BROADCASTING

AND THE YOUNG ADULT CONSUMER

Local and Global Media Influences
On Maltese Youth Culture

Joe Grixti

A Report on Qualitative Research Undertaken for the

Broadcasting Authority, Malta

2004

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Broadcasting Authority
7 Mile End Road
Hamrun HMR 02
Malta
Tel: **(+356) 21 221 281 / 21 247 908**
Fax: **(+356) 21 240 855**
Url: **www.ba-malta.org**
E-mail: **info@ba-malta.org**

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Message from the Chairman

Dr. Joe Grixti MA (Oxon) Ph.D. (Bristol), was the academic commissioned by the Broadcasting Authority to carry out its first qualitative research project that dealt with the effects of television and radio programmes on the attitudes and behaviour of young people, aged 14 and under. That report published by the Authority in April 2000 was generally recognized to be a comprehensive study that contributed to a wider appreciation of the impact of the mass media on the future development of the younger generation. In this new qualitative study, Dr Grixti addresses a somewhat similar subject focusing specifically on the young adult consumer. Dr. Grixti conducted his research with the aim of providing a clear understanding of how the lives and attitudes of young Maltese consumers are influenced by the commercial orientations of the broadcasting media as they currently operate in the Maltese scenario.

The research focuses on young consumers aged 14 to 25. It explores the extent to which their beliefs, attitudes, values and modes of behaviour are influenced by the context and contents of broadcasting. Faithful to his terms of reference, Dr. Grixti therefore considers:-

"1. the attitudes and responses of young people in this age group to the images, messages and values which they encounter when exposed to the various media of communication and this with special reference to commercially driven broadcasting, advertising and entertainment;

2. the nature and patterns of their uses of and engagement with broadcasting technology; and

3. their perceptions and understanding of the broader and increasingly more globalized patterns of commercial broadcasting."

Dr. Grixti's study is remarkable in that he relies for his evaluation solely on the Maltese experience as evidenced by the data gathered by him through in-depth and highly focused questioning of carefully selected representative youth groups. His study gains credibility primarily from the obvious thoroughness with which the researcher conducted his investigation, the way in which he clearly managed to obtain the trust of the young people interviewed and the sincere, open and straightforward answers he managed to elicit from them. On the other hand, the work has merits that go well beyond being just a faithful record of the interviews made and of the basic conclusions that these interviews suggested to the researcher. Dr. Grixti has in fact succeeded to project his findings on the behavioural reactions of youth to a highly charged commercialized media in a closed micro-society that is Malta on to a scenario of universally accepted, open, macro-society in which youth has all but succumbed to the glitter and temptation of totally commercialized media.

In this study Maltese youth stands out with its indigenous, particular characteristics acquired throughout centuries of formation in a sheltered community but always exposed to outside influence and ideas, imported mostly through contact with successive colonial administrations. Maltese youth, though still proud of its national identity, seems apparently on the point of capitulating to the negative, levelling effects of the globalization of mass media that inevitably brings about the corruption of tastes and standards and the erosion of ethical and moral values.

Dr. Grixti's research, while often registering obvious, well-known facts against a competent theoretical and academic background, is in many respects an eye opener. It shows Maltese youth to be conscious of the mistakes of their elders, eager to avoid them but still very much uncertain where to draw the golden line between virtue and vice. Subjected to the constant onslaught of amoral media commercialization, traditional values are questioned. They have not however, as yet, been thrown completely overboard. Maltese youths seem still to be struggling to identify to what extent they were prepared to modify their way of living as adults under what they perceive to be a new and, for them, modern code of ethics and morality. There is in this respect perhaps, one aspect which does not receive adequate attention. This is the positive commitment of large segments of youth in the age bracket under review to voluntary social work in favour of those in need and the greater awareness of environmental issues.

As in his previous study Dr. Grixti's contribution is in my view, superlative. It combines a competent theoretical approach with case studies which adequately illustrate the findings reached by him in his concluding chapter. This work should therefore have an appeal that transcends the strict limits of Dr. Grixti's remit on how the lives and attitudes of young Maltese consumers are influenced by the commercial orientation of the broadcasting media. It provides an insight into today's youth, its virtues and failings, its troubled present and uncertain future. It is therefore a study that should be most useful to all those who operate in the sphere of youth management. The work should find a place in the library shelves of politicians and religious, sociologists and educators among others.

The Authority finally augurs that this study will serve as a contribution to the debate on a very topical subject and that the findings of this report will eventually be implemented by the powers that be.

Chief Justice Emeritus Dr Joseph Said Pullicino B.A. (Hons.),LL.D.
May 2004

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A number of very good friends were also indispensable in helping me gain access to potential interviewees, often offering their homes or places of work as venues for interviews. In this respect, I once again give thanks to the following for their friendship, patience and hospitality: Albert and Catherine Friggieri, Henry and Rosella Schembri, Joe and Maria Pirotta, Ronald and Roseline Sultana, Joe and Joyce Cauchi, Cettina and Mario Axiak, Marvic and Joseph Attard. My sisters Lena and Helen were as generous as always in providing board and hospitality during my periods of fieldwork in Malta, and Helen and her husband Michael Borg also went out of their way to help me identify and contact some of the interview sources.

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The young people who formed the various focus group discussions were almost invariably generous, friendly and open in their ideas and opinions. I hope that I have represented and interpreted their views and positions fairly and accurately, and thank them all for their time and help.

I am also deeply grateful to Katja, Sam and Vanessa, who in their very different but always uniquely refreshing ways continue to remind me that the world looks invigoratingly different when seen from the perspective of the young.

Finally, but far from last in importance, it is a great pleasure to once again thank my wife and colleague Dr Kathryn Rountree for her constant support, encouragement and engagement with my work on this project as in everything else. Her perceptive comments and suggestions were as invaluable as always. For this, and for so much more, I am profoundly grateful.

Joe Grixti
M.A. (*Oxon*). Ph.D (*Bristol*)

February 2004

PREFACE

Aims and Methodology

This report analyses the attitudes of young Maltese people to the increasingly commercialised media landscape which surrounds, solicits, entertains, informs and ultimately contains them. It works out of the conviction that broadcasting and the media are an integral part of everyday life, and that they both shape and are in turn moulded by the cultural environment in which they exist. The aim is to contextualize and to draw connections between the media, young media audiences and the larger culture, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the significance of the media in the formation and enculturation of young Maltese consumers. One key premise here is that young people's notions of the good life are profoundly influenced by media culture, and that, consciously or not, they look to television and other broadcasting media to acquire imaginative strategies for acting on their dreams and hopes for the future, and for coping with social dilemmas (cf Fisherkeller, 1997).

The research project focused on the extents to which young consumers' beliefs, attitudes, values and modes of behaviour are influenced by the contexts and contents of broadcasting. This included a consideration of: (i) their attitudes and responses to the images, messages and values which they encounter through the various media of communication, with special reference to commercially driven broadcasting, advertising and entertainment; (ii) the nature and patterns of their uses of and engagement with broadcasting technology; (iii) their perceptions and understanding of the broader and increasingly more globalised patterns of commercial broadcasting. One main underlying premise is that the process of data collection and analysis in audience research is inseparable from the study of society and the community (cf Seiter, 1999), and the methodology used for collecting data was therefore inspired by a desire to understand what the experiences and activities of those studied mean to them.

The study thus analyses data from a series of focus-group interviews with a total of 195 young men and women aged between 14 and 25. The interviewees came from different socio-economic and regional backgrounds, and the interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, including university, a range of schools, private homes, and different work places. Most but not all interviews were in mixed gender groups. The average length of each interview was approximately 50 minutes, though there were several which went on for longer – in some cases for well over two hours. A total of

96 males and 99 females were interviewed in 31 separate focus groups. All the interviews were conducted, audio-recorded and transcribed by the chief researcher. For ease of reference, each of the interviews was numbered and these numbers are used as reference points in this report whenever specific quotations from individual interviews appear in the text. All names have been changed to protect confidentiality. Full lists of the interviews are tabulated below, with details of interview locations, as well as of the number, background, gender and age of interviewees in each group.

Another important source of information was a series of interviews with professionals working either directly in the media industry or else in areas which have a direct engagement with young people and the media in Malta. These professionals included advertising agents, a producer of radio programmes and of other activities aimed specifically at young people, university lecturers, parents, and the president of the Commission for People with Disabilities. My sincere thanks to them for their time, insights and patience are more specifically recorded in the list of acknowledgements which appears in the report's opening pages.

The focus group discussions followed a similar structure, with variations to accommodate individual interests or group dynamics. I usually started by explaining that I was meeting different groups of young people to gain a clearer understanding of their attitudes to broadcasting and the media, and of how their lives might be influenced by them. I explained that this was part of a project commissioned by the Broadcasting Authority, and all participants were assured that their anonymity would be respected. The opening questions focused on patterns of frequency and preference in young people's use of the media. This was used as a preliminary to more open-ended questions exploring perceptions of personal and cultural identity – with particular reference to the predominantly commercialised and globalised nature of the Maltese media landscape, where young people are bombarded with alluring images, films and lifestyles, most coming from overseas and projecting values which appear to be increasingly at variance with more traditional Maltese beliefs and customs.

Interviews were held either in Maltese or English, depending on which language the participants felt more comfortable with. In some cases, because of the mixed nature of the group, a mixture of both languages was used. In order to allow the voices of the participants to come through as much as possible, statements which were made in Maltese are reproduced in the report in their original form, with English translations added. Quotations

from interviews which appear in English only are usually direct transcripts of comments made in English.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Interview No.	Location of Interview	Group	Number and Gender	Age
A1	University	3rd Yr BEd Students (Sec)	3 male	21-22
A2	University	3rd Yr BEd Students (Sec)	4 female	20-21
A3	University	3rd Yr BEd Students (Sec)	6 male	20-22
A4	University	3rd Yr BEd Students(Prim)	4 male 2 female	21-23
A5	University	3rd Yr BEd Students(Prim)	2 male 2 female	20-21
A6	Delta Factory, Kordin	Factory Workers	5 male 1 female	19-20
A7	Prominent Factory, Bulebel	Factory Workers	5 male 3 female	18-25
A8	Playmobil Factory, Bulebel	Factory Workers (admin)	3 male 3 female	18-25
A9	Playmobil Factory, Bulebel	Factory Workers (shop floor)	5 male	21-25
A10	Capuchin Friary, Victoria, Gozo	Students (Gozo Seminary and Junior Lyceum)	2 male 3 female	14-16
A11	Capuchin Friary, Victoria, Gozo	University Students (2nd and 4th yr Ed and Psych)	1 male 3 female	19-22
B1	Guze D'Amato Boys' Area Sec School, Paola	Fourth Form students	6 male	14-16
B2	Guze D'Amato Boys' Area Sec School, Paola	Fourth Form students	6 male	14-16
B3	Guze D'Amato Boys' Area Sec School, Paola	Fourth Form students	6 male	14-16
B4	Lily of the Valley Girls' Area School, Mosta	Fourth Form students	7 female	14-15
B5	St Aloysius' College, Sixth Form	Sixth Form Students	4 male 2 female	16-17
B6	St Aloysius' College, Sixth Form	Sixth Form students	3 male 3 female	16-17
B7	St Theresa Girls' Junior Lyceum	Fourth Form Students	7 female	14-15
B8	St Theresa Girls' Junior Lyceum	Fourth Form students	7 female	14-15
B9	St Martin's College	Fourth Form students	3 male 3 female	14-15

B10	St Martin's College	Fourth Form students	5 female	14-15
B11	Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School, Naxxar	Sixth Form students	2 male 5 female	16-18
B12	Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School, Naxxar	Sixth Form students	1 male 8 female	17-18
B13	Institute of Business and Commerce, MCAST, Paola	Communications Class	3 male 10 female	17-20
B14	Institute of Business and Commerce, MCAST, Paola	Marketing Class	4 male 14 female	17-21
B15	School of Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy, Sliema	Hairdressing students	2 male 4 female	16-20
B16	Private Home	4^{th}, 5^{th} & 6^{th} Form students (St Aloysius' College & St Joseph Junior Lyceum)	5 male 1 female	14-17
B17	School of Art and Design, MCAST, Targa Gap	Art and Design students	4 male 2 female	17-22
B18	Institute of Building Construction, Naxxar	Building Construction students	6 male	16-18
B19	Private Home	Sixth Form students (Junior College & St Aloysius' College)	6 male	17-18
B20	Private Home	Sixth Form students (Junior College)	4 male 1 female	17-20

Chapter 1
A SNAPSHOT OF THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Traffic Intersection near Paola Roundabout,
Malta, 30 May 2002:
Cultural symbols competing for young people's attention
as they make their way to and from school or their place of work.

"A Shinier Malta"

On a billboard at a busy intersection in Paola, a triptych of images advertises Versace soaps and body lotions. I saw this billboard while I was on my way to meet students at the MCAST Institute of Business and Commerce in Paola, and again when I was coming back from interviews with young factory workers at Corradino and Bulebel Industrial Estates. What struck me most was the positioning of the billboard and this particular poster. Just behind it was a Catholic Church, while on the other side of the street facing it stood Malta's only (as far as I know) mosque and minaret. The Junior Lyceum stood not far down the road, with the MCAST buildings beyond that.

In the opposite direction lies the industrial estate, with its range of factories and production plants. An eye-catching symbol of global glamour and commercialised sexuality appeared here to have reached the gates of the centres of learning, labour, tradition and organised religion, and incongruously assumed the role of guardian at the gates.

For me this captured the conflicting forces and contradictions which dominate Malta's cultural landscape at this stage in its history. These are the symbols which vie for young people's attention as they make their way to and from school or their place of work. And in this competition for hearts and minds, it seemed to be the poster advertising body products which had pitched its lines of appeal most unequivocally at the young. Indeed, when I asked the different groups of students and young workers I interviewed whether they had noticed this particular poster, I was struck by how accurately most of them remembered its details. Many insisted that posters and billboards like this showed that Malta was moving away from its restrictive past and embracing a more "international" perspective. "Billboards like this give Malta that sort of better and more modern look," remarked 21 year-old Vincent[1] (A8). "If you go to England or France or wherever, everywhere is covered with that sort of form of advertisement. They make Malta look shinier!" Yet most of the young people I spoke to about this particular poster also insisted that the young models portrayed in it were obviously not Maltese – a Maltese couple would not pose like that because of

[1] As was pointed out in the Preface, all the names of the young people interviewed have been changed to protect confidentiality.

the scandal it would create.

In the first image, in stark shades of blue, a young blond woman and a dark haired young man tilt their heads and shoulders against each other as they lean up and forward from a reclining position, smiling broadly at whoever happens to glance at them from the busy street. What can be seen of their young and well-trimmed bodies indicates that they are totally naked, though their decency (as they used to say) is strategically protected by the angle of their postures and the positioning of their arms. Next to this image, in the centre of the triptych, is a picture of the young woman by herself. The dominant colour here is red, and the model is again looking straight at the viewer (through the camera), her arms partially covering her breasts, with one of her hands slightly touching her lips, as she sits cross-legged and naked behind three bottles of "Time for Pleasure" body products. The third image is in green. The couple are together again, but this time they are caught in an embrace, with his arms around her shoulder and back, their legs interlaced with each other. Here too they are naked, and here again they look straight at the viewer, but this time they are looking sultry rather than smiling.

Lines from W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" spring to mind: "The young / In one another's arms …. commend all summer long / Whatever is begotten, born, and dies./ Caught in that sensual music all neglect/ Monuments of unageing intellect."

There is clearly nothing particularly technologically advanced or innovative in the messages projected by an advertising poster like this one. What is striking about it are the qualities it shares with the countless similar images which appear so frequently in the popular media: the technical virtuosity with which it has been posed, composed, and airbrushed; the eye-catching way it has packaged its banal equation of success and happiness with physical appearance and sexual attractiveness; its endorsement and propagation of stereotypical norms of enviable body shape, youthfulness, looks and sexual orientation. In this respect, as indeed is the case with most commercial media, the poster is selling more than a brand of soap and body lotions – it is selling a whole way of life. Judging by the ways in which Maltese youth talk about themselves and their relation to their cultural environment, the sales pitch appears to be working.

Perceptions of Pluralism

Most young people appear to believe that pluralism in broadcasting has led to greater awareness among the young about the options and choices which are available to them – not simply in terms of consumer products but more importantly in terms of new ideas encountered through greater contact with a range of different lifestyles and belief systems. Though there were some notable reservations, most of the young people I interviewed said that they see this as a positive development, in the sense that greater awareness has led to greater openness to global perspectives and more freedom of choice. Many expressed impatience with "the old ways of doing things", insisting that greater openness to new ideas, and especially to ideas coming from more technologically advanced cultures, was essential to Malta's further development. Local politics and the Catholic Church were often cited as major exponents of "the old ways of doing things", and were often criticised for failing to take account of the needs and interests of the young. One 20 year-old male factory worker (A6) blamed what he saw as Malta's "third world status" on these two traditional bulwarks of Maltese cultural identity:

Alla]ares nibqg]u lura! Hawn Malta g]andna \ew[affarijiet li jitfawna]afna lura: il-politika u l-knisja. Nibqa ng]ida]ajti kollha ji[ifieri jien. Ma jistg]ux jinbidlu ji[ifieri. Hawn Malta titfana]afna lura din! It-tielet dinja qeg]din hawn!	Heaven forbid that we remain backward! Here in Malta there are two things which throw us backwards a lot: politics and the church. I'll keep saying this all my life. And there's no way they can change. Here in Malta this throws us back a lot. We're living in a third world country here!

The reference to "third world" status is interesting in this context because Malta is here being assumed to be in this "backward" position not because of economic indicators (through which "third world status" is normally defined), but because of customs and attitudes associated with local politics and religion.

At the same time, however, many young people see the intrusion of foreign ideas and values as increasingly compromising and even potentially destroying what they consider to be Malta's greatest assets – most of which tend to be associated with family values, a relatively relaxed lifestyle and vibrant traditions. These perceptions and the wider issues they raise are discussed more fully in the ensuing chapters of this report. At this stage, I

simply wish to draw attention to the mixed and often conflicting feelings that young people have about what they perceive as tradition and change, and to the manner in which such conflicts also reveal themselves in how they talk about the media and broadcasting.

While young people generally applaud the introduction of pluralism in broadcasting, seeing it as bringing in more variety and freedom of choice, they also tend to be very critical of its application and consequences. One of the major negative consequences of pluralism identified by many of the young people I interviewed was the fact that it is seen to have compromised the quality of most local productions. A frequently recurring note in focus groups was the view that quality is being sacrificed for quantity. This was often ascribed to the heavy demand for Maltese television and radio programmes and teleserials, the proliferation of newspapers and other media outlets, and the fact that every major political party and many other interest groups have their own TV and radio stations, publications and other competing media outlets. One group of University students (A1), for instance, remarked that limited finances in local broadcasting mean that production values can never hope to match material coming from overseas. They acknowledged that there has been some improvement over recent years, but insisted that because there is so much competition, the limited resources available are being spread too thinly. Daytime studio-based television and radio programmes of the "talking heads" variety were specifically targeted as major culprits in this respect, and were frequently described as repetitive and unimaginative.

We can perhaps start to get a better understanding of what these perspectives reveal about young people's beliefs, hopes and frustrations if we place them in the context of the varied uses Maltese youth make of the communications media at their disposal. To this end, the rest of this chapter is devoted to outlining patterns of media consumption as they emerge from statements made by young people themselves, as well as from figures published by the National Statistics Office in two key reports which relate directly to youth and the media: *Children: Official Statistics of Malta* (2002a) and *Kultura 2000: A Survey of Cultural Participation* (2002b).

Patterns of Television and Video Consumption

According to the National Statistics Office, in the year 2000, 99.1 per cent of Maltese households owned at least one television set – just marginally higher than those with a telephone service (99 per cent). 91.3 per cent of

households had at least one video cassette player/recorder; and only 5.6 per cent owned DVDs (2002a: 89).

When I asked the young people interviewed for this project about the amount of time they spend watching television, the most striking feature was the vast range of responses which they gave. But despite the considerable variations, one clear trend is that most claim to watch less than they used to when they were younger. This trend is in line with patterns recorded in overseas surveys (Fine et al., 1990; Josephson, 1995; Neumann, 1988; Rosengren and Windhal, 1989).[2] The amount of time that interviewees said they spend watching television per day ranged from half an hour to around five hours. An average of about two hours per evening seemed to be quite common, though most insisted that there is considerable variation in how much they watch – usually depending on what else they have to do and what time of year it is. Some insisted that they watch no television at all, preferring to spend their free time at the computer. There are of course also many avid TV viewers to be found in this as in all other age groups. 16 year-old Sonia (B6), for instance, described herself as a TV maniac:

> I watch anything! Argentinean soaps, Italian soaps, American soaps, anything! I just watch them because I love TV… cartoons… anything… I just love watching TV. I watch for one to one-and a half hours after school, then from nine till midnight, except for when I have to study. I don't like watching local news because they're too biased and boring. I prefer Italian news. I like current affairs programmes and debates and programmes like *Xarabank* and ones on the environment. I don't watch Maltese teleserials. They bug me those!

The NSO figures for the number of hours spent watching television by young people aged 16 to 24 provide the following percentages[3]:

[2] Citing Canadian and international research, Josephson (1995) reports that adolescents "watch less television than they did when they were younger, since they begin to spend more time away from home, do more things with peers, and listen more to radio."

[3] The reference year for the NSO figures was 1 November 1999 till 31 October 2000. All percentages reprinted in this chapter have been tabulated differently from how they appear in the NSO report, which also provides figures for a larger range of age groups (16-24; 25-34; 35-44; 45-54; 55-64; 65+).

NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT WATCHING TV:	PERCENTAGES OF 16-24 AGE GROUP:
0-1 hours	26.67
1-2 hours	23.95
2-3 hours	24.81
3-4 hours	11.17
4-5 hours	5.74
5 + hours	7.66

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 14)

In the present study, the types of TV programmes which were named as most popular included recent films (especially on satellite), sports (especially with boys), MTV-style music shows, cartoons, local comedies and teleserials, news reports (but often not the local ones), talk shows, and discussions about young people and life issues ("but definitely not politics!"). Many also complained that local television is too dominated by party politics.

The NSO survey (2002b: 26) gives the following percentages for preferred types of television programme for the 16-24 age groups[4]:

PREFERRED TYPE OF TV PROGRAMME:	PERCENTAGES OF 16-24 AGE GROUP:
News	77.41
Serials	45.99
Music	58.63
Sports	55.20
Films	83.13
Documentaries	46.88
Children's Programmes	25.98
Entertainment	54.74
Talk Shows	46.07
Sell-programmes	14.10
Others	30.69

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 26)

There were several interviewees who made a point of stressing that they never (or hardly ever) watch local stations, and that they prefer foreign

[4] Every person could indicate more than one preference.

transmissions. But there was considerable variation in this regard, and attitudes to local and foreign stations appear to be related to home background, education and socio-economic status. Those who insisted that all Maltese stations and programmes are "rubbish" or "a joke" often seemed to want to distance themselves from what they thought of as "typically Maltese traditions", preferring instead to align themselves with lifestyles, ideas and productions coming from overseas. This is a point that I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 7.

There is also considerable variation in how young people watch TV. A large number said that they tend to watch alone, but there were also many who stressed that they enjoy watching with the rest of the family, particularly when popular teleserials are on. Channel surfing is very common, with many saying that they often watch two programmes or more at once, and that they rarely watch anything from beginning to end. Television was also frequently described as something to watch while doing something else around the house, as background noise, or as a distraction. Some interviewees remarked that they don't have the patience to focus on one activity or even one medium at a time. One female University student (A2), for instance, described her TV watching habits as follows:

Nie]u gost nara l-a]barijiet g]ax pa`enzja naqra l-gazzetta jew hekk, m'g]andix! Allura, dik il-]a[a, per-e\empju qed niekol u qed nara l-a]barijiet, hemmhekk allright ...	I enjoy watching the news because I don't have the patience to read the newspaper! So, I find it good, for example, to be having my dinner and watching the news at the same time.

The rental or buying of pre-recorded video tapes and DVDs is not as widespread as appears to have been the case in the past. Several respondents commented that they can watch recent films on satellite, so they have no need of renting them.

The exact number of households with access to satellite is difficult to assess because of the widespread availability of pirated satellite reception. Mr Josef Buttigieg of the Youth Policy Secretariat noted that the amount of import duty being paid on satellite equipment in Malta is actually much lower than the number of home satellite dishes in circulation. I was also told that the growth in pirated satellite reception has led to significant drops in the number of subscribers to Cable television, as well as in attendance at cinemas.

One exception in the area of video rentals appears to be videos of Maltese teleserials and soap operas, which several interviewees said that they enjoy renting and watching. But in most cases, the video recorder appears to be used most often for taping programmes which cannot be watched at the time they are broadcast, and particularly when the young prefer to go out.

Radio, Audio Tapes and CDs

The figures given by the NSO for how frequently young people aged 16 to 24 listen to radio indicate that 64.61 per cent listen to radio every day; 20.34 per cent listen several times a week; 5.12 per cent tune in once a week; 6.85 per cent less than once a week; and 3.08 per cent assert that they never listen (2002b: 28). The following percentages are also provided in the NSO report for the average number of daily hours that people in this age group spend listening to radio:

NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT LISTENING TO RADIO:	PERCENTAGES OF 16-24 AGE GROUP:
0-1 hours	36.27
1-2 hours	16.59
2-3 hours	13.08
3-4 hours	6.46
4-5 hours	4.89
5 + hours	22.71

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 30)

In the course of the interviews conducted for this project, radio was generally described as "something to listen to while you're doing something else" – driving, working, studying, etc. Manual workers at factories said they usually listen to radio while working – on a personal walkman or else on communal receivers when safety regulations make this impossible. For 21 year-old university student Martina (A2) having the radio on as background noise wherever she happens to be appears to be a necessity:

Dika [lieda dejjem id-dar, g]ax jiena That's always a cause for arguments

f'kull liema kamra li nkun, nixg]el ir-radjo! (laughs) G]ax niddejjaq noqg]od wa]di. Anke jekk ir-radjo ma nkunx qed nag]ti kasu, nixg]elu, biex ikun hemm dik i`-`ertu moviment fid-dar ...

at home, because whichever room I'm in, I'll put the radio on! *(laughs)* Because I hate being alone. Even if I'm not paying any attention to the radio, I switch it on, so as to have some movement in the house…

For the vast majority of young people, radio is primarily a source of music, and many insist that they actually prefer to listen to CDs, tapes or even music downloaded from the Internet as this gives them more control on what they listen to. It also saves them having to listen to adverts and endless radio talk. Several said they buy original music CDs (as distinct from pirated copies) on a fairly regular basis.

Asked what happens when they are listening to radio and a discussion programme comes on the air, the majority said that they switch stations, especially if it is a political programme. Radio talk shows were often described as too dominated by party politics: "They reduce everything to politics rather than talking about serious issues," was how one young man described them (A6). Others remarked that heated arguments over politics on the radio would be hilarious if they weren't so tedious and repetitive:

}lief kull]add ji[[ieled ma tismg]ax! Xi kulltant i[eg]luk tid]aq, ming]ajr ma jridu!

All you hear is people fighting! Sometimes they make you laugh without their wanting to!

Discussion programmes about topics of "youth interest" were often listed as exceptions. As one 17 year-old student (B5) put it:

Jekk ikun hemm xi diskussjoni fuq i\-\ag]\ag], all right. Imma ma rridx dik il-]afna retorika tal-politika! Iddejjaqni! Radjo jg]o[obni, ija, mu\ika imma! Jekk ikun hemm]afna riklami naqliblu... u]afna news idejjaqni!

If there's a discussion about young people, that's all right. But I don't want all that political rhetoric! I can't stand it! I like radio, yes, but it has to be music! If there are lots of adverts, I change the channel … and I can't stand lots of news either!

In the NSO survey, music programmes were identified as preferred type of radio listening by almost 95 per cent of young people in the 16-24 age

groups. Other types of programmes listed as preferences in the NSO report are tabulated below (every person could indicate more than one preference):

PREFERRED TYPE OF RADIO PROGRAMME:	PERCENTAGES OF 16-24 AGE GROUP:
News	40.20
Music	94.77
Sports	23.47
Children's Programmes	2.39
Talk Shows	16.04
Sell-programmes	6.34
Others	8.87

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 33)

Cinema

In the interviews, there was considerable variation in the ways young people spoke about how often they go to the cinema. The highest number of visits for those who saw themselves as movie buffs was once a week, but once or twice a month seemed to be more common, and there were also many who said that they had not been to the movies for years. Several said that they are more likely to go in winter than in summer, and all said that they go with friends, partners or relatives, never alone.

The percentages given by the NSO for numbers of visits to the cinema during 2000 by people aged 16 to 24 read as follows:

NUMBER OF VISITS TO THE CINEMA DURING 2000:	PERCENTAGES OF 16-24 AGE GROUP:
Never	10.20
1	6.73
2	6.24
3	9.10
4	10.10
5 +	57.63

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 62)

Most of the males interviewed for this project said that they prefer thrillers, horror, fast-action films and comedies; the females usually said that

they preferred comedies, films with a good plot, "true stories" and romance, but action movies were also highly rated by several female respondents.

The high cost of going to the movies was mentioned by a large number of respondents, and this was seen as a major disincentive. "It's better to spend that money on drinks!" commented 16 year-old Jason (B16) (*"A]jar tmur x'imkien u tixrobhom!")*. For 14 year-old Justin (B1), cinema censorship is the main annoyance – he has to wait for adult rated films to come out on video when he cannot see them at the cinema! Many said that they don't see the point of going to the cinema when they can see the films on satellite or (in some cases) on versions downloaded through the Internet. As two university students put it (A3):

Steve: *Ikun hemm film tajjeb, ma nitilfhux. Però ma tantx immur spiss g]ax nara] g]oli, g]ax spe`i tistenna xharejn ikun fuq is-satellita wkoll.*

Steve: If there's a good film on, I don't miss it. But I don't go all that often because I think it's expensive, because you can sort of wait a couple of months and it will be on satellite anyway.

Carmel: *Jiena ifhimni, immur hekk spe`i b]ala ]ar[a, anka jkun hemm film tajjeb spe`i. Renta, g]ax g]olja daqxejn, jekk tmur fil-weekend]a t]allas aktar.*

Carmel: In my case, I go because it's a kind of outing, and also when there's a good film on. It's a bit of a burden though, because it's quite expensive, and if you go on the weekend you have to pay even more.

Some of the older males commented that it costs even more when they go with their girl friends because in the majority of cases the man is still expected to pay for both. Those who do go to the cinema on a regular basis stressed its social dimensions (it's a way of going out with friends), and also the fact that cinema has better sound, visual effects and atmosphere than you get when you watch a film on TV.

In marked contrast, there were also those who said that they hate going to the cinema because they find the atmosphere claustrophobic and don't like having to sit in the same spot for so long. 20 year-old Tanja and Angela (A2) remarked that they only go because of pressure from their boy friends, and would much rather meet friends and chat when they go out:

Rari mmur, u bil-[lied! G]ax niddejjaq noqg]od hemm tlett I rarely go, and only after a lot of arguments! Because I can't stand sitting

sieg]at, uff... M'g]andix pa`enzja!	there for three hours! I haven't got the patience!

Computers and the Internet

According to NSO statistics, in 2000, 51.3 per cent of Maltese households had personal computers, but only 15.4 per cent had Internet access points (NSO, 2002a: 89). The NSO *Kultura 2000* survey provides the following percentages for the numbers of young people aged 16 to 24 using a personal computer in several locations:

PERSONS USING A PERSONAL COMPUTER BY LOCATION OF ACCESS	PERCENTAGES OF 16-24 AGE GROUP:
Never	29.99
At home	28.31
Not at home	15.36
At home and not at home	26.34

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 4)

The interviews for this project revealed great variations in access to and use of computers and the Internet, though there appears to be a predictable correlation between use and educational home background. Respondents who come from more professional and career oriented home backgrounds seem to have more access to home computers and they appear to make the most extensive use of them. Among the Internet users, those coming from the lower end of the 14-25 age bracket tended to spend a lot of time chatting on the Internet – most often with friends and other Maltese youths, though sometimes also with people from overseas. One student (B17) described how in her early to mid teens, she had been through a "terrible phase" (*"fa\i kera"*) lasting about two years, during which she used to spend from 6.00 p.m. till 6.00 a.m. chatting with Maltese friends on the Internet! 22 year-old Conrad (B 17) also insisted that he makes extensive use of the Internet:

Jien g]andi computer bid-dial-up. *Hemm xi]a[a fija li kif isiru s-*	I have a computer with dial-up connection. There's something in me

sitta naqbad. Minn dejjem kont hekk. {ieli anki n]allieh lejl s]ie] jag]ti, anka nkun rieqed, inkun qed niddownlowdja jew xi email kbira jew xi update ta' xi]a[a u hekk. Imma l-i\jed li nu\ah emails, communications, hekk, i\jed to keep in touch, *na]seb, dik li* it makes me connect, *g]ax na]seb li]a nsib lil s]abi ...*

that makes me want to go on line as soon as it's six o'clock. I've always been like this. Sometimes I even leave it running all night long, even if I'm asleep, when I'm downloading either some large email or some update of something or other. But the most I use it for is emails, communications, that sort of thing, more to keep in touch, I think, the idea that it makes me connect, because I think that I might find my friends on line…

Conrad also revealed that all the friends he chats with on the Internet are Maltese, and that the longest he had spent chatting was four hours, with a girl with whom he later went out.

Computer games were also frequently cited as favourite activities, and several said that they make extensive use of the computer to download and listen to music. For 21 year-old Vincent (A8), for instance, the computer is the centre of all his leisure activities:

> I do everything with my computer: TV, DVD, everything through my computer. Anything that requires any form of electronic work is done with my computer. It's my toy. I usually spend about four hours on it. I use it mostly for entertainment and to follow my interests. Mostly I could say that the purpose of my computer is music… you know, the wonderful world of MP3s.

The majority of users, however, insisted that they use computers and the Internet mostly for study and research, especially when they are working on school or university projects and assignments.

The NSO survey gives the following percentages for frequency of use of the Internet among users of personal computers:

FREQUENCY OF INTERNET USE	PERCENTAGES OF 16-24 AGE GROUP:

Everyday	21.19
Several times a week	32.32
Once a week	0.92
Less than once a week	13.25
Never	32.32

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 7)

The NSO report also gives the following reasons for young people's use of the Internet (every person could give more than one reason):

REASON FOR INTERNET USE	PERCENTAGES AMONG USERS IN 16-24 AGE GROUP:
Communication	58.99
Information	85.84
Service Use	22.05
Shopping	10.96
Others	18.69

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 10)

Mobile Phones

Virtually all the young people interviewed had their own mobile phones. Those who did not own one, either said that they were about to get one, or that they had lost their old one and were on the point of replacing it. All insisted that they consider their mobile phone a necessity and that they cannot imagine managing without it, even though they also acknowledged that it can be very expensive to run.

Mobile phones are used mostly to keep in contact with friends – particularly when arrangements need to be made about where to meet and where to go. Many also insisted that it is a safe way of keeping their parents informed as to where they are and what time they'll be home when they are out late. Text messaging (SMS) is clearly a boom market among the young and, because it is cheaper than phoning, it is used very extensively for contacting friends and planning meetings, etc.

15 year-old Reuben (B2) described his dependence on mobile phones as follows:

Ara qabel, xi ftit snin ilu, kien g]adhom ma je\istux il-mobiles, mhux kif saru populari llum. Ara issa, illum, ming]ajr mobile tippanikja! Tippanikja! G]ax]a ng]idlek: il-mobile safe, fl-istess]in. Imma ara qabel, tmur s'g]and sie]bi, tmur bil-mixi insomma... Ara issa, i``empillu, hekk... Bil-mobile issa saru a]jar... jekk jinqala' xi]a[a fil-familja, per e\empju, i`emplulek.

A few years ago, mobiles still didn't exist, not in the way they are popular today, anyway. But now, today, if you don't have a mobile you panic! You panic! Because, you know, the mobile is also safe. What happened in the past was that if you wanted to visit a friend, you'd go on foot… But now, you just ring him up… Things are better now with mobiles – if anything happens in the family, for example, they can ring you.

Some respondents also commented that many buy mobile phones to be like others, and that the brand names of the better makes have also become a status symbol among the young.

Newspapers and Magazines

The impression I got from the interviews was that the majority of Maltese youth normally skim through the newspapers, rather than reading them thoroughly or on a regular basis. The exception were a relatively small number of University students and sixth formers who described the daily reading of one or more papers (in both Maltese and English) as "a must", and preferably first thing in the morning. In most cases, however, when young people read the papers they tend to simply flick through the headlines or specific sections – the sports page, cinema reviews and entertainment sections, news in brief, and so on – and they will occasionally read articles which catch their attention (especially reports of accidents, scandals, major crimes or court cases). Newspapers are also more likely to be browsed through or read on Sundays.

There were also a few who said that they regularly go through the classified adverts section – not necessarily because they are looking for something specific to buy, but because they like to keep a check on prices of products they happen to be interested in or have already bought (cars, bikes, property, etc). Many said that they flick through if a newspaper happens to be around the house or at work. A number of young men said that they usually start at the back page and work their way backwards. Several of the 14-15 year olds said that they only read the paper to check the TV and films

sections, and for the jokes. One University student said that he only reads the newspaper while he's eating, unless he happens to be watching television!

Again, even in talk about newspapers, party politics tended to be described as no-go areas. "When I read the papers, I take an interest in anything, as long as it's not political!" was how one 20-year old (A6) put it. There were also a number of students who have a more active interest in politics and who said that they follow political and parliamentary reports regularly and closely. Several respondents also conceded that they become more interested in politics during election periods, though they also complained that the incessant campaigning over such periods is excessive and oppressive.

The NSO *Kultura 2000* survey provides the following percentages for how frequently young people aged 16 to 24 say they read newspapers:

FREQUENCY OF NEWSPAPER READING	PERCENTAGES OF 16-24 AGE GROUP:
Everyday	35.29
Several times a week	24.45
Once a week	19.84
Less than once a week	7.95
Never	12.47

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 39)

The NSO survey also identified the following percentages for the types of news-sections which young newspapers readers prefer (every person could indicate more than one preference):

TYPES OF NEWSPAPER NEWS-SECTION PREFERENCES	PERCENTAGES OF READERS AGED 16-24:

Local	11.48
European	7.40
International	9.67
Financial, Economic	6.54
Cultural	12.03
Other Local	27.97
Sports	24.91
Other	21.31

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 42)

The figures published by the NSO about how frequently young people read magazines, and about the type of information they seek when they read magazines are more difficult to interpret because they do not specify what the survey took "magazines" to include. The impression I got from my interviews was that, unless you include newsletters, TV programme guides and the colour magazine supplements which come with the Sunday papers, the reading of special interest magazines is not very widespread among the young. The types of magazines which were mentioned by those who said they do read them included magazines devoted to cars, bikes, sports, fashion, films, stars and rock bands. Some University students studying foreign languages said they regularly read magazines in the language they are studying (French, Italian, German) to improve their language competency. One young teenager said that he always reads his father's copy of the local bird-hunters' newsletter, and a group of young girls said that they love reading imported gossip magazines about pop stars and rock bands. Many also said that they look through the Sunday colour supplements more or less regularly.

