rather than a form of advertising. Meaning, the SXF lingerie fashion show, as a form of femvertising, concealed the capitalist intentions of the marketed content as it lay a focus on the societal message it communicated through its female representation (Johnston & Taylor, 2009; Ouellette, 2019). The interviewees interpreted the message of the SXF female representation as aiming to break the stereotypical norms in the media. This can be understood from Zilah (22, Dutch) who perceived the women in the SXF show to be dancing in non-stereotypical, "masculine" ways, and then explained that this portrayal, to her, meant that the women were "breaking out from that whole image" of stereotypical femininity.

Only one interviewee made the reflection that SXF, just like other brands that utilize femvertising as a marketing strategy, cannot be feministic as it ultimately exploits feminism in order to attract buyers (see Martin, 2016). Thaís (21, Argentinian) expressed the way in which brands, such as SXF simply shape their female representation in their marketing content to accord it with what consumers want to see and be attracted to as buyers. She thereby questioned the authenticity of the brand's feministic female representations, after being asked whether SXF is a feministic brand:

I mean, I guess that it could take ideas from the feminist movement then maybe help the movement a bit. But I still think it's the brand and it's, I don't think brands are, I don't know, like should be considered feminist or not. I don't know. [...] Um, *I still think they do a lot of things just to sell.*

To conclude, the participants gave significant meaning to the message that they interpreted the female representation of the lingerie fashion shows to be sending. The female representation of the VS fashion show was significantly seen as attempting to sell the viewers their desire for attractiveness through the representation of traditionally ideal women, in terms of their looks and femininity. However, this was negatively and opposingly perceived as it demotivated the interviewees from wanting to buy VS lingerie. The female representation of the SXF fashion show was seen as promoting feminist ideals, which is also what the interviewees expressed encouraged them to support the brand.

#### **4.4 Festive or controlling ambiance of the female representation**

The final theme that is relevant to the ways in which the participants gave meaning to the female representation in the lingerie fashion shows is that they gave significant meaning to the perceived ambiance that the female representation was radiating. The ambiance that the interviewees sensed in both of the lingerie fashion shows was overall coded as ‘festive’. This ambiance perceived from the female representation encompassed how happy and confident the interviewees perceived the women in the show to be in terms of their sexuality, femininity and body image, as well as how much fun they were seemingly having. This can be taken away from the following quote by Giselle (22, Belgian/South-African) in which she is describing the mood of the models in the VS show: “just super *confident*, *happy*, they looked like they were having a ton of *fun*.” The italicized words illustrate the festive mood of the models. Also Flavie (23, French) clearly described the festive ambiance of the SXF show which is reflected through the female representation: “The mood of the show is killing it. It's about dancing and *having fun*. [...] it's just a bunch of girls *having fun* on stage.”

In addition, it was interesting to see a pattern in the way in which the interviewees demonstrated to be empathetic towards the women represented in the show. Meaning, the mood and the emotions that the interviewees observed affected their own mood. Hereby, the festive ambiance which was observed from the active confidence and happiness of the women in the shows made the majority of the interviewees take pleasure from the representation and the show as a whole. Selin (23, Belgian/Turkish) expressed how she felt happy for the models in the VS fashion show clips as the models themselves seemed happy to be taking part in the show after having worked hard to get there, since the VS fashion show is a selective and competitive show to be casted for, “You see how happy they are. You see that they worked for this the whole year and they just waited for this moment. So I get very happy and get good

feelings when I see it.” This empathy of the interviewees reflects a sense of group empowerment, where the happiness and pride of the women in the show, positively effects and empowers the viewer. Céline (21, Belgian/Thai) also described such an experience while watching the SXF fashion show clips. To her seeing women of different sizes, ethnicities, and femininities that are normally marginalized in the media, such as bigger sized women and disabled women, being confident and fiercely taking part in the SXF fashion show made her happy and proud:

I was like cheering for the models. [...] I felt really happy, like happy for them because it feels like they're living their best life. [...] I feel really happy for them, mostly because you know, a lot of, uh, women in the show would not have been able to do this in like, for example, the Victoria's Secret fashion show. So I think it's really nice that like they're getting out there, like there are people getting to know them.

