

## Chapter 5: Methodology

In the previous chapter the value and validity of creative and visual methods within social research was considered by looking at a number of studies that have employed such techniques. This chapter moves on to describe the aims of the present study, beginning with an outline of the methodological procedure and how this was informed. The chapter then discusses the sampling strategy as well as data-collection methods utilised within the study, and provides a detailed overview of the collage-making exercise and groups involved in this research project. Finally, the chapter sets out an analytical framework based upon art therapy principles through which the findings can be approached, and illustrates a range of the collages produced by the young people who participated in the research process.

### 5.1 Methodological Procedure

In order to explore young people's self-identities this study invited participants to produce two collages in which they were asked to express: 1. 'How I see myself' and 2. 'How I think other people see me'. The collages were created under similar conditions, where all participants were given the same instructions and had access to the same materials from which they could select images. In addition, the participants completed a brief questionnaire concerning their own perceptions of self-identity. This process was followed by a series of unstructured interviews between the participants and researcher<sup>29</sup>, in which the participants discussed their own self-reflexive explanations of the collages that they themselves had created. It was anticipated that these procedures would facilitate a more extensive exploration of the participants' notions of identity through both the production of creative materials and the participants' *own* reflections on their work.

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<sup>29</sup> In all cases, the researcher was myself. The fieldwork ran from September 2005 to January 2006.

### 5.1.1 Evolution of the Methodology

This study had initially aimed to recruit 14-16 year old schoolchildren (Year 10 and 11) as participants for this project. However, after consultations with a number of teachers in various schools, it became apparent that accessing this age group would be highly problematic, as these students were fully engaged in their GCSE work. Thus, the availability of Year 10 and 11 students would be restricted by timetabling/coursework demands and, in the view of the schools, the allocation of time to conduct research within scheduled teaching hours would not be feasible.<sup>30</sup> Instead, it was suggested that due to these limitations, a younger age group should be considered. In light of this, it was necessary to evaluate whether such a group would be able to understand the principal concepts behind the collage exercise. Jean Piaget's work on cognitive development was referred to (e.g. [1926] 2001; [1929] 1973; Piaget and Inhelder, 1969); here he identified that during what he termed the 'Formal Operational Stage' (11-12 years and beyond), children are capable of hypothetical thinking and can speculate about what may be *possible* rather than what is *actual*. According to Piaget's model then, children within this age band should demonstrate the ability to manipulate ideas and therefore engage with the creative and reflexive tasks required by this study.<sup>31</sup> It should be noted here though that Piaget's position has been challenged by more recent work on cognitive development which questions whether children's development occurs in stepped stages (e.g. Flavell, Miller and Miller, 2002), and claims the approach both underestimates children's cognitive abilities (e.g. Bower, 1974; McGarrigle and Donaldson, 1974; Donaldson, 1978) and overestimates the development of formal operational thinking (e.g. Neimark, 1979; Dasen, 1994). However, as Patricia Miller (2002) states, 'Piaget's main claims concerned the sequence in which behaviours are acquired rather than the particular ages, which he thought would vary. Thus, showing that an ability emerged earlier than Piaget claimed is not necessarily damaging to his theory' (p. 85). In

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<sup>30</sup> Running these sessions during after-school clubs was not considered practical as students' attendance could not be guaranteed and parental consent would be required. Furthermore, unlike Buckingham and Bragg's (2004) study, no financial incentive was offered to the participants.

<sup>31</sup> A pilot study was run at Southampton Solent University with 12-13 year old pupils (Year 8) in June 2005 as part of a Widening Participation 'taster day'. In these sessions, the students demonstrated that they were capable of producing identity related collages.

addition, Piaget's (1972) own modifications of this theory suggested that although almost all individuals could develop formal reasoning, they did so only in relation to areas of specific importance to them, as demonstrated in Shawn Ward and Willis Overton's (1990) study which found that 12th grade students in American high schools could reason abstractly about relevant everyday issues and activities which they were already familiar. Rita Vuyk (1981) further highlights that Piaget's later work placed less significance on step-like stages, and moved towards formulating development as a progressive spiral: '[Piaget] now considers development a spiral and though one may call a stage a "detour of the spiral", this indicates that periods of equilibrium are relatively unimportant' (p. 192; see Piaget, [1975] 1985). Hence, in consideration of these factors, it was decided to involve Year 9 students (13-14 year olds) for the purposes of this research. Furthermore, the decision to focus solely on 13-14 year olds was made to ensure some level of consistency and comparability between the participants. Moreover, participating teachers at all of the schools involved in this study had stated that by this level children would be familiar with collage-making techniques, having undertaken identity related projects such as the construction of 'identity boxes' in which images used on inside and outside walls represented internal and external facets of the individual's self, and poster-collages that depicted pupils' own conceptions of their identity.