The NSO gives the following figures for frequency of magazine reading among young adults:

FREQUENCY OF MAGAZINE READING	PERCENTAGES OF 16-24 AGE GROUP:
Everyday	4.35

Several times a week	36.28
Once a week	11.69
Less than once a week	25.34
Never	22.34

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 44)

The NSO report also identifies the following types of information as sought by young readers of magazines (each person could indicate more than one type of information):

TYPE OF INFORMATION SOUGHT IN MAGAZINES	PERCENTAGES OF READERS AGED 16-24:
Local	4.48
European	0.00
International	4.73
Financial, Economic	8.73
Cultural	22.19
Other Local	18.58
Sports	34.36
Other	61.49

Source: National Statistics Office (2002b: 47)

Conclusion

A number of salient features emerge from the statistics and comments presented above. In the first place, it is clear that there is a very broad range of interests and patterns of media consumption among Maltese youth. It is also clear that they are very much in tune with new media technologies and that they tend to look positively on such technologies – often associating the media and those images and messages that appeal to them with the future and with contact with a wider and braver new world. It is also significant that as young people's interests become more focused on their social life outside the family home, one of their most frequently used communications tools has become the mobile phone, which they use primarily to maintain regular contact with friends. Even young people's use of the Internet and email are often primarily associated with keeping in touch with friends, so that extensive Internet chatting sessions, for instance, are usually held with contacts who live locally.

Young people also of course make extensive use of the larger and more commercially-oriented entertainment media, a substantial proportion of which are of foreign origin. As they try on and test out a range of possible new personae and identities, young people also explore, reach out to, draw in and often internalise those aspects of the wider world which appeal to them. The world of youth-oriented music forms a central part of youth culture in Malta as anywhere else. Films, whether viewed through the television screen or at the cinema clearly exercise a great deal of appeal; as do other forms of screen entertainments. And it is in this area that those who are older often express concern about the potential or perceived influence of these global forces on young people's values and behaviour.

In this respect, the images and messages encountered through the media often come into conflict with more traditional values and ways of doing things, even as they assume a key role in the formation of youth culture and individual identity. It is to a detailed consideration of those processes of identity formation and how they relate to local and foreign media and broadcasting that the chapters which follow direct themselves.

Chapter 2
YOUNG PEOPLE AS CONSUMERS

"Being Savvy" and "Getting it Right"

When I asked two young University-educated professionals in their late twenties if they thought that Maltese young people have changed a lot over the past ten years, they both insisted that there have been quite dramatic changes since they themselves were in their teens. Today's youngsters, they told me, are "all so savvy and they know what's going on and they've got it right". Citing Cable Television, MTV and foreign travel as important influences, they described today's youth as "more streetwise, more fashion conscious":

> MTV was a very big influence. Before, I'll tell you from my own personal experience, for example. I always had a – in fact it's part of what I specialise in – I always had a thing for style, for fashion, it always interested me a lot. And from when I was young, I always used to be wearing something that was a bit kind of, you know, new. And you never used to see anybody wearing it. Nowadays the guys dress up even better than the girls. You see guys' shops full of guys shopping. You see the guys with the weird haircuts. The girls now all look pretty similar. Even that has changed, for example, and that's happened because of MTV, it's happened ... and I think one other reason, I don't know why, but people seem to be travelling more. They seem to be going abroad more. It's easier to travel now. Younger people have more opportunities to work in some jobs, they save more. And it happened in a very short time, and now there's an overload as well. Which is why, I think, things are going a bit sour in certain areas, you know, I mean with the rave scene, kids drinking alcohol, and so on. I mean, when you get an overload of something sort of, you try to get too much of it.

Underlying these assertions about what it means for young Maltese consumers to be "savvy" and to "get it right", is an implied association of the "new" with the "foreign", particularly as imported through television, MTV and the experience of foreign travel. By implication, being less "savvy" and

"getting it wrong" is associated with the "old", the more traditional, "local" or indigenous. The implications of this point in terms of cultural and national identity are discussed in detail in Chapter 7. What I wish to explore in this chapter is exactly what being "savvy" for today's young means in terms of their attitudes to spending and saving, and how they see this as being different from what was the case in the past.

This discussion proceeds from the understanding that, particularly in the fields of communications and entertainment, Malta is inevitably part of a process of "globalisation" that has been dominated by a combination of dramatic developments in technology, world-wide processes of deregulation in broadcasting, and the growth of massive multi-national media conglomerates which command interests that span a range of key media sectors and operate across the major world markets. The rapid rise of global commercial media all across the planet is, as Robert McChesney (2002) points out, closely linked to neo-liberalism and the neo-liberal "deregulation" of corporate activity:

> Neoliberalism is often called "deregulation", but that is inaccurate and misleading. There is still plenty of government regulation – try broadcasting on a channel licensed to a commercial firm – but the regulation is now conducted increasingly to suit the needs of the largest businesses instead of the general public. […] The commercial media system is the necessary transmission belt for businesses to market their wares across the world: indeed globalization as we know it could not exist without it. A whopping three-quarters of global spending on advertising ends up in the pockets of a mere 20 media companies. (McChesney, 2002: 24-5)

These developments have given the leading world communications companies what Graham Murdoch calls "an unrivalled capacity to shape the symbolic environment which we inhabit" (Murdoch, 1996). Indeed, many commentators have argued that this process amounts to a new form of cultural imperialism, and that it has become virtually synonymous with what has been variously termed the "Americanisation" or "McDonaldisation" of society (Barber, 1996; Barker, 1997; Boyd-Barratt, 1998; Herman and McChesney, 1997; Real, 1996). Such patterns of influence are often argued to be most pronounced with the young, and they are said to be particularly noticeable in young people's styles of dress, modes of speech and in the types

of films, TV programmes, video games and music which they find most appealing and claim as their own, and which appear increasingly identical in different parts of the world.

However, it is worth stressing (as indeed I argue more fully in Chapter 7) that it is misleading to think of this process as a simple "cause and effect" phenomenon – with one side (the Hollywood inspired media entertainment juggernaut) injecting its influence on an indeterminate mass of passive recipients (Maltese youth and Maltese culture more generally). For one thing, the "global mass media" in the fields of entertainment are actually made up of a complex and varied network of conglomerates and forces which are not exclusively American in origin or orientation.

More importantly, when cultures come in contact the influence is likely to go in both directions, so that (as indeed is happening throughout the world) traditional Maltese youth culture is not so much getting replaced by global mass culture as coexisting with it and being inflected by it. Though it is heavily influenced by the commercial orientations currently dominating the global media, youth-oriented media entertainment is also strongly driven by the interests and input of young people themselves. The young play important roles not just in determining which particular media products, images and values they choose to endorse, but also in the production of such media images and values. It is usually young people of similar ages to their fans who become pop idols or adored film stars, and many of the most popular films and TV shows have young people, and young people's themes, as their focus. Local versions of programmes aimed at and presented by young people (as in MTV-style compilations) may indeed often look very similar to their overseas counterparts, but they are also very distinctly Maltese.

But though it is misleading to ascribe the cause of changing attitudes and patterns of behaviour among the young exclusively to the media, and to commercially oriented, globally-inspired media in particular, the fact remains that there have been some very dramatic developments in the ways Malta's youth perceive themselves and their relation to their local and global environments. And it is also clear that the media have played and continue to play a very significant role in these developments. The aim of this chapter is to start unpacking some of these developments by focussing on changing patterns in spending and saving among today's youth, and on how young people see their lives and opportunities as being different from those of their parents' generation.

Attitudes to Spending and Saving (Ages 18-25)

According to figures published by the National Statistics Office in January 2004, over the period from 1994 to 2002 the disposable income of Maltese households increased by 49.8 per cent – from Lm732 million in 1994 to an estimated Lm1.1 billion in 2002. At the same time, there has been a 241.9 per cent increase in personal loans over the same period, from Lm149 million in 1994 to Lm0.5 billion in 2002. Since 1994, the total amount that the Maltese borrowed, on average, increased from 20.3 per cent of their total disposable income to 46.4 per cent in 2002. The amount borrowed for the purchase or finishing of dwellings doubled from 16.4 per cent of disposable income in 1994 to 33.5 per cent in 2002. According to the NSO, "Effectively this means that while the Maltese, on average, borrowed 16c on property for every Lm1 they earned in the form of disposable income in 1994, this figure went up to 34c in 2002. In terms of total loans, the Maltese borrowed an average of 20c for every Lm1 they earned in 1994, the figure rising to 46c in 2002" (*The Times*, 23 January 2004).

The dramatic changes in general attitudes to spending, borrowing and saving reflected in these figures are also borne out in the way Maltese youth speak about money and how they use it. One topic discussed in the focus groups for this project related to young people's attitudes to spending and saving money. In each case, they were told that young people in Malta used to have a reputation for saving; did they think that this was still the case? The responses to this question revealed some striking patterns in ideas about consumption and spending.

Most said that young people today do not save. Indeed, several even found the concept of saving amusing, insisting that they have no idea where their money disappears to. "Money just flies out of your pocket," as one 18 year-old student (B17) put it ("*Lanqas naf fejn imorru! Itiru min [ol-but!*"). 19 year-old Paul[5] (B17) described how he was amazed to realise how much he had been spending when he lost his credit card and had to pay in cash:

[5] As was pointed out in the Preface, all names have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Allura spi``ajt dik il-[img]a nistaqsi lil-mummy g]al-flus, ng]idilha, issa ntihomlok! U ndunajt kemm nonfoq, fil-veru sens tal-kelma! Li hawn il-lum il-[urnata hi li tmur xi mkien, t]allas bil-kard u lanqas tarhom]er[in il-flus mill-bank!

So I ended up asking my mum for money that week, telling her "I'll pay you later!" And I realised how much I actually spend! What happens today is that when you go out you pay with your card and you don't even see the money going out of the bank!

A frequent explanation for the decrease in saving habits offered by young people themselves is the argument that everything is now much more expensive, that there are many more consumer products available than in the past, and that money is both easier to come by and harder to hold on to. One key determining factor in this change which was cited by a number of interviewees was the liberalisation of economic policies which came about during the years following the change in Malta's government in 1987. Several pointed out that many have got into the habit of living beyond their means, and that this can be attributed to the fact that it is so easy to borrow money from the banks. Joanna, a 25 year-old factory worker (A8), insisted that there has been a significant change in spending patterns among the young in recent years. She spoke of her own experience, saying that she had not been able to save any money since she was nineteen, but that she had been in the habit of saving a lot before then:

Joanna: *Biex ng]idlek il-verità meta kont \g]ira, kelli dawk is-sixteen, hekk bdejt na]dem, kont kapa`i n[amma']afna. Issa]lief inberbaq ma ng]amilx!* (laughs) *Il-paga qatt ma sservini, ji[ifieri, avolja mi\\ew[a u hekk ikolli b\onn il-flus. Na]dem l-overtime u nonfoqha. Ji[ifieri jien na]seb li anka il-mentalità tieg]i turi kemm inbidlu l-affarijiet. Minn ta' sixteen sa twenty-five suppost rabbejt l-g]aqal. G]andi l-post, uh,]eqq mi\\ew[a u suppost inkun kapa`i iktar in[emma' milli*

Joanna: To be honest with you, when I was younger, around sixteen, I started working and I was able to save a lot. Now all I ever do is fritter it all away! *(laughs)* My wages are never enough, even though I'm married and need to have money for that. I work overtime and spend it. So, even my own way of thinking shows how things have changed. From the age of sixteen to twenty-five I should really have grown more responsible. I have a home and I'm married and I should really be able to save more than when I was

meta kelli sixteen. U hemm qlibt!

sixteen. I've done the exact opposite!

Interviewer: *Allura x'qed i[g]elek, kif g]idt int, tberbaqhom il-flus? Fejn qed imorru dal-flus?*

Interviewer: So what's making you, as you put it, fritter your money away? Where is the money going?

Joanna: *X'naqbad ng]idlek, emm. L-ewwel nies, meta \\ewwi[t u hekk qiesni]adt il-libertà tieg]i g]ax ommi w missieri kienu stretti. No]ro[iktar, ingawdi iktar, inkun mar-ra[el uh ... Nixtri]afna]wejje[...*

Joanna: What can I say, emm. First of all, when I got married I sort of got my freedom, because my parents were strict. I go out more, with my husband I mean … I buy a lot of clothes …

Joanna was also convinced that the situation has also changed as far as her younger counterparts today (i.e. those who are around 16 years old) are concerned, in that they too no longer save as people of her generation used to. This was an opinion shared by many others, who insisted that today's youth live from day to day, that saving is less frequent than it used to be, and that it requires a type of sacrifice which many of today's youth are not willing to make.

There are two points which need to be made in relation to these comments. The first is that the demand for instant gratification is not limited to the young – it is much more widespread and probably applies to all age groups and strata of society. Indeed, the whole fabric of consumer-driven economies depends on its propagation and growth. The second point refers to the fact that young people in industrialised countries worldwide are marrying later than they used to in the past. Given this development, it is perhaps not surprising that Maltese youth (who like many of their foreign counterparts are postponing marriage plans till at least their mid- to late- twenties, and also later) should consider it preposterous to start saving for a home when they are still in their teens or early twenties.

The most widespread form of serious saving among the young in Malta has traditionally been in the area of saving to buy a house or set up home once a young couple decide to get married. This pattern is still noticeable in a large number of cases – except that marriage plans tend not to be made at as young an age as was often the case in the past. Drawing on her

own experience in market research, Dr Noellie Brockdorff told me that spending patterns often change dramatically when a couple start going steady and start looking for property, and that it is the female partner who is most likely to assume the role of treasurer when this happens. "What came through in our research," noted Dr Brockdorff, "was that if you're trying to convince someone to do something with their money, invest or whatever, the other partner will need to be convinced before they do anything." But, as is suggested by the NSO figures about the doubling of amounts borrowed for the purchase or finishing of property since 1994 (cited above), this does not necessarily mean that young people are still depending as heavily on their own savings as they did in the past when they come to invest in property.

But it is clear that in a number of cases, patterns of spending and saving do change dramatically when young people decide to get married. 24 year-old factory worker Cliff (A9) told me how he used to be constantly in debt through his Bank credit card, until he got engaged and started living with his fiancée. After that, he managed to save enough for his wedding in the space of one year:

Cliff: *Issa qisni mi\\ewwe[. But wie]ed. Ji[ifieri hemm il-familja qisa.*
Interviewer: *Ma bqajtx tonfoq?*

Cliff: *X'tonfoq?! G]andi is-CID fuqhi!* (laughter)

Cliff: Now it's the same as if I were married. One pocket. There's the family to think of, sort of.
Interviewer: So you stopped spending?
Cliff: What spending?! I have the CID guarding me! *(laughter)*

But rising costs and daunting expenses, as well as an unwillingness to give up spending on entertainment, have also led to a situation where several young people feel that getting married is simply not a viable option. One group of young manual workers in their early twenties (A7) insisted that you don't find many youths who say that they save these days, and that what today's young people want is to enjoy what they earn. The high cost of living and low wages make saving hard, they pointed out; and when you consider that you'd need a year's wages to buy a bedroom suite, it's simply not worth giving up everything for that – especially when even a packet of cigarettes costs Lm1. When I asked what they do when they decide to buy a bedroom suite, they replied that this was precisely why young people don't get married and just live together:

Godwin: *Ipo[[u fliemkien uh! Jekk ma' tla]]aqx mal-]ajja! Inqas responsabilta'. L-ewwel]a[a ma' tintrabatx. It-tieni]a[a spejjes \ejda. It-tielet]a[a jekk inti tkun g]arus u t]assar, Alla]ares qatt, tkun ilek xi erba snin u jkollhok il-post, u t]assar, dawk flejjes mo]lija!*

Godwin: If you can't keep up with the high cost of living, you just live together! That way, first of all, you have no ties. Secondly, you spare yourself unnecessary expenses. Third, imagine if you've been engaged for four years and you've bought a place to live, and then, heaven forbid, you break up – that's all wasted money!

Sandra: *U anka wara \-\wie[, iebsa mbag]ad biex tkompli ...*

Sandra: And even if it happens after you're married, it's very hard to carry on…

Godwin: *Imma mhux worth it, uh, mhux worth it ti\\ewwe[! Id-dinja illum g]olja, u bil-pagi tal-lum ma' tla]]aqx!*

Godwin: But it's not worth it, it's not worth getting married! Life is very expensive today, and you cannot keep up with today's wages!

Sandra: *Il-familja hi responsabilta' kbira]afna, la ta]seb darba g]al-]ajja kollha. M'huwiex worth it li tikkommetti ru]ek daqshekk. Hawn]afna x'tag]mel fil-]ajja ...*

Sandra: Having a family is a huge responsibility, especially when you consider that it's for life. It's not worth committing yourself to that extent. There are so many things to do in life…

Interviewer: *Imma qed tg]idu li \ag]\ag] b]alkom ma' jridux ji]duha dik ir-responsabilta'?*

Interviewer: But are you saying that young people like yourselves don't want to take on that responsibility?

Sandra: *Mhux kull]add, imma ma' nafx ... il-ma[[oranza ...*

Sandra: Not everyone, but I don't know, the majority …

So what are the "many things in life" which young people like these do not want to give up? In some cases, it's simply a matter of being able to afford fairly basic treats. According to 21 year-old Vincent (A8), for instance, "In the past couple of years, life has gotten harder money-wise, I mean, you know I remember when Kinnie was 12 cents and that was fantastic!" But in most cases, the bulk of spending goes on entertainment, going out to places like Paceville, and expensive clothing. According to Josef Buttigieg of the Youth Policy Secretariat, organised rave parties are another major and relatively recent development in the Maltese youth entertainment scene. Large scale parties attracting between 2,000 and 10,000 participants are held

in June, July, August, September and Christmas. These tend to be venues for extravagant spending.

When I asked Cliff (A9) how he used to spend his money before he started to save for his wedding, his answer triggered further revelations from his fellow workers:

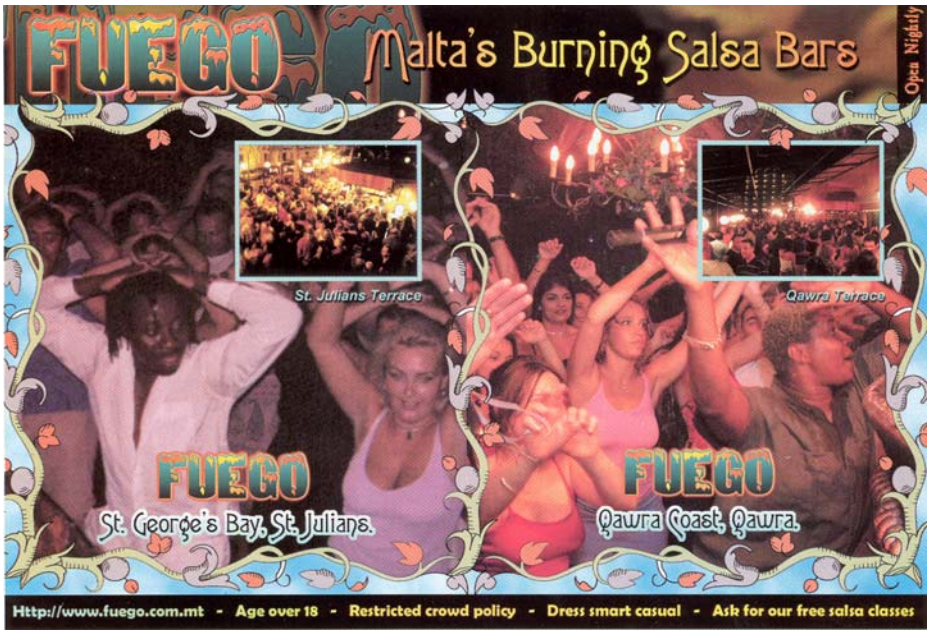
Cliff: *Divertiment, safar, kollox,]wejje[... Hawn Malta, hawn dawn l-imbierkin parties, uh, biljett g]axar liri. I\-\ag]\ag] hekk, ta, illum! U mela! Iktar ma jkun g]ali g]ax tad-ditta, aqbad u ixtri! Kull fejn tmur, high class uh!*	*Cliff:* Entertainment, travel, everything, clothes… Here in Malta, there are these blessed parties, where a ticket costs ten pounds. That's how the young are today! That's how they are! The more expensive things are because of the brand, the more they buy them! Wherever you go, it has to be high class!
Claude: *Jien ng]id g]alija, kont inmur ma s]abi, g]oxrien lira dejjem itiru kienu!*	*Claude:* Speaking for myself, I used to go out with my friends, and twenty pounds would always disappear!
Interviewer: *F'[urnata wa]da?*	*Interviewer:* In one day?
Claude: *Heqq mela! Fuq ix-xorb ...*	*Claude:* Of course! On drinks…
Philip: *F'lejl. Titla' Paceville xis-sieg]a ta' filg]odu, u tag]mel erba' sieg]at, sal-]amsa, is-sitta.*	*Philip:* In one night. You go to Paceville at around one in the morning, and you spend four hours there till five or six.
Cliff*: Ti[ik xi tmin liri [ieli, ta' ... u ma tkun xtrajt xejn! Ma tkun]adt xejn!*	*Cliff:* Sometimes it costs you around eight pounds and you get nothing for that! Nothing at all!
Claude: *Round drinks gieli jqumli LM14, imma mbag]ad kull]add jixtri round.*	*Claude:* A round of drinks often costs me LM14, but then everyone buys one round.
Cliff: *Jew hemm min i]obb jibbamja id-drinks. Jien dawk ma na]milhomx!*	*Cliff:* Or there are those who like to bum drinks. I hate people like that!

Others insisted that though not everyone spends the same amounts, a night out drinking at Paceville (i.e. from about midnight till four or five in the morning) is likely to cost more than Lm20, particularly if there are many

people buying rounds. Several said they spend their wages as soon as they get them, usually when they go out on the weekend. One 20 year-old male factory worker (A6) put it this way:

Jiena ma nfaddal xejn, qatt! Imma t]ossok eh, ji[ifieri li m'intix tag]mel sew, imma dana tkun imdorri to]ro[inti ... Ji[ifieri l-flus fil-weekend tonfoqhom ... Taqbad il-paga, ji[ifieri l-[img]a, sibt u l-]add, daqshekk, bye bye, ji[ifieri. G]id li jkollok titlob flus l-ommok, ng]id g]alija jien!

I don't save anything at all, never! But you do feel that you're not doing the right thing, but you know if you're used to going out…. I mean, you spend all your money over the weekend… You get your pay, that is Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and that's it, bye bye! Then you have to ask your mum for money, that's what I do anyway!



"Here in Malta, there are these blessed parties, where a ticket costs ten pounds. That's how young people are today! That's how they are!"
(24 year-old male factory worker)

Spending Patterns among Younger Consumers (14-17)

Younger people are likely to have less money at their disposal, but here too the tendency to spend appears to be more common than saving. As one 14 year-old girl (B4) put it:

Jiena, jekk in[emma, g]id l-g]ada sejra nonfoqhom!	If I save anything, you can be sure that I'll spend it the next day!

Some did say that they save, insisting that when they set their minds on an object they want to buy, they do manage to save up. One 15 year-old boy (B1) commented that he has never taken out one cent from his money box ("*Qatt g]adni ma]ri[t one cent mill-karus jien!*"). But on average, the most common response to questions about saving tended to be along the lines of that given by 15 year-old Chris (B2):

Jiena, jekk ikolli xi flus g]andi, nonfoq kollox! Nixtri kull ma nara! Ara, jekk ma jkollix, noqod naqra lura, imma jekk ikunu f-idejja,]allini]a ng]affe[! Dejjem hekk!	If I have any money, I spend everything! I buy everything I see! It's like this, if I don't have any many, I hold back, but if it's in my hands, I just muddle along! It's always like that!

Many said that they can see themselves saving to buy a car, but they thought that the idea of starting to save for marriage at an early age was old fashioned – "We're different from those who came before us!" was the way one 15 year old girl (B 7) put it ("*A]na [eneralment differenti minn ta' qabilna*"). Another fourth former in a State area school (B2) described his attitude to saving as follows:

Jiena, mhux ma n[emmg]ax, nixtieq in[emma', imma ma jirnexxiliex, g]ax meta n[emma' g]id li dejjem]a jinqalg]ali xi]a[a. E\empju, [emmajt xi]a[a dil-[img]a, xejn! }a nonfoqha g]ax inkisirli xi]a[a b\onju\a li g]andi b\onnha w irrid immur ner[a' nixtri o]ra b]alha. Hekk ji[ri! Imma mbag]ad, e\empju, nipprova meta nsib [ob wara li nlesti l-'O' Levels u hekk, nibda nitfa' xi]a[a g]al	It's not that I don't save, I want to save, but I just don't manage it, because as soon as I save anything, there's bound to be something else cropping up. For example, if I save something this week, it's for nothing! I'll spend it anyway because something I need will break and I'll have to buy another one like it. That's how it is. But then, for example, when I get a job after my

karozza, g]ax il-karozza b\onju\a!	'O' Levels I will start putting something aside for a car, because having a car is a necessity!

One item which was frequently cited as a recurring expense was the mobile phone. Virtually all the young people interviewed for this project said that they own one, insisting that it's a necessity, that they use it mostly to organize meetings with friends, and that it is also essential for emergencies. According to 16 year-old Jennifer (B5), mobile phones are "marketed in such a way that it makes you feel that you need it". Other recurring expenses cited by this age group (14-17) were mostly related to going out and hanging out in Paceville. As 17 year-old Sandra (B5) put it:

> Transport is always expensive. That's every Saturday. If you're going out, you'll spend a pound or so on transport. And then, obviously, you'll have a drink with your friends. I'm not saying a drink to get drunk, even though there are many who do this … But you always have one drink, two drinks, socializing … It's expensive going out. It's very expensive! Or we make it expensive, anyway!

Other expenses associated with "socializing" included parties, eating out, buying drinks for friends, and going to the cinema, where ice cream and popcorn also added to the general costs. Cigarettes were also listed as recurring expenses by some of the older interviewees. Clothes were another major expense, for both males and females. Even among the 14 to 17 year-olds, several said they often pay for their own clothing, mainly because this allows them to exercise fuller control on the type of clothes they buy; but for the majority in this age group, the buying of clothes is an item which their parents usually help to pay for.

Compulsive and Conspicuous Consumption

One recurring note in the focus group discussions was a sense that young people as a whole are very much aware of the fact that they are living in a consumption-driven environment. This is a point which is often noted by parents and those who work closely with the young. Commenting on her observation of spending patterns among university students, one university lecturer remarked:

> You see a lot of young females, and a lot of young men in the last few years as well, becoming much more concerned with their clothes, and with their body image. This is following the same trend as the rest of the world, of course. But they've become much more conscious about what products they're using. I think people have become more consumer oriented, and more conspicuously so as well. They like to be seen to be spending. Young people especially. I'm not a sociologist, but you see these amazing vehicles coming on campus, and you soon realise it's the students and not the lecturers who are driving them!

In similar tones, an advertising agent commented that young people have become very concerned about being seen to be consuming the "right" product – which usually means the more expensive, imported product:

> You have to push yourself a little bit further to prove yourself a bit more, with your Heineken bottle and your Marlborough Lights, and stuff like that. There's a lot of label consciousness.

In the course of interviews, young people often remarked that in order to be accepted by their peers they have to be able to show that they can spend – by buying the "right" brand of clothes, for example, or being able to pay for expensive rounds of drinks, or having access to the latest technology. Among the students, 22 year-old Kevin (B17), argued that today's standards are very different from what they were in the past, and that you are considered strange if you don't have particular commodities, including things like a computer and the Internet. Similar ideas were expressed by 14 year-old Antoinette and Laura (B10):

> *Antoinette:* "I don't think we go with the tradition of saving. I think we sort of cut that out. I'm always broke! Nowadays I believe that we're not spending our money only on our necessities. We're tending to take notice of more people around us, and if we don't have enough money to buy the things that the people around us are buying, we feel as though we are left out, in society, you know. And I don't think that's really good."
>
> *Laura:* "Nowadays people especially young adults and those are spending a lot of money, even like when you're eighteen, if

> your friend got a car, you feel you have to buy a car as well. And then after six months I know a person who got fed up of this car after spending a lot of money on this car and adding stuff on it. After six months he got fed up of it and got a new car! Even in mobiles, after a few months you get fed up with your mobile and you buy the latest mobiles."

Several commented that today's youth (including themselves) are "never happy" and that they "always want more". 25 year-old factory worker Joanna (A8) put it this way:

Illum]add m'hu kuntent bli g]andu, eh. Illum dejjem trid, trid, trid ... Ng]id g]alija, sa kemm nakkwista li rrid, mbag]ad daqshekk, nitlaqha!	Today nobody is happy with what they have. Today you always want, want, want ... As for me, I'm only interested in something until I get it, then that's it, I leave it!

When they were asked what kind of things they want, several interviewees indicated that the wanting is more important than the having. As 15 year-old Peter (B2) exclaimed:

Eh! Dik is-sabi]a! Inti tkun iddejjaqt minn din, tkun xbajt mill-o[[ett, tkun trid tixtri ie]or ming]ajr ma taf x'inhu! Kif tixtri dik il-]a[a, trid xi]a[a differenti!	Well! That's the odd thing! You're fed up of one thing, you've had enough of it, and you want to buy something else without knowing what it is! As soon as you buy one thing, you want to buy something different!

One group of sixth formers (B20) saw this kind of thinking as an encroachment of capitalist (and particularly American) cultural values. Referring to Coke, McDonald's and to the proliferation of advertising billboards spreading "the culture of London and America" all over Malta, one young man in this group remarked that he wishes he could burn all "these symbols of capitalism" because of the negative effects they are having:

I[eg]luk tixtieq dak li m'g]andekx b\onn. Tg]id, "Hi ara, jien m'g]andix hekk …" Dejjem tikkonsma, tikkonsma …	They make you wish for what you do not need. You say, "Oh look, I don't have that …" So you're always consuming, consuming …

As they acknowledged themselves, this particular group of students have been influenced in their attitudes by their reading and studies, particularly in sociology and political philosophy. Terms like “capitalism”, “consumerism”, “exploitation of workers”, etc., figure prominently in their speech. They campaign actively against what they see as the encroachment of consumer values, identifying their life’s mission as that of raising public awareness of the inequities and dangers of capitalism. They thus deliberately avoid buying branded clothes – particularly those made by multinational companies with a reputation for exploitation of child labour. They also organise public protests against multinational fast food chains like McDonald’s, in tandem with similar protests overseas, with the aim of raising public awareness of environmental and work equity issues.

These young people represent a significant (if small and distinctive) segment of Maltese youth. But it is not the case that their tastes are radically different from those of their peers – they like rock music, for instance, but prefer to listen to what they see as socially committed (alternative) music groups rather than the mainstream “commercial” variety. They spoke enthusiastically, for instance, of the Maltese group “Norm Rejection”, whose CDs include titles like “De-Conform”. They agreed that their liking of this group and this type of music was probably fuelled by their political and ideological beliefs in the first place, but stressed that the songs had also played a key role in the formulation of their world views. The strong sense of youthful idealism and commitment to a cause reflected in these young men’s speech and actions is in some ways not unlike that of young people who form part of Christian or other religious action groups and who make a point of rejecting “materialistic values” in favour of “higher ideals”. In both cases, youthful enthusiasm and energy appear to be triggered into action by the conviction that one way of seeing the world is more enlightened and valid than others, and that a particular cause is worth fighting for. How the young choose to focus their enthusiasms and energies will depend very much on their developing (and often changing) belief systems. How those belief systems are formed, develop or get discarded is inevitably influenced by the different cultural milieus which young people come to endorse as most germane to their interests.

As the comments from the majority of other young people quoted in this report as a whole suggest, the cultural milieus endorsed by most of today’s youth tend to be ones whose “higher ideals” tend to be linked with

the ongoing acquisition of consumer products, and with the need to move away from "old fashioned values" and local limitations.

Comparison with Parents

The question arises as to how far these changing perceptions, ideals and patterns of behaviour can be related to changes in the Maltese cultural environment – particularly in terms of whether they can be linked to developments in broadcasting and the media, and to the increasingly "secularised" and commercially oriented inflections which characterise global media influences. In an attempt to unpack some of the key issues raised by this question, the focus group participants were encouraged to talk about how and to what extent they perceived the ways they are living today as different (if at all) from the ways in which their parents or grandparents lived when they were young. Do they think that earlier generations were any more or less happy than they are now, and if so, how and why?

One of the most common responses to these questions was the observation that earlier generations were happier with much less. Many believed (on the strength of what their parents had told them, presumably) that young people in the past led simpler lives and were happy to make do with what they had, however basic. I got the impression that many of these responses appeared to be repeating what young people had frequently been told by their parents, presumably when they were being too demanding and wasteful. Indeed, when I put this point to one group (A8) and asked whether such claims were true or simply what parents are always telling their children, one young woman commented that when she hears her grandmother talking she hears a very different story from the one she hears from her parents. A minority of interviewees also insisted that they did not believe that their parents were any more or less happy when they were their age, and that though new technologies have brought about many changes, earlier generations had their own worries as well as blessings.

But the majority of those interviewed were convinced that their parents had had happier youths precisely because they had fewer resources and comforts at their disposal. Many stressed repeatedly that young people today are never satisfied with what they have; all their toys or gadgets have to be bought (as distinct from being home-made as was the case in earlier times); they lose interest in what they have very quickly, and are constantly looking for something new, but without really knowing what they want. As 15 year-old Keith (B2) put it:

A]na qatt m'a]na kuntenti b'xejn! Qatt m'a]na m'xebba'! Imma ara qabel. Missieri kien jil[]ab bil-ballun tal-kamoxxa. Qalli, issa tridu tal-[ilda inthom! Qalli, l-inqas]a[a li konna nsibu, konna nie]du gost biha. Qabel bix-xejn kienu jilg]abu, bil-bo``i u bi\-\rar… jien naf! A]na i\jed avvanzati, na]seb, imma avvanzajna i\\ejjed. Dejjem tg]a\\inna u qatt m'a]na kuntenti bli g]andna.

We're never happy with anything! We're never satisfied! But it was different in the past. My father used to play with a rubber ball. He told me, now you want leather ones! He said they used to be happy with anything they found. They used to play with anything, with marbles, with small bits of stone… anything! We're more advanced, I think, but we've advanced too far. We've got lazy and we're never happy with what we have.

Children in earlier periods were thus believed to have been better at improvising (e.g. by making their own toys), and because they had less, they were better able to appreciate what they did have and enjoy it. According two male factory workers in their early twenties (A9):

Cliff: *Bix-xejn jie]du pja`ir jg]idu kienu!*

Cliff: They say they used to get pleasure out of the smallest of things!

Interviewer: *Imma ta]seb li veru kien hekk?*

Interviewer: But do you think this was really the case?

Cliff: *Na]seb veru, g]ax il-]ajja kienet ir]as, mhux b]al tal-lum ...*

Cliff: I think it was, because the cost of living was lower, not like today…

Errol: *Ma kienx hemm dad-divertiment li hawn illum, jew hekk ...*

Errol: There wasn't the type of entertainment which you get today, or things like that…

Cliff: *Ommi bl-ixkora kienet tilg]ab! Bi xkora! Mur g]idli jiena bi xkora!* (laughter)

Cliff: My mother used to play with a sack! With a sack! Imagine me playing with a sack! *(laughter)*

The difference was thus ascribed to changed conditions and easier access to resources, rather than to differences in predispositions. As one young woman (A6) put it, "If they'd had the things which we have today, they would have been like us – they wouldn't have appreciated anything!"

Many stressed that young people today have much more at their disposal and are much better off than their parents were at their age. According to 22 year-old Dave (A8), "lifestyles have changed, you can't compare today's life with back then; basically life has just upgraded itself into another stage." For 16 year-old Jonathan (B5), this has had both positive and negative consequences:

> It's very different nowadays. Malta had many traditions which made it unique. It was something like living in another world. Now we have a total invasion of traditions. It's good and it's bad at the same time. It's good because we are moving on with technology and stuff. And it's bad because we're losing traditions with it.

Today's youth are also believed to have more easy money at their disposal than their parents did, and this has led to their feeling a greater need for ostentation and conspicuous consumption. 17 year-old Charles (B20) insisted that the easy availability of money has also led to lack of responsibility:

Jien na]seb li wa]da mill-affarijiet li affettwat kienet illi f'daqqa wa]da [ew]afna flus fl-idejn. Per e\empju, fejn qabel missieri meta kien \g]ir l-ewwel paga ta' apprentist ta lill-ommu kollha, issa peress li hawn]afna flus, tg]id "Il-lallu kemm g]andi flus f'daqqa wa]da!" Il-pajji\ qisu minn sistema qisu pjuttost kommunista, f'daqqa wa]da [ie kapitalista. L-istipendji f'Pa`eville jintefqu l-bi``a l-kbira, u fuq il-]wejje[il-Belt.

I think that one of the things which had a big influence was that all of a sudden there was lots of money around. For example, when my father was young, he gave all of his first pay as an apprentice to his mother. Now, because there is so much money around, you say "Goodness! Look at how much money I have all of a sudden!" The country all of a sudden went from a system which was more or less sort of communist to one which is capitalist. Most student allowances get spent in Paceville, and on clothes in Valletta.

Earlier generations were also believed not to have had as many worries and pressures as beset today's youth. A number argued that in the past the cost of living was not so impossibly high when compared to wages. It also costs much less for young people to enjoy themselves than it does

today, and life for earlier generations was also less hectic: they did not have so much pressure to do well at school or to go to university in order to get a good job and earn a decent living in what is seen as an increasingly daunting and competitive employment market. According to one young woman (A7), changed economic conditions mean that families no longer help out as much as they used to – simply because they cannot afford to or don't have the time. It was also suggested that personal relations in less complicated times were also less strenuous and difficult to manoeuvre. According to one 18 year-old female factory worker (A7), for instance, the predominance of stricter moral codes in the past meant that partners could be trusted more than today:

Qabel ma' tantx qiesu kien hawn]afna tgerfix kif hawn illum fid-dinja... Kif taqbad tg]id? To]ro[ma' xa]add, e\empju, jien naf toqg]od tinkwieta g]ax]a jo]ro[ma']addie]or minn warajk u affarijiet hekk. Qabel dawn ma' kienux jag]mluhom.

In the past there wasn't so much confusion as there is in the world today…. How do I put it? You go out with someone, for example, and you keep worrying that he might go out with someone else behind your back and things like that. In the past they didn't do such things.

But though the majority believe that their parents were happier with less, most young people would not want to trade places with them; they cannot imagine living without the comforts and technologies which they're now used to. Only one or two said that they would choose to be born at an earlier age if they had the option.

Conclusion

Comments like those quoted above suggest that young people are trying to balance and come to terms with positions and world views which are inherently contradictory. On the one hand, they imagine (perhaps like their elders) that the past was somehow a Garden of Eden – a harsher place than the present, but one which was also blessed with greater innocence, simplicity and security. At the same time, they also see this place as forever alien and lost – one which, because they have tasted of the fruit of technological knowledge and global entertainment, they neither can nor particularly want to revive or revisit. It is a past which the young know to be mythical but whose soft-toned echoes continue to haunt. These contradictions partly account for their nagging dissatisfactions with their present conditions

– the guilt and discomfort they sometimes say they feel because they cannot save; their insistence that they know that they are never satisfied.

These are dissatisfactions and nagging doubts that are not unique to the young. They are also apparent in the behaviour of other age groups and are in fact symptomatic of the commercial neo-liberal cultures in which today's young are forging their identities. Indeed, such cultures can only survive and flourish on the strength of the continued spread of such dissatisfactions and doubts. Blaming the young for being insatiable and constantly demanding instant gratification is like blaming them for having internalised the values which underscore the structures of most Western-style world economies in contemporary consumer culture. The world of commercial glamour and insatiable consumption is one where the promise of happiness has to be constantly deferred. As John Berger famously remarked over thirty years ago,

> Publicity, situated in a future continually deferred, excludes the present and so eliminates all becoming, all development. […] The act of acquiring has taken the place of all other actions, the sense of having has obliterated all other senses. […] Publicity exerts enormous influence and is a political phenomenon of great importance. But its offer is as narrow as its references are wide. It recognizes nothing except the power to acquire. All other human faculties or needs are made subsidiary to this power. All hopes are gathered together, made homogeneous, simplified, so that they become the intense yet vague, magical yet repeatable promise offered in every purchase. (Berger, 1972: 153)

In the next chapter I focus on how these developing orientations influence, and are in turn reflected in, young people's perceptions of themselves as physical and gendered individuals.