The way that the young female participants empathized with the accomplishments of the represented women shows traces of feminism in the way they gave meaning to female representation in lingerie fashion shows, since feminism as a movement aims to give a voice to those who feel marginalized in society (see Burn et al., and Munro, 2013). This gives increasing relevance to the feminist movement once again as it appears to shape the lens through which the young adult women of this research view female representation in branded lingerie fashion shows.

Another ambiance was thematized amongst the participants' responses to VS' female representation, which was that it was 'controlling'. Many interviewees namely expressed that the female representation in the VS fashion show lacked autonomy and freedom which is why the mood was strict and controlling. From the interview with Lena (25, German), for example, it can be illustrated how the VS show was strict on its female representation, as she expresses that she “doesn't have the impression that the women have their own choices”, which is also why she does not perceive the female representation in the VS show to be feministic. It is due to the fact that the female representation was so ideal, stereotypical and uniform that the participants found the representation to be forced, ingenuine, and fake, as can be exemplified by Elli (20, Croatian) who says that the mood that is replicated “is very *fake*. It's very *staged*. [...] it felt like very *forced*” as all the models “look the same, there's nothing that makes them stand out”.

Often the limited perceived agency of the models was described as coming from the organizers of the VS fashion show and the brand itself, as opposed to the women themselves choosing to act in constrained and uniform ways. Karen (23 Lebanese) expressed such a viewpoint when she discussed the mood of the show: “It’s very *strict*. It’s very you have to do this, you have to do that. Like it’s *not free*. You can feel that these models *were asked* to walk this particular way.” A controlling ambiance was also felt as the interviewees saw the women as being pressured to look as perfect as they could in order to make the show look as fantastical as possible, even if that meant mentally and physically suffering as a repercussion. Natalia (21, Belgian and Brazilian) expressed how she felt a “fake vibe” from the show as a consequence of the outside pressure, and lack of autonomy that the models had in their own representation, “To me it has a fake vibe to it [...] As if they [VS] say ‘okay you have to be happy now for five minutes and then you can stop starving yourself and eat something’” Here, Natalia points out that the organisers of the fashion show, from her perspective, were instructing the models to, through unhealthy manners, look as perfect as they could. As a result of the perceivably controlling environment of the fashion show, Natalia noted that some of the women looked very uncomfortable, “for example Bella Hadid, she is not comfortable”. She explained it to be due to the fact that the women did not seem comfortable in the clothes or that they were forced to act “super happy”.

Interviewees, just like Natalia, did not enjoy the restrained extent of self-expression that the women in the fashion shows were allowed, but did significantly enjoy the female representation when the women were perceived as being themselves and being happy. This unveils that the young adult women in this research gave importance, not only to who is represented in the female representation of lingerie fashion shows, such as diverse models which was deliberated in the previous themes, but also how women are represented. Namely, as discussed, the participants desired active female representation which gives women in fashion shows the agency to behave or look however they want to (see also Martin, 2016). Active female representation opposes the traditional passive female representation that was abundantly present in lingerie advertising, as Ouellette (2019) described. Passivity in women is a characteristic female trait in patriarchal societies, where women are dependent on men and thereby do not need as much autonomy (Gill, 2009; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Mulvey, 1999; Zotos & Tsihla, 2014). Few interviewees themselves also described how women are stereotypically represented in the media in passive and objectified ways. Alice (27,

Belgian/Thai), for example, described how women in the media, opposed to men who are depicted as being strong, typically just have to “shut up and be pretty.”

The finding that the interviewees of this study gave significant meaning to the perceived autonomy and active representation that the women in the shows had, shows that the interviewees took a vigilant, critical feminist perspective on the female representation in the fashion shows (see Clark, 2014, Daley, 2010, & Jane, 2017). This is because the interviewees critically observed the representation according to their feminist ideals which embrace gender equality, and the extent to which the representation accorded with these ideals (Daley, 2010; Martin, 2016). This finding reveals how, for the participants of this research, the critical feminist perspective is deeply rooted in the way they give meaning to female representations in lingerie fashion shows. It continues to show the negative feelings that are evoked when female representations accord with patriarchal ideologies, such as the objectification of women or the passive representation of women.