## **5.2 Sample and Data-Collection**

### **5.2.1 The Sample**

The selection of participants who would be involved in this study required consideration before the research commenced, but as David Silverman (2005) notes 'sampling is not a simple matter [and] the crucial issue ... seems to be thinking through one's theoretical priorities' (p. 136). Indeed, Alan Bryman (1988) has suggested that instead of following a statistical rationale, qualitative research accords with a theoretical logic, arguing 'the issue should be couched in terms of generalizability of cases to theoretical propositions rather than to populations or universes' (p. 90). However, it should be highlighted that Pertti Alasuutari (1995) has proposed that 'Generalization is ... [a] word ... that should be reserved for surveys

only. What can be analyzed instead is how the researcher demonstrates that the analysis relates to things beyond the material at hand ... *extrapolation* better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research' (pp. 156-157, original emphasis). The relationship between theory and sampling is further developed by Jennifer Mason (1996), who explains:

[T]heoretical sampling means selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position ... and most importantly the explanation or account which you are developing. Theoretical sampling is concerned with constructing a sample ... which is meaningful theoretically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test your theory and explanation (pp. 93-94; see also Miles and Huberman, 1994, pp. 27-34).

As one of the principal aims of the investigation was to explore how young people used the media in the conceptualisation and construction of their identities, it was deemed appropriate to select male and female participants from a variety of (class and ethnic) backgrounds to allow for a broad spectrum of responses, and therefore necessary to locate schools with diverse student populations. In order to achieve this a total of twenty-six schools were contacted from across the Dorset, Hampshire and London regions. Specifically, these schools consisted of either a multicultural or predominantly 'white' student cohort and were situated in both socially and economically deprived, as well as affluent areas. Although the study would have ideally liked to engage with young people from various locations throughout Britain, this was not feasible due to financial and time limitations, and would have been beyond the ability of a single researcher, thus accounting for the research being undertaken in Southern England. Furthermore, particular types of schools that were approached, these being private, religious, and single-sex boys' schools, stated that they did not accommodate researchers, and as such access to these institutions was not possible. Nevertheless, despite these limitations and constraints, such factors did not seem to impact negatively on the research project as a diversity of young people were represented in the final sample. Consequently, from this selection process seven schools were chosen, and these provided a combined total of eight groups for the project. During this stage, it was also emphasised to teachers that participating groups

should not be selected by ability; rather they should be generally representative of the student body.

## **5.2.2 The Schools**

### **5.2.2.1 Cantell School, Southampton**

Cantell School (Ofsted, 2004a) is a mixed comprehensive with 1217 pupils and received special college status for Mathematics and Information and Communication Technology in 2003. Educational standards are below average at entry, and approximately a quarter of the students have special educational needs. The school has a population that reflects the diverse ethnic origins and socio-economic mix of the community, which includes areas of considerable deprivation. In addition, amongst the student cohort are a number of refugee children and asylum seekers. Furthermore, a fifth of the pupils have English as an additional language. Like Millbrook Community School (detailed below), this school suffers from problems relating to the recruitment and retention of staff.

### **5.2.2.2 Kelmscott School, London**

Kelmscott School (Ofsted, 2002a) is situated in Walthamstow, East London and attended by 938 pupils: a majority of these students coming from underprivileged backgrounds. The student population reflects the cultural diversity of the community, with nearly a third of the students having Pakistani origins. Furthermore children from Indian, black Caribbean and black African backgrounds are highly represented, as well as a small percentage of refugee children, principally from Albania. For many students then English is an additional language: Urdu, Punjabi, Turkish and Bengali being predominantly spoken. In addition, pupils' educational attainment at entry is below average with a high number of students being recognised as having special educational needs.

### **5.2.2.3 Millbrook Community School, Southampton**

Millbrook Community School (Ofsted, 2002b) is a mixed comprehensive and has a small cohort consisting of 527 students, a proportion of which have been excluded from other schools. The school is located in an area which suffers from extreme deprivation, where very few adults gain any higher education experience and the majority of students' families encounter social and economic hardship. The pupils are almost exclusively from white UK backgrounds, with only a very small minority of the students coming from different ethnic groups. In addition, the school has a very high level of students with special educational needs (currently 60 per cent) and general standards of educational attainment remain below average. Furthermore students' behaviour, in many cases, is challenging and difficult for the teachers to control. These difficulties have resulted in low student aspirations and problems with the recruitment and retention of staff.