Chapter 3
SELF-IMAGE
AND THE BODY BEAUTIFUL

> "When you look through the magazines, all you see is young women with great figures, and everywhere you look you see stuff about dieting. And the men all have amazing bodies! And then you look at yourself in the mirror, and you say, my goodness, what a sorry mess God made when he created me!"
>
> Sandra, 23 year-old factory worker.

This chapter examines the extent to which young Maltese people's attitudes to body image, personal grooming and fashion can be shown to be changing as a result of their exposure to commercially oriented and increasingly globalised media images. The main focus is on exploring how young Maltese men and women speak about their own bodies and physical appearances, and the aim is to develop a clearer understanding of how their self-worth and perceptions of others relate to recurring projections of desirability in the media. The chapter thus explores the following areas of enquiry: (i) body image and commercial media, including advertisers' views on what body images are appropriate for use in advertising; (ii) gender stereotypes and young women's perceptions of body image and grooming; (iii) changing perceptions of masculinity and fashion; (iv) brand names, fashion and cosmetics.

Commercial Media and "Beautiful People"

As is the case in other aspects of media influence on behaviour, ascertaining how media consumption may be affecting young people's attitudes to body image is not as straightforward as it might look. The evidence from international research makes it clear that it is misleading to look for direct cause-and-effects relations of what has come to be known as the "magic bullet" or "hypodermic needle" variety.[6] However, there are also

[6] In this view, the effects of the media are assumed to simply "happen" to people who are "exposed" to media messages. As the images suggest, the media are here believed to "do things" to passive recipients – so that the influence is like a bullet shot at them, or an "injected" drug which causes them to think and behave differently.

very clear indications that the value systems propagated through popular media images can have a profound influence on how young people perceive their own bodies and appearance. According to Elizabeth Bird (2003: 168):

> The dramatic power of the media to define desirability and beauty is suggested in an anthropological study of the cultural impact of the recent introduction of television into a Fijian culture (Becker et al. 2002). The authors paint a dispassionately scientific, but heartbreakingly sad picture of changes effected in a matter of a year or two by the arrival of images of blonde, thin, imported beauties. In a society that traditionally valued generous female proportions, young girls quickly learned disgust for their bodies, discovered the binge/purge syndrome, and told interviewers: "I want their body, I want their size. I want to be in the same position as they are… We have to have those thin, slim bodies…" Certainly, these young girls derived great pleasure from this new medium. But we cannot ignore the negative impact of globalizing economic forces that ensure that Fijian girls' first media experiences are of *Baywatch* and glamorous soap operas.

Other researchers have argued that the development of eating disorders, especially among females, is likely to be fostered by the presence of so many television advertisements for food, combined with other advertisements' emphasis on "female beauty" (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002: 258). One analysis of US TV programmes popular with teenagers found that 94 per cent of characters depicted in such programmes are below average in weight (Levine and Smolak, 1996). Another study found that in situation comedies thin characters receive significantly more positive verbal comments from male characters than heavier female characters do (Fouts and Burggraf, 1999).[7]

The advertising agents interviewed for this project spoke of their awareness and use of young people's concern about image:

> We know that they're very conscious of the image. They buy clothes that are branded, and anything that they would go for has

[7] Eating disorders are discussed further in Chapter 5.

> to give them a particular standing. You know, "are you of a particular clique?" sort of. So that is the first thing we keep in mind.

At the same time, however, the agents were also insistent that in locally produced advertisements they usually use 'ordinary' people rather than professional models. One agent stressed that in her campaigns she chooses models who are healthy rather than being unrealistically beautiful or unrealistically thin:

> At least from our side we try to show very down to earth images and concepts. The photography used is simple but classy and it has style, and quite modern. But that is with what we tried to attract their attention, not by giving them something, you know, "Wow!" ... you know, with beautiful girls, you know, with nice cleavage and provocative looks on their face ... We tried to move away from that.

I asked this particular advertising agent (AA) whether she thought that the way young people are looking at themselves has changed as a result of what they see in the media, particularly in the types of models used in advertising. Have young Maltese people over recent years become more concerned about their appearance, body weight, and physical fitness?

> *AA*: Definitely, definitely. In fact sometimes, you know, you get particular groups writing in the papers to complain that advertising is giving the wrong image …
> *Interviewer*: What would they mean by "the wrong image"?
> *AA*: The wrong image: because we... I didn't use a chubby person there *[in an advert for jewellery showing a young Maltese couple]*, you know, or a big bellied guy. So for them sort of, we're saying, OK you're giving the younger ones the impression that for them to be successful, for them to have the things they want, they have to look like that.... which I don't believe in because if you're healthy you *should* be looking like that. The couple in the local Vascas advert, for instance, were not 'supermodel' types, they're good looking, but not abnormally so. And there are no professional models in Malta, anyway. You can't be fully employed as a model. They all have full time jobs and do modelling as part-time. The young

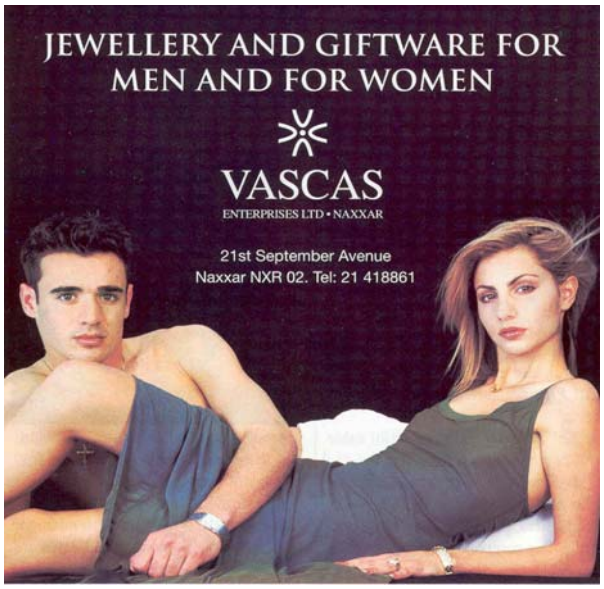
man in this Vascas advert and others is also a footballer, for instance.

Interviewer: So you've chosen models who are healthy rather than being unrealistically beautiful, is that what you're saying?

AA: Exactly. Exactly. And they're not unrealistically thin either. They're not the Twiggy sort of models, you know.

I asked whether she would consider using somebody who is chubby or fat in an advertising campaign for a product not specifically related to body size or appearance (as in this particular advert for jewellery). Predictably perhaps, the answer was no: for her, this was a matter of promoting better health consciousness:

> No, I wouldn't. I wouldn't, because I believe that an advert should portray an ideal situation, so ideally you're healthy, you've got a good physique, even if you're not particularly beautiful but you know how to keep yourself well groomed. So for me that is the image that I should be giving with my advertising. If you're healthy, you should be looking like that.



"The young couple in this advert are good looking, but not abnormally so. They're not 'supermodel' types, and they're not unrealistically thin either. If you're healthy you* should *be looking like that."

Advertising Agent

When I put a similar question to two other advertising agents, they made it clear that for them it was more a matter of aesthetics and good sales technique:

> *AM:* To be very honest with you I wouldn't [use a chubby or fat person in an advertising campaign] not because it's not healthy, I wouldn't do that because …
> *AF:* It's unattractive …
> *AM:* ... it's unattractive. It's very straight and simple. Unless that applied to the concept of the advert, and I would never put an advert out there which takes the Mickey out of overweight people... Not least because I used to be overweight myself…
> *AF:* No, no …
> *AM:* It's unattractive. You have to make an advert look as appealing as possible. Now we're not necessarily saying, 'look this is great', but if I'm going to put a picture of a woman drinking at a bar, I'm not going to put an ordinary looking woman there for the simple reason that when you see someone ordinary you don't look at the ad. If you see someone who's good looking you just look at it and it attracts attention to the advert. That accompanied by the good line, you've got the person's attention. It might sound very horrible, but …
> *AF:* No it isn't. In one particular campaign in which we aimed at young adults, the people we used were attractive, very attractive, but nothing that intimidated, nothing that made you feel: 'Oh my God, I can't go next to that crowd of people because I'm going to be inferior…'
> *AM:* They're normal people …
> *AF:* It's just, you know, people anyone could relate to. So we wouldn't have, we don't use models, we don't use model agencies, very rarely, you know …
> *AM:* We use well people …
> *Interviewer:* Unless you import adverts from overseas.
> *AF:* Then yes.
> *AM:* But it's true, obviously the people have to look good in the photos, or they have to be photogenic ... to serve the purpose, I mean …

The specific campaign aimed at young adults referred to above was locally produced and involved what sounded like a relatively uncomplicated procedure:

> We got a local group of friends, who happen to be my group of friends, who happen to be quite a good looking bunch of people, and we just put them on a sofa in a nightclub, lit them up, gave them shades, and just told them to sit down and have a good time. We got a certain image, an image which was young, cool, trendy. We called them the beautiful people.

The fact that this particular campaign was aimed at attracting young consumers to drink a brand of alcohol raises health and ethical questions which are addressed more specifically in Chapter 5. At this stage, I wish to focus on how these recurring images of "beautiful people" are perceived by young Maltese consumers, and on how young people's self-image and attitudes to their own appearance might be influenced by such material. What happens, for instance, when young people perceive their own bodies and appearance as failing to match those of the "beautiful people" whom advertisers project as "normal people, people anyone could relate to"?

Gender Stereotypes and Double Standards

Stereotypes continue to prevail in the representation of women in Maltese broadcasting – a point stressed by Dr Brenda Murphy on behalf of the Broadcasting Authority's Gender Advisory Committee[8]:

[8] Dr Murphy was Chair of the Gender Advisory Committee at the Broadcasting Authority from 1999 to 2003, when the Committee was dismantled. She describes the Committee's brief as follows: "At its inception in 1999 it was given several tasks. These were: to advise the Authority on the adoption of guidelines concerning gender images in programme content; to formulate guidelines on the use of generic terms which include both sexes; to advise the Authority on the possible preparation of contact lists of women experts, for use by producers in the area of news and factual programming; and to advise the Authority on the introduction and implementation of equality of opportunity as a requirement in the issue or renewal of broadcasting licenses. In the time it was operating, it had many successes thanks to the support of the Authority, which included the development and launch of a database for all journalists and broadcasters with a list of women and men who are experts or have specialist interests." (Bartolo, 2004)

> The major problem locally is that there's a huge amount of stereotypical advertising going on. It's a very patriarchal structure that permeates through into all advertising and all broadcasting. We're seeing a slight shift in where women are taking up places within the industry at the moment, where they're becoming journalists; they're becoming technicians, editors, camera people, etc. But it's not filtering down yet to the portrayal and output side of things, and that's something that concerns us. That is something that is still a big issue in most countries across Europe as well. But it is much more in your face here. It's not just stereotypical and patriarchal; it's also very patronising towards women and downright degrading at times, because there are some images that just wouldn't be allowed elsewhere, they wouldn't happen. There'd be an outcry.

In the course of the interviews, several young people commented on the double standards which characterise expectations about body size and physical attractiveness. Many were very conscious of the fact that the standards of attractiveness for women tend to be tougher than those for men. Interestingly, young people themselves were frequently very critical of these double standards, though there were also comments made at various stages which also suggest that, even among the young, patriarchal and chauvinistic attitudes are still relatively widespread. I was told, for instance, that when young girls go to the bars and nightclubs in Paceville, they are told to wear short skirts in order to avoid being asked for proof of their age (B15). An 18 year-old male student who has worked on local television (B17) described his encounter with sexism in media production as follows:

Hemm differenza bejn ir[iel u nisa. Per e\empju, jiena, g]at-televixin]a ng]id, jiena mill-esperjenza li g]andi naf x'ji[ifieri jsiru auditions g]al programm tat-televixin. U jiena ma' d]altx televixin g]ax]elu, jien ma' nippretendix li jien xi supermodel! Perod meta riedu tfajla biex tippre\enta programm mieg]i, dawn kliem tal-producer tieg]i stess kienu, qalli: "Jiena ma jinteressanix jekk din tkun [ifa, tkun ji[ifieri hawn [ew

There's a difference between men and women. For example, I'm going to talk about television. From the experience I have, I know what happens in auditions for TV programmes. And I did not go into television because I'm good looking; I don't think that I'm a supermodel or something! But when they wanted a young woman to present a programme with me, these were the words of my producer

vojt." Qalli: "l-importanti li g]andha figure! Tfajla fuq it-televixin kull ma' trid hu li jkolla x'turi. Tista' tkun bela!" Qalli: "minn na]a l-o]ra, [uvni jista' jkun ikra], basta jkun jaf jitkellem, jkun jaf x'g]andu jag]mel."

himself, he said: "It makes no difference to me if she's thick; if up here [her head] is empty. What's important," he told me, "is that she has a good figure". He said that all a young woman needs on television is that she has something to show, it makes no difference if she's a moron. He said that on the other hand, it's OK for a young man to be ugly, as long as he knows how to speak and can do his job properly.

He added that as a result of this policy, most of the female presenters who worked with him did not last long because "you had to tell them things three times over before they understood." When she heard this story, one of the young women in this focus group pointed out that this type of attitude works against women because it perpetuates the idea that women are always less clever than men, especially if "dim" female presenters are chosen simply for their looks.

Stories like this indicate that offensively sexist behaviour among media practitioners is definitely not a thing of the past. The attitude is often obvious (though perhaps not always so blatantly) in the different ways in which males and females are depicted in advertisements. For example, in a series of advertisements for Nescafe which were given wide circulation on billboards, newspapers and magazines in 2003, viewers were asked to send in their best chat up lines to (in one version) an attractive young man and (in another) an attractive young woman, posing against the words "Wanna froth with me?" Both models look, and presumably are meant to look, Maltese. The adverts are clearly intended to be read in a light-hearted manner – they hint at sexual suggestiveness in a context which at first sight appears frivolously incongruous: the young man/young woman are after all only inviting us to join them in enjoying a drink which leaves a moustache-like line of froth on their upper lips. There is something childlike about this light-hearted game which is also (presumably) meant to be recognised as deliciously naughty.

The two images of the male and female are also presumably meant to be complementary and balanced. But when they are placed next to each other (as above) a notable difference becomes apparent. While the young man is wearing a shirt (pointedly open-necked perhaps, but these are his street clothes), the young woman is wearing lacy underwear. Her right hand is also poised over her breast, drawing the viewer's eye to her exposed cleavage, and to a spot of "froth" on her upper chest. The text in the advert showing the young woman also includes two sentences which do not appear in the version showing the young man: "Chat me up!!" and "Let your imagination run wild."

"Frothy" and frivolous as the images and sexual innuendoes in both pictures may be, their portrayal of male and female sexuality and sexual allure are not even-handed. Looking at both images I was reminded of a comment which a number of my young interviewees made on the several occasions when they spoke of sexual double standards. "If a man plays around," they said, "he's considered a playboy; but if a woman does the same

thing, she becomes a slut."[9] The fact that these ideas and associations are being reinforced through what looks like an "innocent", "light-hearted" and "frothy" campaign underlines the extent to which these discriminatory and unequal values and ways of seeing have come to be taken for granted.

Such values were interestingly reflected in the ways a number of interviewees spoke about the impact of advertising images. In the opinion of one group of boys and girls aged 14-15 attending a private school (B9), advertising images are definitely having a major influence on how women in particular think of their own bodies:

> *Raymond:* For example, imagine there's a woman, and she sees this other woman on the billboard, she sees she has a lovely figure, you know, wearing a bikini or something, really good. She might just stay going, she looks at herself *(laughter)* and she sees, like, she thinks she's so fat and seeing that she can lose weight, and she starts buying all these products to lose weight and everything …
> *Claudia:* That's true.
> *Interviewer:* You think it's true?
> *Claudia:* Yes. You see, like, a woman who looks perfect and you say, like, why can't I be like that? I mean, so many times you want to look perfect, but in reality you can't be...
> *Interviewer:* OK, what about men and boys? Does it have the same effect on them?
> *Sean:* To me it doesn't have any effect …
> *Raymond:* No …
> *Interviewer:* Is it because there aren't as many billboards with men?
> *Raymond:* I think so. It's true, you hardly see any.
> *Interviewer:* So who are they trying to attract?
> *Mandy:* Well, showing a woman on a billboard attracts both sexes because, like, the man is interested in the woman and the woman is interested in the woman because she wants to be like that.
> *Claudia:* Yeah.

[9] The subject of sexual double standards is discussed further, and in relation to evidence from international research, in Chapter 6.

One striking feature about comments like those quoted above is that it is assumed that it is girls and women who are most concerned about attaining the "ideal" body image. Indeed, some young men seem to think that such concern is "natural" or even biologically determined where women are concerned! Women are thus assumed to "naturally" want to improve their image by fitting the stereotype of sexual attractiveness in order to attract the male gaze. According to 24 year-old Cliff (A9), for instance, women are always obsessed with their figures anyway, irrespective of what the media or advertisers throw at them. Such "common sense" assumptions in effect constitute what Marxist social critics call false consciousness – in that they define as "natural" (and hence as inevitable and unchangeable) a discriminatory and exploitative situation which has grown out of specific historical and cultural conditions. What is being assumed here is that anything which is seen is "naturally" seen from a male perspective. As feminist scholars like Laura Mulvey (1989) and Tania Modleski (1988) have forcefully argued, when this perspective prevails, women too start seeing themselves exclusively "through the male gaze" – constantly watching themselves being watched and understanding their identity only in terms of how it matches patriarchal expectations and meets (or fails to meet) the male gaze's approval.

In an interview with Gillian Bartolo published in the *Sunday Indepedent* of 11 January 2004, Dr Brenda Murphy drew attention to the difficulties of trying to challenge such values in the Maltese context. She pointed out that Malta has "neither an outside regulatory body on sexism in the media and advertising, nor self-regulation, and this makes it difficult for consumer complaints or complaints by watchdog bodies […] to be heard." She gives the following example:

> At the end of last year, Arkadia motors ran an advertisement in the press, in which male consumers were urged to "part-exchange their old [car] model". The advert said in parenthesis that "this offer is limited to vehicles only, sorry" in a clear reference to the woman in the advert, who was dressed to look as unattractive as possible. The advert did two things. It objectified women as exchangeable property, and alienated potential female consumers. I was inundated with calls from colleagues and students objecting to the advert, but because there is no regulatory body the only thing anyone who objected could do was write to Arkadia Motors saying they found the advert

> objectionable. Had there been national or organizational regulations in place, such as the UK Advertising Standards Authority, the advert might not have appeared in the first place, or could have been removed if complaints were received. As the [Broadcasting Authority's] Gender Advisory Group, our team had started producing guidelines for the media industry concerning stereotyping and sexism in the media, but now, sadly, that all lies in abeyance.

The types of comments quoted from young people's statements in this report make it clear that though attitudes to gender differences are gradually changing, there is still a great deal of "common sense" thinking which describes as "normal" or "natural" or "inevitable" ways of representing men and women that in some other countries would be termed offensively stereotyped and exploitative. This is not a situation which is unique to Malta – indeed, many of the most blatantly sexist images often seem to come from or are inspired by segments of the Italian media. But the fact remains that such stereotypes easily become internalised and ultimately play a key role in how young people (and older ones of course) approach gender relations and sexual differences. It would seem appropriate, to say the least, that there should be a properly constituted and qualified body whose task it is to monitor standards of advertising in terms of the types of issues raised in Dr Murphy's comments.

Young Women's Perceptions of Body Image and Grooming

In the course of the interviews, many young people spoke of the ways in which the images projected through the media create stereotypes of sexual attractiveness which encourage girls to wish for a slim figure, and boys for a muscular one. 15 year-old Mark (B16), for instance, described young people's perceptions of the "ideal" body types in language coming straight out of popular magazines and advertising media:

> Every girl I've ever met, however thin she was, always said that she's too fat! Some boys I know who are fat often get depressed because of their body and do everything to lose weight, not eating, etc. But it's much worse with girls. Girls go for the perfect shape. The perfect shape *à la* American style: perfect shape meaning a Size C cup basically and a small rounded ass. Either one or the other: backside or 'What a girl!' if you see

what I mean. For guys as such, they want to be well built, so their aim is to have a six-pack, muscles, and to be tall – taller than the girls they want to date.

Echoing comments made by the advertising agents cited above, a number of the young people interviewed also said that young people want to look slim because it is healthy. But they were also frequently concerned by the extent to which the standards of beauty promoted by the media are affecting their priorities. 16 year-old Sonia and Thomas (B6) put it this way:

Sonia: At the same time, I watched a programme... Lately on Italia Uno there was this debate… ehm … I don't know what it was it called …
Thomas: 'Assemblea'.
Sonia: Yeah, that one ... and they were talking about this image, and someone stood up and said, "But let's be realistic. Do we want to see fat slobs on TV, or *jien naf* or people without hair, or something of the sort?" You know what I mean?
Thomas: Oh yes. It's true.
Sonia: And it's true. And this idea that they affect us to want to look good or to eat better food, in a way if it doesn't get excessive, it's good, because after all we feel good, and if we're what we want to be, we're OK with ourselves.

Feeling good about oneself in the context of this conversation presumably means not being "a fat slob" or being "without hair". Another group of sixth formers (B5) similarly insisted that the media have encouraged young people to become more health and figure conscious:

Sandra: Especially girls, they're very conscious. *(Others agree.)* You also see lots more people walking and exercising in the street, early in the morning.
John: That's because of the media, most of it …
Sandra: Because 'half an hour a day is good for you' …
John: Even if you see a film, you see someone...
Philip: Because in the past, they didn't use to have them. I mean, even in Mosta we have a newsstand full of magazines and supermodels, and on the Internet they see supermodels. Now, especially girls, but maybe even guys, they're all the time …

Godfrey: They're bombarded with this figure, of 'there is the perfection'!

Peter: It's the thin female form. You love it or you hate it … But we love it!

The cliché in that last statement again stresses the extent to which the language of popular entertainment and advertising helps to mould how young people assess beauty, as well as how they make sense of their feelings, urges, and sexual preferences. Sandra, a 25 year-old factory worker (A7) summed up the situation as follows:

Tara 'l-magazines, tibda tqalleb,]lief tfajliet im[ismin ma' tibdiex tara. Kollhu dieti l-hawn u dieti l-hemm; u l-ir[iel kull [isem daqshiex! Umbag]ad t]ares lejk lejn il-mera, tg]id, il-lallu kemm g]amilni disgrazzjata l-bambin!	When you look through the magazines, all you see is young women with great figures, and everywhere you look you see stuff about dieting. And the men all have amazing bodies! And then you look at yourself in the mirror, and you say, my goodness, what a sorry mess God made when he created me!

Though perhaps not always expressed as colourfully as this, these sentiments were voiced by many of the young women interviewed, irrespective of their age. Three 14 year-old girls (B10) put it this way:

Louise: Sometimes they put you down...

Stephanie: Sometimes they can lower your self-esteem. Like, come on, these are all perfect, why can't I be like them?

Kate: It's true. They make you angry, you know, actually the pressure starts getting to you.... It's quite frustrating, but you end up in a certain stage when you say: "I don't care!" you know. That's what I ended up saying. You can never be perfect, only God's perfect...

Interviewer: Do you think that's true of everyone, though?

Stephanie: No, no. If you look around you, no one's extremely perfect, maybe there are people who look good and they don't look bad, you know, but no one's extremely perfect. It's only in advertising that they show someone perfect so that you'll want to be like them …

A 16 year-old girl finishing her first year of Sixth Form (B6) similarly spoke of what she perceives as pressure to conform to media images of physical attractiveness:

> It's a vicious circle. Everyone is beautiful on TV. All the guys are handsome. All the girls have a perfect figure. But then, even between us, I feel, between the girls and the boys, we're all struggling. Who has the nicest figure? Who has the nicest clothes? This struggle … and I think we're giving a lot of importance, a lot of ways, for example, I speak about myself, and I'm a fashion maniac. I love shopping, *jiġifieri* [I mean], it's one of the things I love doing, and I feel, actually when I'm in a bad mood and I buy something, some new clothes, I feel better. Now, I think this is really bad ... I think I'm weighing, we're putting too much weight on the physical and maybe become too materialistic, I think …

It is of course neither new nor surprising that adolescents should be concerned about their appearance. This, after all, is a period in their lives when they become particularly conscious of their looks and when a key concern is that of being accepted and validated by one's peers and the larger community. But the criteria on which that acceptance and validation are based can vary considerably according to context and cultural stereotypes. The comments quoted above suggest that these young people find themselves pulled by different, and often conflicting, values and ideals. Their Catholic upbringing has taught them to be suspicious of materialistic values and of the impropriety of "putting too much weight on the physical". But at the same time, the media and the entertainment venues which the young see as *their* space often seem to place all values on physical appearances, conspicuous consumption, and being accepted for one's looks. There are also important health issues raised by all this of course, and these are discussed more specifically in Chapter 5.

Changing Perceptions of Masculinity and Fashion

As is indicated by the evidence cited in this chapter so far, there are significant differences in the ways young men and young women are portrayed in the media, as well as in how they perceive their own masculinity and femininity. However, it is also clear that there are important changes taking place in the ways that men and masculinity are portrayed in the media

globally, and this is also having an impact on young Maltese men's perceptions of themselves.

In the course of a focus group discussion with a group of Fourth Form girls (B7), one 15 year-old exclaimed: "Lately boys have become very vain, almost as much as girls!" Similarly, when I asked a mixed gender group of 16-17 year-olds (B5) whether they thought that girls are more concerned about fashion and figure than boys, they replied:

Sandra*: Insomma,* lately it's different, *g]ax* I went to see a modelling show, lately. *L-ammont ta' subien* modelling, it is extreme, *fis-sens li qed jog]la,* it's unbelievable ...

Peter: *Dan l-a]]ar il-[uvintur jag]mlu* facials *u affarijiet* ... (laughter), treatments *u hekk,* pedicures ...

Sandra: *Issa t-tfajliet u l-[uvintur l-istess* with this mentality.

Godfrey: *Jag]mlu s-sens! G]ala m'g]andekx tie]u]siebek in-nifsek?*

John: *Imma t-tfajliet jibqg]u iktar* stereotyped. *L-i[iel qed ji\diedu, vera...*

Sandra: *Insomma, da l-a]]ar, l-ir[iel,* the bigger, the taller ...

John: *U* gyms*! Kull]add imur il-*gym!

Godfrey: Weight-lifting *u ...*

Anthony: *U dawn il-magni li tixtri, dawk ...* (quotes from advert) 'improved with infra red ...' Buy this and you'll still have the body which we saw a week ago!

Sandra: Well, lately it's different, because I went to see a modelling show, lately. The number of boys modelling, it is extreme, in the sense that the numbers are going up, it's unbelievable.

Peter: Lately guys are having facials and things ... *(laughter)*, treatments and things like that, pedicures...

Sandra: Now girls and guys are the same with this mentality.

Godfrey: That makes sense! Why shouldn't you look after yourself?

John: But girls are still more stereotyped. The number of men is increasing, it's true...

Sandra: Anyway, recently, for men, the bigger, the taller...

John: And gyms! Everyone goes to the gym!

Godfrey: Weight-lifting and...

Anthony: And these machines you can buy, you know *(quotes from advert)* 'improved with infra red...' Buy this and you'll still have the body which we saw a week ago!

The fact that young men have become more fashion-conscious and apparently more concerned about their physical appearance is not a phenomenon that is unique to Malta. Indeed, changing attitudes towards fashion and personal grooming among young Maltese men can be read as indicators of how the young perceive and construct their own emerging identities in an increasingly globalised media environment.

Several international researchers and commentators have over recent years become interested in men's relationship to consumption and in the ways in which perceptions of masculinity have been changing in consumer society. According to Tim Edwards (1997: 73), since the 1980s it has become "more socially acceptable for men to be consumers *per se* and, more importantly, to be consumers of their own masculinity or, in short, to look at themselves and other men as objects of desire to be bought and sold or imitated and copied." The sources of this development on an international scale have been traced to "a series of apparently unprecedented and diverse developments starting in the mid- to late 1980s," including:

> first, the rise of designer fashions for men and the inclusion of menswear collections on the catwalk; second, a series of related markets for specifically male products, particularly in the arena of cosmetics and grooming and ranging from aftershaves to moisturizers; third, the meteoric rise in the UK particularly of increasingly self-conscious and glossy style magazines aimed directly at men as consumers; fourth, the simultaneous rise of advertising targeting men as opposed to women, of which the worldwide cinematic and TV commercials for Levi's 501 jeans remain prime examples; and fifth, the sense in which all of these developments in conjunction were also increasingly constructing men as the objects as well as subjects of consumer desire, sometimes in blatantly sexual ways. (Edwards, 2000:135)

The perception of male sexuality as a consumer product suggests that masculinity is coming to be perceived as something to be displayed, gazed at, envied and groomed. In many ways, these qualities have traditionally been more stereotypically associated with femininity. But these changing perceptions, again according to Edwards, do not appear to have radically affected traditional sexual behaviour:

> There is often little evidence to suggest traditional heterosexual male practices have altered at all in relation to the home, workplace and sexual relationships. What has perhaps shifted is the perception rather than the practice of male sexuality itself as something more artificial and floating, as opposed to natural and fixed. (Edwards, 1997: 73)

Judging from comments made by several Maltese youths in the course of interviews, this observation would appear to also hold true for most young Maltese males.

Boys and Body Image

The way different boys and young men react to the perceived pressure to 'look good' varies considerably. One 17 year-old (B6) described his reactions to recurring media images of 'perfect bodies' as follows:

L-impatt fuqi: OK, naqra o]xon u dan, biss ma' tantx! OK, tara tfajla]elwa all right, g]ax tfajla. Pero' tara guvni, mbag]ad tg]id, 'G]alfejn minhix b]alu dak jien?' b]al spe`i. Jien personalment, hekk ng]id. Ma' tantx t]allini down*, fl-istess]in, g]ax umbag]ad indur, u ng]id "G]andi karattru sabi], g]al menu g]alija tajjeb]afna" .... Perod xorta ...*	About the impact on me: OK, I'm a bit fat and so on, but not too much. OK, if you see a pretty girl, it's all right, because it's a girl. But if you see a young man, then you say, "Why am I not like him?" sort of. Personally, that's what I say. It doesn't get me down that much, however, because then I turn, and say, "I've got a lovely character; at least for me it's very good." But still …

In some cases, building muscles and showing them off becomes almost obsessive. According to 17 year-old Ben and Karla, both finishing their first year as Sixth Formers (B6):

> *Ben:* Boys are also becoming very concerned about their appearance. Even at the gym. I go to a gym. There are times, you're sort of working out, and there are guys that literally, for example, they stand in front of the mirror, they start lifting up their arms, they look at their arm. They lift up their top, they look at their ... Don't be so vain! At least if you want to be

vain, do it at home, fine, but don't do it at the gym! You know, and ... actually strut in front of a girl, you know …

Karla: Actually, I believe you because, in fact I told you about it. There was this person in class, we had a lesson *[Ben laughs]* and he started putting up his sleeves to show us his muscles! *Ejja!* Come on! We're in a lesson, you know!

Visits to the gym appear to be quite common with many young men, especially those from the higher socio-economic home backgrounds. There is also an element of snobbery or conspicuous consumption involved in terms of which specific gym they go to. Commenting on her observation of university students, Dr Brenda Murphy remarked:

> The fact that students are going to the gym has also become a form of conspicuous consumption. You hear them asking: "Are you a member of Synergy? Are you a member of somewhere else?" Synergy is the cool gym in Paceville. So to be making a good statement you need to be saying that you're a member of Synergy gym, rather than, say, the Zejtun gym.

A group of 14 year-old boys attending a private school (B9) told me that they all intended to start going to the gym when they are a little older. One of them said that most of his friends go to the gym, but don't do weights there because they've been told that doing weights at their age might stunt their growth in height. One of the girls in the group added:

Corinne: A lot of boys go to the gym, do weights, whatever, so that they can look nice, I mean …

Carlos: For the girls!

Corinne: Especially now that summer is coming, you know, they'll be on the beach with their six-pack, you know, attracting girls. And guys always want to be seen with a nice girl, not to be seen for example with some ugly girl or whatever … I know many eighteen year old guys who are always telling me, "No I can't go out now, I'm going to the gym!"

18 year-old Pierre (B20) similarly noted that there has been "an enormous boom in Gym memberships", that many of his school friends go to the gym, and that they do this because they want to look sexy:

Jien na]seb il-ma[[oranza jmorru biex jg]abbu, mhux g]al isports innifsu, biex ikollhom figure!	I think the majority go so as to pick up girls, not for the sport itself, to have a good figure!

For this young man and his friends, going to the gym is not equivalent to being health conscious – many of the gym-going young people they know, they said, are regularly eating junk foods at places like Macdonald's! This type of behaviour, they believe, is more of a cultural fad, related to a "macho culture" which they see as coming from capitalist countries like America and parts of Europe:

L-ir[iel tarhom anke fuq l-istazzjonijiet tat-Taljan. Tarhom well built*. Allura tg]id: "Jien hekk g]andni nkun allura!"*	You also see men like that on the Italian stations. You see that they're well built, and so you say: "That's how I should look then!"

But gym attendance, or even concern about body size, does not appear to be so common among young men coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds. According to a number of young women in this category, for instance, men are not usually as worried about their appearance as women are. Girls will diet so as to stay slim, they pointed out, but in the Maltese context, boys and men are not as worried about their body weight or looks, and many think that it actually looks better for a man to be stocky in build (B17). One 15 year old girl (B7) remarked that "if a guy is a bit fat we're not going to take much notice; we're not expecting to go out with a model or something!" And according to 18 year-old Mike (B17):

Jien per e\empju ng]id g]alija ma noqodx ninkwieta x'niekol u hekk! Jiena nie]u]sieb, all right: nie]u]sieb wi``i, nara li ma jitlax ammont e``essiv to ponot, ji[ifieri. Imma daqshekk, ji[ifieri …	Speaking for myself, I don't worry so much about what I eat and so on. I do take care, it's true: I take care of my face, I make sure that I don't have an excessive amount of pimples growing, I mean. But that's it …

Several young men commented that they eat a lot deliberately because it is part of a "lifestyle" programme – they go to the gym and want to build up their muscles so eating more helps to bulk them up. They feel that as long as they are doing enough exercise to maintain a healthy lifestyle, then they see no problem with eating whatever and as much as they like. Several

boys, in fact, joked about how they tease their girl friends when they go out by eating a lot of "junk food", while the girls (so the boys believe) are tortured because they would love to join them but daren't because they are too worried about their figures.

But the claim that boys are not really worried about their appearance is of course misleading. They might not be concerned about the same aspects as girls, but there is no doubt that "looking cool" is very much a young male preoccupation. One area where this is very pronounced is in the way young men talk about their hair. Several comments were made to the effect that boys have become more concerned about hair grooming and appearance than appeared to be the case in the past. Hair gel was frequently cited as a young male obsession. As one 17 year-old student (B5) put it, "I have to gel up!" He also noted that he had been surprised when he looked through his older brother's school annual magazine to discover that no one in the class photos appeared to have used gel in the past. "Now they even do it in Form One," he commented, and he had "even seen a baby in a pram with gelled hair". Another boy in the same group added:

Jien naf min, bis-serjetà tlett kwarti kull jum, kull fil-g]odu jdum jg]amel xaru! Dan [uvni! Biex imur l-iskola!	I know someone who, seriously, spends three quarters of an hour a day, every morning, fixing his hair! This is a guy! To go to school!

Girls often joked about the fact that boys won't let anyone touch their hair once it's been gelled. One group of 15 year-old girls (B7) commented that boys get so embarrassed when their hair is not gelled that they wear caps to hide it. In the course of one discussion (B9), the one boy in the group who obviously was not wearing hair gel became very self-conscious and embarrassed when his friends started describing how important getting properly gelled was for them. The boys also frequently insisted that they like to choose their own brand of hair products. According to 15 year-old Francis (B9):

> Most people judge gel according to the brand name. But what I like doing is ... if I, like, see one which I haven't used before, I'll get it and I see, so I could judge for myself which gel is the best and which goes best for my hair. I wouldn't buy it because my friends say it's good …

Two 14 year-old girls (B10) described boys' growing concern with hair and their increasing obsession with brands of hair gel:

> *Isabel:* And in fact, you know what I noticed? Guys are becoming fussy on their gel brand. I don't know if it's just my friends, but some of them go: "Oh, this gel sucks, man! *L-anqas ǯaqq!* I tried this new wax and it's real rubbish!" And they stay fussing about their gel brands and how Loreal is good and …
>
> *Interviewer:* Who would they say this to, to their friends?
>
> *Isabel:* Friends, guy talk …
>
> *Joanna:* Once some guy came up to me and said: "What gel do you use?" I had curly hair and put gel on it. He said, "What gel do you use? I like your hair!" It was a guy! I said, "I use so and so". He said "Oh good! I'll try that one!" and he just ran off! *(Laughter)*

Boys were also very conscious of the fact that the better brands often left a hole in their stipends. According to 17 year-old Rupert and Jonathan (B5):

> *Rupert:* I spend Lm 15 on four products: spray, balm, curl, shampoo... I know it sounds funny, but …
>
> *Jonathan:* No, no, no … Even conditioner, I believe in hair conditioner. If I miss using conditioner once I go spare!

Brand Names and Boys' Clothing

Though it is impossible to generalise, and there was a lot of variation in attitudes to brand names in clothing, most of the young people interviewed agreed that boys are usually more concerned about wearing the right brand of clothes than girls are. Girls are more likely to be interested in fashion and "looking good". The brand names and fashions most sought after are not usually the top of the range "haute couture" ones, but more of what one advertising agent termed "the middle of the road brand names – not Armani or Prada but Reebok, Nike or Diesel"

Boys' concern with wearing relatively expensive brand clothes also appears to have a lot to do with peer pressure. According to a 20 year-old male factory worker (A6):

G]ax inti jekk]a to]ro[u jkollok flokk tal-Monti,]a ng]idu hekk, inti qisek]a taqa' g]a`-`ajt, jekk tkun ma' s]abek u jkunu kollha tad-Diesel u tal-Levis u hekk. I\-\ag]\ag] kwa\i kolla jixtru tad-ditta. Issib ta li ma' jilbsux, imma ifhimha, dana mhux kull]add l-istess uh!

Because if you go out and you're wearing one of those tee shirt tops you buy at the Valetta market, for instance, you're going to look ridiculous if you're with your friends and they're all wearing tops by Diesel or Levis and so on. Most guys buy brand clothes. Mind you, you do find those who don't wear them, but you have to understand that not everyone is the same!

For boys, the wearing of branded clothes was very much a matter of looking good in the company of friends. Many said that they didn't mind what they wore while working, but were quite particular about what they wore when they went out with their friends. As one 16 year old boy (B1) put it:

Jekk ikun bid-ditta, dejjem ikun a]jar bid-ditta u! Flokk ma tantx, imma jeans ikun tad-ditta ikun a]jar. Jien g]alija jg]o[obni i\jed. Jekk inkun qed nag]mel xi qadja ma jimpurtax, imma jekk inkun ma s]abi u hekk, nippreferi jkun tad-ditta.

If it's a brand item it's always going to be better. Not so much for vests, but when jeans are branded they're better. Speaking for myself, I like them more. If I'm working at something it doesn't make much difference, but if I'm with my friends and so on, I prefer brand ones.