Overall, this theme shows the festive or controlling way that the ambiance of the women represented in the Victoria’s Secret and Savage X Fenty lingerie fashion shows was perceived. A festive ambiance was noted by all of the interviewees in the SXF show, and by some in the VS show, as they regarded the representation as party-like, with them feeling happy for the women in the show who were perceivably having fun themselves. A controlling ambiance in the VS female representation was mentioned by few of the interviewees as they concerned themselves with the extent of autonomy that the women in the show had which they gave importance to from a vigilant, critical feminist standpoint.

## **5 Conclusion**

### **5.1 Summary and discussion of findings**

The lingerie industry has witnessed a rapid shift in female representation in lingerie advertising, and most remarkably in lingerie fashion shows. This research therefore investigated “*how young adult women give meaning to the female representation in the mediated lingerie fashion shows of Victoria’s Secret (VS) and Savage X Fenty (SXF)*”. Through a qualitative thematic analysis of 14 semi-structured in-depth interviews held with young adult women aged 20 to 27, living in the Netherlands or Flanders, this research aimed to explore and compare the ways that the participants perceived and interpreted the female representation in the VS and SXF lingerie fashion shows. The thematic analysis of the 14 interviews revealed four broad themes that describe the different ways in which the participants of this research gave meaning to the female representation in the VS and SXF fashion shows.

Firstly, the participants emphasized how they perceived the brands to conceptualize beauty and femininity, based on the female representation in their fashion show. For Victoria’s Secret this conceptualization was thematized as stereotypical as the female representation conformed to what the participants and theory described as stereotypical female representations in the media (Grau, & Zotos, 2016; Matich et al., 2019; Munro, 2013). This conceptualization was also perceived as uncontemporary and outdated by the participants because of the way in which it reflected stereotypes that have existed for a long time. So long in fact that Connell’s (1987) description of the ‘emphasized’, stereotypical femininity in society was relevant to the participants’ description of VS’ represented femininity. Savage X Fenty’s brand, on the contrast, was perceived as conceptualizing beauty and femininity in non-stereotypical, contemporary ways as it showed a diversity of women’s bodies, femininities, and assumable sexualities, which is also why it was perceived as being feministic. As a result of the aligned conceptualizations of female beauty and femininity, the participants could thoroughly enjoy watching the lingerie fashion show.

Furthermore, the second theme identified was that the female representation set particular standards for women in society. According to the participants, VS set unrealistic standards due to its exclusive and unattainable female representation, which the participants negatively perceived. Meanwhile, SXF perceivably set realistic standards due to its accurate reflection of women in society in its female representation, which was positively regarded.

This finding suggests that the participants desired lingerie fashion shows to ‘mirror’ female populations in society that they can relate to, and thereby gives support for the ‘mirror’ argument in the mirror versus mould debate on representation in advertising media (Eisend, 2010; Grau, & Zotos, 2016; Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack, & Zahid, 2018; Zotos, & Tsihla, 2014). In addition, it was found that whilst idealistic female representations, such as in the VS show which set unattainably high standards, can have negative mental effects on women as it deteriorates their confidence and sense of self-worth (as Chrisler et al., 2013, and Pennel & Behm-Morawitz, 2015 also showed), diverse and relatable female representations, such as in the SXF show, can increase women’s confidence and sense of self-worth by empowering them.

Then, the third theme described the marketing message that the participants picked up from the female representation. VS’ female representation was described as attempting to sell the viewer their desire for beauty, which according to Doyle (2009) is an accurate approach to branding, however the participants saw this message as being unaligned with their morals which is why they felt unmotivated to support or buy from the brand. SXF’s female representation was not seen as having marketing intentions, but rather feministic intentions which did engage the participants as consumers of the brand, which is why it can be considered a covert form of femvertising (see Drake, 2017). Feminist consumption (as coined by Johnston & Taylor, 2008) is applicable to what the interviewees of this study expressed, as they aligned their consumption habits with the extent to which the female representations in the lingerie fashion shows reflected the feminist ideals which they held (Clark, 2014). While Ouellette (2019) had previously described feministic consumption strategies as an under-researched concept, this study enlightened upon it by showing how femvertising, as a feministic consumption strategy, stimulates feminist consumerism.