### **5.2.2.4 Oaklands Community School, Southampton**

Being located within the same catchment area as Millbrook Community School, Oaklands Community School (Ofsted, 2004b) shares many similar characteristics. This school is a mixed comprehensive with 732 pupils, serving as an educational facility for both adults and children within its vicinity. On entry, students have well below average educational attainments, demonstrated by a significant number of pupils possessing the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy in Southampton. The proportion of students with special educational needs is also much higher than the national average. In addition, a majority of the student cohort are white British with very few ethnic minority students attending the school.

### **5.2.2.5 Regents Park Girls' School, Southampton**

Regents Park Girls' School (Ofsted, 2002c) is a comprehensive situated in Southampton and has 1092 pupils from mixed socio-economic backgrounds. Attainment levels of students on entry are below average, however these rise to above average on leaving school. The student body consists of a broad range of cultures and faiths, with a fifth of the pupils having English as an additional language: Punjabi,

Urdu, Bengali and Gujarati being the first language of many students. Although the number of students with special educational needs is average, a disproportionate number of these students have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

#### **5.2.2.6 Twynham School, Dorset**

Twynham School (Ofsted, 2001a) is a mixed comprehensive with 1437 pupils whose educational attainment on entry is average. However, the number of pupils with special educational needs is marginally above average. The school's cohort is predominantly middle-class and almost exclusively white, with very few students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Furthermore, English is the first language for the vast majority of students.

#### **5.2.2.7 Willowfield School, London**

Willowfield School (Ofsted, 2001b) is a mixed comprehensive attended by 596 students. The school is located in Walthamstow, East London, an area which is marked by educational disadvantage and low socio-economic circumstances. Students' abilities on joining the school are below the national average, whilst the number of children with special educational needs and English as an additional language exceed the national average. This school consists of students from culturally diverse backgrounds: Pakistani pupils constituting the largest group, followed by white European, black Caribbean and black African.

The descriptions of ethnicity and class in the preceding summaries are somewhat crude; however they provide a broad picture of each school in question.

### **5.2.3 Data-Collection**

Within this study the creative work produced by participants constitutes an integral component of the research process. Although this study would have benefited from allowing the children to create their own collages using *any* images of their own choosing, pragmatically this was not viable due to time and financial limitations, as

well as a vast majority of the schools simply not having the resources to accommodate such a request. Indeed, whilst the use of internet and colour printing facilities could have enabled participants to access a greater range of images, for most of the schools involved in this project such equipment was not easily available. Thus, each group was provided with twenty-five magazines and newspapers, all receiving the same edition of each title, from which they produced their collages.<sup>32</sup> These publications were chosen as they offered a broad range of images from both mainstream and minority presses (Table 5.1).

**Table 5.1: Magazines and newspapers used for collage-making activity**

<i>All About Soap</i>	Fortnightly soap opera magazine outlining storylines and celebrity lifestyles
<i>Asian Times</i>	Weekly middle-market newspaper focusing on developments in Britain, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka
<i>Attitude</i>	A glossy monthly lifestyle magazine for gay men
<i>BBC Wildlife</i>	Monthly wildlife magazine
<i>Desi Xpress</i>	Weekly newspaper covering Asian entertainment and current affairs
<i>Diva</i>	A glossy monthly lifestyle magazine for lesbians
<i>Eastern Eye</i>	Weekly newspaper detailing UK and Asian news, sports, fashion and media
<i>Empire</i>	Monthly film magazine
<i>Glamour</i>	Young women's glossy monthly magazine covering fashion, beauty and celebrities
<i>The Guardian</i>	British broadsheet newspaper (Monday-Saturday)
<i>Heat</i>	Weekly celebrity gossip magazine
<i>Men's Health</i>	Monthly men's lifestyle magazine focusing on health, fitness and sex issues
<i>MK Milk</i>	Monthly Hong Kong youth lifestyle magazine featuring fashion, music and sports
<i>New Nation</i>	Weekly newspaper targeted at the black British community providing news, sports and entertainment coverage
<i>NME</i>	Weekly alternative music magazine
<i>Pride</i>	A glossy monthly lifestyle magazine for black women
<i>P2</i>	Monthly computer games magazine
<i>Shoot</i>	Weekly football magazine
<i>The Sun</i>	British tabloid newspaper (Monday-Saturday)
<i>The Telegraph</i>	British broadsheet newspaper (Monday-Saturday)
<i>Top of the Pops</i>	Monthly teenage popular music magazine featuring celebrity gossip and fashion/beauty advice
<i>Touch</i>	Monthly UK urban music magazine
<i>Unity</i>	Monthly inline skating and style magazine
<i>The Voice</i>	Weekly newspaper aimed towards the British African Caribbean community covering news, sport and arts
<i>Zoo</i>	Weekly men's magazine focusing on sport, sex and humour