Another boy from the same area school (B2) drew attention to peer pressure and the desire not to seen as "cheap":

Grant: *{ieli anka jekk ma jkollok xejn tad-ditta joqg]odu jg]iruk. Taf kemm jg]amlu hekk!*
Interviewer: *Allura inti x'tg]amel?*
Grant: *Tmur tixtri].*

Grant: Sometimes, if you're not wearing any branded clothes they keep teasing you. You'd be surprised how often this happens
Interviewer: So what do you do?
Grant: You go and buy it!

I asked another group of boys (B9) whether the type of clothes they wear makes any difference to how their friends react to them:

Godfrey: I think more than saying something, it will be all in their heads. I mean, they'd pass comments to themselves or maybe behind your back, but they wouldn't tell you in your face.

Many also insisted that branded clothes are usually better quality than cheaper products; they last longer, and are more comfortable. Sports shoes were repeatedly identified as examples of how important it is to buy a good brand if you want them to be safe and to last.

In marked contrast to these attitudes, there is also a relatively small group of young people who see themselves as more socially aware and responsible. They specifically avoid branded clothes, especially those of multi-national sports brands like Nike or Addidas because of what they have read about these companies' exploitation of cheap labour, particularly in under-developed or developing countries. One young man (B20) in his early twenties told me that he would prefer to buy fabric himself and sew his own clothes. He had, in fact, made one pair of colourful trousers, but didn't have the time to make any more. Another 17 year-old in the same focus group said that he is careful as to which brand of shoes he buys:

G]a\-\raben jien noqg]od attent. Imma mhux dejjem! Qabel ma kont konxju illi n-Nike jabbu\aw it-tfal, kont xtrajt Shining Shoes tan-Nike. Xtrajtu g]ax kien ir]is imma l-anqas]aqq, g]ax wara ftit inqala l-qie]! Ovvjament sewwejtu bl-Araldite!	I'm careful about which shoes to buy. But not always! Before I became aware that Nike exploits children, I bought a pair of Nike Shining Shoes. I bought them because they were cheap, but it wasn't worth it, because after a while the sole came off! I obviously fixed it with Araldite!

This particular group of young students saw themselves as having an important role in helping to change their own "small world".

Girls, Fashion and Cosmetics

With girls, the main areas of personal appearance and grooming on which they spend most of their time and money appear to be clothes, cosmetics and hair. When I asked a group of 14 year-old girls (B4) how they choose their clothes, they replied:

Several: *Moda. Affarijiet tal-moda.*	*Several:* Fashion. Things which are in fashion.
Interviewer: *Imma skond id-ditta, per e\empju?*	*Interviewer:* But does that depend on the brand name, for example?
Several: *Le, le ...*	*Several:* No, no...
Lara: *Ditti ma rridx g]ax ma tantx jinteressawni!*	*Lara:* I don't want brand names because they don't interest me much!
Doreen: *Jien na]seb is-subien iktar jinteresshom jilbsu tad-ditta.*	*Doreen:* I think it's boys who are more interested in wearing branded clothes.
Marisa: *Jiena g]alija, l-aqwa li jkun qed jg]o[obni.*	*Marisa:* For me, the most important thing is that I like it.
Interviewer: *Allura ix-xebbiet f'hix interessati l-iktar? Fil-kumditŧ ? Fil-moda? X'hix?*	*Interviewer:* So what are girls most interested in? In comfort? In fashion? What?
Doreen: *Moda, iva, na]seb li jimxu mag]ha. Imma mhux daqs is-subien biex jixtru tad-ditti w hekk.*	*Doreen:* Fashion, yes, I think they follow it. But they're not as into buying brand-name clothes as much as boys.

Several also acknowledged that their choice of fashion items or preferred appearance is influenced by images they see in various media. A group of 15 year-old girls (B8), for instance, commented that they like seeing adverts depicting attractive women on billboards and magazines because they give them ideas about fashion and grooming. They were responding to a question about whose attention they thought adverts depicting beautiful women were aimed at attracting:

Alexandra: *G]ax na]seb a]na n-nisa ukoll xorta ji[bduna, g]alkemm ir-riklam ikun mag]mul bi tfajla xorta naraw]!* (Laughter and agreement from others.) *Xorta. Jekk hemm il-libsa sabi]a, allura na]seb tista' iktar taffetwa lil-tfajla ... G]ax per e\empju, jekk qed tag]mel riklam tal make-up,]a taralha wi``ha hekk bil-make-up, inti tibda tag]mel:*	*Alexandra:* I think we women are also attracted, even though the advert is made with a girl, we still look at it! *(Laughter and agreement from others.)* We still look. If there's a nice dress, I think it's more likely to influence a girl … Because for example, if the girl is doing an advert for make-up, you're going to see her face

"Ara dak sabi]!" (Agreement from others.) *Forsi, anka tara]wejje[...*

Joan: *A]na naraw g]al prodott, na]seb, mhux b]all-ir[iel. L-ir[iel ma jarawx g]al prodott, jaraw g]al mara uh!* (Laughter).

Interviewer: *Allura qed tg]idu li dawn ir-riklami jinfluwenzaw il-mod kif t]arsu lejnkom infuskom ukoll?*

Several: *E]e ... Ija ... }afna.*

Interviewer: *Kif?*

Isabel: *Na]seb jirriflettu mbag]ad fuqna g]ax, ifhem, bla ma trid inti]a t]ares lejhom u anka jikkonvin`uk, u anka]afna minnhom toqg]od tg]id: "Ara dik! Kieku kont b]ala ..."*

Alexandra: *E\att!*

Isabel: *Ji[ifieri bla ma trid, uh ...*

Marthese: *Jien iktar nie]u idejat, spe`i ta. Anka nara wie]ed bil-make-up, ng]id "OK, darb'o]ra nu\a] hekk il-make-up." Mhux ng]id nixtri dak il-prodott. Iktar l-istil li [eneralment ikun fir-riklami. }afna drabi hekk ng]id. Nie]u l-idejat minnha. Ma ng]idx irrid inkun b]alha.*

like this with make-up, and you'll start going: "Look that's nice!" *(Agreement from others.)* Or you might see clothes …

Joan: We look to see the product, I think, not like men. Men don't look at the product, they look at the woman! *(Laughter)*

Interviewer: So are you saying that these adverts influence the way you look at yourselves as well?

Several: Yes … Yeah … A lot.

Interviewer: How?

Isabel: I think they have an impact on us because, you know, without wanting to you're going to look at them and they convince you, and with many of them you say: "Look at that one! If only I were like her …"

Alexandra: Exactly!

Isabel: So you do it automatically …

Marthese: I'm more likely to take ideas. Even if I see one for make-up, I say, "OK, next time I'll use make-up that way." I don't say I'm going to buy that product. It's more the style which is in the advert. That's what I say very often. I get ideas from her (the woman in the advert). I don't say that I want to be like her.

Several girls said that they devote a lot of time and money to cosmetics and make-up. Here is 15 year-old Diane (B10):

> I love make-up! I spend more money on make-up than anything else I think. If I have to go to the Body Shop for basic necessities like sealers and powders, sometimes I spend ten

pounds. I just say, "Ee, I need to pick up something!" … Ten pounds! When I said I need new colours, I spent about twenty pounds on new colours … I go to Body Shop for basics, but I love Benetton, but they're very expensive …

Interviewer: How do choose the product then?

Diane: Usually the bottle! *(laughs)* If the bottle looks cool, then I'll check it out.

Other girls said they are not so keen on cosmetics but prefer jewellery and accessories like bracelets, rings, and earrings.

Girls also appear to feel considerable peer pressure to keep up with the fashion, not just as they see it on TV and other media, but also on the streets. This is how 15 year-old Corinne and Ann (B9) spoke of this:

Corinne: People will dress like models in ads to impress others, even if it's not comfortable.

Interviewer: Do you want to dress like that?

Corinne: I do. I mean, I do that without realising it sometimes, you say: "Wow, yes, that's come into fashion, we'll buy that!" You do anything; you go out of your way to impress people …

Ann: And even, not just on TV, if you go out to the Sliema front, like everyone is a walking advert, all advertising different brands …

Another group of 15 year olds (B7) similarly said that when they see an item of clothing which they like on TV or in adverts, they often try to buy it or something like it in a cheaper brand. 15 year-old Diane (B10) described the situation as follows:

What you see you buy! It's not about comfort any more, at all, at all, at all! I feel I have to dress in clothes that won't be considered bad looking by others. You want to be as good as your friends, you don't want to be any worse, you know! You see someone and her jeans are really cool, you know, and you try to get that pair of jeans. People wear the latest fashion and the good brands to be noticed … which is stupid because everyone is wearing the same things and in a way you're not noticed at all!

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this chapter suggests that images of the "body beautiful" projected through the media and advertising are having both negative and positive effects on young people's attitudes to their own bodies. On the one hand, the idea that an ideal body weight is related to a healthy lifestyle seems to be quite widespread, with many showing more awareness of the need of a healthy diet and regular exercise. At the same time, however, there is also an ongoing tendency for unhappiness with one's own body and looks when these do not fit the "ideal" type. The expectations on women to fit this ideal are still much stronger than they are on men, even though there is a distinct shift in fashion consciousness and self-grooming among young males – possibly as a consequence of changing representations of men in international advertising and the media generally.

There is also the question of ongoing gender imbalance and double standards in the propagation and continued acceptance of stereotypes. This phenomenon is not unique to Malta of course, but a lot more could be done to improve awareness of its insidiousness and consequences within the Maltese context. I return to the issue of double standards in Chapter 6, where I focus more specifically on sex and sexuality. At this stage, it is worth stressing that balance and equity are not likely to become a reality until there is a more informed public understanding of how images from the media help to both reflect and shape attitudes, prejudices and, ultimately, social behaviour. More systematic media education programmes in all schools, and at all levels, would be an important start. Instituting more accountable and reflective ways of monitoring media and advertising images would be another. As the samples of young people's opinions cited in this chapter make clear, the ongoing impact of glamorised or idealised body images on the young is too complex and insidious to be assessed exclusively in terms of unexamined "common sense" assumptions, or left to the exclusive discretion of marketers interested in the hard sell.

The next chapter elaborates further on the issues discussed here by focusing more directly on a segment of the population whose body images can never hope to match the "ideal" or "healthy" looks so deliberately espoused and propagated in popular films, TV programmes, magazines and advertising.

Chapter 4
YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Being Young and Disabled in a Mass Mediated Environment

Chapter 3 argued that media images of the "ideal" physical appearance can lead to insecurity or unrealistic expectations and even self-punishing behaviour among many young people. The situation becomes more pronounced in the case of young people who suffer from physical disabilities and who are trying to develop self-awareness in a context often dominated by idealised images of the body beautiful. Society's norms, often reinforced by repetitive media images of what we should all look like if we're healthy, or attractive, or desirable, create a situation where those with disabilities come to be seen (and also come to see themselves) as "the other". In a context where advertising and entertainment media focus primarily on selling dreams of successful lifestyles linked to images of attractive young men and women disporting themselves in healthy abandon, people with disabilities are either simply ignored or else portrayed in stereotypically damaging ways. Deni Elliott (1994: 74) gives the following examples of the types of images of disability which frequently appear on the media:

> The people with disabilities whom we meet through the media include a talented physicist who is described at the top of news stories written about his accomplishments as 'a prisoner in his own body.' The presentations include a man with a scarred face who is used to illustrate that driving when drunk can result in 'a fate worse than death.' And they include a teenaged girl who rates a feature story because she is managing to get through high school despite her blindness.
>
> Disability could be presented as a usually unimportant consideration as media consumers work to achieve the dream world that media promote, but it does not happen that way. Rather, people with disabilities are presented as the stuff from which nightmares are made. They are offered as oddities and symbols of fear by which 'normal' people can know their own worth.

Such representations have been challenged by people with disabilities as offensive and destructive. They have also been argued to be as objectionable as sexism and racism in the representation of women and minority groups.

When I asked Joe Camilleri, Chair of Malta's Commission for People with Disabilities,[10] whether he thought that the type of idealised body images which predominate in films and advertisements have an impact on how people with disabilities perceive themselves, he insisted that they do. In his view, films and soap operas play a more critical role than advertisements in this respect, in that they have a greater impact on how young people come to perceive their identity. Adverts, he noted, were always "Peter Pan fantasy worlds" as far as he was concerned; too distant from one's personal reality to invite comparison. It was the less fantastical programmes and films which helped to forge his self image. Films and soap operas have a greater impact "because they provide your imagination with the stories that just stay there, and stay there, and stay there. And they create images of what you would like to be." Referring to his own recollections of what it was like to grow up as a disabled teenager, he remarked that he used to have the same sort of hopes and ambitions as other teenagers. His idols were the stars; he played in a band, and hated the fact that he was small, that the electric guitar he played seemed bigger than he was:

> I've been following arthritis cures since I was fourteen, and they're still as far away as they ever were. And eventually you've got to decide well, this is how I am; this is how I'm going to have to live my life. But it's horrible when you're young. It's terrible when you're young. I mean, I hated being short, I hated having very thin limbs, you know, like Kermit the frog … All the images come out. And for years and years and years you just think you're a freak, and 'why are you alive?' and if you are alive, why is your mind not messed as well so you don't know what's happening to you? If you read Milton, it was exactly the same: he felt exactly the same. Pope felt exactly the same.
>
> And every time I tried to speak about how I felt, people would say: 'Oh, you've got nothing to worry about. You've got nothing

[10] Most of the information in this chapter was supplied by Mr Camilleri, who generously agreed to an extended interview, which lasted almost three hours. His comments are quoted extensively because of the insights and analyses they offer, and the clarity with which they were expressed.

> to be unhappy about!' What they were saying was 'Please shut up, don't talk about it. It's too painful.' So you shut up … But then it's difficult because you don't open up to anybody.
>
> In fact, if you look at one of my school annuals, the then editor described me as 'the smiling prince'. This is all they saw of me. And I was going through hell on earth at that time, when I was about 14-15. Absolute hell on earth. My mind was in absolute ferment, and I was just riven in two with emotions. They didn't see any of that. I didn't show it. There was no point, because by then I had given up on any adult making any sense to me. Nobody made sense. I was scared stiff.

Most disabled people are never given the chance to break the silence or speak out for their rights. Their environment encourages them to think of their identity as being totally defined and confined by their "disability". In other words, by refusing to get close enough to see them for who they really are, society is also insisting on seeing and defining those with disabilities exclusively in terms of the characteristics which it has itself determined to be "abnormal" because they "deviate from the norm". The disabled become the perennial "other" – to be ignored or else treated as curiosities or as objects of pity:

> People with disabilities are consumers, but people with disabilities in Malta don't have a voice. They don't speak out. They're still too scared to speak out. Remember that we're such a minority, and the majority in that minority are elderly people who would rather die than admit they're disabled. So they won't speak out.

Figures and Images of Disability

Eight per cent of Malta's population is officially registered as disabled. However, the exact number is difficult to pinpoint because registration in Malta is voluntary, and the vast majority of those who do register as disabled are older people – i.e. those who have become disabled in old age. The figures can thus be expanded or minimized depending on how disability is defined or measured. According to the National Office of Statistics' 2003 *Lifestyle Survey*, for instance, "nearly a quarter of the population have a long-term health problem or disability" (*The Malta Independent*, 11/12/03), but what exactly "long-term health problems" and

"disabilities" involve, or indeed how they differ from or overlap with each other, is not explained. The World Health Organisation estimates that 10% of the population of any developed country are likely to be disabled. The figure for non-developed countries is estimated to be higher, and it is also estimated to be higher than average in highly developed countries, simply because countries with stronger economies can afford to broaden their definitions of disability, and presumably their financial support, to include cases which would not be defined as such in other countries.

As in the case of attitudes to other groups that have traditionally been systematically marginalised through patronising or infantilising stereotypes, people with disabilities are still habitually perceived and portrayed in the media as primarily in need of charity, pity and "loving protection":

> The thing that people tell me is: 'I'll help you, but don't start on about rights!' They feel threatened. Same as why many men don't like independent women. They like us to be submissive, they like us to be smiling all the time.
>
> The disabled have traditionally been stereotyped and patronised as completely valueless (they don't earn their keep or anything), but they're very much loved. They're very sweet; they're very lovable; look what a big heart the Maltese have! Don't forget that this also reinforces the image of the Maltese family. The Maltese family is strong and it doesn't give up even on its weakest members and everybody is loved.
>
> But that image depends on stereotyping. And it ensures that the disabled person never becomes independent. This is also reflected in our social services. All our pensions are based on the assumption of lifelong dependency, in the sense that if I had to live off a disability pension I couldn't live independently, I would have to be supported by somebody, because you can't rent a house, you can't run a car, you can't buy clothes, you can't do anything on a disability pension. There is no chance of you having a relationship, there's no chance of you living independently. I mean if you don't get on with your parents, forget it because you're a lifelong prisoner, and so far nothing's been done to change that.

The way people with disabilities are represented in the media tends to make this situation more insidious, reinforcing prejudices and ultimately reassuring the non-disabled about their own good fortune: "There but for the grace of God go I!" When the disabled are not ignored or infantilised as helpless, they are presented as the exact opposite – again in unrealistic and unproductive ways:

> You have to understand that although people have satellite and cable and all sorts of things, disabled people on the media worldwide are still rare. You don't get many disabled people on the media. If you look at the Hollywood films about disabled people, most of them are stories of triumph, or stories of tragedy. You go out of the film feeling lucky that you are who you are basically: thank God it's not me; thank God it's not my family … Very rarely you get a film like *Children of a Lesser God*, which is a bit punchy, but very rarely, and even then the message is lost on the majority of people. You've got to explain it, or at least discuss it with them.
>
> The thing is we are not on the media all that much, and even when we are, people get the wrong end of the stick. People can't understand why we're not happy when we're regarded as heroes … 'But I admire you! Why aren't you happy?' And you keep telling them: because it's not real, it's not the way I live my life. I struggle in my life. I have to put up with a lot of pain; I have to put up with a lot of misunderstandings and things like that. And that's what you've got to look at, you know, there's no miracle about getting up in the morning and going to work. It takes a lot of organization. It takes a lot of determination, and things like that. But look at the organization, look how it happens. When I'm at work I'm productive. But why am I productive? Because the place is accessible, because I've got the support that I need and I've got the training … You know, I've been given a chance to work, and so on and so forth. Let's look at it from a purely realistic point of view.

Media Portrayals of Disability

The ability to treat disabled people with respect and realistically becomes more problematic in a social context where the media are becoming

more and more commercialised, where the kind of body images habitually projected as desirable are, as one of the advertising agents quoted in Chapter 3 put it, based on what they consider an "ideal" which everyone who is healthy should be aiming at. A lot of films, TV programmes and advertisements play on images of sexuality, "beautiful young people", as well as happy families and healthy parenting. But people with disabilities are not usually seen as sexual beings, and they are usually patronisingly assumed to be incapable of being independent or raising their own families. In this context, they are (often unconsciously) encouraged to think of themselves as being asexual – ironically within a global media context which is increasingly sexually oriented. Joe Camilleri argues that "for most people with disabilities, sexuality has never been an issue":

> The exception is a small group, who realise years later that they were being moulded and guided into asexuality. They don't realise that it's happening. Then, gradually, when they've gone beyond it, they begin to catch in their memories snippets of conversations with parents, half-finished sentences. Don't misunderstand me: They're not actually told to think of themselves as asexual. It's so subtle that they don't even notice. But once they're in there, and the key is turned and thrown away, some people never realise it's happened.
>
> The younger parents today are much more aware of the totality of their children as a whole, and in fact we've got really unusual things, like parents of youngsters with Down's syndrome talking about their youngsters growing up and having a relationship, which would have been unheard of with parents of the older Down's syndrome sufferers. They would have been absolutely shocked at the idea of their children possibly having sexual feelings and wanting to settle down with someone.

Part of the work of the Commission for People with Disabilities has been that of developing an environment which allows people with disabilities to function as efficiently and painlessly as possible – and to do so with dignity and self respect. A crucial component in this process involves encouraging the wider community to change their perceptions of disability and of people with disabilities. The Commission has also actively campaigned to challenge, or at least make people more conscious and critical

of, the use of stereotypes of disability in broadcasting and on the media more generally.

It is worth identifying and unpacking some of the most common and insidious of these stereotypes, not least because they are so widespread and so often go unchallenged – and thus continue to reinforce popular prejudice and misconceptions, as well as nurturing negative self-images among those with disabilities. Media portrayals of people with disabilities have traditionally tended to fall into one of several "handicapist stereotypes" (Biklen and Bogdan, 1982). There is also a substantial body of international research which indicates that though these stereotypes are widespread, growing awareness of them can lead to considerable improvement in the ways in which those with disabilities are represented in the media, and hence in the ways they perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

In order to contextualise this discussion more specifically, the next section describes some of the most common media stereotypes of disability. The list is adapted from Jack A. Nelson's "Broken Images: Portrayals of Those with Disabilities in American Media", which appears in *The Disabled, the Media and the Information Age* (Nelson, ed., 1994).

Major Media Stereotypes of Disability

1. *The Disabled Person as Pitiable and Pathetic:*

This stereotype is most often seen in fund-raising telethons or maudlin news stories featuring syrupy or heart-wrenching appeals for donations and the appearance of people with disabilities as examples of misfortune. Such portrayals perpetuate the image of those with disabilities as objects of pity, usually depicting them as childlike, or incompetent, needing total care, as non-productive in our society, and as a drain on taxpayers. Such portrayals reinforce passive images that some disabled people have of themselves, and they reinforce that image in the non-disabled public's mind, distracting attention from the important issues of discrimination, access and rights. They also fail to acknowledge the accomplishments of those who carry out their lives in ways that are mostly normal and who contribute greatly to society.

2. *The Disabled Person as "Supercrip":*

In this stereotype someone likeable is heart-warmingly depicted as facing the trauma of a disability. Such characters are usually presented as inspirational and often superhuman – through great courage, stamina, and determination

they either succeed in triumphing or succumb heroically. Though such portrayals show the human capacity for achievement, they can also make a lot of ordinary disabled people feel like failures if they haven't done something extraordinary. As one actor who walks with a brace put it, "Do we have to be 'supercrips' in order to be valid? And if we're not super, are we invalid?" (Nelson, 1992: 6). Such portrayals can also distract attention from issues of equity: the everyday basic needs of access, transportation, jobs, and housing to improve the status of those with disabilities.

3. *The Disabled Person as Sinister, Evil, and Criminal:*
This involves portraying threatening and evil characters as also having a prominent disability or deformity. The association of physical handicaps with evil or monstrosity is a holdover from medieval attitudes, but it is still fairly common in popular films. Psychiatric disorders have traditionally been particularly common in this respect, with films and television programmes portraying mental patients as "criminally insane", dangerous, and unpredictable. Such depictions often lead to unwarranted apprehension and ostracism of people with such disorders, as well as creating greater problems for the disabled, their perceptions of themselves, and their understanding of the community's attitude toward them.

4. *The Disabled Person as Better-Off Dead:*
The image stems from the unfortunate misconception that because anyone with a serious physical impairment is unwhole and incapable of a fulfilling life, he or she finds life unbearable and would be better off not being alive at all. The portrayal also harks back to fear and loathing, partly because for many, the sight of serious physical disability is an unpleasant reminder of mortality and vulnerability. In films like *Whose Life Is It, Anyway?,* death becomes preferable, not least because it relieves society of the problem of dealing with the long-term needs and rights of those with such disabilities.

5. *The Disabled Person as Maladjusted – His Own Worst Enemy:*
In this image the disabled are bitter and full of self-pity because they have not learned to handle their disability. In many TV dramas, a friend or family member has to set the pitiable character straight by telling him or her to "buck up" and take control. Almost always, the non-disabled person is shown to understand the problem better than the one with the problem; and rarely is any mention made of social prejudice or the role of society in helping with the problems. The implication is that those with disabilities are unable to

make sound judgements themselves or to shape their own destinies. The real ability to shape one's destiny, however, is often resource-based.

6. *The Disabled Person as Burden:*
This stereotype is often used as a device to show the nobility and generosity of those who furnish care, making the disabled person little more than a prop rather than a human being capable of interacting with others to the profit of both. This is the function served by Tiny Tim in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol,* for example. The portrayal dehumanises those with disabilities because they are viewed as no more than a burden whose needs have to be met by family, friends or society.

7. *The Disabled Person as Unable to Live a Successful Life:*
The media frequently portray those with disabilities as being defined by their disability and unable to live full and happy lives. Portrayals have thus traditionally tended to be mostly of inferior persons who are stigmatised by their disability, and who only make an appearance in popular films or programmes when there is a dramatic reason for their presence. According to Nelson (1992:9), "rarely, at least until recently, have they been shown as useful and happy members of society: workers, members of families, lovers, teachers or students, or any of other numerous roles by which human beings are usually defined."

Stereotypes and the Maltese Media

The Commission for the Disabled has consistently campaigned against the infantilization of the disabled, and against the tendency to represent them exclusively as people to be pitied. This has included regular protests in the press and other media, and, in conjunction with the Broadcasting Authority, the setting up of codes of practice and guidelines about appropriate and inappropriate language when referring to disabled people on the media (published by the Authority in December 2002).

Joe Camilleri argues that the stereotype of abject helplessness associated with disability in the non-disabled Maltese popular mind frequently surfaces on television and radio programmes when they run charity shows – as happened in an unfortunate *Istrina* charity telethon at the end of 2001, where viewers were repeatedly and often morbidly urged to make donations out of sentimental pity for the disabled. This issue surfaced again during the Christmas 2003 *Istrina* telethon, when a controversy broke

out over complaints made by the Commission for People with Disabilities over some of the filmed publicity spots shown repeatedly during the programme. In their press release, widely circulated through the local media, the members of the Commission's Council identified a series of problematic issues raised by the spots and drew attention to other local TV programmes which similarly "create more harm than good":

> The Council feels that the majority of the spots which were broadcast portray disabled persons as almost completely incapable. One recurrent image stressed that a person could not enjoy a good quality of life if they couldn't walk. Therefore the image went on to make two important implications: (a) that disabled people depend utterly on the paternalistic help of 'more fortunate' people, and (b) that, directly or indirectly, the benefactor's contribution would help the disabled person to 'get better' (that is, that they would walk).
>
> The Council also agrees that, over a period of years, these types of programmes (*Istrina, Tista' Tkun Int* and on a lesser scale *Nies ta' Veru*), create more harm than good. Therefore, instead of portraying disabled persons as objects of pity, […] let us instead show what can be achieved with the monies collected, for example, human and technological support, changes in the physical environment, improvements in information services, etc.

Writing in *The Times* on 8 January 2004, Tonio Mercieca similarly objected to the spots' "pitiful portrayal of disabled children combined with the background movie soundtrack of the film *Schindler's List*. What does the Holocaust have to do with all this?" The programme's producer strongly denied that the spots in their totality created an impression of helplessness, insisting that the disabled children had been shown because their parents had wished it. They also stressed, however, that they wanted to work closely with those who had objected to the images so as to avoid similar problems in the future.[11] Abigail Mallia, who was responsible for the filming and editing of

[11] The comments appeared in an interview with Peppi Azzopardi, the programme's producer, on *Xarabank on Line*, 12 January 2004. Mr Azzopardi is reported as saying: "*Huwa assolutament mhux veru li l-filmati fit-totalita' tag]hom taw impressjoni ta' helplessness kif qed jing]ad. Fil-fatt jing]ad hekk ming]ajr]add ma j[ib e\empju wie]ed kif dan [ara ... b'daqshekk m'inix ng]id li ma nistg]ux na]dmu flimkien ma' min hu jew hi kon`ernat biex l-*

the offending spots, expressed surprise, anger and disappointment at the objections, particularly in view of the record sums of money collected, which, she insisted, were "a true necessity" for those who would otherwise be facing a very harsh year. Writing in *Fuq ix-Xarabank* (12 January, 2004. p. 13), Ms Mallia argued:

Min jara l-clips u jsib lil dawn innies helpless u pjetu\i qed jag]mel g]a\la li j]ares lejhom b'dan il-mod. Jien nag]\el li n]ares 'l bog]od mill-b\onn, u ng]in fejn nista' sabiex il-]ajja tag]hom tkun a]jar, u ninsab `erta li huma se jkunu hemm biex jg]inu lili meta jien ikolli b\onn l-g]ajnuna biex flimkien ni[bdu]abel wie]ed.

Those who see the clips and find that these people are helpless and pitiable are *choosing* to look at them in this way. I choose to look beyond the need, and I help where I can so that their lives can be better, and I am certain that they will also be there to help me when I am in need so that together we can pull the same rope.

There is no denying the goodwill and noble sentiments which lie behind statements like these, as well as the generosity and altruism of those who are moved to make donations when they view such programmes. But it remains an unfortunate fact that pulling on people's heartstrings in order to encourage them to make donations is inevitably going to depend on and perpetuate attitudes and preconceptions based on negative stereotypes. In Joe Camilleri's view, one key influence on the development and insidious propagation of the popular stereotype of the disabled person as helpless and incapable was a series of well-intentioned radio programmes which has been running on the national station for over fifty years. *Is-Sieg]a tal-Morda* ("The Hour of the Sick") was started on national radio by Monsignor Azzoppardi in the 1950s. Its name was later changed to *Is-Sieg]a tal-Morda u }andikappati* ("The Hour of the Sick and the Handicapped"), and later still (under a lot of pressure) to "The Hour of the Sick and People with Disabilities". The programme's current presenter is reportedly proud of the fact that it's still the same as it was fifty years ago.

> That programme was important from a media point of view because it was one of the programmes that set up the stereotypes that disabled people are sick people, disabled people are poor

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affarijiet isiru a]jar ... dan huwa nuqqas minn na]a taghna li se naraw kif ma jirrepetix ru]u". (Downloaded from:http://www.xarabank.com/topic.asp?TOPIC_ID=9967& FORUM_ ID=14&CAT_ID=1&Forum_Title=Xarabank+News&Topic_Title=Intervista+iStrina)

> little angels… And in fact *'l-an[li'* is what Monsignor Azzopardi used to call the residents at *Dar tal-Providenza*. Consequently, all disabled people became *'an[li'*. At the time it was a very positive step because before that disabled people had been demonised. If you were disabled you were cursed, you were '*wild ix-xitan*' (the devil's offspring), you were all sorts of things. So the disabled person became someone to love, but he was still someone apart. Instead of being kept apart in the cellar, he was apart because he was celestial.

One area of media representation which has been specifically targeted as exploitative by Malta's Commission for the Disabled is the use of images of disabled people in contexts intended to make politicians or the business community look good — often without the permission of those photographed:

> If you are seen with weak people, you look powerful. If you are seen with people whom society considers as valueless, even if loved, you look good. The business community was quite shameless about it. What they would do was donate a wheelchair, which is 0.0001% of their profits, and then they would blow it out of all proportion, and they always insisted on having photographs of one or two disabled people in the picture when they publicised the donation. And the more obviously physically deformed the disabled people were, the better it was for the company. And this we've put a stop to. We've written in the papers about it and we've spoken out, and that to a certain extent has stopped. The Broadcasting Authority has also issued a "Code of Practice on Disability and its Portrayal in the Broadcasting Media", and we were directly involved in the formulation of the code.
>
> We've made a lot of positive progress. I don't think it's as firmly rooted as we would like it to be. It can be easily dismantled. I don't think that the social model of disability has got strong enough foundations yet, or that it is understood well enough yet.

Educational Campaigns

Other education campaigns involve regular meetings with school children and parents, in which the Commission often makes extensive use of popular films in order to "stand people's habitual stereotypes of disability on their heads":

> The children watch a lot of things like Disney, and so we use this for teaching image and attitude. They'll watch things like *Dumbo*, which is very good, and we also use *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. One thing I haven't started using yet, but we'll use much more than most do is *Shrek*, for example, which I like a lot. Also *Babe* about the little pig, and so on. I choose films like these because they have a lot of humour in them. *Dumbo* for example has a lot of different issues that we face: the rejection and so on and so forth. But like other early Disney films, it's all sentimental – that's where it breaks down. *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* is late Disney, so it's full of political correctness, whereas *Shrek* is not – she kisses her true love and *she* becomes an ogre, which is turning conventions topsy-turvy, and it's all like that. So it's got a much more positive message because it's saying that you are who you are and you ought to be accepted as who you are. And it says it in a funny and subversive way.
>
> This is quite different from earlier Disney films. For example, Dumbo, the 'freak elephant', is accepted because he is extraordinary – he can fly – and in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, Quasimodo's great sacrifice in the film is when he gives up Esmeralda, and he's happy because his best friend and the love of his life have got together! This is complete nonsense, because any disabled person would have stabbed him in the back! I would have, anyway!
>
> So when I speak to the youngsters in schools, I explain this, and I say: 'How would you feel if it happened to you?' And basically a lot of what I do is to stand their stereotypes on their head.
>
> Young people today like and respond to subversive humour. Adverts are more appealing to them when they use this type of humour because the young are clued to it. They like ironic images because they're becoming more ironic themselves. They

> enjoy subversive humour. Films and TV programmes aimed at the young often make a lot of use of this.

It is a great pity that this type of media awareness education is not more widespread in Maltese schools. The types of lessons described above would benefit a broader range of children and adults, and they could also be profitably applied to the identification and analysis of other areas of social discrimination, inequalities and ongoing prejudice. As I pointed out elsewhere in this report, one striking characteristic among the young people who had been to schools with active media education programmes was that they were consistently more critical and reflective about what they saw in films and on TV. Though they were not immune to negative influences, they were clearly better armed to understand what was being thrown at them, and also to think through how their attitudes and behaviours might have been inflected or even moulded by the images and values which dominate the global and local media landscapes. Young people who have not experienced media education and media analysis courses tended to depend more on what they took to be "common sense" responses. Such responses can be easily appropriated and manipulated by professional image-mongers, and they are very frequently moulded by the popular media anyway. As such, they are usually little more than vehicles for unchallenged assumptions, unacknowledged prejudice and unfounded preconceptions.

Conclusion

In Joe Camilleri's view, Malta compares well with a lot of other countries in its overall treatment of disabilities:

> But most of the issues and most of the constraints are exactly the same, on a much smaller scale, in terms of size and money, etc. But they're all there; exactly the same. What has happened in Malta, as indeed is the case in countries like the UK, is that the language has changed and the public manners have changed, but the private attitudes are still the same. As soon as people feel unsafe and unstable (as happens in a recession) they will turn against people they see as empty mouths. If the economy is good, they'll give us handouts.

People with disabilities have as important a role to play in society as anybody else. At the very least, they deserve the right to be represented

realistically and with dignity, and to live in an environment which empowers them by allowing them to develop and maintain positive self-images. If nothing else, in this as in other areas of discrimination, putting a stop to the ongoing waste of human potential should be a priority – not least because this will also benefit the larger community.

As the European Disability Forum has forcefully pointed out, the business community and the commercially-driven media too have a lot to gain from a change of attitude. In its "European Declaration on Media and Disability", issued at the European Congress on Media and Disability (Athens, June 2003), the Forum drew attention to the fact that disabled people are insufficiently represented in media output and that the number of disabled people employed in the sector is generally very low. Without doubt, the Congress declared, "the mass media has a significant impact on society and a major role to play in promoting a shift in attitudes and the way society looks at disability. Disabled people represent a vast audience that is currently inadequately catered for, and the media industry will therefore gain from addressing this issue more effectively" (http://www.media-disability.org).

"The European Declaration on Media and Disability" provides a useful starting point for further action and reflection on how to improve the image of disability in media and advertising, as well as encouraging an active participation of disabled professionals in this sector. The guidelines include the following suggestions:

- Production of action plans and development of strategies to promote inclusion of disabled people within media organisations;
- Development of diversity units within media organisations and the inclusion of disability issues within their practices;
- Delivery of disability equality training for employees within the organizations;
- Encouragement of Further Education establishments to include disability as a topic within media and communication studies courses;
- Exchange of best practice within the sector and encouragement of monitoring of progress;
- Where appropriate, development of training and employment programmes to increase the participation of disabled people within the sector;
- Access audits of workplaces in the media industry;

- Development and use of appropriate technologies to promote access for and inclusion of disabled people in media services.

These suggestions are intended to encourage and help individual communities work towards greater equity and productivity. Their main aims are to

- promote change in the mainstream media sector to improve its portrayal and inclusion of disabled people;
- increase the visibility of disabled people in all genres;
- increase coverage of issues which specifically concern disabled people and their families;
- promote positive images of disabled people that are not based on charity or the medical approach and avoid negative stereotypes;
- encourage close cooperation between disabled people and their representative organisations, the disability specific media and the mainstream media industry;
- increase the number of disabled people employed throughout the media industry, particularly at professional levels;
- ensure the accessibility for disabled people of media services;
- ensure the physical accessibility of the working environment in the media industry.

All this requires determination and more systematic and positive action in the changing of non-disabled public perceptions and attitudes. Pious hand-wringing gestures and occasional charity marathons are not going to help the long term problems of image and perception, in this as in any area of discrimination. With Malta's entry into the European Union, there will hopefully be closer access to larger resources and networks like the European Disability Forum. But the work and changes have first to be undertaken more widely and energetically at the local level.

Chapter 5
HEALTH ISSUES: ALCOHOL, SMOKING AND EATING

An obvious but critical question raised by young people's responses to commercially oriented media messages and advertising relates to the extent to which such messages can be said to nurture habits and modes of consumption which are manifestly unhealthy or dangerous. In this chapter I want to examine young people's attitudes to three forms of consumption which (especially in advertising) are regularly associated with socialising and having fun: the drinking of alcohol, smoking, and over- or under-eating. Young people's attitudes to these as to other aspects of consumption are anything but uniform, and the impact of the media on their patterns of behaviour here needs to be assessed in relation to other cumulative influences as well as individuals' social and educational backgrounds. The chapter thus explores what young people themselves say about these topics and how this relates to the ways in which alcohol, tobacco and food are represented in advertising and the media in Malta more generally. I start first by reviewing published statistics outlining patterns of alcohol consumption among Maltese youth.

Recorded Patterns of Alcohol Consumption among Maltese Youth

Statistics relating to attitudes and habits of Maltese 16 years old students to tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs have been published by *Sedqa*, the National Agency against Drug and Alcohol Abuse (reprinted in NSO, 2002:122-128). The figures are based on surveys conducted by *Sedqa* in collaboration with the European Division and the Swedish Council for Information on Alcohol and Drugs. They indicate that in 1999, 94 per cent of the 3,703 students surveyed said that they had had experience of alcoholic beverages. This figure pointed to an increase on the figures recorded in 1995, when 91.9 per cent of the 2,832 students surveyed said that they had had the experience. The surveys also explored the number of times these students had consumed alcohol and the number of times they had been drunk in their lifetime. The figures for 1999 are reproduced below, but in a re-tabulated format and with percentages added so as to make comparisons clearer:

Number of Occasions Used in Lifetime								
		0	*1-2*	*3-5*	*6-9*	*10-19*	*20-39*	*40 +*
ANY ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE	**Boys**	90	109	152	165	215	222	735
	Girls	125	159	185	217	342	332	559
	Total	**215 (6%)**	**268 (7.4%)**	**337 (9.3%)**	**382 (10.6%)**	**557 (15.4%)**	**554 (15.3%)**	**1294 (36%)**

Number of Occasions in Lifetime								
		0	*1-2*	*3-5*	*6-9*	*10-19*	*20-39*	*40 +*
BEEN DRUNK	**Boys**	815	387	214	107	87	41	58
	Girls	1112	436	206	88	67	26	24
	Total	**1927 (52.5%)**	**823 (22.5%)**	**420 (11.5%)**	**195 (5.3%)**	**154 (4.2%)**	**67 (1.8%)**	**82 (2.2%)**

Frequency of Alcohol Use and Drunkenness 1999
(Adapted from: NSO, 2002a: 122-128)

What is striking about these figures is the fact that so many sixteen year-olds say that they drink alcohol regularly. However, the frequency of drunkenness is much lower than the frequency of drinking. Thus while only 6 per cent said that they had never had any alcoholic beverage, 52 per cent said that they had never been drunk. Similarly, while as many as 36 per cent said that they had alcoholic beverages more than forty times, only 2.2 per cent said that they had been drunk more than forty times. These figures need to be read with a certain amount of circumspection, in that it is not clear how "drunkenness" was defined or measured, and self-reporting (as in this case) can often be influenced by perceptions of how acceptable it is to be drunk – particularly in the context of a formal questionnaire. In this sense, the figures may not so much be proving that Maltese youth drink often but only get drunk rarely, but rather that they do not consider it cool to admit to having been drunk when questioned in an official context.