Finally, the fourth theme addressed the ambiance of the female representation which participants empathetically emphasized. As a result, a festive ambiance was sensed from both of the shows, as the women in the shows were seen as having fun. However, in the VS show participants also noted a controlling ambiance as they perceived the women to be pressured and forced to act the way they did. This finding shows the ways in which these young participants emotionally empathized with the represented women, and how vigilant they were when observing the female representation in the fashion shows, as they closely and critically attended to the autonomy of the women and their apparent treatment. The participants’ vigilant concern and outspokenness about the represented women thereby associates with the

feminist vigilantism which occurs online as a part of the fourth wave of feminism (Attwood, 2015; Grau, & Zotos, 2016; Munro, 2013; Jane, 2017).

To answer the research question, “*How do young adult women give meaning to the female representation in the mediated lingerie fashion shows of Victoria’s Secret and Savage X Fenty?*”, the young adult women that participated in this research revealed the critical feminist and contemporary perspective that they took when discussing the female representation of both the Victoria’s Secret and the Savage X Fenty lingerie fashion shows (Daley, 2010; Neuendorf et al., 2010; Sulé, 2014). They gave considerable importance to the notions of equality, diversity and individual empowerment that were observable in the representation of the women.

In the female representation of the VS fashion show, the young women addressed and emphasized the marginalization and pressure that went into the composition of the female representation and what this evokes onto other women in society. VS’ female representation was seen as uncontemporary and misaligned with rising conceptualizations on beauty, femininity, and sexuality which endorse diversity in society, and the emancipation of women from restrictive patriarchal norms (Eisend, 2010; Grau & Zotos, 2016; Zotos & Tschla, 2014). The participants also recognized patriarchal norms and structures of power, as theory illustrated (see Addis et al., 2010; Gill, 2009; Kumar 2017; Mulvey, 1999; Wood, 2016), that were translated into VS’ female representation, such as the compliance of the women to the demands of others and the gazing of (male) audiences, which considerably diminished their ability to enjoy the lingerie fashion show.

The female representation in the SXF fashion show deeply resonated with the young participating women as they felt engaged with the active contemporarily perceived representation. The diversity and empowerment sensed from the show corresponded with the participants’ critical feminist perspective which longed for non-stereotypical female representations that they could relate to and support (Abdallah et al., 2019; Robson & Pitt, 2018). SXF’s female representation calibrated with notions of femvertising which the participants were susceptible to as they expressed a great desire to purchase SXF lingerie, or further commit to the brand (Drake, 2017; Grau & Zotos, 2016).



## 5.2 Discussion of limitations & suggestions for future research

The limitations of this study which should be taken into consideration are that the findings are not generalizable due to their qualitative nature and the fact that the participant sample is not representative of a population (Brennen, 2017). The findings do, however, offer great insights into how the participating young women perceived the female representation, and can be cause for future quantitative research into the correlation between femvertising lingerie and the consumption habits of young adult women, for example.

The research design limited the scope of the research as only 20- to 27-year-old adult women, of higher education, living in the Netherlands and Flanders were interviewed. This means that, even though numerous women of diverse nationalities were interviewed, the research may not cover all of the perspectives and ways that women give meaning to female representation in lingerie fashion shows. Generational, cultural, and educational differences may exist in the ways women give meaning to female representation in lingerie fashion shows, which future research could look into. Moreover, men were not taken into account in this research, therefore future research into men's perceptions of female representations in the lingerie industry may offer valuable insights into how men support or oppose the changing female representation in the lingerie industry. This could unveil whether, or to what extent men take a critical feminist perspective to female representation in the media, which could in return shed light on their commitment to the feminist movement.

Furthermore, this study solely focused on the female representation in the popular mediated lingerie fashion shows of Savage X Fenty and Victoria's Secret, even though this already offers foundational research into the ways that audiences give meaning to lingerie fashion shows, with the rising popularity of mediated lingerie fashion shows as forms of advertising, as can be seen with Hunkemöller's<sup>12</sup> inaugurated use of mediated lingerie fashion shows for example, research should continue to address this phenomenon. The female representation in lingerie fashion shows can have harmful or offensive<sup>13</sup> consequences on individuals, as the findings of this research and past research (Chrisler et al., 2013; Pennel & Behm-Morawitz, 2015) have enlightened, therefore further research into the topic could help guide and shape media policies addressing televised/mediated lingerie fashion shows which would help avoid its negative or harmful impacts on audiences.