<sup>32</sup> Prior to the magazines and newspapers being distributed amongst students, the researcher asked participating teachers to identify any material that they considered inappropriate which was then removed. The content removed was similar for all groups and consisted of sexually explicit material (e.g. advertisements for phone sex lines, naked women in sexually provocative poses).

Therefore, despite the scope of material appearing arguably limited, the diversity of images within these texts helped overcome such restrictions. Furthermore, as the study progressed, this selection allowed the researcher to monitor which materials were being utilised and which ones were not. Moreover, the collages were accompanied by a questionnaire which aimed to elicit further information regarding how children envisage their own identities (Table 5.2).

**Table 5.2: Questionnaire**

➤ Name:	.....
➤ Age:	.....
➤ School:	.....
➤ Are you:	Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/>
1. Ethnicity (please tick <u>one</u> of the boxes below)	
<u>White</u>	
British	<input type="checkbox"/>
Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other White background	<input type="checkbox"/> (please give details: .....
<u>Black or Black British</u>	
Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
African	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Black background	<input type="checkbox"/> (please give details: .....
<u>Asian or Asian British</u>	
Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Asian background	<input type="checkbox"/> (please give details: .....
<u>Mixed</u>	
White and Black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
White and Black African	<input type="checkbox"/>
White and Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Mixed background	<input type="checkbox"/> (please give details: .....
<u>Chinese or Other Ethnic</u>	
Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other Ethnic background	<input type="checkbox"/> (please give details: .....
2. How would you <i>usually</i> describe your ethnicity? .....	
3. Can you think of <i>three words</i> that you would use to describe <i>how you see yourself</i> ?	
1.	.....
2.	.....
3.	.....
4. Can you think of <i>three words</i> that you would use to describe <i>how you think other people see you</i> ?	
1.	.....
2.	.....
3.	.....

Question 1 mirrors the format of many official ethnic monitoring forms, and sought to identify how students would categorise themselves within this framework; whereas questions 2, 3 and 4 were specifically designed as open questions to allow participants

to offer any response they chose. Question 2 expands upon question 1 by enabling the participants to define their own ethnicity in order to establish how they articulate their identity. Finally, questions 3 and 4 relate directly to the collages, and aimed to encourage the participants to think reflexively about themselves and the work they produced.

Of course, a number of disadvantages have been attached to the use of questionnaires, as Ina Bertrand and Peter Hughes (2005) state:

- They provide simple answers to simple questions, so they cannot help to establish thick description or to understand process or social context.
- They depend upon the capacity of the researcher to ask unambiguous questions dependent on clear definitions, but in social and cultural research definitions are always influenced by the context.
- They depend upon the capacity of the respondent to answer, and their willingness to do so honestly, so questionnaire answers are always inherently unreliable.
- The simpler the questions, the less chance for misunderstanding, but also the more chance that respondents will assume that the questionnaire is not important and will not give it serious attention.
- There will always be a proportion of non-response or incomplete response: taking a larger sample than strictly necessary helps to reduce the effect of this, but may exacerbate bias (pp. 69-70).

Therefore, within the context of this study – which centres upon establishing young people's *own* understandings of their self-identities by allowing them the opportunity to shape the research agenda – the participants' responses to these questions were not analysed; instead the questionnaire was used as a strategy for encouraging participants to further reflect upon their identities. Nevertheless, this information could of course later be incorporated into a quantitative search for trends and patterns in the data if desired.