More recent surveys reported in the local press reflect similar patterns. A survey conducted by the National Office of Statistics (published in December 2003) reported that in a sample of 500 respondents, the age group with the highest percentage of drinkers were the 18 to 24 year-olds, 62.2 per cent of whom said that they consume alcohol on a regular basis (*The Malta Independent*, 11/12/03). Another survey, conducted by the Catholic Church in Gozo, found that sixty per cent of the 16 to 18 year-olds surveyed said they consume alcohol (Mallia, 2003). The Health Promotion Department similarly published findings of a survey which indicated that forty-seven per

cent of 15-year-olds are already drinking alcohol on a weekly basis, and that this trend continues into the late teens, with 78 per cent of males and 59 per cent of females aged 15 to 19 saying that they drink alcohol regularly (*The Times*, 10/12/03). According to the Health Promotion Department's report, the figures for 15 year olds are the highest registered in Europe. All of the young people surveyed by the Health Promotion Department said that they had had their first drinks at home, and most associated alcoholic consumption with having fun at parties, clubs or discos. According to Dr Mario Spiteri of the Health Promotion Department, "We're living in a culture where alcohol is associated with having fun. Young people see it as a sensible alternative to drugs, and they try to find means of getting drunk by spending the least amount of money" (*The Malta Independent*, 10/12/03).

Another recent scientific study of youth drinking in Malta is Dr Mario Spiteri's 2002 Ph.D thesis at the University of Southampton, which investigated Maltese sixth form students' behaviour, knowledge and attitudes in relation to substance abuse. That investigation identified a significant relationship between gender and alcohol consumption, in that a greater proportion of males drink alcohol on a regular basis and in large quantities. According to an article about Dr Spiteri's research published in *The Malta Independent* (7/01/04), "most students mentioned friends as their sources of information about a new drink. [Dr Spiteri's] thesis said that the role of advertisements in providing information was referred to by about half of both the male and female respondents. Some students relied upon their own personal experience to check out a new drink, fewer students sought product information and only four females mentioned relatives or others as their source of information".

Research Evidence from Overseas

It is important to see these figures in relation to their broader cultural and global contexts. For one thing, alcohol has a historic place in Western social custom, and international evidence suggests that 90 per cent of all those who drink do so safely (Saffer, 2002). Figures about alcohol use and abuse among teenagers in other countries also suggest the trends recorded in Malta are neither unique nor unprecedented. For instance, citing patterns emerging from US studies published in 1999, Steinberg (2002:428) concludes that most American adolescents have experimented with alcohol, that many have used it regularly, and that alcohol is clearly the drug of choice among teenagers, a substantial minority of whom drink to excess. More

specifically: eight out of 10 US teenagers are reported to have tried alcohol; 3 per cent reported using it daily, and "about one-third of all seniors, one-fourth of all tenth-graders, and one-sixth of all eighth graders reported having abused alcohol (having had more than five drinks in a row) at least once during the past two weeks" (Steinberg, 2002: 428; citing Johnston et al, 1999). These figures are not dissimilar from those reported in Malta.

How these patterns are related to media exposure is not clear-cut, of course. As with other areas of media effects, the international research evidence does not support the claim that there is a direct or uniform influence, but advertising and broadcasting are generally acknowledged to play a key role in how teenagers view alcohol. For one thing, positive images of alcohol consumption tend to be very common on television. Recent US TV content analyses indicate that alcohol use is depicted in 70 per cent of programme episodes, that more than one third of the drinking episodes are associated with humour, and that negative consequences are shown in only 23 per cent of episodes involving the use of alcohol (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002:221, citing Christenson et al, 2000). According to other analyses, on average, alcohol use appears every 14 minutes on MTV, every 17 minutes in the movies and every 27 minutes on prime-time television (Gerbner and Ozyegin, 1997). Alcohol is also frequently associated with increased levels of sex and sexuality (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002:221).

Studies which specifically examined the relationship between television alcohol advertising and patterns of drinking among the young have claimed that increased exposure to alcohol advertising is linked to (i) increased brand awareness and recognition, (ii) decreased scepticism about the negative effects of alcohol use, (iii) increased beliefs in the positive social effects of drinking, and (iv) increased expectations of future intentions to drink among adolescents (Wyllie et al, 1998; Austin & Nach-Ferguson, 1995; Grube, 1995). Other studies have tried to ascertain how youths interpret, understand and respond to the themes and images portrayed in television alcohol advertisements. Reporting on focus-group discussions with ninety-seven students aged nine to 15 in Northern California, one group of US researchers (Waiters et al, 2001) concluded that their participants identified the main message of television beer commercials as an exhortation to purchase the product based on its quality and its relationship to sexual attractiveness. The students understood beer commercials as implying that attractive young adults drink beer to personally rewarding ends, and that what made alcohol advertisements attractive to young people was their use of

youthful lifestyle images, humour and youth-oriented music. According to these researchers, the public-policy implications of their findings were that

> Alcohol advertisers should be encouraged to produce more product-oriented advertisements that young people typically do not understand or find boring. Such advertisements would serve the industry's need to build brand recognition among adults without appealing to young people. (Waiters et al, 2001:715)

There is also an increasing body of literature that suggests that alcohol counter-advertising (the use of media to promote public health) is effective in reducing alcohol consumption among teenagers and young adults, and that "increased counter-advertising, rather than new advertising bans, appears to be the better choice for public policy" (Saffer, 2002: 173).

The next section explores how the statistical and international evidence and arguments presented above compare with perceptions among young people in Malta, as revealed in statements made in the course of interviews.

Alcohol Use and Abuse among Maltese Youth

When I asked what young people usually drink and where, the most common answer was that most tend to associate going to Paceville with drinking alcohol in the company of friends. I was struck by how openly even the younger interviewees spoke about consuming alcohol – they were not asked whether they drank alcohol specifically, but their response to the question "What do you normally drink when you go out?" was usually to list alcoholic beverages. One group (B14) said that from the age of 14 upwards young people do a lot of social drinking when they go out, and that the most popular drinks tend to be wine, vodka and beer. Indeed, in the course of another interview with 14-15 year-old Fourth Form girls (B7), they complained about the exorbitant prices charged for drinks in Paceville. When I asked what types of drinks they would be most likely to have, they mentioned alcoholic drinks quite freely, as if these are taken for granted as part of going out. "Vodka Ice" (vodka with orange, cherry or strawberry) was identified as a clear favourite. Another girl said she likes "light drinks" like Malibu, Pils and Red Bull; others said Baileys and cocktails. One girl said she has beer or wine (about two glasses) at home, but doesn't like drinking when she goes out because she's afraid ("*Barra ma tantx in]obb nixrob, g]ax*

nib\a naqra"). In the course of another interview with a group of 17 year-old males (B19) most said that they usually drink beer when they go to Paceville; one said "anything: wine, anything alcoholic"; another: "mainly vodka".

A group of males aged 17-20 (B20) insisted that many young people binge drink precisely because they want to get drunk (*"issir patata"*), and that when they go to Paceville, many go to bars first so as to "get smashed" (*"biex isiru]ara"*) before moving on to discos where drinks tend to be more expensive. Claims like this do not seem to tie up with the *Sedqa* figures cited at the beginning of this chapter, which give the impression that while youth drinking is very common, the incidence of drunkenness is more limited. There is no doubt that there is a certain amount of exaggeration in how these young men speak about the drinking excesses of others – a pattern reflected also in the tone of the expressions they use to describe such excesses (*isiru]ara, issir patata*). But (accurate or not) the perception that youth binge drinking has reached what many believe to be epidemic proportions is also shared by a large cross-section of the population, older adults as well as younger ones.

According to another group of 15 year-old boys (B16), many of their acquaintances (not quite friends) drink a lot and "their aim in life is to get drunk on Saturday". They argued that alcohol consumption has increased a lot among the young because drinking is associated with "being cool":

> *Anton:* Where in the past people used to go out to be with friends, now they go out to get drunk!
> *Leo:* There's the cool image of drinking. But many also exaggerate, claiming they drink more so as to make themselves look cool!
> *Anton:* You ask them how much they drink, they say 'till I get drunk, man, when I get drunk I might stop.'

Yet these young men also made a point of distancing themselves from this type of behaviour. One described how he calculates how much he can drink according to what he had read about what a person of his weight can handle:

> When you're out with friends and you feel like socialising, there's no better way than when you're happy. Not drunk, drunk is the worst position you can be in.

When I asked a group of 20 year-old factory workers (A6) whether young people today drink a lot of alcohol, they said yes:

Paul: *Jekk]a to]ro[, iva ...*
Kurt: *Ma noq g]odx nixrob id-dar, ji[ifieri, rari ...*
Carmen: *Jiena [ieli nibda ninnota l-mejda wara li nitilqu min post, kif tkun!* (laughs) *Per e\empju inkunu qeg]din f'xi bar, qeg]din ma' s]abi f'xi bar, nibda ninnota l-mejda wara li nitilqu. Nibda mmur: 'Ara, possibbli xrobna dak ix-xorb kollhu?!'*
Interviewer: *Imma x'tip ta xorb?*

Carmen: *Kollox, imbid, birra, li jkun! Li jkollok aptit dak il-]in ikun hemm. Qed tifhem?*
Carl: *Meta jasal il-weekend, xalata, tmur tixrob mal-]bieb …*

Paul: If you go out, yes…
Kurt: I don't do much drinking at home, rarely anyway…
Carmen: I sometimes start noticing the table after we leave a place, how it is! *(laughs)* For example, we might be in some bar or other, with my friends, and I start noticing the table after we leave. I go: "Goodness, is it possible that we drank all those drinks?!"
Interviewer: But what type of drinks?
Carmen: Everything, wine, beer, anything! Whatever you feel like at the time will be there.
Carl: When the weekend arrives, you go wild; you go drinking with friends…

Young People as Targets in Alcohol Advertising

As is the case in other countries (see Strasburger & Wilson, 2002; Saffer, 2002; Waiters et al, 2001), the evidence from Malta suggests that it is the young who are being specifically targeted most frequently by alcohol advertisers. Comments made repeatedly in the course of interviews and discussions indicate that the drinking of alcohol in Malta (for many also in excessive quantities) is habitually associated with socialising and with being a fun-loving young adult. As the data presented below indicate, these associations are regularly and deliberately nurtured in advertising, where the drinking of alcohol is consistently linked with having fun, being "cool" and forming part of the "in group".

These associations also appear to figure prominently in the way some DJs address their audience on popular radio. Dr Brenda Murphy suggests that the increase in youth binge drinking and in young people's perception that

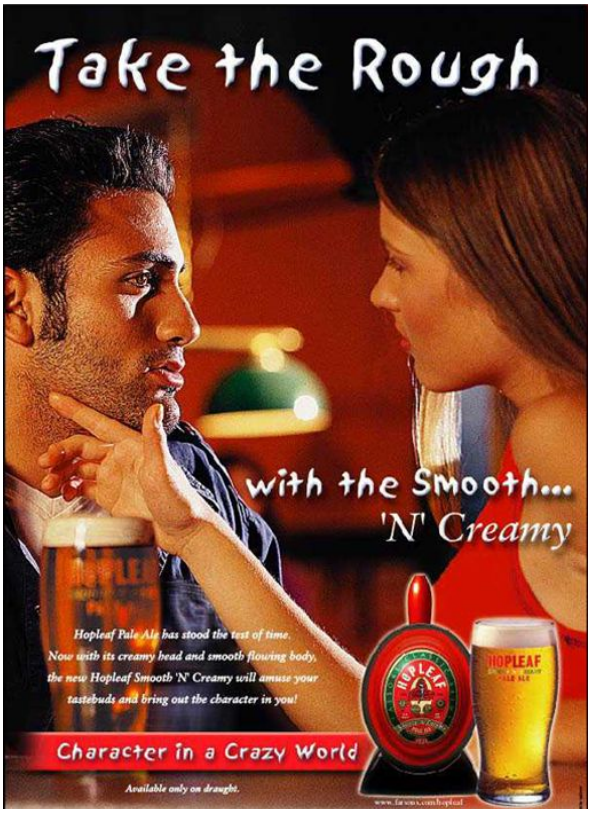
drinking is "cool" was significantly influenced by the fact that pluralism in broadcasting ushered the arrival of a new brand of radio-speak:

> The strong link between going out, socialising, especially in Paceville, and heavy drinking is quite new, and that happened, I think, thanks to pluralism. I remember an overseas friend of mine who was living here at the time that pluralism was introduced. He had lived here quite a long time, and when we suddenly got the licenses for all the new radio stations to come in, there was a DJ on a Sunday morning going on about the fact that he had a hangover, and "Man, what a great night it had been!" A lot of Americanisms were being used. And this kind of talk-radio started to enter. I remember this friend of mine saying, "What is happening? A year ago we would never have had to listen to this drivel, and this value being put on alcohol. We've never seen that before!" And suddenly this new value seemed to be coming across on the radio, through the DJs, through the young guy DJs. I think that was the turning point. We've seen this sense of group membership build up around the dance scene, the pub scene, the bar scene (but they don't call it a bar because it's not trendy enough) and these dancing places, the dancing bars, the Latin American stuff. And the advertisers are buying into this.

17 year-old Jason (B5) argued that whether young people will be attracted to a product or not will depend on the extent to which its packaging projects a young image:

Iridu jkunu l-ewwel]a[a affarijiet g]a\-\ag]\ag]. G]ajnek hemm]a tmur. Jew g]all-inqas jekk il-prodott ma jkunx g]a\-\ag]\ag] jag]mluh b'xi mod li ji[bed li\-\ag]\ag].	First of all they have to be things that are for young people. That's where your eye will go. Or at least, if the product is not for young people, they have to present it in such a way that it attracts young people.

Repeatedly in the interviews, young people identified beer advertisements as among the best made and most interesting – often because of their humour and clever twists – "*tad-da]q u fih naqra sens*" as one 15 year old boy put it.



Beer advertisements often associate drinking with youthfulness, sexual appeal and having fun. The text in this particular advert underlines the sexually-charged connotations of the young models' pose by promising that the drink will "arouse your tastebuds" with "its creamy head and smooth flowing body".

(B1). Adverts for Budweiser and Heineken, as well as locally produced adverts for Cisk beer, were mentioned on several occasions because of what were seen as their professional production values. 14 year-old Tony (B2) doesn't like the taste of beer, but he feels that if the advert is attractive enough, it will convince him to try out a particular brand:

Imma birra normali mhix tajba, u l-Bud u l-Heineken hekk, na]seb dik tinfluwenza, g]ax jekk qatt ma tkun ppruvajta, tg]id: issa nipprovaha, u!	But beer normally isn't good, and the Bud and Heineken sort of, I think they do influence people, because if you've never tried it, you'd say: now I'll try it!

Another incentive for drinking is often the prospect of being seen to be drinking a trendy product. One advertising agent told me that a particular brand of imported beer did not sell well in draught form (from the tap) but was very successful when sold in bottles (where the brand remained visible):

> Heineken didn't do well in draught, as a draught beer, because in a glass you can't tell what it is. It does very well in a bottle, because the bottle is the symbol that you want to have. […] And then there's that, you know, you have to push yourself a little bit further to prove yourself a bit more, with your Heineken bottle and your Marlborough Lights, and stuff like that. There's a lot of label consciousness.

The advertising agents I spoke to were very clear that they cannot legally target people under the age of eighteen in their advertising, but they also acknowledged the fact that there is a drinking problem among the young:

> *Interviewer:* Many young people have told me that a lot of 14 and even 13 year olds go off to Paceville and do a lot of drinking …
> *AM:* Yes …
> *AF:* Yeah, but we can't target them...
> *Interviewer:* I know you can't target them, but I'm wondering whether you've had any backlash of people saying 'look you're advertising and encouraging underage drinking'.
> *AF:* No. Because the drinks are sold in the clubs or bars, and it's up to them, it's the responsibility of the club owners to allow anyone under sixteen in, or whatever their policy is. So we don't really get into that.
> *AM:* That does happen though. A lot of 14 year-olds go to Paceville and get smashed.

At the same time, however, they were also very clear about the fact that in order to increase the sales of their clients' alcoholic products they had to make those products appealing to the younger generation. They were particularly proud of the success of a campaign for a specific alcoholic beverage (Martini) which had led to the tripling of product sales in the space of a year:

AF: Martini had very low sales, they were very weak, and we did a series of promotions which were completely locally produced, locally oriented and all that, in clubs, wherever young people go, and it was so effective that by the end of the year sales were tripled.

AM: One problem we had with Martini was that it was too expensive. A main decision-making factor in what people will drink is price. Martini has to be drunk with Vodka. It has to be drunk with something else. You shouldn't be drinking it on its own. That's how we're promoting it. That's very expensive, so it took us a while to pick up the sales, but once we stepped up the promotions and we were absolutely everywhere, everybody was drinking it then.

Interviewer: So the price stopped being a problem?

AM: The price stopped being a problem, because you gave them a limit, which is something that they like and something that they want to be like …

AF: And then they'll buy it …

[…]

Interviewer: How did that campaign target young people?

AF: Just by being present everywhere, like nightclubs, parties … We had actually organised a couple of parties, sponsoring big parties which were coming down to Malta, because there's a huge clubbing scene.

AM: With Martini, what is a very big help, which is very effective here for brand advertising, is radio. For the young, radio, like Bay Radio, for example, is a very very effective medium, to promote a brand.

Radio is also a relatively cheap form of advertising and, as another agent put it, it makes it possible to "blast the whole country" with your message.

The Martini campaign was so successful that it was widely imitated by other advertisers. The advertisers who produced it ascribed this success to the fact that it had systematically associated the drink with being young, good-looking, fun loving and trendy:

AM: Now for Martini, we did a bit of a market research before all this started, and it turned out that with people who were below 36, I think, or below 30 – I can't remember the exact

figures because this was quite a while ago – it was "that bottle of alcohol in my parents' drinks cabinet". And so we said OK, we have to revive this. So we attached a kind of image of people to the brand …

AF: Of local people …

AM: We got a local group of friends, who happen to be my group of friends, who happen to be quite a good looking bunch of people, and we just put them on a sofa in a nightclub, lit them up, gave them shades, and just told them sit down and have a good time. And people started drinking this drink. Backing that up with radio advertising, Public Relations, and advertising in newspapers as well. It was a very successful campaign.

The campaign appears to have appealed to the young not just by looking trendy, but also by combining an accessibly local look with "foreign" prestige:

Interviewer: Was it important that your models looked Maltese in the advert? Because you said that you use a lot of foreign adverts …

AM: Not necessarily, no. I mean, I would say, for example there were 12 people: five or six of them didn't look Maltese at all…

AF: No, but more than that what helped was the fact that it's a very small social scene here to a certain extent, and people like to see themselves in the newspaper and they like to see people they know in the newspapers.

AM: Yes, because that's what we did as well, as part of the promotion. We got the models down to the club, and they were taking photos with people, and we were putting those pictures out on the newspapers as well. We like to show, over here, we like to be seen. And that was really effective. That really, really worked, for example. And it influenced young people who didn't like this drink at all. We got a certain image, an image to give to this drink which was young, cool …

AF: ...the beautiful people …

AM: trendy … We called them the beautiful people. And you know how Martini is, there's a very glamorous image attached to it.

The idea seems to have been that of making this "glamorous image" more accessible by letting ordinary local people take on the role of models for advertising photo shoots:

> *AM:* In fact now we're doing new promotions inside nightclubs where we're actually staging a photo shoot in a nightclub, with a photographer and about six models, and we're going to choose people from the nightclub to take part in the photo shoot. So people will see the glamour, and they'll see that it's possible to be part of it. That's the whole idea behind it …
> *Interviewer:* What age group would that be targeted at?
> *AF & AM:* Eighteen to late twenties.

"The Martini Ritual:
Sinners in Heaven 22/11/02"
http://groups.msn.com/TheMartiniRitualMALTA/shoebox.msnw

As shown by the comments made by teenagers and by the international research evidence quoted in this chapter, advertisements and other media images linking the consumption of alcohol with young adults socialising and enjoying themselves have a very strong appeal to those who are technically under the legal age for drinking – even though this age group may not be "officially" targeted by advertisers. This, after all, is an age when young people are very keen to assume what they see as young adult roles, and

to be seen as no longer acting like children. Unfortunately, it is also those who are younger that are more likely to have difficulties distinguishing between the sensible enjoyment of "grown-up" drinking, and drinking (often to excess) so as to prove that they are old enough to enter the world of young adult merry-making – or that world as it is repeatedly projected in commercial advertising, anyway.

Smoking

According to a survey on health behaviour among secondary school children aged under sixteen carried out by Malta's Health Promotion Department in 2002, smoking rates among Maltese youth are comparable with smoking rates among youths in EU countries (Xuereb, 2004). The survey revealed that 24.4 per cent of boys, and 24.9 per cent of girls between the age of 11 and 15 had experimented with smoking. These figures reflect a 5 per cent rise in the incidence of smoking among children in this age group since 2000, when an identical survey had revealed that 19.5 per cent of under 16-year-olds smoked. The 2002 survey also revealed that the average rate of young people who have smoked tobacco increases dramatically at age 13.

In the course of the interviews, it was peer pressure and the desire to look cool that were most frequently identified as the principal reasons why young people start smoking. Sixteen year-old Lorna (a non-smoker) described how she had once been told that she'd look really good with a cigarette in her hand (B6); while 19 year-old Denise (B15) said that she had started smoking when she started going out, and that was when she was in Form 1. Many also believe that it is not so much external influences as an individual's make-up and character that determine whether a person chooses to smoke or drink. In this view, whether young people choose to drink or smoke is ultimately a matter of individual choice, personal likes and attitudes, strength of character, or family background. As two young men aged 17 and 15 (B18, B1) put it:

Na]seb jien, dan, jekk tkun tpejjep jew tixrob, minnek ikun [ej, mhux mir-riklam!	I think that if you smoke or drink, it's really coming from you, not from the advert!
Fl-a]]ar int tidde`iedi, u. Mhux ir-riklami! Ir-riklam mhux]a jg]idlek ... inti ridt tag]mel.	In the end you are the one who decides, aren't you? Not the adverts! The advert is not going to tell you … You wanted to do it.

These comments echo findings from a recent study by Charlotte Sant Fournier, who surveyed smoking trends across a sample of 600 respondents from three age groups (16-21, 40-45 and 60-65). That study indicated that "14 per cent of the 16- to 21-year-olds and seven per cent of the 60- to 65-year-olds started smoking to impart a 'cool' image", but that "none of the participants felt that cigarette advertising persuaded them in any way to start smoking" (*The Times*, 18 July, 2003).

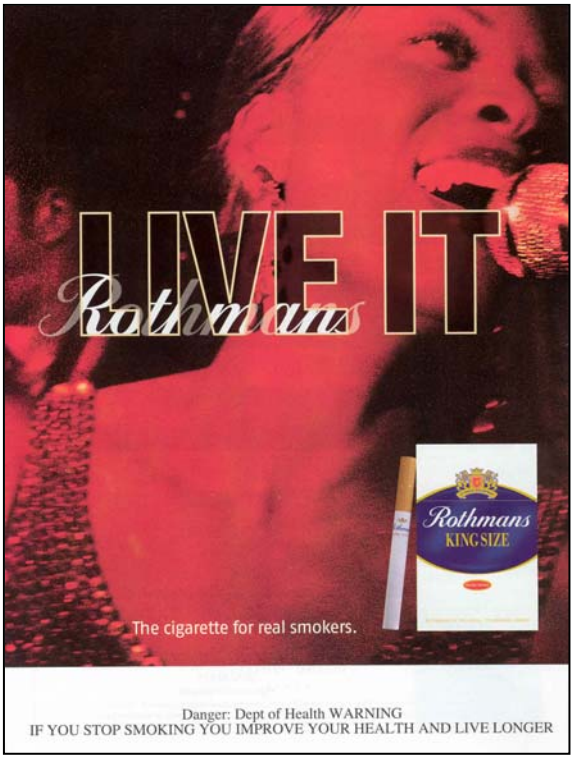
The assertion that cigarette advertising does not persuade young people to start smoking, and that its influence is limited to encouraging smokers to change brands, was in fact made by several of the young people interviewed for this project – including those who identified themselves as smokers. This is an assertion which is also frequently made by cigarette companies and advertisers, particularly when they protest against bans or restrictions on advertising. However, evidence from international research on this topic reveals a very different picture. The weight of research evidence suggesting that cigarette advertising encourages smoking among teenagers by glamorising smoking and smokers in 1994 led the U.S. Surgeon General to conclude that:

> Cigarette advertising appears to affect young people's perceptions of the pervasiveness, image, and function of smoking. Since misperceptions in these areas constitute psychosocial risk factors for the initiation of smoking, cigarette advertising appears to increase young people's risk of smoking." (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1994: 195).

Separate studies conducted in the U.S. and Britain have shown that the most heavily advertised brands of cigarettes are also the most popular among teenage smokers (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002: 208-9). A comprehensive 3-year longitudinal study of 1,752 California adolescents found that one third of all smoking experimentation in California between 1993 and 1996 could be attributed to tobacco advertising and promotions (Pierce et al., 1998). In Britain, a survey of 1,450 students aged 11 and 12 found that awareness of cigarette advertising correlated with smoking (While et al., 1996). In New Zealand, cigarette consumption fell after a complete ban on cigarette advertising, and in Norway, the number of smokers aged 13 to 15 dropped from 17 per cent in 1975 to 10 per cent in 1990 after an advertising ban was imposed (Vickers 1992). Another international analysis of factors influencing tobacco consumption in 22 countries revealed that since 1973,

advertising restrictions have resulted in lower rates of smoking (Kaugesen and Meads, 1991).

Cigarette advertising on Maltese billboards and magazines:



Cigarettes are pointedly (and incongruously) associated with the idea of being a "real" man or woman, living the good life, and unabashedly enjoying a young and carefree lifestyle.

As the U.S. Surgeon General's 1994 Report makes clear, in the case of smoking as in drinking, "individual choice" as well as "peer pressure" can often be influenced in one direction or another through the repetitive association of products with glamorised lifestyles and images. As is the case with alcohol advertising, cigarette advertising on Maltese billboards and in the print media still deliberately targets the young by associating smoking with the enjoyment of a carefree and independent lifestyle – frequently represented through images of young individuals who seem to be in control of their own lives and know how to enjoy active pursuits.

Challenging these associations, as indeed happens in a lot of anti-smoking campaigns, can help to change the thrust and pull of peer pressure and "individual choice" exactly in the opposite direction. Several interviewees insisted that in the same way that young people often start smoking because of peer pressure and the desire to look cool, in some peer groups the pressure is precisely in the opposite direction. This is how one group of sixth formers (B5) described how they exert peer pressure to persuade one of their friends *not* to smoke:

Sandra: It's true that most people *imbag]ad jg]idu: 'G]ax* my friends won't like me if I don't smoke.' *Imma dik imbag]ad*, it's more of a psychological problem…

John: *Skond il-grupp, ji[ifieri. Issib min*, he won't like you because you smoke.

Peter: *E\att! A]na hekk qeg]din. Qeg]din grupp illi, grupp kbir, illi wie]ed biss hemm ipejjep minnhom. Meta jibda jpejjep, nibdew ng]ajtu mieg]u, ji[ifieri.* We just don't like it.

Malcolm: *Tkun minn]biebek.*

Hugo: *G]alkemm, na]seb essenzjalment anka jekk inti tobg]odhom is-sigaretti, fl-a]]ar mill-a]]ar jekk qatt]a tipprova wie]ed, na]seb* the main factor will be, you're curious …

Malcolm: *Jiena nemmen illi tiprova wie]ed dejjem trid. Dejjem trid g]ax* it's useless being curious about it and … not doing anything about it. *Meta tipprova wie]ed*, it makes a difference. For example, *meta pprovajt wie]ed jien*, it made a total difference *g]ax g]amilt nofs*

Sandra: It's true that most people will then say: 'Because my friends won't like me if I don't smoke.' But that's more of a psychological problem …

John: It depends on the group. There are also those who won't like you because you smoke.

Peter: Exactly! We're like that. We're in a group in which (it's a big group) there is only one who smokes. When he starts smoking, we start telling him off, I mean. We just don't like it.

Malcolm: It comes from your friends.

Hugo: Although I think that basically even if you hate cigarettes, in the last resort, if you're ever going to try one, I think the main factor will be, you're curious …

Malcolm: I believe that you always have to try one. You have to, because it's useless being curious about it and … not doing anything about it. When you try one, it makes a difference. For example, when I tried one myself, it made a total difference because I was coughing

sieg]a nisol! (laughs)

Hugo: *E]e! G]id lili! Fil-fatt ma na]mlux!*

Sandra: Same thing! First time I tried it, I said OK, good, try it, first and last, won't again …

for half an hour! (laughs)

Hugo: Yeah! Tell me about it! In fact I hate it!

Sandra: Same thing! First time I tried it, I said OK, good, try it, first and last, won't again …

Malcolm's remark that "you always have to try one" is interesting in that it suggests that even young people who don't want to smoke are still attracted enough to the idea of smoking to at least be "curious" about it.

Attitudes to Health Promotion Campaigns

Health promotion campaigns are clearly having a positive impact in a number of areas. Several interviewees commented, for instance, that people of all ages have become much more conscious of the need of healthy eating habits and exercise. Young people have also become much more aware of the dangers of drinking, smoking and drugs generally. Health awareness publicity on the media was repeatedly identified as a key factor in this development.

However, increased awareness does not always mean that all young people will necessarily drink or smoke less as a result of these campaigns. For instance, most of the smokers among the research sample conceded that anti-smoking campaigns were a good idea, but they also insisted that they are not enough to convince them to stop smoking.

Young people coming from a professional home background, or who form part of groups with access to better schooling, appear to be more responsive to health campaigns than others. This pattern appears to be related to the fact that these groups are also better informed about advertising and media techniques of persuasion, often because many of them are or have been at schools where media education is part of the curriculum. The tendency for the better informed and better educated to be more responsive to health promotion campaigns was also reflected in Charlotte Sant Fournier's 2003 study of smoking trends across three age groups (16-21, 40-45 and 60-65). According to press reports of this study, "education campaigns may be having an impact on the professional class since none of the respondents that fell into this category were smokers but no fewer than 40 per cent of this sub-group were ex-smokers" (Grech, 2003).

Anti-drinking campaigns during the summer months have focused on undercutting the 'cool' image associated with drinking. Other campaigns over the Christmas period stressed the dangers of drink-driving.

There is also a danger that too much counter-advertising can become counter-productive. A number of the young people I interviewed complained that health campaigns had become too intense and repetitive. 14 year-old Helen (B16), for instance, complained that her secondary schooling had been punctuated by Sedqa over-pushing the case against drugs:

Form One sena s]i]a droga, Form Two sena s]i]a tipjip, Form Three sena s]i]a alcohol, imbag]ad Form Four ta]lita tat-tlieta li huma! Tqa\\i\na!	In Form One we had a whole year about drugs, in Form Two a whole year on smoking, in Form Three a whole year on alcohol, and Form Four was a mixture of all three! We're sick of it!

And 17 year-old Ben (B6) similarly complained that health promotion campaigners tend to overstate their case:

> I think that all of us know so much about the benefits and the whatever that there are of drinking, smoking and drugs. Everywhere you go, I mean, even on the school billboard last time there was a thing about the effects of some drugs. We've heard it over and over again. And I think that personally, whether you have an ad telling you to smoke or one telling you not to, either way it's based on you. If you're a person who doesn't want to smoke because you don't want to damage your health, you're fine…

Another group of Sixth Formers (B5) said that anti-smoking campaigns have become too familiar, and that they need "a reshuffle or a face lift". The counter-productive consequences of overstating negative effects to the young were also well captured in one young man's response (B5) when he was asked why young people choose to smoke, given the intense counter-advertising:

Jien ng]id minni biex nisfida! (laughs)	Speaking for myself, I do it as a challenge! (laughs)

Eating Disorders, Undereating and "Junk Food"

According to the National Office of Statistics' 2003 *Lifestyle Survey*, 7.6 per cent of Maltese females aged between 18 and 24 are underweight (*The Malta Independent*, 11 December 2003). According to an earlier report published by the Health Promotion Department, the overwhelming majority of patients suffering from anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa in Malta in 2003 were female; almost half were aged between 18 and 29, and more than a quarter were under 17 years of age (*The Malta Independent*, 12 July 2003). These figures are particularly striking when compared to the *Lifestyle Survey*'s revelation that 60 per cent of the Maltese population are either overweight or obese, and that 56.3 per cent of these are males.

The links between girls' desire to have slim or thin figures and the images of female beauty most frequently projected in films, television programmes and advertisements have frequently been documented in the international research literature. Several cross sectional studies have found "an apparent link between level of media exposure and likelihood of having an eating disorder or eating disorder symptomatology" (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002: 264). One study found that young women with eating

disorders report that magazines and newspapers influence their eating habits and their concept of beauty (Murray et al, 1996). Studies of college women in the US found that the ones who are most dissatisfied with their bodies and are most prone to bulimia are those who most "internalise the cultural bias toward thinness" (Thompson et al., 1999). Similar patterns of dissatisfaction and levels of eating disorders have been found with younger girls "whose devotion to fashion magazines leads them to compare their bodies with fashion models" (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002: 264). According to Becker et al. (1995, 2002), in the Pacific isle of Fiji, the proportion of teen girls scoring abnormally high scores on a test for disordered eating doubled three years after the introduction of television. There was also a significant rise in cases of teenage girls reporting that they had vomited to control their weight and in the numbers of girls reporting that they felt "too big or fat".

In the course of the interviews undertaken for this project, a group of 14-15 year-old girls (B7) complained that boys are more attracted to thin girls and that this is a direct consequence of what they see on television:

Imbag]ad il-guvintur qishom per e\empju iffissati fuq it-tfajliet li jaraw fuq it-televixin. Il-lallu! Daw iriduhom irqaq u hekk u hekk ... A]na ma' tantx qisna ... it-tfajliet ... jekk ikun naqra o]xon mhux sa natu xi kas]afna! Mhux sa no]ro[ma' xi mudell, jew hekk! ... Imma l-guvintur iktar iffissati; bi``a]a[a hekk iriduhom, qishom tal-qasab, jew platt!

Boys seem to be sort of obsessed with girls whom they see on television. My goodness! They want them to be slim and this and that ... We are not so much … girls I mean … If he's a little bit fat we're not going to take much notice. I'm not expecting to go out with some model or something! … But guys are more obsessed; they want something like that, thin like a bamboo stick, or a plate!

It's worth stressing, however, that most of the boys interviewed insisted that they do not like girls who are too thin – or too fat for that matter. Asked whether they thought men wanted women to look like the models they see in adverts and on TV, two 15 year-old boys (B9) replied:

> *Martin:* I'm not so sure … It's very ironic, because women most of the time, they want to go really thin and skinny. But I know many boys who if they see a very thin girl, they say "Yuck! How thin she is, like a skeleton!" I mean, girls who are very

fat, I mean, wouldn't be very attractive to most of the boys, but yet, when they're too thin, and many are in fact a bit too thin, especially at this age, they tend to like, put people off, at the same time …

Robert: And neither extreme is nice …

Martin: Exactly.

16 year-old John and Peter (B5) similarly told of a girl they know who is obsessive about her weight, even though she is very thin:

John: *L-g]ar meta jkollok tfajla veru rqieqa u* she says she's fat, *madonna! Imma tal-bi\a ta, ji[ifieri! Anke Peter kien jafaha … Konna nafu wa]da, bis-serjeta! Iddawwar idejk b'subajk ma qaddha!*

John: The worst is when you have a really thin girl and she says she's fat, my goodness! But it's really shocking, I mean! Even Peter used to know her … We used to know this girl, really! You could wrap your hand round her waist and touch your fingers!

Peter: *U sejra, u sejra:* I'm this fat, *madonna! Irrid nag]mel dieta g]al dan …*

Peter: And she'd go, she'd go: I'm this fat, my goodness! I have to go on a diet …

John: *Tal-bi\a kienet!* And she's not anorexic, *ta, ji[fieri … Imma j[[ennuk, ta!*

John: She was shocking! And she's not anorexic, I mean … They really drive you mad when they're like that!

Several spoke more specifically of the dangers of eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia nervosa. One 16 year-old girl (B5) described her own experience and that of one of her friends as follows:

> There are thin people who are so affected by how, like … like you have to have a perfect body, you have to be thin, and you can't. Like, my hips are huge; I still want them to be smaller, but … I had gone through a phase when I didn't eat. Like, you lose three or four kilos in a week, but you put them on again, so it's a waste! But I had a friend, she's tall, very thin, and still she wasn't eating anything. Another friend of mine blacked out last week …

It is ironic that such perceptions are prevalent in a context which also encourages young consumers to eat unrealistically glamorised fast foods. Throughout the interviews, whenever McDonald's or Burger King were mentioned, the interviewees' eyes tended to light up, even though they frequently referred to such food as "junk food". One young man (B5) insisted that he never touches food from such places because he worked in one briefly and knows "exactly what crap there is in the burger." When he said this, his friends in the focus group begged him not to tell them: "We don't want to know! We like it too much!" In another discussion (B7), a group of teenage girls spoke enthusiastically about how much they love McDonald's – because of the taste, they said, but also because they like the clean environment and the fact that it's a good place to meet. One girl complained that the burgers are never as large or nice-looking as they appear on the adverts, but this was not a disincentive to eating them! Here is how one girl in this particular group of McDonald's enthusiasts described the food she also loves eating there:

Gloria: *Na]seb dat-tip ta' ikel, il-*junk foods, *na]seb tilqit ikun jien. Huma ma jg]idulekx, imma jien hekk ng]id, g]ax mimli imbarazz, na]seb jien!*

Interviewer: *"Tilqit" f'liema sens?*

Gloria: *L-ikel ma jkunx naturali. L-anqas il-burgers li nixtru a]na ma jkunu hekk!* (Others agree)

Interviewer: *Allura jekk tafu li tilqit, g]aliex tmorru?*

Gloria: *Imma jkuni tajbin! Imbag]ad dak il-]in tibqa nie\la!* (laughter)

Gloria: I think that this type of food, junk foods, is all leftovers. They don't tell you, but that's what I say, because it's full of rubbish. That's what I think!

Interviewer: What do you mean by "leftovers"?

Gloria: The food is not natural. Not even the burgers we buy are natural! *(Others agree)*

Interviewer: So if you know that it's all "leftovers", why do you go?

Gloria: But they taste good! And once I get started there's no stopping me! *(laughter)*

A 24 year-old male factory worker (A9) similarly described how he loves McDonald's and Burger King (*"dik l-hena tieghi!"*). Another young man in the same focus group commented that though he tries not to eat burgers when he's out because you don't know what goes into them, he finds the smell irresistible (*"ir-ri]a tirb]ek!"*).

Conclusion

One point which emerges forcefully from the evidence presented in this chapter is the need of sustained media education as far as health issues are concerned. Though there is clearly a great deal of excellent work already being done in this respect by the Public Health Department and organisations like Sedqa, young people's complaints about the repetitiveness of health promotion campaigns suggest that they also need to be constantly updated and modified if they are to be effective. There also appears to be a major gap in the area of education about the media themselves, particularly in terms of providing children and young adults with the critical tools which will enable them to better understand how techniques of persuasion are pitched and how they work. As pointed out at various other points in this report, the interviews reflected very marked differences in the responses and attitudes of those who had been through a media education programme in school or at university and those who had not.