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<sup>12</sup> A lingerie brand that since 2019 has also been making annual mediated fashion shows.

<sup>13</sup> Through cultural appropriation or the hypersexualization of women, for example.

A significant take away from this study is that the participants expressed near-to no incentive to actively advocate their beliefs online, however the young female participants had strong incentives to align their consumption habits with their feminist ideals (Clark, 2014; Johnson & Taylor, 2008; Ouellette, 2019). This suggests that the feminist behaviour of the interviewees did not correspond with the actions of the fourth wave of feminism (Matich et al., 2019; Munro, 2013; Pruchniewska, 2019), but may touch upon a new, contemporary wave of feminist action that relies on feministic consumer behaviour. Future research should thereby continue to look into the phenomenon of feminist consumerism, as there is a potential to investigate the extent to which audiences feel empowered through their consumption choices, and how much of a feministic impact this point of action can contribute to the movement and society.

In conclusion, this thesis addressed the changing female representation in the lingerie industry by exploring and comparing how young female audiences perceive and give meaning to the female representation in the Victoria's Secret and Savage X Fenty lingerie fashion shows. The findings contribute towards an understanding of the importance that feminist ideals hold in the perspective and consumer culture of young women who search for notions of equality and empowerment in the media, which is what directed the participants to feel more engaged and connected to the female representation of the Savage X Fenty fashion show than the Victoria's Secret show. This research thereby reveals that, though Victoria's Secret may once have endeared audiences (Abdellah et al., 2019; Robson & Pitt, 2018) with its elegant and colourful fashion shows in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, audiences seem to now have shifted in culture where they no longer idolize any one particular body, femininity, or sexuality, but rather desire a projection of diversity, relatability, and equality in female representation in lingerie fashion shows, and the media at large. The success that the Savage X Fenty fashion show had at embracing a diverse array of women in its female representation, and thereby resonating with the young women who were interviewed for this thesis, also shows a step in the right direction for media depictions that have the opportunity to empower and celebrate the diverse women that exist in society.

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## Appendix A- Overview of respondents and materials used during interview

Participant number	Name	Age	Nationality	Place of residence	Occupation	Highest level of achieved education
#1	Giselle	22	Belgian/ South African	Flanders	Student in law	Undergraduate at university
#2	Julia	23	Spanish	Flanders	Student in mechanical engineering	Postgraduate at university
#3	Natalia	21	Belgian/ Brazilian	Flanders	Student in physiotherapy	Undergraduate at university
#4	Céline	21	Belgian/ Thai	Flanders	Student in linguistics	Postgraduate at university
#5	Zilah	22	Dutch	Netherlands	Working in social media marketing	Postgraduate at university
#6	Clara	25	German	Netherlands	Student in clinical psychology	Postgraduate at university
#7	Lena	25	German	Netherlands	Student in business	Postgraduate at university
#8	Selin	23	Belgian/ Turkish	Flanders	Student in communication	Undergraduate at university of applied sciences
#9	Simay	21	Turkish/ Russian	Netherlands	Working in social media marketing	Postgraduate at university
#10	Thaís	22	Argentinian	Netherlands	Student in psychology	Undergraduate at university
#11	Karen	23	Lebanese	Netherlands	Student in communication sciences	Postgraduate at university
#12	Alice	27	Belgian/ Thai	Flanders	Working as a restaurant manager	Postgraduate at university of applied sciences
#13	Elli	20	Croatian	Netherlands	Student in fashion	Undergraduate at university of applied sciences

#14	Flavie	23	French	Netherlands	Working as a bar manager	Postgraduate at university
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Table 1.0 Overview of participant information

Video clips shown during the interview:

Clip #1- Victoria's Secret #1

The first clip that was shown was from minutes 15.00 till 16.46 of the Victoria's Secret 2018 fashion show. In this clip the pop-singer Halsey performs. Halsey is a Caucasian singer, who is also known for her advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community, as well as against sexual assault. The clip features various supermodels walking on a runway, wearing Victoria's Secret lingerie and designs. Most of the models also wear contemporary VS wings which is an integral feature of the fashion show and brand. One model that walks in this particular clip is Winnie Harlow. Winnie Harlow is a Canadian model of Jamaican descent, who is known for her advocacy on the skin condition vitiligo, which she herself has. Another well-known model that is present in this clip is American model Bella Hadid, who is also of Dutch and Palestinian descent. A year after her taking part in the show, Bella Hadid mentioned in an interview at the Vogue Fashion Festival in Paris that she did not feel powerful in the Victoria's Secret runway, but did in the Savage X Fenty show, as she was a part of the SXF show in 2019. At the end of the clip, Elsa Hosk, a Swedish model walks down the runway in the Fantasy Bra, which is a million-dollar bra that is crowned to one supermodel in the VS show every year.