In addition to the above methods, unstructured interviews were conducted with the participants in which they reflected upon and offered interpretations of their own work. Interviewing and the data this produces has been criticised for a number of

reasons, including: participants may struggle to articulate their thoughts or feelings and/or may provide responses they believe the interviewer desires (Bertrand and Hughes, 2005, p. 74); the interview environment leads to a power imbalance in the research process which positions the interviewer above the interviewee (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997, p. 115); and, data provided by interviews is frequently misunderstood as a ‘window onto the world [rather than] the rhetoric of socially situated speakers, *not* an objective report of thoughts, feelings or things out in the world (Lindlof, 1995, p. 165, original emphasis). Within this study these problems were addressed through utilising techniques employed in art therapy, which are discussed later in Section 5.4. Furthermore, in relation to this study the interviews fundamentally served as a means through which the participants could voice thoughts and feelings regarding their identity collages on their *own* terms, and enabled the researcher to clarify any points by developing upon the young people’s responses. As such, the interviews did not explore themes pre-determined by the researcher, rather themes emerged out of the responses provided by the young people themselves. Consequently, the researcher did not evaluate the interviews using computer programmes for qualitative data analysis, for example NUDIST or NVivo, which although able to manage information effectively, cannot ascribe meaning to this material (see Miles and Weitzman, 1994; Seale, 2005). Instead, the researcher elected to adopt a fully ‘hands-on’, manual approach by immersing herself within the interview data, reading and re-reading the transcripts in order to become familiar with the participants’ voices. During this process themes which emerged in the data were identified, and headings describing the content of the students’ responses were assigned – a technique known as ‘open coding’ (Burnard, 1991). Following this, both the themes and the headings (along with the relevant interview extracts) were then grouped into broader categories, which provided the framework of the final analysis. Crucially, this method enabled the researcher to identify issues and concerns that had been expressed by the young people which would not have been recognised by computer software.

### **5.3 Overview of the Research Exercise and Groups**

The collage-making activities were all undertaken within classroom environments during scheduled art lessons, and conducted by the researcher with a teacher present

(see Table 5.3).<sup>33</sup> Within these sessions the researcher briefly discussed the use of visual metaphors and elicited responses from the participants to ensure their understanding of this concept. This was achieved by showing the children a soap opera character they were familiar with – Demi from *EastEnders*<sup>34</sup> – and asking them to suggest specific words which other characters might use to describe her. On completion of this, the participants were then prompted to supply words that Demi could use to characterise herself. Having compiled a list of words, pupils were then encouraged to propose images which could represent the concepts *visually*, thereby enabling an understanding of metaphors and providing an illustrative example of the task itself. The students were then directed to create two collages to express: 1. ‘How I see myself’ and 2. ‘How I think other people see me’. At the end of this exercise pupils were given a brief questionnaire to complete, with the researcher assisting those students who were unable to do these themselves. Further time was made available by the schools during teaching hours for the unstructured interviews to take place, in which no teachers were present to ensure student confidentiality. Furthermore, to allow for a fuller understanding of the procedures, Table 5.4 details how the collage-making and interview process took place in each specific case:

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<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that during these sessions the participating teacher was asked to refrain from intervening – which they agreed to and complied with – except in instances when the researcher requested assistance with difficult students.

<sup>34</sup> Prior to conducting the fieldwork teachers from all groups had stated that *EastEnders* was particularly popular amongst the student cohorts, with Demi being a familiar character for the participants due to their similar ages. Furthermore, Demi’s character attracted much attention at this time as the current storyline highlighted her role as a teenage mother and association with drugs.

**Table 5.3: Lesson plan**

<p><b>Aim:</b> This session engages students in collage-making activities through which they will express their identities using visual metaphors</p> <p><b>Key Vocabulary:</b> Visual representation, metaphors</p> <p><b>Duration:</b> 1 x 1 hour 40 minutes or 2 x 1 hour (dependent upon timetabling)</p> <p><b>Procedure:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Brief introduction and group discussion about the media</li><li>• Group exercise to explain visual metaphor:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Image of Demi (from <i>EastEnders</i>) is shown and placed on board.</li><li>• Image of Keith and Rosie (Demi's parents) is shown and placed on board next to Demi. Students asked 'what words would Keith and Rosie use to describe Demi?' (words are written on board). Process is repeated with Pauline (godmother to Demi's child) and Patrick (neighbour with no association to Demi).</li><li>• Students asked to think of words that Demi would use to describe herself (written on board).</li><li>• Students asked to substitute the words for images (to elicit visual metaphors).</li></ul></li><li>• Using the above, students are shown that they could create two collages from this.</li><li>• Students asked to create two collages in which they express: 1. How I see myself, and 2. How I think other people see me (areas to consider elicited from students and written on board).</li><li>• On completion of collage task, students complete questionnaire.</li></ul> <p><b>Materials:</b> Sheets of card (A2) Magazines/Newspapers Scissors Glue Pens/pencils/markers (various colours)</p>
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**Table 5.4: Time spent making the collages and interviewing**