By itself, the bombarding of young people with health promotion messages is not going to be enough, and in some cases (as some comments by young people indicate) it can also be counterproductive. The fact that today's youth are living in media saturated environments makes it imperative that they should be helped to become better equipped to understand the language of the media – in terms of how, for instance, their own world views and "common sense" assumptions relate to the images and values projected and endorsed in commercial broadcasting and global media. Young people rightly want to be accorded greater trust and allowed to make their own judgments about matters related to their health. They resent being "nagged", whether by parents or health promotion campaigns. But in order to be able to make those judgments wisely, they also need to be better informed about the ways in which their opinions, beliefs and desires are constantly being courted and lured by commercial forces whose main concern is not so much their health as the nurturing of world views and life habits dominated by unrealistic and endlessly receding dreams.

Chapter 6
CONSUMING SEX

Youth, Sex and the Media: A Global Perspective

One area in which the increasingly globalised nature of contemporary media entertainment can be argued to have had an impact on Maltese youth is in the ways that attitudes to sex and sexuality have changed over recent years. In this chapter I explore the evidence pointing to these changes, and the extents to which the changes can be linked with broadcasting and other media messages. The chapter's main focus is on the impact of gender-differentiated messages about sex and sexuality (as broadcast through both local and international media) on young Maltese people's perceptions, attitudes and patterns of sexual behaviour. In order to help contextualise all this, I start with an overview of international research on the links between young people's media habits and sexual behaviour.

Many studies appear to assume that sexual messages are more or less uniform, and they usually focus on looking for links between amounts of TV watching and viewers' general attitudes about sexuality (e.g., endorsement of premarital sex). However, it is worth stressing that media messages about sex are anything but uniform. "Sex" (like "violence", in fact) is not one clear-cut entity which is either present or not present in particular television programmes or other media messages. The word itself carries different connotations in different contexts, so that there is not simply "sex" on television, but rather different ways of portraying various forms of human activity which we habitually place under this broad heading. The ways in which these activities are portrayed will also be loaded with a wide range of possible associations and value systems (ranging from the exploitative to the educational, the normal to the abusive) which will also play a key role on how the material is perceived, interpreted and responded to. To give a fairly obvious example, a discussion programme looking at the implications of extramarital relations among young adults is as much about sex as a late night striptease show, but this hardly makes the two programmes comparable in terms of the types of responses which they are likely to encourage.

It is also worth stressing that most media portrayals of sex and sexual activity are usually gender-specific, in that messages about expected sexual behaviour for women are very different to those for men. Content analyses of popular television programmes most watched by children and young adults in

the US (Ward, 1995, 2002) have stressed the gender-differentiated nature of most television messages about appropriate and inappropriate sexual behaviour – a trend that echoes wider cultural assumptions and expectations. It has been argued that a sexual double standard prevails in which female passivity and responsibility is balanced against male sexual aggressiveness (Schwartz & Rutter, 1998). Thus, young women are expected to be sexually attractive, but not too sexually active or assertive; their goal is to attract a man and establish a loving relationship (Tolman & Higgins, 1996). Young men, on the other hand, are expected to be 'players' and to 'score' at all costs. Studies of music videos aimed at and catering for young viewers have also noted a tendency for the characters in such videos to be highly gender stereotyped, with the men shown as aggressive and the women as sexual and subservient (Gow, 1996; Sommers-Flanagan et al., 1993). Such gender-differentiated images have led to their being described as a young adolescent male's sexual fantasy (Jhally, 1995), in which women are almost always scantily dressed and rarely portrayed as anything other than sexual objects (Seidman, 1992).

According to some writers, television has become an important sex educator for two major reasons: (i) its portrayals of sexuality are frequent, consistent, and they are usually assumed to be realistic by young people; (ii) there is a lack of alternative sources for learning about sexual behaviour (see Strasburger, 1995: 38-45; Strasburger and Wilson, 2002: 158; Roberts, 1982). As one group of US researchers put it, "depictions of human sexuality are being consumed in reasonably large quantities [...] but useful and informative messages are not being conveyed to many young people" (Buerkel-Rothfuss et al, 1993:113). A survey conducted in California in 1996 reported teenagers as saying that they would prefer to get sexual information from their parents, but more than half reported learning about pregnancy and birth control from television and movies, and more than half of the teenage girls surveyed said they learned about sex from magazines (Princeton Survey Research Associates, 1996). According to Ward (2002: 1-2),

> despite television's potential for educating about sexual relationships, the general conclusion is that the messages it sends about sexuality are distorted, stereotypical, and potentially harmful. Formal analyses of TV's sexual content consistently reveal that the bulk of sexual actions occur between characters who are not married to each other and include little mention of safe sex, contraception, and sexually transmitted diseases [...]. In

> addition, depictions of courtship and sexual relationships are often stereotypical, frequently featuring sex-driven males competing with each other for females, who are viewed as sexual objects or conquests [...]. While portrayals of healthy male-female relationships and responsible sexual decision-making are present, they may be overshadowed by more frequent and more 'titillating' depictions of sex as recreational, superficial, and inconsequential. Therefore, the prevalent yet limited nature of TV's sexual portrayals has raised concern that heavy viewing of these images may lead to stereotypical or casual attitudes toward sexual relationships, distorted expectations, and irresponsible sexual decision-making. Evidence suggests that these concerns are warranted.

The evidence includes studies arguing that teenagers who are avid consumers of media are more likely to overestimate the number of their peers and friends who are sexually active and to feel more pressure from the media to begin having sex than from friends. Citing several research reports, Strasburger and Wilson (2002: 159) speculate that:

> Heavy doses of television may accentuate teens' feelings that everyone is "doing it" except them and may be contributing to the steadily decreasing age of first intercourse for both males and females that has been occurring during the past two decades.

Adolescents who are frequent television viewers have also been claimed to be likely to be ambivalent about the possibility that marriage is a happy way of life (Signorielli, 1991), and also to have a more positive attitude toward recreational sex (Ward, Gorvine & Cytron, 2002).

The boundaries of what is acceptable television fare have also been pushed back considerably, and a number of TV content analyses indicate that this pushing of boundaries is indeed incremental. According to a recent US survey (Brown & Witherspoon 2001:83), "sex is more common and explicit in media available to adolescents now than ever before". Portrayals of and talk about sex occur in three-fourths of programmes, even during early evening viewing, with an average of eight sexual incidents per hour – more than four times as many as in 1976. An analysis of feature films most viewed by adolescents found an average of 17.5 sexual portrayals per movie (Greenberg et al, 1993). In the UK, the 2000 "Content and Analysis Briefing

Update" published by the British Broadcasting Standards Commission noted that there had been an increase in the number of sexual scenes in the 1999 sample its researchers examined, including an increase in the proportion of scenes containing depictions of the sex act:

> The data shows that kissing of a sexual nature accounts for the majority of all scenes of sexual activity in all samples. However, there has been a steady increase in both the number and proportion of simulated sex acts depicted, with a commensurate decrease in pre- and post-coital sex scenes. Most of the scenes of sexual activity [...] take place within established relationships – a consistent finding. The proportion of married relationships has fluctuated across the sampling period, with 1999 containing one of the lowest percentages of such relationships depicted. (BSC, 2001)

Earlier studies had noted similar trends in popular TV programmes. One study, for instance, had analysed portrayals of sexual behaviours on prime time television programmes in the US in 1987, compared these with findings from an identical study in 1979, and found a generally higher rate of sexual behaviours per hour in 1987 (Lowry and Toules, 1988). That study had also found that over the period under scrutiny there had been a substantial increase in the portrayal of sex between unmarried persons, with few attendant consequences. According to Gunter (1995:105), television provides young viewers with frequent lessons on how to look and act "sexy," while "prime time dramas and movies feature explicit portrayals of sex; magazine and talk shows feature intimate conversations about impotence and orgasms; situation comedies are filled with sexual innuendo and suggestiveness." As a result, and in the absence of alternative sources of information, "the sexual lessons young viewers derive from television foster an inaccurate image of sex that can lead to unrealistic expectations, frustration and dissatisfaction" (Gunter, 1995:111).

One type of programme that is universally popular with the young is MTV-type concept music videos (i.e., videos in which a story is enacted to go along with the lyrics of the song). Correlational studies suggest a relationship between viewing MTV-type music videos and permissive attitudes about premarital sex (Strouse, Buerkel-Rothfus & Long, 1995); while content analyses stress the predominance of sexual and sexually stereotyped themes and messages in such videos. In one content analysis of

concept music videos, sexual themes were found in more than three-fourths of the videos, but for the most part the sexuality was implied rather than shown: the videos were more likely to contain provocatively dressed women than actually to show people kissing, fondling, and so forth (cited in Arnett, 2001:381). Rap videos have been found to be especially high in sexual content, compared with other videos (Jones, 1997); and sex and violence often appear in the same video (Gow, 1996). Similar patterns have been noted in relation to advertisements aimed specifically at young viewers (see e.g., Cortese, 1999; Craig, 1992; Dines & Hume, 1995; Fowles, 1996; O'Barr, 1994).

The extent to which such material influences young people's attitudes and behaviour is not easy to determine. As Raviv et al (1996:631-2) point out,

> Idolization of pop stars has unique characteristics for adolescents. First, the mere activity of listening to this music is age segregated and therefore sometimes outside the realm of parental control. In this way it provides a basis for self-expression, the construction of self-identity, the achievement of independence, and intimacy. Indeed, some adolescents' most pressing questions find an answer through listening to pop music. It has been established that the music itself that adolescents revere often plays important functions [...]. It appeals to salient adolescent concerns, from sexual relations through alternative cultural values to rebellion and autonomy. The lyrics, rhythms, and harmonies provide stimuli that youth draw upon in learning sex roles, composing their sexual identities, shaping their values, and establishing their independence.

Content analyses may tell us what is being shown and how often, but they do not reveal what young people actually learn from these portrayals (Strasburger and Wilson, 2002: 158). International research indicates considerable diversity in how young people interpret and respond to images and narratives encountered in various media, and this diversity is also inflected by a range of cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, age and gender variables. For instance, older teenagers have a better understanding of televised sexual innuendos than younger teenagers do, and they feel more comfortable with them; girls are more likely than boys to use the media to learn about interpersonal relationships (Brown & Witherspoon, 2001:85). In

one study examining adolescents' responses to the Madonna video "Papa Don't Preach" (cited in Arnett, 2001:382), racial and gender differences were found to play a key role: Black adolescents tended to interpret the story differently from White adolescents, and Black males interpreted it differently from Black females.

Even if we accept that most young people learn about sex and sexuality through the media, patterns of sexual behaviour among the young clearly also vary considerably according to context, background and a range of other variables. For instance, research in the US suggests that young people are actually waiting longer to have sexual intercourse and are using condoms more frequently than they have in the past, but there is still a very high rate of teenage pregnancy and incidence of sexually transmitted diseases among US youth (Brown & Witherspoon, 2001:82-3). Working out the extents to which all this relates to what young people see on the media is therefore problematic.

Changing Attitudes to Sex among Youth in Malta

How does this information and data from overseas relate to the situation in Malta? The introduction of pluralism in broadcasting in the early 1990s has not only meant the availability of a very large range of overseas programmes through Cable and Satellite, but presumably also (because there are now more local stations) a cumulative increase in the number of such programmes broadcast through local channels.[12] It can also be argued that the style and content of locally produced programmes, especially those aimed at young viewers, have taken on many of the characteristics associated with overseas products. The reach of popular music – on CDs, through radio and as accompanied by the visual images of MTV-type music videos – has also taken global dimensions. Is it possible to see connections between these trends and the ways in which Maltese youth talk about sex and their own gender/sexual identities?

In this section I review some of the statistical data pointing to changing patterns of sexual behaviour among young people in Malta over

[12] There has in fact been a significant increase in the number of locally produced programmes since the arrival of pluralism. Citing NSO and Broadcasting Authority statistics, Borg (2003) reports that in 2001, 85 per cent of the production on Maltese TV stations was of Maltese origin (as compared with 43 per cent in 1994), and that only 15 per cent of productions on Maltese radio stations were of foreign origin. These figures, however, need to be read in relation to the dramatic increase in the number of TV and radio stations since the early 1990s.

recent years. It is, of course, very difficult (and well out of the scope of the present study) to get precise or even indicative figures of levels and frequency of sexual activity (of whatever nature) among young people living in Malta today. But we can get a broad indication of the extent to which patterns of behaviour and attitudes are changing among Maltese youth by looking at some of the available statistics and other surveys. This review is intended to further contextualise a range of comments about sex-related matters which were made by the Maltese young people interviewed for this study, and which will be discussed in the ensuing sections.

Figures published by the National Office of Statistics regarding records of live births for the period 1960 – 2000 indicate that while the total number of births recorded since 1990 has declined, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of births to single mothers over the same period. These figures do not, of course, include terminated pregnancies, and they clearly are not a measure of overall sexual activity. They may indeed only indicate changing attitudes to single parenthood, not changing attitudes to sexual activity. The figures are tabulated below in a different format from the way they appear in the NSO report so as to draw out comparisons more clearly.

Year	Mothers Aged 19 & Under		Mothers Aged 20 & Over		TOTALS	
	Total Live Births	Live Births Outside Wedlock	Total Live Births	Births Outside Wedlock	Total Live Births	Total Live Births Outside Wedlock
1960	330	9	8,235	54	8,565	63
1965	246	20	5,382	39	5,628	59
1970	227	19	5,087	60	5,314	79
1975	265	18	5,742	53	6,007	71
1980	155	14	5,661	45	5,816	59
1985	160	21	5,427	45	5,587	66
1990	144	24	5,424	71	5,568	95
1995	142	59	4,861	154	5,003	213
2000	239	143	4,147	321	4,386	464

Live Births: 1960-2000
(Source: National Statistics Office, Malta, 2002a: 108-109)

Official statistics about single teenage mothers aged 17 and under reveal (not surprisingly perhaps) that the majority are single – 86 per cent in 1999, 85.9 per cent in 2000, 87.2 per cent in 2001. Over the three year period between 1999 and 2001 there was a total of 10 births to mothers aged under 15; 35 births to mothers aged 15; 68 to mothers aged 16; 103 to mothers aged 17. There appears to be an average of three births per year to mothers aged under 15 – a total of 29 births to this age group were recorded between 1993 and 2001 (NSO, 2002a: 107).

Questionnaire-based surveys of young Maltese people's attitudes to sexuality during the 1990s have suggested that young people's attitudes to sexual behaviour have become more liberal. According to Abela (1998), "urban higher educated, religiously secularised and media-sensitive young people are found to be more inclined to favour a liberal sexual lifestyle than their traditional counterparts", and this, in Abela's view, makes them "closest in sexual attitudes to other western Europeans". A survey conducted by the Youth Diocesan Commission in 1995 found, among other things, that 68 per cent of the 5744 young people aged 14 to 19 surveyed agreed with a questionnaire statement asserting that "sex is a private matter in which the Church should not interfere". Fifty-three per cent said that they agree with the assertion that there is "nothing wrong in pre-marital sex for couples who love each other", and 97 per cent agreed that "sex is something good and beautiful" (cited in Abela, 1998: 13-14). A survey of 390 university students in Malta, reported in an M.Sc. human sexuality dissertation at the University of London in 1996, similarly "uncovered a diffuse sexual activity which is not allowed by the moral teachings of the Catholic Church" and "point[ed] to a weakening of the sexual double standard amongst Maltese University students" (Abela, 1998:15).

A more recent survey conducted by the Catholic Church in the diocese of Gozo (Mallia, 2003) found that almost 19 per cent of the 16 to 18 year-olds surveyed said they engaged in sexual relations with members of the opposite sex. The survey also found that over 43 per cent said they had watched pornography. In an article entitled "Teenagers Not Taking Precautions When Having Sex" (Massa, 2003) the Malta *Times* quoted the director of the Genito-Urinary Clinic, Dr Philip Carabott, as saying that the World Health Organisation estimated that Malta had potentially 13,000 sexually transmitted infections a year, but so far just a fraction of those affected were visiting the clinic. According to Dr Carabott, about 42 per cent of the 1,000 people who do visit the clinic annually to test for sexually

transmitted diseases are teenagers, some as young as 13. Seventy-five per cent of these teenagers admit that they do not use condoms or any form of contraception when having sex; and fifty per cent also admitted having casual sex on one-night stands when they cannot recall the name of their partner.

A survey of 166 male and 251 female university students commissioned by the University Chaplaincy (published in January 2004)[13] similarly found that 71 per cent of those interviewed said they saw nothing wrong with premarital sexual intercourse, especially in a steady relationship leading towards marriage, and more than 36 per cent of the students said they had had sexual intercourse in the previous year. Almost all the students interviewed – 99.8 per cent – said they saw nothing wrong with premarital cohabitation, the most popular reason given being "to get to know the partner better". The survey also found that "an extreme majority view marriage as a meaningless, yet binding and expensive contract which creates more problems than it solves." The survey revealed that 85 per cent do not accept the Catholic Church's teaching on birth control and its prohibition of artificial contraceptives, while 40 per cent disagree with the Catholic Church that divorce is morally wrong, and another 41.4 per cent disagree with its position on civil marriage with regards to Catholics. Just over 30 per cent disagree with the church's position on abortion.

The common thread which runs through all these studies is the contention that attitudes towards sex and sexual behaviour among Maltese youth have become more liberal and that this trend is on the increase.

Accessing and Interpreting Data

Before proceeding to the more detailed discussion of what young people interviewed for this project had to say about the topics of sex and sexuality, it is worth stressing that accessing and interpreting data on these topics in interviews and focus group discussions is inevitably problematic. For one thing, there are ethical and privacy issues which limit what and how much it is appropriate to ask or pursue. Young people are understandably (and appropriately) guarded when they talk about their attitudes to representations of sex, especially with a stranger. Indeed, the topic was

[13] Findings from the survey as presented at a press conference held on 16 January 2004 were reported in *The Malta Independent* of 17 January 2004, and in *The Sunday Times* of 18 January 2004.

pursued in group discussions only when it was clear that the interviewees felt comfortable about discussing it, or when they raised it themselves. Interpreting what young people say in such a context is also not straightforward, in that there is frequently a tendency to project attitudes and behaviours on to others which the speakers often also insist they do not share themselves. As in the case of talk about violence in the media,[14] when young people (and indeed adults) discuss the influence of sexually oriented material, they frequently insist that *others* are likely to be affected but that they themselves are not. As Strasburger and Wilson (2002: 159-160) put it:

> This is the well-known third-person phenomenon [....]. Everyone is influenced by the media except oneself, and it seems particularly prevalent among teenagers. For teens, the very idea that something as simplistic and ordinary as the media could influence them is insulting; they are far more "sophisticated" that that.

The reliability of such reports is often either questionable or difficult to ascertain, but they do provide an important indication of what young people consider to be general patterns of sexual behaviour among their peers.

Changing Attitudes to Sex outside Marriage

I asked one group of young factory workers (A8) if they thought that Maltese young people's attitudes to sexual relations might be changing because of what they see on films and other material coming from overseas. For 25 year-old Jane, there have been significant changes even since she was a teenager:

Per e\empju, illum i\-\g]a\ag] mhux b]al meta per e\empju meta kont \g]ira jien, meta kelli dawk is-sixteen, seventeen, hekk. Illum, kull]add dak li jrid, it-tgawdija u allura]afna minnhom per e\empju ma ji\\ew[ux. Allura ming]ajr ma trid

For example, today young people are not as they were when I was young myself, when I was about sixteen or seventeen or so. Today, what they all want is to enjoy themselves, and many of them don't get married for this reason. So,

[14] The third-person phenomenon as it relates to talk about the effects of media violence has been extensively documented in the UK by David Buckingham. Its incidence in Malta is discussed in detail in the report on the first qualitative research project commissioned by the Broadcasting Authority (Grixti, 2000).

tibda ta]sibha hekk, jekk inti g]andek l-ideja ta' barra li huma ma ji\\ew[ux, jg]ixu flimkien, jekk jiddejqu telqu. Hawnhekk ma kienitx hekk. Hawnhekk ta]seb,]a [[emma', ta]seb g]al post u hekk ... u ji\\ew[u, u mbag]ad per e\empju jrabbu familja. Illum qisa na]seb naqra naqra [ejja minn barra din li jg]ixu flimkien u hekk. G]ax na]seb qed taffettwa]afna, jien. Anka g]as-separazzjonijiet na]seb jien, taffettwag]hom]afna.	without choosing to you start thinking like this, if you have the idea that overseas they don't get married, that they live together, and just leave when they've had enough. It didn't use to be like that here. Over here you were expected to think ahead, to save up, to plan for a house and so on ... and then get married, and then, for example, have a family. Today, I think that this business of couples living together and so on is something which is creeping in from overseas. Because I think it's having a lot of influence. I think it also has a big influence on separations.

Asked if she thought this was a good thing or a bad thing, Jane answered that not everyone saw it the same way, but that she had no problems with it.

In the course of an interview with another group of factory workers (A9), two young men in their early twenties similarly insisted that more and more young Maltese couples are living together without getting married[15], and that they consider this to be a positive development. One of these young men was himself, in fact, currently living with his fiancée. It should be stressed, however, that there were also many young people who said that they find this state of affairs unacceptable, even though they acknowledged that more young couples are living together without getting married. As one 18 year-old female factory worker (A8) put it:

Veru ti[ri]afna. Imma jien ma narahiex xi]a[a sabi]a.	It's true that it happens a lot. But I don't see it as a good thing.

[15] The trend is also reflected in official statistics: figures issued by the Curia indicate that there is a decrease in the number of marriages that take place every year, and of the total number of annual marriages, about a quarter are civil ones (22.26 per cent in 2001) (Blondel, 2003a).

I asked another group of factory workers in their early twenties (A6) whether young people in Malta still believe that it is wrong to sleep with someone unless you're married to them. One of the young men answered as follows:

Jekk g]adhom, jien kieku na]seb diffi`li biex wie]ed jag]ti kashom irid. Pero' g]alija dika `u`ata eh! Na]seb li hawn Malta biss li dik il-mentalitaÏ qeg]da! Ir-reli[jon na]seb ma' jg]idlhekx hekk jien. Dawn kollha affarijiet li na]seb il-quddiem g]ad iridu lanqas ji[u jag]tu kashom in-nies. Il-quddiem]afna, ji[ifieri, ghax g]ad hawn nies li l-menalitaÏ g]ada hekk ... Xi darba \-\ag]\ag]]a jikbru, uh! Na]seb li l-mentalitaÏ tinbidel jiena, di[a' nbidlet naqra issa, ji[ifieri, g]ax ifhimha, qabel meta tara tfajla ta' sittax il-sena]ar[et tqiela, qisu skandlu kbir; issa fi trieq ikun hemm xi sitta!

If they still believe it, I think it's difficult for anyone to take notice of them. But for me that's a stupid idea. I think it's only here in Malta that you get that mentality! I don't think that's what religion tells you. These are all things which I think people in the future will no longer be bothered about. Far in the future, I mean, because there are still people who have that mentality ... The young will grow up eventually! I think that mentality will change, it's already changed a little now, in fact, because in the past when you saw a sixteen year-old girl coming out pregnant, it was like a great scandal; now you'll find six in one street!

So how exactly is this "youth mentality" changing and why? As a way of answering this question, I turn next to a consideration of perceived links between what young people say about their attitudes to sex and their patterns of exposure to the media.

Media Images and Perceptions of the 'Norm'

When they were asked whether they thought that young Maltese people's attitudes to sex are influenced by what they see in films, TV programmes, advertisements and other media messages coming from overseas, most of the interviewees insisted that there was a definite connection. An 18 year-old young woman in a marketing class at the MCAST (B14) put it this way:

Jekk per e\empju tara film u tara l-mod tal-]ajja kif jg]ixu \ag]\ag] daqsna, inti ming]ajr ma trid, tinfluwenzak, u tg]id, 'Il-listra, x']ajja jg]ixu!' U ming]ajr ma rridu a]na spe`i naslu biex nag]mlu b]alhom l-affarijiet. E\empju fuq it-televixin, kienu j[ibu xi tfajla, jien naf, inqabdet pregnant jew hekk, qabel kienu jg]idu 'Il-listra x'bi``a din!' Issa forsi, anki min]abba it-television jew hekk, spe`i, mhux je]duha for granted ta. Mhux daqshekk, imma il-medja juruk li is-so`jetaÏ tista' ta``etta affarijiet hekk.

If for example you see a film and you see the kind of life that young people of our age live, without thinking about it, it influences you, and you say, 'My goodness, what a good life they live!' And without wanting to, we sort of end up doing things the same as them. For example on television, when they used to show a girl who had, I don't know, fallen pregnant or whatever, in the past they used to say 'What a terrible thing this is!' Now maybe, even because of television and so on, sort of, it's not that they take it for granted. Not to that extent, but the media shows you that society can accept things like this.

I asked this particular group of marketing students (B14) whether they thought that the way sexual behaviour is represented in films might be having an influence on young Maltese people's attitudes. Their response included the following exchange:

Helga: *Il-kbar, per e\empju ommi u missieri, jg]idu 'qed jag]tu e\empju]a\in,' hekk jg]idu. Jiena ng]id 'affarijiet normali dawn'.*

Helen: Older people, for example my mother and father, say 'they're giving a bad example,' that's what they say. I say 'these are normal things'.

Anna: *Imma mhux li tmur torqod ma xi]add l-ewwel darba li to]ro[mieghu!*

Anna: But not to the extent that you sleep with someone the first time you go out with them!

Helga: *Imma it-televixin ng]id jien je\a[era, u dawn l-affarijiet xorta]a ji[ru ...*

Helen: But what I say is that television exaggerates, and these things are going to happen anyway …

Anna: *Ji[ru wara `ertu \mien imma, mhux mal-ewwel!*

Anna: But they happen after a certain time, not straight away!

Helga: *Jinfluwenzaw, g]ax na]seb minflok]a[a ta]sibha mitt elf*

Helen: They do have an influence, because I think that instead of

darba, ta]sibha inqas, tg]id 'U ija!'

Marthese: *Ma na]sibx. Tkun qisa xi]a[a li bil-fors trid tag]milha ... Jew forsi mhux ta' bil-fors, imma l-anqas ta]sibha. Ji[ifieri meta tfajla to]ro[ma xi]add l-ewwel darba, tibqa' sejra tispi``a [os-sodda ma xi]add, fis-sodda. Tg]id 'mhux xorta', qisa normali, qisa hekk, 'U e]e, kieku barra hekk jigri!' ... Anke]afna [uvintur, per e\empju, jekk jo]or[u ma xi tfajla qishom]a[a biex jg]idu li g]amlu hekk lil-]addie]or. It-televixin qed jinfluwenza]afna!*

Helga: *Il-[uvintur, issa]a nitkellem bil-Malti pur, jekk tmur mag]hom, jg]idu qa]ba, jekk ma tmurx, jg]idulhek 'U di, kemm hi dejqa!'*

thinking something over a thousand times, you think less of it, you say 'O well!'

Marthese: I don't think so. It becomes more something that you have to do... Or maybe not have to do, but you don't even think about it. So that when a girl goes out with someone for the first time, she ends up in bed with them. She says 'it doesn't matter', it's like it's normal, like 'Oh well, that's what would happen overseas!'.... Even lots of guys, for example, if they go out with a girl it's like it's so that they can tell others that they've done it. Television is having a big influence!

Helen: Guys – I'm going to speak bluntly now – if you go with them they call you a whore, if you don't go, they call you a prude.

In the opinion of these girls then, the "liberal" way that sexual behaviour is usually depicted in overseas TV programmes and films is definitely encouraging more "liberal" (and "less responsible") behaviour among Maltese youth.

A group of 15-16 year old boys (B16) similarly insisted that the liberal attitudes to sexual behaviour depicted in foreign films and TV programmes are leading to the development of "new values" among Maltese youth:

Mark: *Tara `ertu films, per e\empju b]al m'hu, hawn ra] kull]add probabbli. 'American Pie'. L-idea li* 'virgin equals loser'. *Dik ]ar[et ]afna dik l-idea, minn `ertu films b]al dawn ...*

Anton: *Inda]]lu l-valuri [odda, hekk*

Mark: You see some films, for example like, everyone here saw it probably: *American Pie*. The idea that 'virgin equals loser'. That idea has come out a lot, from films like these …

Anton: New values have entered this

...

Mark: *E\att.*

Interviewer: *Qed tg]idu li dik l-idea qeg]da fil-film. Ta]sbu li \-\ag]\ag] Maltin qed ja]sbu hekk, imma?*

Mark: *Dak il-film Malta intg]o[ob]afna. Ji[ifieri iva.*

Anton: *E\att! Spe`jalment iktar u iktar hu film fuq storja ta\-\ag]\ag], ji[ifieri, iktar* they relate to them easily.

way …

Mark: Exactly.

Interviewer: You're saying that that idea is in the film. But do you think that Maltese youth are thinking along those lines?

Mark: That film was liked very much in Malta. So yes.

Anton: Exactly! Especially since it's a film with a story about young people, I mean, so they relate to them more easily.

Leo: The whole point of the story is focused on that fact.

Mark: Exactly. That is a propaganda film. That, and in a different way, S*cary Movie*. The comedies are always based round sex. Even specifically on TV, there are films called 'Sex in the City', literally, and things like that. They're all based round that idea. Like, there's a lot ...

Michael: *Il-medja hija, b]al spe`i,* just pictures, *b]al spe`i* ... If you want to be cool, *trid tintg]o[ob,* you have to lose virginity, *ji[ifieri. Hekk qisa,]afna. Qabel, ji[ifieri suppost kienet ma\-\wie[, ji[ifieri, imma, nie\la dejjem. Ovvja, ji[ifieri, u anke nie\la l-eta' ji[ifieri ...*

Anton: *Naf anka ta' twelve jien nies, ji[ifieri, anka ta' l-etaÏ tag]na, ji[ifieri, hemm]afna. U tista' ta]seb, g]ax* all right *]afna minnhom ma jkunhux open, ji[ifieri jg]idlek '}a ng]id lilhek, spe`i g]ax]abib tieg]i, tg]id lil]add' u hekk, tipo* ... All right, *jiddejqu, fis sens li jg]idu quddiem in-nies, imma ...*

Michael: *U* believe it or not, *mbag]ad hemm, hekk l*-imagery.

Michael: The media is, sort of, just pictures. Sort of, if you want to be cool, if you want to be liked, you have to lose virginity, I mean. It's very much like that. Before, I mean, it was supposed to be with marriage, but it's going down all the time. It's obvious, I mean, even the age is going down …

Anton: I know even twelve year-olds, I mean, even of our age, there are a lot. And you can imagine, because OK, many of them are not open, I mean he'll tell you: "I'm telling you, sort of because you're my friend, don't tell anyone," and that sort of thing. All right, they don't like to speak about it openly, but …

Michael: And believe it or not,

Hemm min jg]idlek li he lost his virginity, *u din mhix vera* (others agree). *Ji[ifieri*, that's just to look cool. *Issa, e\empju tg]id 'Qtilt lil-dak* to look cool*!' Hekk i\-\ag]\ag]! 'Dak jiena qtiltu!'*

there's, you know, the image. There are those who tell you that they "lost their virginity", and this is not true *[others agree]*. I mean, that's just to look cool. Now, for example, it's like saying "I killed that man to look cool!" That's young people! "It was I who killed him!"

Mark: *E\att, hekk!*

Mark: That's it, exactly!

While this particular group of middle class Fifth Formers appear to be indirectly distancing themselves from the liberal stances which they claim to be widespread among the young (and are even disapproving of them, as suggested in the concluding comments just quoted), other groups were less reserved in their endorsement of liberal sexual attitudes. When I asked a group of 16-18 year old boys at a building construction school (B18) whether they thought young people's attitudes are changing because of how they see sexual relations depicted in films and on TV, they replied that they are not changing fast enough. Complaining about double standards, they commented that while people in Malta are happy to watch anything on Italian or other foreign stations, they will claim to be scandalised and complain loudly if they see any portrayal of sexuality on a Maltese programme. Citing reactions to Maltese teleserials like *Il-Madonna ta`-¬oqqa* and *Ipokriti*, one 17 year-old in this group said:

Qed jitka\aw bihom, imma mbag]ad nag]mluhom a]na stess, ifhem!

They're claiming to be shocked by them, but then we're doing these things ourselves, if you see what I mean!

According to these young men, it is now no longer unusual for couples to live together in Malta ('*saret normali*'). In their view it is in fact better this way because if you live with a woman before marriage you have a chance to get to know her better than, say, from just meeting her on weekends; and if you have an argument you don't have to go to court, you can simply leave ('*qbadt u tlaqt*').

The 'liberalisation' of attitudes to sex among Maltese youth is not, however, taken to be a positive development by all young people. Indeed, a

number of them appear to feel that this increased laxity in attitudes to sexual behaviour can lead to confusion and stress. This appears to be particularly the case when young people are faced with stark contrasts between their understanding of more traditional moral precepts and standards, and what they perceive as the prevailing norms among modern globally oriented youth.

'Pressure' to Conform to Perceived Norms of Sexual Behaviour

A mixed gender group of 16-17 year old Sixth Formers (B6) commented that young people today have a lot of pressure to conform to norms and expectations about appearance and sexual behaviour. It is worth stressing that these young people are simultaneously describing a pattern which they assume to be generalised, as well as implicitly projecting the more 'extreme' manifestations of this pattern on to others:

> *Sonia:* I think women have quite a lot of pressure …
> *Ben:* There's a lot of pressure about appearance and sex …
> *Interviewer:* When you say there's more pressure, do you mean there's more pressure for young people to get into sexual situations? Is that what you're saying?
> *Ben:* I personally think so. I think there's more pressure for people to conform to what we see in films, you know. Like, fine, we go out on a date and then we go home and have sex … I feel there's more pressure to conform to what the media is conveying.
> *Sonia:* People, without wanting to, think that they are different because, I don't know, they went out with this person and didn't sleep with them …
> *Ben:* Exactly!
> *Sonia:* Or never slept with anyone.
> *Ben:* And also there are times that you read even in newspapers, for example, girls or guys feel bad because if they don't have sex with their boyfriend or girlfriend, they will dump them, you know … Whether that's true or not, I don't know, but I suppose if it is published in a newspaper, someone did some research and it was proven to hold some ground …

When I asked specifically how strong they thought this "pressure" coming from the media was, Ben pointed out that there is so much sexual material on TV and the Internet that you simply cannot avoid it:

Ben: Every time that you turn on the television … for example, last time I was watching Satellite. I was just zapping, you know. I must have seen about three or four sex scenes, you know what I mean. OK, fine, if you want to show, I mean, be my guest, you know, do whatever. But it's so, it's all the time, and it's at any time of the day, you know, be it six o'clock in the morning, four in the afternoon, whatever, they show these things …

Karla: And even children have access to them …

Ben: Even children … I mean, the Internet as well, for example, it's incredible. Sometimes even if you ... like last time I was researching for something. I can't remember what it was, nothing to do with sex … The number of porn sites that came was incredible. You know, like, *il-lallu!* It had nothing to do with it. It was something for biology, autoradiography, you know …

It's worth noting that in spite of Ben's stance of open-mindedness ("be my guest ... do whatever"), both he and Karla appear to find the easy availability and even intrusiveness of this material problematic.

Another group of young men (B16) similarly spoke of the extent to which sex dominates the popular commercial media:

Leo: You also see videos, let's say, for example, videos on MTV, or you see jokes on the Internet. Ninety per cent of them focus on that thing.

Mark: MTV ... For me MTV is my icon, almost, but it's true, completely …

Michael: For the body, they demean the body …

Mark: No, it's not that they demean the body. They use it. But it depends, with certain groups more than others. For example, 'No Doubt', I love the group, but as such there is no video where sex isn't involved. Their latest video there's definitely sex involved. Either nudity or actual sex, in plastic, anything … But then others … emmm, whether you like it or not, the idea of sexuality always comes through. For example, even for example, talk about the clothes they wear, what they wear, I mean. For example, Jennifer Lopez, or ... Kylie Minogue … 'The little woman with the big attitude'. I mean the only

reason why she made a hit was her golden hot pants in the first, her first single, and the white piece of cloth she wore in her latest single as such. That's what made her, the sexual image made her, and she changed, I mean, it came like a rebellion. While she was first the, emm, that very family kind of singer, and then she changed into a sex symbol …

Anton: One of the … the only road to popularity!

Leo: Exactly!

In a few cases, particularly with groups of Fifth and Sixth Formers at a prestigious Church School, it was clear that the speakers were indirectly trying to distance themselves from the types of values which they claimed to be dominant among other Maltese youth. Though they insist that young people today are under pressure to fit the norm of openness to sexual freedom, they also make a point of distancing themselves from this position. It is "others" who fit the norm, not themselves. This point is quite well captured in the following exchange (B6):

Sonia: The thing is we've lost the important values, I think. That anything goes, sort of … And that in itself is a tragedy to humanity, you know …

Sandra: Perhaps that's what makes people sad now. I mean before they didn't, as Ben said, they didn't have that much pressure before …

Interviewer: Do you feel the pressure yourselves?

Sandra: Yes …

Sonia: I don't personally, for sexual things and that …

Interviewer: I mean pressure in general?

Sonia: There's lots of pressure to study …

But there were several other interviewees who emphatically aligned themselves with what they perceived as newer and more liberal attitudes to sex. A 21 year-old male clerical worker in a factory (A8) had this to say about the easy availability of pornography:

I think in the modern world today, everyone's probably exposed to their fair share of pornography, and that would be, you would think belittling to the female, but when it comes down to it, it doesn't really affect our lives. We know what we see on paper is not what we put into our treatment of women. Like … after, if I

> had to go and watch a porno movie I'm not going to go out and rape the first girl I see because I think that that's what she wants. It won't change my attitude to people, as seeing them as people.

This young man's position about pornography appears to assume that the only way to assess whether media images are affecting attitudes is by checking whether they cause viewers to imitate what they see on the screen. But media influence cannot be measured exclusively, or even primarily, by the incidence of overt imitation.[16] Many concerns about sexually explicit media have to do with communicating attitudes and values. As Harris and Scott (2002:313) point out, "repeated exposure to media with a more-or-less consistent set of messages may cultivate a worldview that increasingly reflects the perspective of the media", though "such effects are especially likely to happen if the TV characters holding those values are respected characters with whom viewers identify." And this worldview becomes normalised in the culture. You don't even need to be exposed to any media to know the attitudes and values because they have been taken up by in society generally.

As the next sections shows, a large number of the young people interviewed for this project frequently did express concern about dehumanising effects and objectification, especially in the use of women as sex objects in advertisements and media images more generally. They frequently also criticised chauvinistic double standards, especially when they saw these revealed in the behaviour of older generations. Significantly, these concerns were in their turn also inflected by contradictions and unresolved tensions.

Gender Differences and Double Standards

There were several comments to the effect that, especially when it comes to sexual behaviour, there are major differences between the criteria and expectations that are customarily assumed to apply to girls and young women, and those applied to boys and young men. According to one 18 year-old male factory worker (A7),

[16] The limitations and problematic implications of this position, particularly as they relate to media violence, are discussed in Grixti, 2000.

Il-mara llum il-[urnata [iet o[[ett tar-ra[el, g]ax li jg]idilha r-ra[el trid tag]mlu.	Women today are treated as men's property: they have to do what the man tells them.