The models all walk down the runway in a straight line at similar paces. When they reach the end of the runway they pose in various celebratory and thankful ways such as smiling, or blowing a kiss at the audience.

Clip #2- Victoria's Secret #2

The second clip that was shown was from minutes 24.45 till 25.50 of the Victoria's Secret 2018 fashion show. In this clip the pop-singer Shawn Mendes performs. Shawn Mendes is a Canadian singer, well known for his albums that evolve around the topics of love. In the clip, models of various ethnicities walk down the runway in VS lingerie and designs. They sometimes interact with the singer, and also pose gracefully once they reach the end of the runway. The model Gigi Hadid, the older sister of Bella Hadid, is seen walking the runway in Victoria's Secret garments.

The following is the link to the Victoria's Secret 2018 fashion show:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5fCM8U4S4I&t=1570s>

#### Clip #3- Savage X Fenty #1

The third clip that was shown was from minutes 17.26 till 19.00 of the 2019 Savage X Fenty fashion show. In this clip no specific artist performs, however an electronic remix of one of Rihanna's song is playing, whilst the models/dancers perform a choreographed dance routine. There are a dozen of dancers on stage, all wearing SXF lingerie and designs. Various models are given close ups as they pose fiercely by looking into the camera or looking at themselves. The models are of various ethnicities, and body sizes. At the end of the clip American model Gigi Hadid (same as in the VS fashion show) is shown walking on stage, and doing a posed routine.

#### Clip #4- Savage X Fenty #2

The fourth clip that was shown was from minutes 32.20 till 33.50 of the 2019 Savage X Fenty fashion show. In this clip no specific artist performs, though electronic-dance music plays as models/dancers perform a choreographed dance routine. There are a dozen dancers on stage, all wearing SXF lingerie and designs. American model Lauren Wasser is then shown walking on stage in SXF lingerie. Lauren Wasser is a Caucasian model with two prosthetic legs. Other models of various body sizes and ethnicities walk after her. Then, African American singer and dancer Normani performs a choreographed routine whilst wearing SXF lingerie. The clip ends as Normani is dancing on stage with a dozen of other dancers.



## Appendix B- Interview guide

### Introduction

- Welcome participants and give brief personal introduction
  - Hi, my name is Sophie and I am a Dutch and French Master's student at the Erasmus University of Rotterdam. Currently I'm writing my thesis and I deeply value your participation in my research which ultimately will help me graduate.
- Explain/mention key ethical aspects
  - I would just like to remind you of the fact that you are in no way obliged to be here and thus you have the right to stop or leave at any point. For research purposes this interview will be recorded, and as we were unable to meet in person I was wondering whether you would be willing to confirm your consent to participate in this interview, and for the registration of your first name, on the record once we start the actual interview? I would like to reassure you that this recording will not be shared with anyone. A transcript, however, will be made, though this will only be available to the supervisors of this research project. The recording will even be deleted once the research has been completed. Thus, what will be said during this session will be kept strictly confidential.
- Background of study and research topic
  - Now, about the interview and the research topic, I am very interested in what women think about lingerie fashion shows. And, I'm particularly fascinated by two very different shows, namely Victoria's Secret's and Fenty's. With this interview I would like to find out how you feel about these topics.
- Participant role and introduction
  - What you can expect from this session is that I will ask you some questions and at some point I will also show you some video clips. Simply answer the questions as honestly as possible, mentioning anything that comes to mind and that expresses your point of view. There are absolutely no right or wrong answers at all, so don't feel pressured to hold anything back or having to be quick in answering the questions. If you just say what you want to say or how you feel then that's perfect.
- Okay, so let's start.

- Turn on tape-recorder
- First of all, I'd like to ask if you agree to the terms of this interview?

Warm up questions: We will begin the interview with a few warm up questions.