Group	School	No. of weeks	Collage-making	Interviews	Total hours
1	Cantell School	2	1 x 1h 40m	1 x 1h 40m	3h 20m
2	Kelmscott School	3	2 x 1h	1 x 2h	4h
3	Millbrook Community School	2	1 x 1h 40m	1 x 1h 40m	3h 20m
4	Oaklands Community School	3	2 x 1h	1 x 3h	5h
5	Regents Park Girls' School	2	1 x 1h 40m	1 x 1h 40m	3h 20m
6	Twynham School G1	4	2 x 1h	2 x 1h	4h
7	Twynham School G2	4	2 x 1h	2 x 1h	4h
8	Willowfield School	2	1 x 1h 40m	1 x 1h 40m	3h 20m

The eight groups produced a total number of 165 collages with the accompanying questionnaires. From this 111 interviews were conducted with the children, in which they discussed their work (the discrepancy between these two figures was due to either time limitations or student absenteeism). Table 5.5 and 5.6 provide a breakdown of these details in greater depth:

**Table 5.5: Group details and work completed**

School (Year 9 pupils)	Group size	Gender ratio	Collages produced (with questionnaires)	No. of interviews conducted	Collages (with interviews and questionnaires)
Cantell School	20	14 male 6 female	20	12	12 9 m/3 f
Kelmscott School	19	8 male 11 female	19	17	17 6 m/11 f
Millbrook Community School	14	7 male 7 female	14	13	13 7 m/6 f
Oaklands Community School	24	12 male 12 female	24	18	18 10 m/8 f
Regents Park Girls' School	21	0 male 21 female	21	15	15 0 m/21 f
Twynham School G1	24	12 male 12 female	24	11	11 4 m/7 f
Twynham School G2	21	13 male 8 female	21	12	12 5 m/7 f
Willowfield School	22	13 male 9 female	22	13	13 5 m/8 f

**Table 5.6: Ethnic composition of groups**

	Cantell School	Kelmscott School	Millbrook Community School	Oaklands Community School	Regents Park Girls' School	Twynham School G1	Twynham School G2	Willowfield School
<u>White</u>								
British	16	2	10	22	14	20	18	4
Irish	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	-
Other White background	1	1	-	-	1	1	1	-
<u>Black or Black British</u>								
Caribbean	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	4
African	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Other Black background	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
<u>Asian or Asian British</u>								
Indian	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pakistani	-	8	-	-	1	-	-	7
Bangladeshi	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Other Asian background	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	1
<u>Mixed</u>								
White and Black Caribbean	-	-	-	1	-	1	1	1
White and Black African	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
White and Asian	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-
Other Mixed background	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	2
<u>Chinese or Other Ethnic</u>								
Chinese	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Other Ethnic background	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-

Having detailed the background of the schools from which the groups were recruited, and overviewed the circumstances in which the work was created and interviews took place, the principles that will inform the analysis of the students' collages and their own responses to them will now be discussed.