A 17 year-old building construction student (B18) commented that while Maltese boys have a more 'relaxed' lifestyle, girls have to put up with stricter constraints:

Oscar: *Id-differenza mbag]ad hawn Malta g]at-tfajliet na]seb iktar hekk ... hemm iktar qishom li[ijiet g]alihom it-tfajliet. Per e\empju tag]mel xi]a[a li ... tmur per e\empju tfajla ma' dak jew hekk, iqerruh. Barra iktar je]duha fatt. Qisa, a]na hawn, l-ir[iel, l-ir[iel qisa g]alina g]addejjin]ajja* relaxed … *imma mbag]ad* (interruptions) … *u le imma hekk ji[i! G]al ma' barra, mbag]ad it-tfajliet ta' barra na]seb iktar, g]andhom hajja iktar ...*	*Oscar:* The difference here in Malta is that for girls it's more … there are more rules, sort of, for girls. For example, if she does something which... for instance, if a girl goes with a guy and so on, she'll go to confession over it. Overseas they take it more for granted. It's like, here for us, for men, men are leading a more relaxed life, but then *(interruptions)* … but no, that's how it is! If you compare it with overseas, I think girls overseas have more of a life …
Interviewer: *Jekk qed nifmhek sew, qed tg]id li l-[uvintur ta' Malta ...*	*Interviewer:* If I'm understanding you correctly, you're saying that young men in Malta …
Oscar: *A]jar min ta' barra ...*	*Oscar:* Are better off than those overseas …
Interviewer: *G]ax jag]mlu li jriedu?*	*Interviewer:* Because they can do what they like?
Oscar: *Iktar* relaxed ...	*Oscar:* They're more relaxed …
Interviewer: *U jekk iriedu jmorru ma' din u ma' l-o]ra ma jg]idulhom xejn, imma jekk xebba tag]mel l-istess, g]andha problema?*	*Interviewer:* And if they want to go with different girls nobody complains, but if a young woman does the same thing, she has a problem?
Oscar: *E]e.*	*Oscar:* Yeah.
Interviewer: *Inthom ta]sbu li veru dan?*	*Interviewer:* Do you others think this is true?
George: *Anka mill-[enituri tag]ha.*	*George:* Even from her parents.

G]ax tfajla ...	Because she's a girl …
Oscar: *Qishom jag]mlulha, per e\empju, g]andha]in tkun id-dar, u [uvni per e\empju ...*	*Oscar:* They sort of make, for example, she has to be home by a certain time, but a young man for example …
Interviewer: *Iktar stretti max-xebbiet?*	*Interviewer:* They're stricter with girls?
George & Oscar: *E]e.*	*George & Oscar:* Yes.

Boys' "more relaxed" lifestyle appears to derive from the fact that Maltese families are still typically patriarchal in structure. One 18 year-old female marketing student (B14) described the situation in her home as follows:

Per e\empju, jekk jiena ma naqbadx il-platti u na]silhom, qisni g]amilt xi]a[a inqas, qisni llum]adtha off. *Imma jekk hija ma ji[ix jindenja ru]u jaqbad sarvetta, jg]idu: 'Le, g]ax miskin kellu b\onn jo]ro[!'*	For example, if I don't get up and wash the plates, it's as if I've done less than I should, as if I've taken the day off. But if my brother doesn't even lift a finger to get a dishcloth they say: "No, because the poor dear had to go out!"

Several young men, irrespective of background, referred to the gender-based double standards and hypocrisy reflected in what they see as conventional (or more "traditional") attitudes to sexual behaviour. One young factory worker (A7) described what he called "the mentality of Maltese people" as follows:

Per e\empju jekk tfajla to]ro[ma' sitt [uvintur, hija prostituta. Jekk [uvni jo]ro[ma' seba tfajliet, playboy!	For example, if a girl goes out with six guys, she's a prostitute. If a guy goes out with seven girls, he's a playboy!

But in spite of these complaints about gender-stereotypes and double standards, when these young men spoke specifically about dating and going out with different women, the thrust of their talk was also tinged with chauvinism and prejudice. According to the young man just quoted, for instance, you're more likely to "get lucky" or "score" with foreign girls because that's their mentality, and since they're here only for a short while,

they'll soon forget you. He also explained why double standards are unjust and misleading as follows:

{ieli tara tfajla imkissra, tilbess imqa``at, u mbag]ad tmur tg]amlilha hekk, u ittik daqqa [o]alqek! {ieli ssib tfajla, maqfula minn [od-dar, u kif l-ewwel darba li tmur mag]ha tifta]homlok bera]! ... Ji[ifieri ma' tridx toqg]od tiffama minn na]a g]al-o]ra. Lil]add ma' tista' ti[[udika!

Sometimes you see a tarty-looking girl, scantily dressed, and when you try to touch her she slaps you across the mouth! And then you'll find a girl who's been locked up at home, and the very first time you go with her she opens them wide for you! ... Which means you shouldn't slander one way or the other. You cannot judge anyone!

Further evidence of underlying contradictions and ingrained double-standards also emerged when I asked members of this particular focus group (A7) if there was still any truth to the claim that some Maltese men leave their local girlfriends during the summer months so as to chase after tourists, several agreed that the summer months are often considered the "open season":

Sandra: *Fis-sajf 'summer love' jg]idulu. Bir\ebbu[a kull]add i]assar hemm isfel. Niggarantilhek!*
Gordon: *Mhux jg]idu hekk, na]seb jiena, ja]arbu xi kulltant, qed tifhem?*

Mark: *Mhux jien, imma, huma! Na]seb huma jkunu jridu!*
Pete: *Fis-sajf kull]add i]uf!*

Sandra: *Fis-sajf bil-piki, min itella' l-iktar numru ta' tfajliet ...*

Sandra: In summer they call it "summer love". Down in Birzebbuga everyone breaks up. I guarantee it!
Gordon: They don't quite say that, I think, they just slip away every now and then, do you see what I mean?
Mark: Not me, though, they do! I think it's they who want it!
Pete: In summer everyone goes roaming!
Sandra: In summer they have bets, to see who can pick up most girls …

Comments like these suggest that, when it comes to gender stereotyping, patriarchal and chauvinistic attitudes are still prevalent, in spite of young people's complaints about the "double standards" they see among adults.

Reflected in many of the comments quoted above, there is also another set of double standards being applied to boys' sexual relations with foreign girls (as distinct from local ones). Foreign girls, because they are seen as more open minded, only here for a short while (and also less likely to go to confession, as one young man quoted above remarked!), are stereotypically seen as more accessible and legitimate sources of easy and unencumbered sex. Local girls, on the other hand are still seen as having to fit (or as being encumbered with) the traditional stereotype of respectability and focusing on the longer term responsibilities of home making and child rearing.

These are stereotypes which many Maltese youths insist that they find old fashioned and unacceptable. Yet the way they talk about sexual relations suggest that the stereotypes are still very deeply engrained in their thinking and expectations. In other words, though young people want to be seen as "modern" and open-minded, their talk suggests that they are still caught up in contradictions and confusion when "liberal" attitudes come into conflict with more traditional assumptions and expectations.

In the next section I consider how some of these ongoing contradictions also reveal themselves in how young people talk about the portrayal of nudity on the screen, particularly in terms of the different standards they apply to local and foreign exponents.

Nudity and Sexually Charged Poses

Though there was frequent concern expressed about the exploitation of women, and general agreement on the fact that women are much more frequently portrayed as sex objects than men, many of the young people interviewed (male and female) also insisted that they did not themselves find the use of nudity in advertisements objectionable in itself. But the very ways in which they talked about this matter suggest that double standards also prevail in many young men's responses to the ways women are portrayed in the media. What made the portrayal of nudity problematic was often identified as the fact that it attracts too much attention to itself – not simply at the expense of the dignity or individuality of women, but often also at the expense of the product advertised. Several interviewees commented that they were concerned about road safety because of distracted drivers when nudity or sexually charged poses were used in advertising billboards.

Boys' "objections" to screened nudity often tended to be double edged. They recognised the problems raised by the objectification of women, but at the same time they were also anxious not to be seen as "narrow minded" – often insisting that they also found such images attractive. One 20 year-old male factory worker (A6) agreed that images of scantily dressed women appear much more frequently in adverts than do those of men, but he insisted that such images are a sign of the times and not something to be concerned about, "otherwise we'll remain backward". A group of 15 year-old boys (B2) had this to say about the use of nudity or near-nudity in advertising:

Tony: *Mela jekk tara reklam tal-ilma, b'mara g]arwiena,]a jkun mo]]ok fl-ilma!*

Tony: If you're watching an advert for water, with a naked woman in it, you're not going to be interested in the water!

James: *Jien mhux g]ax niddejjaq in]ares lejhom, ta! Anzi, il-kuntrarju! Imma qed jag]mlu reklam]a\in g]an-nisa. Qishom qed i[ibuhom pupi ...*

James: It's not that I mind looking at them. The opposite in fact! But they're giving women a bad name. It's as if they're turning them into dolls …

Adrian: *It-tfajliet m'huma xejn ...* Just *o[[ett biss ...*

Adrian: It's as if girls are nothing … just an object …

Tony: *Qed ju\aw it-tfajliet b]ala o[[ett!*

Tony: They're using girls as an object!

Interviewer: *Kieku jag]mluhom bl-ir[iel, ta]sbu li jsolvuha l-problema?*

Interviewer: What if they were to use men; do you think that would solve the problem?

Several: *Le! Lanqas!*

Several: No! Not even!

Adrian: *I[ibu l-ilma biss!*

Adrian: They should just show the water!

James: *Jew ir[iel u nisa jilg]abu fis-sil[, per e\empju! Dak sabi] ikun, mela n-nisa g]arwenien! Mhux g]ax ma jg]o[bunix ta!*

James: Or men and women playing in snow, for example! That would be nice, not naked women! It's not that I don't like them, mind!

Peter: *A]na l-Maltin nitka\aw b'kollox!*

Peter: We Maltese are too easily scandalised!

Adrian: *Jien per e\empju, inkun qed nara t-televixin u jkun hemm ommi u missieri, u ji[i xi riklam b'xi tfajla hekk ... niddejjaq meta jkun*

Adrian: For me, if I'm watching television and my mum and dad are there, and an ad comes on with some girl like this … I don't like it

hemm ommi u missieri. Naqbad id-dial u naqliblu, g]ax niddejjaq meta jkun hemm ommi u missieri ...	when my mum and dad are there. I get the dial and change channels, because I don't like it when my mum and dad are there …
James: *Imma meta tkun wa]dek le!*	*James:* But not when you're by yourself!

The fact that young people feel uncomfortable when they see screened nudity or sexually charged scenes in the company of adults is not unique to Maltese youths, of course. [17] Indeed, researchers have frequently noted that both young people and adults feel uncomfortable when such material is screened when they happen to be together. What is perhaps more striking in this exchange is the suggestion of double standards in terms of how such material is described and discussed. On the one hand, the boys insist that the adverts are inappropriate; on the other they also insist that they don't dislike looking at them, especially when adults are not around.

It is worth comparing these assertions with comments made by a group of girls (B4) in the same age group (14-15 years) about how they see boys reacting to nudity on the screen. For these girls, screened nudity is problematic primarily because of the ways boys react to it:

Lidia: *Iktar juraw nisa g]arwenien milli r[iel.*	*Lidia:* They show more naked women than men.
Maria: *Per e\empju, il-bniet ma tantx jinfluwenzhom. Iktar meta tkellem lis-subien, jimpressjonhom, e\empju: 'Ara dik!' (laughter)*	*Maria:* For example, girls are not so influenced by them. It's much more the case when you speak to boys, for example, they go: 'Look at her!' *(laughter)*
Interviewer: *Jekk jag]mlu reklami fejn ju\aw l-ir[iel flok in-nisa, ta]sbu li ssolviha l-problema?*	*Interviewer:* If they were to make adverts in which they used men instead of women, do you think that would solve the problem?
Several: *L-istess!*	*Several:* It would be the same!
Joan: *L-a]jar ma jag]mlu xejn mill-ewwel! G]ax jag]tu e\empju lit-tfal i\-\ag]ar. Lil-]ija jinfluwenzaw],*	*Joan:* It would be best if they did nothing at all. Because they give a bad example to young children.

[17] This topic is discussed more fully in Chapter 7 of the Broadcasting Authority's first qualitative media survey (Grixti, 2000). See also Grixti 2000a; Millwood Hargrave, 1995, 1999; and Sheldon et al., 1994.

per e\empju.	They do influence my brother, for instance.
Interviewer: *Kif? Kemm g]andu \mien]uk?*	*Interviewer:* In what way? How old is your brother?
Joan: *G]axar snien. L-a]]ar darba konna qeg]din hekk, u j[ibu wa]da, sku\i tikka g]arwiena, u sar a]mar nar!* (laughter)	*Joan:* Ten years old. The other time we were watching, and they showed a woman, she was a little bit naked, if you'll pardon the expression, and he went bright red! *(laughter)*

Reactions to the portrayal of nudity or near nudity were also heavily inflected not so much by the amount of flesh that was shown but by the context, tone and connotations. For instance, some of the older focus groups were shown two advertising images portraying nude or near nude women which were receiving wide circulation in magazines and on billboards at the time of the interviews. One formed part of a health awareness campaign focussing on women's breasts and it showed the torso of a young-looking woman with her arms crossed over her chest and wearing only a pair of underpants. The caption (in Maltese) drew attention to the fact that the advert was about women's breasts, but it made it clear that it was aimed specifically at women and that its intention was to educate: "Look after your breasts: Know How". The other image was a frontal shot of another young woman, also covering her breasts, apparently wearing nothing at all, and sitting cross-legged behind a series of "Time for Pleasure" beauty products[18].

There is not much difference in the actual amount of the women's bodies revealed in the two pictures. But there are striking differences in their poses and in the overall look of the two images. The different intentions and lines of appeal are clearly inscribed in the ways the photographs have been taken, cropped, contextualised and captioned. In one, the sexual dimension is very deliberately toned down; in the other it has been made the focus of attention.

The reactions to and comments about the two images were starkly different. Males found the health awareness poster neither interesting nor appealing – it was addressed at women and dealt with women's concerns.

[18] See Chapter 1 for a further discussion of this advertisement as it appeared on street billboards.

The females saw it as a relatively uncomplicated bit of publicity urging women to look after their health. The near nudity was in neither case considered to be particularly noteworthy or problematic. In marked contrast, the image of the young woman in the Versus advert was considered to be very sexually charged by both males and females, most of whom insisted that the image was *intended* to be arousing and "provocative".

Several apparently unresolved conflicts emerged in the course of discussions about this particular advertisement. One striking pattern was that several felt the need to stress that they were not themselves "scandalised" by the woman in the Versus advert (no suggestion of "scandal" was mentioned in relation to the health awareness image). As 18 year-old Marisa (A7) put it:

Jiena meta n]ares lejha, ma tiskandalizzanix hekk. Ma na]sibx li \-\ag]\ag] u n-nisa tal-lum, ma na]sibx li]a joqog]du jitka\aw meta jaraw stampa hekk ... I\jed il-kbar ...

When I look at her, I don't feel scandalised. I don't think that young people and women today are going to be shocked when they see a picture like this … Older people are more likely to …

They also pointed out, however, that by focussing on a woman's exposed body, rather than on the product itself, such adverts were usually primarily intended to attract men's attention, and that this tended to project women as objects rather than individuals. Most of the groups who spoke about this particular advert insisted that the model was obviously not Maltese: she looked foreign and a Maltese girl would not go so far as to pose in such a provocative manner. Here is how a group of 16-18 year old males (B18) put it:

John: *Tidher li mhux Maltija u!*	*John:* You can see she is not Maltese!
Kevin: *Ditta taljana.*	*Kevin:* It's an Italian brand.
Vincent: *Maltin ma na]sibx li joqog]du hekk jien! Issib, imma mhux]a joqog]du hekk!*	*Vincent:* I don't think Maltese people would pose like that! You might find some, but they wouldn't pose like that.
Interviewer: *U kieku kienet Maltija?*	*Interviewer:* And what if she were Maltese?
John: *X'jista? Jg]idu li jafhuha!*	*John:* So what? People might say they know her.
David: *Biex ituha xi erba botti jekk jarawha!*	*David:* They'd call her names if they saw her!
Kevin: *Joqog]du jg]idu fuqha!*	*Kevin:* They'd start to gossip about her.
John: *Imma qed jaraw]afna hekk. Ara kemm ikun hawn fuq it-televixin!*	*John:* But they're seeing many like that. Look at how many there are on television!
Interviewer: *Imma iktar ta' barra milli ta' Malta?*	*Interviewer:* But they're more from overseas than Maltese?
Several: *Iva.*	*Several:* Yes.

According to another group (A7), there would be too much of an uproar if the model were a Maltese woman, and her life would be made a misery:

Skandlu kbir. Kull]add ikun jaf! Ara dik! Skandlu kbir jin]alaq. Kieku tg]id jibg]atuha [o pajji\ ie]or, ta' Maltija allright*; imma mhux iwa]]luh a]na u tilg]in Paceville, e\empju, g]ax kieku il-lallu x'jag]mlulha!*	There would be a big scandal. Everyone would know! Look at her! A big scandal. If they were to send her to another country, as a Maltese girl, that would be all right. But not if they stick the poster on the road to

Paceville, for example, because if they did you can't imagine what they'd do to her!

Yet when this particular group of factory workers were asked whether they would pose for such a photograph themselves, only one of the three young women said that she would not go that far; the other two said they didn't see anything wrong with it, and that they would do it if they were offered enough money. They did, however, make a point of adding that they would never accept prostitution, however much money they were offered.

When the young men were asked whether *they* would be willing to pose in the nude for an advertising photo like this one, one said that he would not do it in Malta because of what people would do, but he saw nothing wrong with it, and would do it if the advert were to appear overseas and not in Malta. Another, 23 year-old Pete (A7), said that he would not do it because it might have a bad effect on others:

Pete: *Psikolo[ikament jista' jkolli impatt fuq]addie]or. Anke jekk ikun ma' jkolli xejn]a\in, nista' n]alli mpatt. Jien hekk nemmen uh. Ma rridx nesponi ru]i ... Da\-\gur li t]alli]afna impatt ...*

Interviewer: *X'tip ta' mpatt?*

Pete: *Tista' bniedem, imur id-dar uh, ra[el, u jag]mel l-affarijiet naturali wa]du uh!* (Laughter from one of the girls.) *Affarijiet ... Mhux affarijiet ta' mpatt dan? Jiena ... tfajla ... ra[el ukoll ji[ifieri, jista' jkun impatt fuq tfajla b'dak il-mod. Tista', jien naf, hekk uh ...*

Pete: I could have a psychological impact on someone. Even if I were to have nothing wrong, I can leave an impact. That's what I believe. I don't want to expose myself … Of course you leave an impact …

Interviewer: What kind of impact?

Pete: A person might go home, a man, and he might do the natural things by himself! *(Laughter from one of the girls.)* Aren't these matters of impact? Me … a girl … even a man I mean, he can have an impact on a girl in that way. She could, I don't know, in the same way, eh …

There is an interesting conflation of moral codes and assumptions underlying these statements – many of them echoing the younger boy's comment quoted earlier about feeling uncomfortable when viewing nudity in the company of adults (but not so much when alone). Nudity or provocative poses here appear to be associated primarily with isolated voyeurism and possible

masturbation. The woman in the picture has ceased to be a person and is seen exclusively as a sexual stimulant.

At another point in the interview, Pete remarked that if a woman chooses to be provocative, she should not complain about the consequences:

Jien taf x'ng]id: Jekk tesponi ru]ha u mbag]ad toqg]od ti[i tg]id g]ax dak g]amilli hekk u dak g]amilli hekk, m'g]andhiex toqg]od tg]id, g]ax hi, hi esponiet ru]ha ...	You know what I say: If she exposes herself, she shouldn't then start complaining that one guy did this to her and the other one did that. She shouldn't complain, because she exposed herself …

And so the stereotypes, "common sense" patriarchal assumptions and double standards roll out again! A woman's appearance and how this affects male passions is asserted to both explain and exonerate abuse and harassment. If she dresses a certain way, she is deemed to be giving up rights over her body and to no longer have any power to control what happens to her.

Conclusion

One thread which runs through most of this chapter is the argument that though there are quite dramatic changes taking place in young people's attitudes to sex and sexual behaviour, these changes are also marked by ongoing conflicts, contradictions and double standards.

Though there is a clear shift towards secularisation and towards what the young themselves believe to be a more liberal approach to sex, entertainment and life generally, the interviews conducted for this project also revealed ongoing contradictions and confusion, especially when the newer values come into direct conflict with more traditional beliefs, demands and expectations. The ongoing hold of more traditional expectations and ways of seeing is tellingly reflected in the very fact that talk about sex so frequently led to talk about religion, and that so many young people felt the need to speak at length about the Catholic Church's influence or about its failure to cater for the needs of the young in this and other areas. These preoccupations are local and uniquely Maltese. But their contours have also been profoundly influenced by the influx of foreign media, images and ideas.

In the next chapter I explore some of the broader implications of these contradictions by addressing the question of cultural identity, with particular reference to how Maltese youth understand and define themselves as Maltese nationals in an increasingly globalised media environment.

Chapter 7
CULTURAL IDENTITY

> "I am Maltese by nationality. I am not Maltese by culture! I speak English wherever I go. I am *very* influenced by Western society … If you want to find the real Maltese people, people who as such are really Maltese, you have to go to places where Maltese culture is dominant. In other words where there is no foreign influence! I am less Maltese than my father is!"
>
> Mark, 15 years old

> "[T]here is certainly much evidence that local cultures are considerably more resistant and creative against the power of the globalizing media than once feared."
>
> S. Elizabeth Bird, *The Audience in Everyday Life: Living in a Media World.* New York and London: Routledge, 2003, p.168.

Being Young and "Maltese" in a Global Media Landscape

This chapter examines how Maltese youths' understanding of their cultural identity and heritage has been affected by changing patterns in broadcasting, new media technologies and global communications.

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991) has argued that an individual's life experiences in late modernity are no longer defined and confined by once-powerful solidarities such as class, occupation, church, locality, gender and family. In his view, growing exposure to a multiplicity of global influences and an increase in access to information about possible ways of life have given individuals greater control over whether, when and how to assume a given social identity. In this chapter I wish to explore some of the problematic issues raised by this assertion through an examination of how the "control" exercised by Maltese young people when they assume or reject a particular cultural identity is inflected by the interactions between global commercial media and indigenous culture. In this discussion I take my cue from Jerome Bruner's suggestion that "the mythologically instructed community provides its members with a library of scripts upon which the

individual may judge the play of his [or her] multiple identities" (Bruner, 1979: 36). I want, in other words, to explore the extent to which the mythologies or "libraries of scripts" provided by indigenous Maltese culture for the nurturing of its youth's identities can be said to have been replaced, superseded or transformed by the commercial imperatives of global media.

It has become a truism that young people in different parts of the world are consuming the same (or at least the same types of) material through the media, most of it originating in or inspired by the US (see, e.g. Klein, 2000, McChesney, 1998; Real, 1996). Indeed, the homogenizing influence of youth-oriented media has frequently been identified as a distinguishing feature of life in the global village – not least by those who own or run these media. For instance, Sumner Redstone, the owner of MTV, has been quoted as declaring that "kids on the streets in Tokyo have more in common with kids on the streets in London than they do with their parents" (cited in Barber, 1996: 105); and according to MTV's president Tom Freston, "Youth culture in just about every nation revolves around music, fashion, and humour. Kids are not the same all over the world, but they resemble each other closely, more than any other generation in history" (cited in Rollin, 1999: 277).

Critics of what has variously been described as the "McDonaldisation", "Coca-Colonisation", "Hollywoodisation", or even the "Californication" of the world, have often claimed that "American cultural imperialism" has bred "an army of teen clones marching – in 'uniform' as the marketers say – into the global mall" (Klein, 2000: 129). Writing in the American Christian magazine *Sojourners* in 2000, Tom Sine declared:

> In the last seven years, a borderless youth culture has emerged. The uniform is Levi's. The drink is Coke. And they are all hard-wired to the same pop media. Outside the United States this phenomenon is seen not only as a product of globalization, but as a new form of American colonization. The world is beginning to look like an American strip mall, complete with KFC, Pizza Hut, and the Golden Arches. […] Not surprisingly, MTV is one of the most effective vehicles for galvanizing the young into this global youth culture. (Sine, 2000)

In similar tones, Chip Walker (1996:42) declared that "the course of the future may not lie so much in the hands of governments, or political or

religious movements, but rather in the hands of those who shape commercial TV":

> Worldwide access to commercial television is creating a global consumer Culture. […] TV is creating a common culture of consumption. More than ever, people around the world know about and want the same types of branded goods and services. Rather than a global village, mass exposure to TV is creating a global mall.

As these quotations indicate, one important player in global media developments as far as the young are concerned has been the music television channel MTV. Since its first broadcasts in 1981, the US-based MTV channel has had a phenomenal global growth. By 1998, it was in 273.5 million households worldwide, only 70 million of which were in the US (Klein, 2000:120). In 1989, MTV was sending its English language programmes to twenty-five countries (Rollin, 1999: 277), and by early 1993 its global audience stood at nearly a quarter of a billion households, with over half a billion viewers in seventy-one countries (Barber, 1996:104-5). As Barber puts it

> The numbers escalate day by day, eclipsing CNN, which, though it is in 130 countries, boasts far fewer viewing households and speaks to yesterday's generation of the over-forty's rather than tomorrow's of the under-thirty's. [...] Indigenous-language MTV programming is available in most countries, but [...] young watchers often prefer American, which is, after all, what MTV is promoting. (Barber, 1996: 104-105)

In *No Logo,* Naomi Klein (2000:120) notes that the New World Teen Study found that 85 per cent of the middle-class teenagers it surveyed watched MTV every day, and that TV was the single most significant factor contributing to the shared tastes of these teenagers. As Klein puts it, "global teens watch so much MTV per day that the only equivalent shared cultural experience among adults occurs during an outbreak of war when all eyes are focused on the same CNN images" (2000:120-1).[19]

[19] The types of programmes and images screened on MTV have also undergone significant changes to target and accommodate changing tastes among the young. According to Strasburger and Wilson (2002:230-231): "In the late 1990s, MTV began transforming itself from a music video jukebox into what one critic calls 'a programming service pandering to

Several commentators have noted that the constant bombardment of tantalizing images of the good life in this glamorised "global mall" can often leave the young dispirited by the reality of their own economic prospects (see e.g., Côté and Allahar, 1996: 148). The same could also be said about what happens when young people perceive their own environment and cultural inheritance as limiting or as lacking the "freedom" which they assume to be more widely accessible elsewhere because of how they see it portrayed in Hollywood-style films and TV shows or in glamorised multinational advertising.

But it is important to stress that the influence of "global media" is not a straightforward one-way process, nor are its consequences the results of simple cause-and-effect relations. Though it is true that young people everywhere increasingly appear to share similar tastes in styles of dress and entertainment, there are still significant regional, ethnic, and cultural differences in the ways they use and appropriate the media technologies and global images at their disposal. Indeed, even within global marketing itself, one striking strategy over recent years has been a declared emphasis on diversity and individualism – a trend which has been described by Naomi Klein as giving rise to "mono-multiculturalism":

> Today the buzzword in global marketing isn't selling America to the world, but bringing a kind of market masala to everyone in the world. In the late nineties, the pitch is less Marlboro Man, more Ricky Martin: a bilingual mix of North and South, some Latin, some R&B, all couched in global party lyrics. This ethnic-food-court approach creates a One-World placelessness, a global mall in which corporations are able to sell a single product in numerous countries without triggering the old cries of 'Coca-Colonization'. (Klein, 2000: 117)

As is the case with most other cultures, Maltese youth culture is not so much getting replaced by global mass culture as mutating by interacting with it. The local and the global have become deeply intertwined, paradoxically reinforcing as they symbiotically transform each other. These trends are interestingly reflected in the patterns which have emerged in the Maltese broadcasting landscape since the introduction of pluralism in the

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teens and their legion of base instincts' [...]. Programs such as *Jackass* and *Undressed* and non-stop spring break celebrations have replaced videos [...]. Clearly MTV is homing in on its youth market."

early 1990s. On the one hand, access to imported programmes, information and images has increased significantly, primarily through the wider availability of cable and satellite transmissions, as well as the free-to-air channels coming from Italy. At the same time, however, the volume of locally produced material has also increased at a phenomenal rate, and audience ratings regularly identify local productions as attracting the largest numbers of viewers. During the last quarter of 2002, for instance, 73 per cent of all TV viewers between 7.00 p.m. and midnight were watching Maltese stations (Vassallo, 2002). Comparing statistics published in 1994 and 2001, Borg (2003) also notes that Maltese is today the dominant language in television production, accounting for 85 per cent of all programmes produced on local TV stations. This marks a dramatic shift since the introduction of pluralism, in that when TVM was the only broadcasting local channel, only 43 per cent of transmitted programmes were local productions, with the rest made up of English and American films, serials, comedies, documentaries, etc.

In order to gain a further understanding of how young Maltese people are constructing and organising their sense of cultural identity in the light of the information about possible ways of life available to them through the both local and global media, I propose to first discuss how a range of interviewees described what they understood "being Maltese" to mean. This discussion starts from the assumption that the act of describing oneself as "Maltese", as indeed is the case in all acts of self definition and identity construction, requires (in the words of Kennedy and Danks, 2001:3) "the summoning of difference, the relativising of the self as against the 'other' imagined as separate, outside". For this reason, the young people interviewed for this project were asked to describe how they perceive Maltese youth to be different from foreign ones.

Young People's Definitions of "Being Maltese"

Dave (A8) is a 22 year-old clerical worker who spent a substantial part of his childhood in Canada and then resettled in Malta when he was in his early teens. Asked whether he thought there was anything which distinguished a Maltese young person from someone from overseas, he relied:

> *Dave:* I'd say a Maltese person is slightly behind from European countries. I mean even the lifestyle, which obviously isn't their

fault, that's because of the way they've been brought up by their parents, and their parents by their parents, you know what I mean? That is the Maltese tradition. But I think youth, today's youth is like, is picking up, *jiġifieri*, I mean. If you look at them today, you could get a European youth, and you can't tell the difference. But I mean you can still see it there …

Interviewer: So what's the difference still, are they still behind?

Dave: I wouldn't say they're as behind as much as they were before, you know. I mean, but you can still see the difference. I mean, I can still see the difference coming back home, you know. I mean even their living and the way they do things, you know …

But "being Maltese" is also a matter of great pride for many young people. This was very much the case for 16 year-old Leo (B16), who was emphatic that he was pleased to have been born in Malta, even though he was critical of the prejudice and ignorance which he believed to be widespread among Maltese people:

Jiena tista' tg]id li ma rridx li kont nitwieled barra jien,]abba, per e\empju jiena g]alija in]ares lejn valuri ta', jien naf, so`jetaÏ f'nofs New York, per e\empju. Qed ng]id e\empju ... Jiena g]alija meta nara il-valuri ta' partikulari familja jew hekk hemmhekk, imnalla ma' twelidx hemm. G]ax,* number one I wouldn't be me, *u* number two, it will be*, spe`i tant ma' nkunx naf, tant inkun per e\empju brainwashed by the continuous outflow of media *u hekk, illi* I would be … *Spe`i, jekk jien g]andi n]ares lejja nnifsi [o mera kif inkun kieku twelidt fl-Amerka, ng]id kemm inkun bniedem totalment differenti, u spe`i nitqa\\e\ kwa\i!*

I wouldn't want to have been born in another country because, for example, I see the values of, I don't know, a society in the middle of New York, for example. I'm just giving an example … For me, when I see the values of a particular family or so there, I feel really thankful that I wasn't born there. Because, number one, it wouldn't be me, and number two, it will be … there would be so much that I would not know, I would be so brainwashed by the continuous outflow of media for example, that I would be … well, if I were to see myself in a mirror the way I would be if I had been born in America, I'd say what a totally different person I'd be, and I would almost feel disgusted by what I saw!

As in Leo's case, pride in being Maltese and in having been brought up in Malta were often linked with the strong family values and family support systems which many believed to be more prevalent in Malta than in other countries. In most cases this was seen as one of the greatest assets of being Maltese, not least because it was believed to facilitate better character formation (B16). Living in Malta was also frequently described as safe: it is possible to walk home at night without any worries after going out to places like Paceville.

But there were also many who saw these characteristics in a less positive light, associating them with what they perceived as narrow-minded attitudes to sexual relations and life in general. As in many other areas, the ongoing influence of the Catholic Church was frequently cited as an important factor in this respect. For 14 year old Helen (B16), for instance, what distinguishes Maltese youth from other nationalities is religion:

Fis sens, mhux li kull]add jemmen u hekk, imma]afna drabi ming]ajr ma' taf tkun illimitat min]abba r-reli[jon.	It's not that everybody believes or practises it, but many times without realising it you are limited because of religion.

A number of the young people I spoke to made a point of distinguishing between "old fashioned" priests and more open-minded younger ones who, they said, have often been chastised or silenced by the Church authorities for speaking out of line. Many felt that it was these younger priests who were more in tune with the needs of the young.

If indigenous culture and traditional attitudes and *mores* were perceived as old-fashioned and restrictive, a movement away from these was frequently seen as a sign of progress. 24 year-old Cliff, for instance, is a shop-floor worker at a manufacturing plant (A9) who lives with his fiancée and is happy that more liberal attitudes have become more widespread in Malta. It is these attitudes, he claimed, which are making it possible for Maltese youth to enjoy an even more easy-going lifestyle than many of their overseas counterparts:

G]ax mbag]ad, dment li jkollhok i\-\mien tieg]ek, tista' ti[i naqra free country*, mhux kif kienu qabel, uh! Il-Malti jien naqtg]u iktar* tough*, u*	Because as long as you're old enough, you can have more freedom (become like a free country), not as they were in the past. For me, a

g]ala biebu minn kollox, ji[ifieri. G]ax qisna free country *hawn Malta, uh! Hawn Malta, issa kif [iet il-]ajja, ta' tmintax il-sena l-bi``a l-kbira tista' taqbad ta]seb g]al rasek. Kieku mhux hekk, kieku na]seb maqful qieg]ed jien!* (laughter)

Maltese person is more tough, and more carefree, I mean. Because we're like a free country here in Malta. In Malta, the way life is now, once you are eighteen, in most cases you can start fending for yourself. If things were different, I think I'd be locked up! *(laughter)*

A similar point was made by a group of young building construction students (B18), who said that they think Maltese youth are happier than their overseas counterparts because Malta's laws are not as strict or rigid as in other countries. Maltese youth, they said, know how to enjoy themselves; they have easy access to communal places of entertainment like Paceville, have fewer problems, and fewer constraints.

In marked contrast to comments like these, there were many who felt that young people in Malta tend to be less independent and outgoing than their overseas counterparts. Several commented that young people overseas leave home at a much earlier age than is the custom in Malta. One group of 17 year-olds (B19) remarked that one quality which distinguishes Maltese youth is their inability to grasp opportunities when they present themselves:

Walter*: Wie]ed Malti itti] \ew[opportunitajiet hekk ...*
Charles: *Ma' jo]odhomx ...*
Walter*: Jibqa' ji``assa lejhom, ja]seb fuqhom ...*
Charles: *Jo]odhom b'nofs kedda ...* We have less opportunities, but when they appear we don't even take them ...
Claude: *Guvni Malti tg]arfu mill-g]ala biebismu, hekk, li kollox xorta. Ikun g]ala biebu ...*
Mike: They're happy with less than what other people would expect...
Robert: *Forsi dik]a[a li g]andna a]jar minn pajji\i o]ra ...*

Walter: If you give two opportunities to a Maltese person …
Charles: He wouldn't take them …
Walter: He'd just keep gaping at them, thinking about them …
Charles: He'd take them half heartedly. We have fewer opportunities, but when they appear we don't even take them ...
Claude: What makes the Maltese youth stand out is the fact that he couldn't care less about anything
Mike: They're happy with less than what other people would expect …
Robert: Maybe that's something at which we're better than other countries …

It was apparent that though what these young men were describing was a stereotypical image (what one of them called the "caricature of a Maltese person"), they also believed themselves to be identifying tendencies and characteristics which they also saw in themselves – inherited or unconsciously absorbed tendencies, perhaps, which they apparently wanted to expunge by adopting more "modern" or imported attitudes. Indeed, when I asked these young men if they included themselves in their relatively negative accounts of what it means to be Maltese, or of the "caricature of a Maltese person", they all said that they did. It was in this context that one member of this group indicated that he strongly disagreed with his peers' negative descriptions, arguing that these comments reflected a tendency among Maltese people to make fun of themselves because of a misplaced sense of inferiority they have about their own country. If this is indeed the case, then this exercise of "making fun" could be argued to reflect these young people's desire to distance themselves from what they perceive as the embarrassingly "backward" and limited aspects of their indigenous environment, and to signal their own (at least potential) superiority by embracing the "foreign". But it can also and perhaps more plausibly be argued that these young people's contact and imaginative engagement with other ("foreign") ways of looking at things has taught them how to see themselves from the outside-in. Read this way, their laughter at the caricatures and foibles in which they include themselves assumes a more healthy and positive aspect. The issues raised by these interpretations need to be explored further – not least in terms of what they reveal about young people's perceptions of their own cultural and national identity in increasingly globalised media environments.

Life and Career Prospects

Malta's size and relatively narrow horizons as far as opportunities are concerned were seen as a curse by some, but also as a blessing by others. There are also those who see them as both a curse and a blessing. 18 year-old Paul (B17), for instance, is an MCAST student who believes that being Maltese has given him openings in television work that simply would not be available to young people overseas:

Jien, ng]id g]alija, I don't mind being Maltese at all. *Ir-ra[uni sempli`i]afna. Jiena x-xog]ol li nag]mel hemm b\onn li tkun daqsxejn*	Speaking for myself, I don't mind being Maltese at all. The reason is very simple. I work in television and so on, and to do the type of work I

popolari biex tag]mlu – televixin u hekk. Jiena ma kontx no]lom li barra nkun qed nistudja l-iskola u nag]mel programm fuq it-televixin. Hawn Malta kollox jg]addi, fis-sens illi kont immur l-iskola u wara mmur nipprepara l-programm tat-televixin, niffilmja, jekk hemm b\onn neditja u kollox. U mbag]ad immur id-dar nag]mel il-homework. Barra minn Malta differenti]afna, u ddum]afna iktar biex issir popolari. I like being Maltese because of that reason; because one of my dreams is of being popular, and it's easier down here.

do you need to be rather popular. If I were living overseas, there is no way I could go to school and make television programmes at the same time. Here in Malta anything goes, in the sense that I used to go to school and afterwards I used to go to prepare the television programme, filming and even editing if necessary. Then I'd go home to do my homework. It's very different overseas, and it takes much longer to become popular. I like being Maltese because of that reason; because one of my dreams is of being popular, and it's easier down here.

In much the same way, a young University student (A11) was also very proud of the fact that he presents and produces his own regular programmes on a local radio station. This experience, he insisted, has not only given him pleasure, but also helped to broaden his horizons and perspective on life. Another young man with a passion for drama was similarly convinced that the range of parts which he has been able to perform in semi-professional theatrical productions in Malta would not have been within his reach if he were living overseas. He spoke of having friends in England who were envious of the opportunities he has already had in performing many challenging roles in a wide range of plays.