- What is your name, where are you from, and where do you currently live?
- How would you describe your clothing style?
- Could you name a few brands that you like, or that you own a lot of clothes from?
- Do you follow many brands or influencers on social media? Which ones?
  - Probe: Have you seen many of their posts?
- How actively do you follow their posts?
  - Probe: Do you think about who or what they post? Do you carefully read their messages? Or do you just see the picture and then scroll past it?
- How would you describe the women that they present in their social media posts/ in their ads?

Themes (main questions)

- Female representation: Now, I would like to focus on female representation in the media, and in particular fashion related media, a bit more.
  1. how do you believe women are portrayed/represented in the media?
    - Probes: What are her qualities and what are her flaws? What is expected of women as shown by the media?
  2. Which of these representations would you describe as stereotypical?
    - Probe: Would you say that these stereotypes are accurate, positive, and/or negative?
  3. Have you noticed any changes in female representations in the fashion industry recently, or over the years? If so, which?
- Feminism: There seems to be a shift going on in the fashion industry which aims to expand and diversify current female representations. This is explained as being a result of women's activism, or feminist movements, which desire progressive changes.
  1. How do you feel about feminism?
    - Probe: How do you define feminism?
  2. Would you consider yourself a feminist? Why so?
    - Probes: How are you active as a feminist?
  3. How would you describe femininity?

- Probe: How would you describe a woman that is feminine? Is this what the media communicates?
4. How is female sexuality addressed in society?
    - Probe: Is female sexuality overtly talked about in society, or not? Do you feel that feminism needs to address the way that female sexuality is viewed in society?
- Lingerie: I would like to address the topic of female sexuality in the lingerie industry a little.
    1. What is lingerie to you?
      - Probe: What do you feel lingerie is for? Is this what the media communicates?
  - Victoria's Secret: One major brand in the lingerie industry is Victoria's Secret.
    1. How would you describe the company?
      - Probe: Have you bought products from VS before? Have you seen any of their previous fashion shows?

I would now like to show you 2 clips from the 2018 VS fashion show, and then I will ask you some questions.

Clip #1 15.00-16.46 and Clip #2 24.45-25.50

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5fCM8U4S4I>

2. What do you think about after watching these clips?
3. How do these clips make you feel?
  - Probe: Does watching these women make you feel good about yourself or not? Why do you dislike the fact there is only one type of body portrayed?
4. How is the female representation feministic or not?
5. How would you describe the femininity that is portrayed with the women?
6. What type of female sexuality is portrayed by the women?
  - Probe: How would you describe the sexual mood that the women portray? What does the representation suggest lingerie is for?
7. How would you describe the mood of the show and the women that are represented?
8. How do you feel about the Victoria's Secret brand?
  - Probe: Does this clip make you want to buy VS lingerie, or not?

- Savage X Fenty: A relatively new, yet growing brand in the lingerie industry is Savage X Fenty.

1. Have you heard of Savage X Fenty before? If so, how would you describe the company?

- Probes: Have you bought products from Fenty before? Have you seen any of their previous fashion shows?
- (if they have not heard of SXF): Savage X Fenty is a lingerie company that was established in 2018 by pop artist Rihanna. It is available online in 210 countries around the world.

I would now like to show you 2 clips from the 2019 Savage X Fenty fashion show, after which I will ask you some questions.

Clip #1 17.26-19.00 and Clip #2 32.20-33.50

2. What do you think about after watching these clips?

3. How do these clips make you feel?

- Probe: Does watching these women make you feel good about yourself or not? Why do you like the fact that there is a diverse representation of bodies?

4. How is the female representation feministic or not?

5. How would you describe the femininity that is portrayed with the women?

6. What type of female sexuality is portrayed by the women?

- Probe: How would you describe the sexual mood that the women portray? What does the representation suggest lingerie is for?

7. How would you describe the mood of the show and the women that are represented?

8. How do you feel about the Savage X Fenty brand?

- Probe: Does this clip make you want to buy Savage X Fenty lingerie or not?

## Conclusion

- That was the last question of the interview, do you have anything that you would like to add or reflect upon?
- Turn-off tape recorder

- Thank you again so much for taking part in this interview, I really appreciate it and it will be highly valuable for my research. If you have any questions you can always reach out to me.