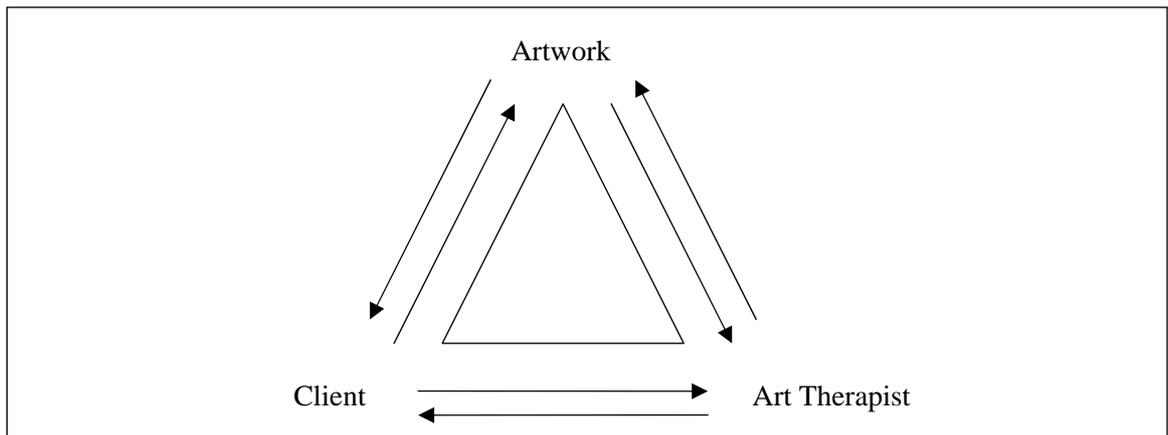
## 5.4 Analysis and Interpretation

This study is centred upon visual materials in that its most evident product is the 111 collages that constitute the basis for the investigation. Confronted by such conspicuous visual artefacts, the researcher may have a tendency to focus exclusively upon an interpretive strategy grounded in visual communication theory (e.g. Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Rose, 2001; Sturken and Cartwright, 2001). However, as David Gauntlett (2004) states, such approaches are deeply problematic, as much work in this area purports to analyse how people use visual media in the context of their lived experience, but in practice imposes the authors' privileged 'reading' onto the visual text and presumes that these interpretations exemplify those of the audience as a whole (p. 5). In contrast, this study is concerned with *actual* people and their relationship with the media, specifically its impact upon their identities. Thus, the collage-making exercises are intended to explore how the participants use media images to articulate their own understanding of their identities: the collages becoming *visual conceptualisations* of the participants' identities and how they might be seen. Moreover, the task itself affords participants *time* to thoughtfully engage with and consider the exercise, rather than having to produce an instant linguistic response.

Therefore, in this study the participants are actively producing visual materials and engaged in an ongoing process of analysis throughout the course of the project. This position is informed by Gauntlett's (2004) discussion on creative visual research, which details how feminist criticisms of traditional methods have highlighted that participants have no impact on the direction or agenda of the research, instead acting merely as passive 'subjects' who provide data (pp. 8-9; see, for example, Roberts, 1981; Reinharz, 1992; Letherby, 2003; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004). He maintains that creative techniques help to overcome these limitations by proposing a more *dialogic* model which enables participants to shape and influence the research itself,

thereby ensuring that they are represented more effectively, rather than having researchers' interpretations projected upon them (2004, p. 9). Importantly however, Gauntlett does acknowledge that any analysis requires the researcher to take on an interpretive role, stating that 'researchers *always* have a job of interpretation to do' (p. 6, original emphasis), and suggests that a solution to the methodological problems of interpretation can be found in principles provided by art therapy – principles which lie at the heart of the present study.

Art therapy was primarily influenced by the psychoanalytic work of Sigmund Freud ([1900] 1997) and Carl Jung (1964) which maintained that imaginative products, for example dreams or works of art, articulate latent mental material, albeit in a codified form (see Edwards, 2004, pp. 27-32). Psychoanalysis then, claims that artworks can be read diagnostically to reveal desires and traumas that are represented in symbolic form. As such, this approach has been traditionally utilised by art therapists to explore psychiatric patients' mental and emotional conditions. A study which demonstrates this point, and specifically seeks to integrate psychoanalytic theory into the practice of art therapy, is that undertaken by Jacky Mahony and Diane Waller (1992) in which they aim to expose the traumas that have caused alcohol and drug abuse through an analysis of the patient's artwork. In this instance, they maintain that the production and analysis of the art constitutes the basis of treatment and acts as a foundation for further therapeutic work. Such techniques therefore, have been used to assess a broad range of emotional and psychological concerns (see Waller and Gilroy, 1992), including those that are particular to children (e.g. Klepsch and Logie, 1982; Di Leo, 1983; Koppitz, 1984; Matthews, 1999; Thomas and Silk, 1990), in which the artwork is interpreted by the therapist as a basis for their evaluation. More recently, as Gauntlett (2004) notes, art therapy has developed from this framework which privileges the therapists' interpretations, to a model that not only includes, but also begins with and relies upon the patients' *own* reflections on what is produced (see Case, 1990; Schaverien, 1990; Wood, 1990). Thus, this method is focused on a 'triangular relationship' (Figure 5.1) which aims to provide a more holistic understanding of the issues that concern the patient, rather than those prioritised by the analyst:



**Figure 5.1: Triangular Relationship (from Edwards, 2004, p.2)**

In such a formulation, as David Edwards (2004) has explained, ‘the therapeutic process in art therapy is primarily concerned with the dynamic interaction between the client, the artwork and the art therapist’ (p. 89) through which the interplay between client and therapist, or client and their creative work can be highlighted or de-emphasised at varying times. Furthermore, he adds that within an art therapy session the process of creating an image may be of therapeutic value to the client, whereas the relationship between client and therapist mediated by the artwork itself can predominate on other occasions. According to Edwards then, in the triangular relationship ‘greater or lesser emphasis may be placed on each axis (between, for example, the client and their artwork or between the client and the art therapist) during a single session or over time’ (p. 2). In doing so, he maintains that the therapist must remain aware of factors which come to bear on this dynamic, including accepting clients and their work, as well as fostering an open and expressive relationship through observing, reflecting and reacting to clients in a sensitive manner. This in turn, Edwards argues, can help enable an environment that may encourage more insightful images and responses to emerge. Developing this point, he proposes a number of areas for the art therapist’s attention whilst conducting sessions, these being: *‘The main themes to emerge during the session and how these were responded to ... The materials the client used ... How the client used the art materials ... [and] The client’s approach to the image making’* (pp. 89-90, original emphasis). In consideration of these issues, Edwards importantly stresses that the therapist’s work will then be informed by both a variety of theoretical approaches *and* responses derived from the client’s artwork, behaviour and feedback. Thus, although the

problematics of achieving ‘objective’ interpretations and analyses are not fully resolved, they are arguably acknowledged within this framework. Therefore, such a mixed-source approach may facilitate a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the participants’ intentions, and as such, may prove to be a valuable method that can be employed in all areas of creative research. This is a principle that will underlie the remaining chapters.

## 5.5 Introduction to the Collages

Before proceeding with a detailed discussion on the collages and their analysis (Chapters 6 and 7), it would seem appropriate to offer some examples which demonstrate a range of work produced (see also Appendix A). What becomes evident within these samples is the participants’ adoption of differing styles and strategies to depict visual conceptions of their identities. (Please note that the names of all participants in this study have been changed to ensure anonymity.)

In a number of cases the collages were packed with visual imagery, giving the work a more crowded appearance:



Figure 5.2: Betty’s Collage



Figure 5.3: Lucy’s Collage



Figure 5.4: Jason’s Collage



Figure 5.5: Malcolm’s Collage





Figure 5.12: Carly's Collage

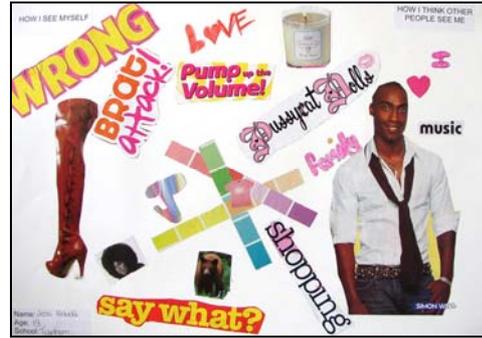


Figure 5.13: Josie's Collage

A number of participants supplemented the available imagery by including their own drawings and writing on the collage:



Figure 5.14: Sarah's Collage



Figure 5.15: Amelia's Collage



Figure 5.16: Pamela's Collage

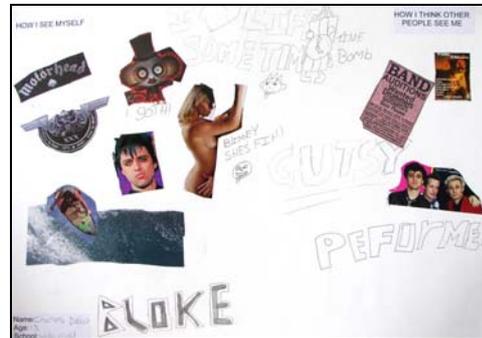


Figure 5.17: Carl's Collage

One participant specifically chose to draw the entire piece, rather than utilising any of the material supplied:





**Figure 5.23: Zahra's Collage**



**Figure 5.24: Christina's Collage**

In addition, some work attributed greater or exclusive detail to one area of the collage:



**Figure 5.25: Joe's Collage**



**Figure 5.26: Diana's Collage**

Finally, other participants used a central feature to represent a point of intersection between the collages' two components:



**Figure 5.27: Polly's Collage**



**Figure 5.28: Dean's Collage**

## 5.6 Summary

Creative and reflexive processes, as discussed in Chapter 4, are integral to the present project, in which the participants' creation of collages and self-reflexive evaluations

will enable the students' voices to actively contribute to, and shape the analysis itself. As such, this enquiry complies with Gauntlett's (2004) position that the study of the media should not be artificially divided between 'theory' and 'practice'. Rather, he states, these two elements should aspire to be fully integrated to enable an understanding of the media in relation to lived experience through the critical production of media texts: 'studying media *by* making media' (p. 15, original emphasis). Here then, the principles proposed by art therapy, as outlined by Edwards (2004), can be seen to offer a credible and valid method of analysis. Similar to the process of art therapy then, the production of materials and interactions between researcher and participants facilitated by creative and visual research methods may generate richer and more rewarding data for analysis. It is this mixture of creativity and communication that the following two chapters turn to, which consider the collages produced in this study through the participants *own* interpretations of their work.