In marked contrast to this, a group of shop floor factory workers (A6) said that they have ambitious friends who can't imagine succeeding in Malta *('G]ax ikollhok `ertu ambizzjonijiet li hawn Malta ma' tistg]ax til]aqhom'*). Twenty year-old Thomas, for instance, insisted that young people with his type of background faced a bleak future in Malta. He made this comment when I asked whether he would have chosen to be born in Malta if he had had a choice:

Thomas: *Jien qatt ma' kont nag]\el Malta! Qatt!*
Interviewer: *G]aliex le?*
Thomas: *Ma' nafx, imma g]adna*

Thomas: I would never have chosen Malta! Never!
Interviewer: Why not?
Thomas: I don't know, but we're still

lura hawn Malta. Jiena g]alija hawn Malta g]adna]afna lura ... Basta mhux Malta. {o l-Europa, basta mhux Malta. G]andek iktar opportunitaÏ barra ... }afna iktar opportunitaÏ. Hawn Malta, hawn Malta jekk ma' tg]allimtx l-iskola daqshekk inti, bye bye! U l-skola hawn Malta! ... Tmur l-iskola tal-Gvern, issib erba tfal, jg]amlulek storja. Kont fil-klassi, ma' tistax titg]allem. Ifimha, jiena kont wie]ed minnhom dawk l-erba, ji[ifieri. Imma jekk tkun trid titg]allem, ma' tistax! Jekk tkun trid tmur privat u mbag]ad ma' tkunx tista' ... Ji[ifieri inti hawn Malta bla futur. Jekk ma' jkollokx il-familja b'sa]]itha bla futur, ng]id g]alija jien ...

backward here in Malta. As I see it, here in Malta we're very backward … Just as long as it's not in Malta. In Europe, but definitely not Malta. You have more opportunities overseas … Many more opportunities. Here in Malta, if you haven't done well at school, that's it for you, you're finished! And schools here in Malta! … You go to a state school, you end up with a gang of trouble-makers and they create havoc. I was in a class where you can't learn anything. Mind you, I was one of those trouble-makers myself. But if you want to learn, you can't! You might want to have private lessons but then you can't afford it… So here in Malta you have no future. Unless you have a strong family, you have no future. That's what I think, anyway …

When I asked different groups whether they would have chosen to be born in Malta if they had been given the choice, the responses ranged from those who emphatically said that they would not (as in the case of Thomas), to those who neither wanted nor could imagine themselves growing up anywhere else. There were also some who insisted that they get homesick even if they go overseas for a short holiday. A substantial number said that they plan to leave the island at some stage – either for a limited number of years so as to broaden their work experience or further their studies, or else for good.

According to Josef Buttigieg of the Youth Policy Secretariat, there has been a marked increase in the numbers of applications for foreign travel through the Youth Specialisation Scheme and other official outlets:

Qed insibuha]afna craze, *jekk nista' insej]ilha hekk, ta' nies li jridu*

We're finding a lot of this craze, if I can call it that, of people who want

jmorru barra jag]mlu jew sena xog]ol, jew jistudjaw. Ji[ifieri dik issa nista' n]ares lejha mil-lat tal-involviment tieg]i fis-Segretarjat ta\-|g]a\ag], vis-a-vis il-Youth Specialisation Scheme. In-numru ta' \g]a\ag] li jixtiequ jissottomettu il-pro[etti tag]hom biex jistudjaw barra qed ji\died, u qed ji\died sew, u ma \g]a\ag] fl-etajiet ta' sittax sa g]oxrin sena, ji[ifieri kif]ar[u mis-sekondarja ... U mbag]ad g]andek l-ammont ta' \g]a\ag] illi jfittxu u jitolbu esperjenzi li jmorru barra ta]t il-Youth Programme tal-EU. Ovvjament ta]t il-Leonardo u is-Socrates ji[ri l-istess ... Hawn g]atx kbir biex dak li jkun ikun jista' jmur. L-istrutturi forsi m'humiex fine tuned *g]adhom, imma xorta g]ad hemm dak it-tip ta' g]atx,]a ng]id hekk.*

to go overseas to either work for a year, or to study… I can speak about that from my involvement in the Secretariat for Youth, vis-à-vis the Youth Specialisation Scheme. The number of young people who wish to submit their projects for overseas study is increasing, and it is increasing a lot, especially among young people aged sixteen to twenty – in other words as soon as they're out of secondary school … And then there are also those numbers who seek out and apply for overseas experiences through the EU Youth Programme. Obviously, the same thing happens under the Leonardo and Socrates schemes … There is a great thirst for going overseas. The structures might not be fine tuned yet, but there is still that type of thirst, if I can put it that way.

Embracing the Foreign

Malta's size and its geographical insularity have at various points in its history been seen as limiting and constricting. But there are significant variations in how young people from different social and demographic backgrounds perceive these "limitations" and how they relate to the culturally "foreign". There are also significant variations in how the young either embrace or distance themselves from imported images and influences. These variations tend to have important consequences on how different groups perceive themselves and their relation to their homeland, and on how they construct their own cultural identities. Faster and easier access to images and ideas from overseas has in some cases made Maltese youth more conscious of and dissatisfied with local limitations. But at the same time, new technologies have also made it possible for many to think of themselves as belonging to a larger global community, perceiving Malta's insularity as less constricting (or else as no longer being of relevance) because the boundaries between the foreign and the local are becoming progressively more blurred.

Talk about television and other media inevitably involves a social process of defining or positioning oneself and others, and such positioning is part of ongoing definitions and redefinitions of power and social identity (see Buckingham, 1993:75). I got a sense of the complexities of this process when I asked my young Maltese interviewees which TV programmes they enjoyed watching most and why. Many of the young people coming from Malta's more self-consciously identified "educated" and upwardly mobile professional classes told me that they make a point of not watching local TV programmes, and that when they do watch them they do so to laugh at their limitations and poor quality. According to one group of 14 year-old girls, for instance, "all the Maltese channels are rubbish", and compared to foreign stations accessed through cable or satellite they are embarrassingly backward. The fact that these teenagers spoke exclusively in English, and often also proudly drew attention to the fact that they do not speak or understand Maltese (the official first language), suggests that the attitude is primarily perceived as an assertion of superior social status.

It is important to stress that this was not the case with all interviewees, particularly those coming from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who repeatedly identified locally produced TV programmes in Maltese as their favourites precisely because they are in Maltese. But the notion that upward social mobility is somehow associated with not speaking the indigenous language is itself significant. Even here the interviews revealed some interesting variations and nuances, suggesting that differences in attitudes to the local and the foreign are not exclusively determined by regional or socio-economic factors. Indeed, whenever I asked for comparisons between locally produced programmes or advertisements and those coming from overseas, I was repeatedly told that the local ones were a "joke", lacking the professional polish of those coming from say Italy, Britain or the US. This was the case with the vast majority of the young people I interviewed, irrespective of their socio-economic or educational background.

These attitudes are also reflected in the negative ways in which local products are frequently perceived. According to Dr Noellie Brockdorff, one thing which struck her about local market research involving the "blind testing" of consumer products (i.e. when people are asked to choose between products first when they cannot see the products' names, and then again when they can) was the tendency for products to be dismissed as bad as soon as they were seen to be of Maltese origin – even though they had been liked when subjects were "blindfolded". Similar patterns are noticeable at

marketing levels, Dr Brockdorff pointed out, in that advice from foreigners usually tends to be given more weight than that coming from locals, even if it is the same.

Those who want to see themselves and their country as part of a more globalised reality, as less different and insular, more modern and "European" often express this through a rejection of what they consider to be "ingrained" and "traditional" values and patterns of behaviour. In the course of the interviews, I was struck by how these young people frequently associate being young, forward-looking, modern, technologically advanced and enlightened with being in tune with what comes from overseas – or more specifically, with what comes from Western Europe, Britain and the United States, particularly through the media. Being "old fashioned" and backward tends to be linked with an inability to move beyond the more obviously indigenous and traditional – locally produced goods, Maltese-language TV programmes (especially soap operas and political debates), and advertisements. Significantly, the two major forces which the young tend to associate most emphatically with old-fashioned indigenous ways of doing things are politics and religion.

Politics and Religion

There is a very distinctively local inflection to the manners in which young people in Malta are engaging with the changing demands and expectations of their increasingly globalised environment. One area where this is particularly noticeable is in what the young themselves believe to be a more liberated approach to sex, entertainment and life generally. In a country which has traditionally been staunchly Roman Catholic in its beliefs and customs, the globally inspired shift towards secularisation has taken a distinctly local emphasis – one whose discourse is dominated by religion and politics. "There are two things which keep us backward here in Malta," a twenty year-old factory worker (A6) told me: "politics and the church. And there's no way they can change! Heaven forbid that we remain backward!"

Whenever I asked about local television and radio I was frequently given detailed accounts of the extent to which these media have become oppressively polarised along party political lines. Such accounts were usually also punctuated by complaints about the exaggerated theatricality of local politics and the exaggeratedly melodramatic ways in which people engage with it on the media. Some young people said they found it amusing to listen

to the histrionics of party fanatics phoning in on radio to praise or damn one party leader or the other. Most said that they always change TV and radio channels to avoid political debates or discussions. Others lamented that it is impossible to believe either political side on any issue because they seem to be engaged in childish arguments in which they disagree simply for the sake of scoring political points. As one young student (A2) put it, "All you hear is people shouting at each other and fighting!" This is how a group of young workers (A9) responded when the subject of politics was raised:

George: *Kif nisma' diskussjoni politika, mal-ewwel naqliblu, televixin u radju, g]ax wie]ed jg]id hekk u l-ie]or jg]id hekk u tag]hom it-tnejn tajjeb!*

George: As soon as I hear a political discussion, I switch channels straight away, both TV and radio, because one side says one thing, the other says the opposite and both insist that they are right!

Paul: *Insegwiha ftit il-politika, imma jdejquk! L-a]barijiet, wie]ed kollox favur, l-ie]or kollox kontra, u dejjem l-istess affarijiet jg]idu!*

Paul: I do follow politics a little, but you get sick of them! On the news, all you hear is one side saying everything in favour, the other everything against, and they always say the same things!

Cliff: *Il-politika saret qisa sport jew festa! Wara l-elezzjoni]afna `elebrazzjonijet minn min jirba], flixkun birra, mbag]ad jintnesa kollox! I\-\g]a\ag] kollha jintnessew minnha, g]ax]add m'g]adu jag]ti kasha l-politika. Min jigdeb l-hemm, minn jigdeb l-hawn, xejn, l-ebda wie]ed minnhom ma fi]x]ob\!*

Cliff: Politics have become like a sport or a village feast! After the election there's a lot of celebrating by those who win, a bottle of beer, and then everything gets forgotten! Young people definitely forget all about it, because nobody takes any notice of politics any more. They're all a bunch of liars, and none of them has any substance!

Interviewer: *Allura kif tidde`iedu x'temmnu?*

Interviewer: So how do you decide what to believe?

Cliff: *Naqbad ma nara xejn u ma nemmhen lil-]add!*

Cliff: I just watch nothing and believe no one!

George: *Mhux g]alhekk i\-\ag]\ag] ma jimpurthomx mill-politka! Wie]ed kollox favur, l-ie]or kontra, allura inti ma tistax tie]u de`i\joni*

George: That's why young people couldn't care less about politics! One side is totally in favour, the other is totally against, and so it's

fuq li jg]idulhek. Allura titlef kull interess, uh!	impossible to make a decision on what they tell you. So you lose all interest, eh!

What I wish to draw attention to here is not so much the (ultimately very old) frustrated cry of "A plague on both your houses!", but the nature of the frustration and what specifically it is caused by. Cliff, in fact, hits it on the head when he complains that "politics have become like a sport or a village feast", except that Maltese politics have not *just* become like this – their drama and noisy exchanges are as old and deep rooted as they continue to arouse passions, allegiances and excitement. Politics and political debates in Malta are conducted in a uniquely passionate and colourful fashion – one which the Dutch anthropologist Jeremy Boissevain (1965) influentially compared to the patterns of patronage and rivalry which traditionally characterised village allegiances to patrons and saints. In this as in all other aspects of Maltese culture, the deep roots and branches of Malta's Roman Catholicism remain unmissable.

In a large number of the interviews, discussions about cultural and sexual identity repeatedly led to comments about the role of the Catholic Church in Malta, which appears to have become increasingly associated with traditional ("antiquated") ways of doing things by the young. These attitudes are also reflected in statistical reports of other recent studies. In a survey conducted by the Catholic Church in the diocese of Gozo (Mallia, 2003), seventy-five per cent of the youngsters that were interviewed said that they no longer take any part in Catholic groups; and over 60 per cent said that they found the format of the Mass boring. Similar findings emerged from a survey of university students published by the university chaplaincy in January 2004, which found that while 98 per cent of the students said that they believed in God, only 74.6 per cent said they believed in the Church (Busuttil, 2004).

During the focus group discussions, many repeatedly referred to the Church as being out of touch with the needs and thinking of the young, and they often insisted that Malta and the Maltese had in the past remained backward because of the Church's influence and attitudes. According to one university student (A2):

Il-knisja]afna drabi [abet mag]ha li n-nies baqg]u lura!	On many occasions the Church brought about a situation where people remained backward.

"Backward" was usually equated with lack of openness to liberal ideas, and lack of technological sophistication. The Church's waning influence was thus often attributed to a combination of these perceived shortcomings and the arrival of more "widespread education", technological advances and access to other cultures through the media and travel. According to another university student (A3):

G]ax inti, imma[ina biss ... jekk timxi kollox bir-reli[jon, sewwa,]eqq, fil-fehma tieg]i]a tibqa mitt sena lura. Illum nafu, teknolo[ija kemm avvanzat, u t-televixin. Illum il-[urnata issib li trid u li jg]o[bok, all right*, bis-satellita u dan. It-tfal, inti, illum il-[urnata meta qabel forsi lili g]allmuni `ertu affarijiet meta kont* Form Two*, illum il-[urnata tg]allimhom it-tfal mod differenti. U kemm hawn ... Per e\empju ... il-]add li g]adda mort g]idt]a nisma' quddiesa.* (laughs) *Il-mod kif jitkellem tinduna wkoll, qed tifhem? ~ertu antikwitaÏ fir-ra[unament! Illum il-[urnata b]al ma nbiddlet id-dinja trid tinbidel int, il-mod kif ta]seb.*

Because, try to imagine … if you follow religion in everything, in my view you'll remain a hundred years behind the times. Today we know, how much technology has advanced, and television. Nowadays you can find whatever you wish for and like, with Satellite and so on. Children today … where before they might have taught me certain things when I was in Form Two, nowadays you teach children differently. And there are so many ... For example, last Sunday I thought I'd go to Mass *(laughs).* From the way he speaks, you realise too, you know what I mean? A sort of antiquated way of reasoning! Nowadays, just as the world has changed, you have to change too, in your way of thinking.

A 20 year-old female secretarial assistant (A6) similarly commented that the Church's influence in Malta has waned because of the influx of media images from overseas, where religion is less dominant:

}afna mill-influwenza li kien ikollha l-knisja]aditha]afna l-medja, uh ... Ta' barra per e\empju g]andhom]afna inqas influwenza mir-reli[jon u hekk, qed tifhem? Iktar jibba\aw, `ertu affarijiet iktar jibba\awhom fuq l-affarijiet li ji[bdulek l-attenzjoni, u

A lot of the influence that the Church used to have has been taken over by the media. Overseas, for example, they have much less influence from religion and so on. They base things more on things that attract your attention, and what

ji[bdu l-attenzjoni dawn i`-`erti affarijiet, qed tifhem ... sess u ... jkun xi jkun, ji[ifieri ... Allura tid]ol mentalitaÏ differenti dejjem, uh!

attracts attention are these things, you know, sex and whatever. And so you get a different mentality coming in all the time.

The church was also held responsible for the perceived moral double standards in Maltese society. A group of third-year University students in their early twenties (A3) put it this way:

Louis: *Na]seb aktar milli l-knisja tinfluwenza]afna fuq il-media, na]seb aktar il-mentalitaÏ li]alliet. Per e\empju jekk f'xi* soap operas *jitkellmu]a\in, il-Maltin li huma daqshekk kattoli`i, allavolja]a jidg]u ta' kulljum fit- triq, imma jekk jaraw] fuq it-televixin, huwa skandlu, huwa skandlu kbir. Li jkun hemm tfajla jew inkella tnejn qed jitbewsu fuq it-televixin, fuq stazzjon Malti, hija skandlu ...*

Louis: I think it's not so much that the Church has a lot of influence on the media, I think it's more the mentality it left behind. For example, if they see someone swearing in some soap operas, the Maltese who are so Catholic, even though they swear themselves in the streets all the time, but if they see it on television, it's a scandal, it's a big scandal. If there's a girl or else a couple kissing on television, on a Maltese channel, it's a scandal …

Michael: *Imma ara mbag]ad fuq it-televixin Taljan ...*

Michael: But then if it's on Italian television …

Louis: *M'huwa xejn ...*

Louis: Then there's no problem …

Michael: *Imma xorta nir`evuh it-televixin Taljan, qed tifhem? Na``etawha g]ax dawk Taljani!*

Michael: But we still receive Italian television, do you see what I mean? We accept it because they're Italian!

Ivan: *Eh, g]ax Taljan, na``etawha.*

Ivan: Yeah, we accept it because they're Italian.

Interviewer: *Ta]sbu li qed tinbidel, imma, il-mentalitaÏ allura?*

Interviewer: But do you think that this way of thinking is changing?

Colin: *Xi ftit jew wisq qeg]da tinbidel ...*

Colin: It is changing a little bit …

Several: *Xi ftit jew wisq, iva ...*

Several: More or less, yes …

Louis: *Mhux minn na]a tal-knisja, eh!*

Louis: But not from the side of the Church!

Colin: *Bil-mod il-mod il-[eneraz-*

Colin: Little by little, the generations

zjonijiet li tilg]in, eh, forsi huma xi w]ud iktar edukati, forsi hawn iktar edukazzjoni iktar mifruxa min qabel. Na]seb illi bil-mod il-mod xi ftit jew wisq il-poter li kellha il-knisja fuq in-nies qieg]ed inaqqas xi naqra ...

which are coming up now, maybe they're a bit more educated, maybe education is more widespread than before. I think that little by little the power which the Church used to have over people is more or less diminishing …

Being "Maltese by Nationality but not by Culture"

A number of the young people interviewed made a point of distancing themselves from what they considered the "traditional" Maltese way of life. Fifteen year-old Mark (B16), for instance, insisted that he was "Maltese by nationality, but not Maltese by culture". When I asked him to explain the difference, it became clear that he assumed "culture" to be relatively static, and that for him "Maltese culture" was synonymous with traditional "old" Maltese folklore, folk dances like the "Maltija" (nowadays most seen in tourist-oriented shows) and village band clubs. These assumptions draw attention to the problems of how we define and understand "the indigenous" or of what we take to constitute "authentic culture" in increasingly globalised and technologically inflicted contexts. These problems are not unique to Malta of course, and their implications have been noted and discussed in relation to other ethnic communities and contexts.[20] This is how Mark described what he perceived as his "cultural identity":

> I am Maltese by nationality. I am not Maltese by culture! I speak English wherever I go. The last time I did anything cultural which is Maltese was probably in 1994 when I danced the *Maltija*! I am influenced a lot by Western society. I am *very* influenced by Western society. If you want to find the real Maltese people, people who as such are really Maltese, you have to go to places where, as such, Maltese culture is at its best. Go to the village band clubs – that is Maltese at its best. You have to go somewhere where Maltese culture is dominant. In other words where there is no foreign influence! I am less Maltese than my father is!

[20] See for instance Anderson, 1983; Hall, 1992; Kennedy and Danks, 2001.

What appears to be happening here is that Mark is locating his own cultural identity at what he perceives as the enlightened end of a continuum between two essentialised forces. At the one extreme stands the indigenous past, associated in Mark's mind with village band clubs, old photographs, irrelevant folk dances, and his father; at the other stands the future, vaguely epitomised as "Western society", home of new technology, forward looking ideas and open spaces. This is a "society" which Mark and his peers have come to know primarily through the media of film, television, books, magazines and the Internet.

In another interview (A8), Vincent (a young clerical worker in his early twenties) also made a point of distancing himself from what he described as the "traditional" or "typical Maltese attitude", declaring himself to be more in tune with what he saw as "the European attitude to things":

> I'm Maltese, but I can't call myself Maltese. I mean my family always spoke English, so I'm associated with that part of Malta, you know. I guess it's more, you can say, the European lifestyle – the European attitude to things, because nothing really is traditional any more.

When I asked this young man what "being Maltese" or "traditional" would involve, he replied:

> For me a typical Maltese attitude would be ... like you've got the American dream, you've got the Maltese dream, which would be: live with your family, get a job, find someone nice, settle down, get married, have your own kids, and the process starts all over again. The European lifestyle is more flowing, in my opinion, like, you don't have to go and live where you were brought up in. You can see the world, whatever. Yes, it's nice to have family values, but they're not what's most important, you know, even partner-wise. Yes, if you meet someone you love all good and fine. Divorce, personally I'm up for it. It's just the whole quality of life, you know … I mean, this is one package we get, and I want to make the most of it.

He insisted that all his friends and "a good 45 per cent of what goes down to Paceville" are "pretty much of the same attitude". I asked him why he thinks that the attitude he describes is not "Maltese", especially since Malta has

historically repeatedly undergone dramatic changes as a result of its encounters with other cultures. His response again revealed a tendency to essentialise the local and the foreign, equating the indigenous with all that he saw as narrow-minded and unchanging. For this young man, the embracing of a "European lifestyle" also requires a rejection of the indigenous and local:

> My attitude is not Maltese because it's influenced too much by foreign culture, foreign attitudes, foreign ways of life. I mean, you could meet a cross-breed, you know, someone who likes this but then has a very firm Maltese behaviour and attitude to his life. But I don't see it as a lasting thing, especially now that Malta's going to join the European Union and whatever. It just opens up so many options that for an individual to be closed off to all of that is very hard, I think.

The term "cross-breed" is particularly interesting in this context, because it again underlines how the indigenous and the foreign have been dichotomised. So is Vincent's suggestion that by joining the European Union, Malta and the Maltese will eventually transmute into a different breed, one which, as he put it later in the interview, would "open its eyes and accept to look after its own things and to become more like Spain and Ibiza where you're going to be, where you can say I am very proud to be Maltese". Pride in being Maltese, for this young man at least, will only be possible when the Maltese stop being "Maltese" as "traditionally" understood and become totally immersed in "foreign culture, foreign attitudes, foreign ways of life".

There is a curious process of self identification and identity formation reflected in these statements. All identity construction, to quote Kennedy and Danks (2001: 3) again, "requires the summoning of difference, the relativization of the self as against the 'other' imagined as separate, outside – and perhaps also as marginal, inferior and dangerous." What seems to be happening in cases like Vincent's and Mark's is that it is the traditional and indigenous which have been designated as the 'other'.

Drawing on Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), Hannerz (1996: 21) has noted how shared commonality within a nation is usually paralleled by a strong sense of cultural and linguistic discontinuity with respect to outsider-nations. Yet in statements like those quoted above, what appears to be happening is that these young people are choosing to nurture cultural (and in some cases linguistic) discontinuity with their own

"inherited" environment in favour of commonality with "the foreign". Again, it is worth stressing that this is not a phenomenon which is unique to Malta – though it does assume distinctive inflections here.

Cultural Crossroads

In his study of ritual, memory and the public sphere in Malta, the social anthropologist Jon P. Mitchell (2002:31) describes the Maltese as "ambivalent Europeans" who have an "awkward relationship with their history and identity":

> There is a habitual self-essentialising tendency in Maltese public debate. This can lead to a kind of self-Orientalism or Mediterraneanism that presents their own difference as inferiority. Implicit in this process, however, is that the Maltese are assumed to have a monopoly over the articulation of such inferiority.

Mitchell (63-4) draws attention to the fact that one important marker of the separation between "outsiders" and "insiders" in Malta has traditionally been the Maltese language, which "is perhaps the ultimate marker of inclusion and exclusion":

> As well as being a symbolic marker of Maltese exclusiveness, *Malti* is also a practical tool for the exclusion of ever-present foreigners – *barranin* – from local discourse […]. In a situation where the country is over-run by tourists for much of the year, it achieves a kind of closure from the rest of the world, allowing the Maltese to speak among themselves without being heard. (64)

If, as Mitchell suggests, speaking Maltese is a marker of inclusion, then the situation becomes paradoxical when one considers that significant section of the Maltese population for whom English is the preferred language of communication, even within the home. For this group, the speaking of English is a symbol of what they perceive as their own cultural and socio-economic superiority. There are of course historical as well as sociological reasons for this, and the tendency is also often resented and even ridiculed by those (probably the majority) who are at ease in either language, or who communicate more or less exclusively in Maltese. But it is worth noting how

for one prominent section of the Maltese population, the deliberate choice of English as the only language of communication has become a means of distancing themselves from local insularity, and of aligning themselves with (and appropriating some of their attributes of) the "outsider/foreigner".

Similar arguments could be made about young people's attitudes to religion and politics, in that Maltese culture as traditionally understood is inseparable from their influence and expressions. Rejecting these influences in favour of allegedly more enlightened, more "foreign" and more technologically advanced ways of seeing and doing things comes to be a further way of distancing oneself from insularity and from the hold of what is perceived as too localised and limited.

But essentialising distinctions between the local and the foreign like those I have been quoting are usually far from the realities of these individuals' lived experiences. For instance, the English spoken in Malta by the young people who want to align themselves with the non-indigenous is distinctive and unique to Malta, representing a striking example of how foreign influences are both incorporated and transformed in specific communities. It has become indigenized, put to local use, and given a local accent (cf Shohat and Stam, 1996: 149), with many local variations and idiosyncrasies. Similarly, in a country which has traditionally been staunchly Roman Catholic in its beliefs and customs, and where political meetings and debates carry many of the traditional hallmarks of the loud and colourful festas held annually in every town and village, the globally inspired shift towards secularisation has taken a distinctly local emphasis – one whose discourse is inevitably dominated by politics and religion. One would not normally expect discussions about the media, new technology, sex or national identity among young people in different cultural contexts (say in England, Australia, New Zealand, or the US) to invariably lead into debates about how such topics relate to or challenge the Catholic Church's position, or to how they are affected by the limitations of local politics. But among Maltese youth, as indeed in Malta as a whole, these relations continue to be seen as crucial.

Despite the bold rhetoric, therefore, there is still a great deal of ambivalence in the way young people in Malta are handling the changing demands and expectations of their increasingly globalised environment. In many quarters, there seems to be a growing sense that the boundaries between the local and the foreign are becoming more blurred, that beliefs,

values and attitudes are changing dramatically and forever. At the same time, however, the precise contours of these emerging new beliefs and attitudes remain ambiguous.

These ambiguities are local and uniquely Maltese, but their patterns are also global in origin and consequence. As such, they provide a useful indication of how indigenous youth go about constructing their cultural identities in the global village. If "diaspora" is understood metaphorically (Spencer and Wollman, 2002: 165), then it is diasporic identities which these young people are embracing – identities which, to borrow Brah's (1996: 196) definition, "are at once local and foreign. They are networks of transactional identifications encompassing 'imagined' and 'encountered' communities."

Appadurai (1990) influentially described the current global cultural situation as a complex transnational construction of "imaginary landscapes". Everywhere, as Stuart Hall (1992: 310) elaborates, "cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, *in transition,* between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalized world" (Hall's italics). If this is the case, then it can also be argued that, like their foreign counterparts, Maltese youth have become diasporic – not because they have been displaced from their geographic homeland, but because the mediascapes within which their cultural identity and "homeland" are defined and constructed are everywhere the products of hybridity.

Chapter 8
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Commercial media are selling the young more than brands of products – they are selling a whole way of life. Judging by the ways Maltese youth talk about themselves and their relation to their cultural environment, the sales pitch appears to be working.

Young people make extensive use of commercially-oriented entertainment media, a substantial proportion of which are of foreign origin. The images and messages encountered through such media often come into conflict with more traditional values and ways of doing things, even as they assume a key role in the formation of youth culture and individual identity.

There is a very broad range of patterns of media consumption among Maltese youth. Most are very much in tune with new media technologies, usually associating the media and the media images and messages that appeal to them with the future and with contact with a wider and braver new world.

Most appear to believe that pluralism in broadcasting has led to greater awareness among the young about the options and choices which are available to them – not simply in terms of consumer products but more importantly in terms of new ideas encountered through greater contact with a range of different lifestyles and belief systems. Though there were some notable reservations, most see this as a positive development, in the sense that greater awareness has led to greater openness to global perspectives and more freedom of choice.

Many expressed impatience with "the old ways of doing things", insisting that greater openness to new ideas, and especially to ideas coming from more technologically advanced cultures, was essential to Malta's further development. Local politics and the Catholic Church were often cited as major exponents of "the old ways of doing things", and were often criticised for failing to take account of the needs and interests of the young.

2. The majority of Maltese youth are very much aware of the fact that they are living in a consumption-driven environment, and they appear to have internalised the values which underscore most Western-style consumer cultures.

Most see today's youth (including themselves) as "never happy" and "always wanting more", and recognise that the wanting is more important than the having. The majority believe that their parents were happier at their age, even though they had fewer comforts and less money at their disposal. But though they see their parents' youth as having been less hectic and stressful than their own, the majority would not want to trade places with them as they cannot imagine living without the comforts and technologies which they're now used to. These contradictions partly account for their nagging dissatisfactions with their present conditions.

Most insist that young people today do not save. Indeed, several found the idea of saving amusing, stressing many are in the habit of living beyond their means. This was often attributed to the fact that money has become both easier to come by and harder to hold on to – it is easy to borrow money from the banks, everything is now much more expensive, and there are many more consumer products and entertainment outlets available than in the past.

Several attributed the fact that more young couples are choosing to live together without getting married to the high cost of living and the low wages, which make it very hard to save up for the responsibilities of starting a family. Many teenagers said that they can see themselves saving to buy a car, but they thought that the idea of starting to save for marriage at an early age was old fashioned.

One item which was frequently cited as a recurring expense was the mobile phone. Virtually all the young people interviewed said that they own one, insisting that it's a necessity, that they use it mostly to organize meetings with friends, and that it is also essential for emergencies. Other recurring expenses are mostly related to going out and hanging out in places like Paceville, parties, eating out, buying drinks for friends, and going to the cinema. Clothes were another major expense, for both males and females. Cigarettes were also listed as recurring expenses by some of the older interviewees.

3. Media images of "beautiful people" can lead to insecurity or unrealistic expectations and even self-punishing behaviour among many young people.

Young people's attitudes to their own bodies are being influenced in both negative and positive ways by images of the "body beautiful" projected through the media and advertising. The idea that an ideal body weight is related to a healthy lifestyle seems to be quite widespread, with many showing more awareness of the need of a healthy diet and regular exercise. But there is also an ongoing tendency for unhappiness with one's own body and looks when these do not fit the "ideal" type.

The expectations for women to fit this ideal are still much stronger than they are for men, even though there is a distinct shift in fashion consciousness and self-grooming among young males – possibly as a consequence of changing representations of men in international advertising and the media generally.

Traditional gender stereotypes are being challenged in a number of quarters, especially among the young. However, as a general rule, patriarchal and chauvinistic attitudes still appear to be relatively widespread, even among the young.

Many believe that the images projected through the media create stereotypes of sexual attractiveness, which encourage girls to wish for a slim figure, and boys for a muscular one. Several spoke of the dangers of eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia nervosa.

Boys and young men are usually more concerned about wearing clothes bearing the right brand names than girls. For boys, the wearing of branded clothes is very much a matter of looking good in the company of friends: they usually don't mind what they wear while working, but are quite particular about what they wear when they go out. Many insisted that branded clothes are usually better quality than cheaper products; they last longer and are more comfortable. Sports shoes were repeatedly identified as examples of how important it is to buy a good brand if you want them to be safe and to last. Hair gel was frequently cited as a young male obsession.

Girls are more likely to be interested in fashion and "looking good". Clothes, cosmetics and hair appear to be the main areas of personal appearance and grooming on which girls spend most time and money. Several also

acknowledged that their choice of fashion items or preferred appearance is influenced by images they see in various media.

4. Young people with disabilities face unique problems of self-image and adjustment in commercially-oriented media cultures.

Repetitive media projections of what are presented as desirable images of what "normal", "healthy" or "attractive" people should look like create a situation where those with disabilities come to be seen (and also come to see themselves) as "the other".

Advertising, popular TV dramas and films often focus on sexuality and on idealised images of happy families and healthy parenting. In this context, people with disabilities have (often unconsciously) been encouraged to think of themselves as being asexual – ironically within a global media context which is increasingly sexually oriented.

As in the case of attitudes to other groups that have traditionally been systematically marginalised through patronising or infantilising stereotypes, people with disabilities still tend to be perceived and portrayed in the media as primarily in need of charity, pity and "loving protection". Such portrayals perpetuate the long term problems of image and perception, in this as in any area of discrimination.

One area of media representation which has been targeted by the Commission for the Disabled as exploitative is the use of images of disabled people in contexts intended to make politicians or the business community look good — often without the permission of those photographed.

People with disabilities have as important a role to play in society as anybody else. At the very least, they deserve the right to be represented realistically and with dignity, and to live in an environment which empowers them by allowing them to develop and maintain positive self-images.

5. As in other countries, the evidence from Malta indicates that the young are being specifically targeted by alcohol and tobacco advertisers.

The drinking of alcohol appears to be taken as a matter of course by most young people. Drinking alcohol in the company of friends tends to be habitually associated with going out to places like Paceville. Beer, wine and vodka appear to be the most popular drinks, though there is considerable variation. Some young people binge drink precisely because they want to get drunk. They were described as going to bars first so as to get inebriated cheaply before moving on to discos where drinks tend to be more expensive.

Alcohol consumption is often associated with "being cool", socialising and being a fun-loving young adult. Some also relish the prospect of being seen to be drinking a trendy product. These associations are regularly and deliberately nurtured in advertising, where the drinking of alcohol is consistently linked with having fun, being "cool" and forming part of the "in group".

Advertisements and other media images linking the consumption of alcohol with young adults socialising and enjoying themselves have a very strong appeal to those who are technically under the legal age for drinking – even though this age group may not be "officially" targeted by advertisers.

Because radio is a relatively cheap form of advertising, it often forms a key part of alcohol advertising campaigns aimed at the young.

Peer pressure and the desire to look cool were also frequently identified as the principal reasons why young people start smoking. Cigarette advertising on Maltese billboards and in the print media appeal to the young by associating smoking with the controlled enjoyment of a carefree and independent lifestyle. Advertising images often link cigarettes with being a "real" man or woman, living the good life, and unabashedly enjoying a young and carefree lifestyle.

Just as young people often start smoking because of peer pressure and the desire to look cool, in some peer groups the pressure is precisely in the opposite direction.

Though health promotion campaigns are clearly having a positive impact, young people's complaints about being bombarded by repetitive messages

suggest that such campaigns also need to be constantly updated and modified if they are to be effective rather than counterproductive.

There also appears to be a major gap in the area of education about the media themselves, particularly in terms of providing children and young adults with the critical tools which will enable them to better understand how techniques of persuasion are pitched and how they work.

6. Though young people's attitudes to sex and sexual behaviour appear to have changed dramatically, these changes are also marked by ongoing conflicts, contradictions and double standards.

Attitudes towards sex among Maltese youth are generally believed to have become more liberal, and this liberalisation is perceived as being directly related to the ways in which sexual attitudes and behaviour are portrayed in films, TV programmes, advertisements and other media messages (especially those coming from overseas).

Many, but by no means the absolute majority, take this to be a positive development. A more liberal attitude to sexual relations was often described as a positive sign of progress and essential if Malta is to "catch up with the rest of the world". One area of influence cited was the fact that more young Maltese couples are living together without getting married. Many saw this as a positive development.

Others feel that the increased laxity in attitudes to sexual behaviour can lead to confusion and stress. Several believe that young people today have a lot of pressure to conform to norms and expectations about appearance and sexual behaviour.

Concern was frequently expressed about the use of women as sex objects in advertisements and media images more generally. Several were quite critical of the chauvinism they believe to characterise the attitudes of older generations; but many young men themselves often betrayed equally chauvinistic attitudes when they spoke about sex and sexual relations.

Especially when it comes to sexual behaviour, there are major differences between the expectations that are customarily assumed to apply to girls and young women, and those applied to boys and young men. While Maltese

boys have a more 'relaxed' lifestyle, girls have to put up with stricter constraints. Boys' 'more relaxed' lifestyle appears to derive from the fact that most Maltese families are still typically patriarchal in structure. Stereotypes also continue to prevail in the representation of women in Maltese broadcasting.

Many insisted that they did not find the use of nudity in TV programmes, films and advertisements objectionable in itself. When boys objected to screened nudity their statements tended to be double edged. They said that they recognised the problems raised by the objectification of women, but insisted that they also find such images attractive and that they are not themselves "narrow minded". For girls and young women, screened nudity is often problematic primarily because of the ways they see boys and men reacting to it.

Discussions on sexual behaviour repeatedly led to comments about the role of the Catholic Church in Malta. Many repeatedly referred to the Church as being out of touch with the needs and thinking of the young, insisting that Malta and the Maltese had in the past remained backward because of the Church's influence and attitudes.

7. Maltese youth culture is not so much getting replaced by global mass culture as mutating by interacting with it.

There is a very distinctively local inflection to the manners in which young people in Malta are engaging with the changing demands and expectations of their increasingly globalised environment. The globally inspired shift towards secularisation has here taken a distinctly local emphasis – one whose discourse is often dominated by politics and religion.

How the young either embrace or distance themselves from imported images and influences varies considerably. Faster and easier access to images and ideas from overseas has in some cases made Maltese youth more conscious of and dissatisfied with local limitations. But new technologies have also made it possible for many to think of themselves as belonging to a larger global community, perceiving Malta's insularity as less constricting (or else as no longer being of relevance) because the boundaries between the foreign and the local are becoming progressively more blurred.

Pride in being Maltese and in having been brought up in Malta were often linked with the strong family values and family support systems which are believed to be more prevalent in Malta than in other countries. In most cases this was seen as one of the greatest assets of being Maltese, not least because it was believed to facilitate better character formation. In others, however, these characteristics were seen as shackles, holding Maltese youth back from embracing a more "liberated" future.

Living in Malta was frequently described as safe, and Maltese youth were believed to know how to enjoy themselves; they have easy access to communal places of entertainment, have fewer problems, and fewer constraints than their overseas counterparts. At the same time, however, young people in Malta were also described as less independent, less outgoing and less capable of grasping opportunities than their overseas counterparts. Malta's size and relatively narrow horizons as far as opportunities are concerned were seen as a curse by some, but also as a blessing by others.

Maltese youth frequently associate being young, forward-looking, modern, technologically advanced and enlightened with being in tune with what comes from overseas – or more specifically, with what comes from Western Europe, Britain and the United States, particularly through the media.

Those who want to see themselves and their country as part of a more globalised reality, as less different and insular, more modern and "European" often express this through a rejection of what they consider to be "ingrained" and "traditional" values and patterns of behaviour.

Being "old fashioned" and backward tends to be linked with an inability to move beyond the more obviously indigenous and traditional – locally produced goods, Maltese-language TV programmes (especially soap operas and political debates), and advertisements. The two major forces which the young tend to associate most emphatically with old-fashioned indigenous ways of doing things are politics and religion.

8. There is a need for more systematic and widespread programmes of education about the media.

The fact that today's youth are living in media saturated environments makes it imperative that they should be helped to become better equipped to understand the language of the media.

Young people who have been to schools with active media education programmes were consistently more critical and reflective about what they see in films and on TV. Though they are not immune to negative influences, they come across as being better equipped to understand and think through how their attitudes and behaviours might have been influenced or even moulded by the images and values which dominate the global and local media landscapes.

Young people who have not experienced media education and media analysis courses tended to depend more on what they take to be "common sense" responses. Such responses can be easily appropriated and manipulated by professional image-mongers, and they are very frequently moulded by the popular media anyway. As such, they are usually little more than vehicles for unchallenged assumptions, unacknowledged prejudice and unfounded preconceptions.

Young people rightly want to be accorded greater trust and allowed to make their own judgments about their own lives and futures. They resent being "nagged", whether by parents, teachers, broadcasters or health promotion campaigners. But in order to be able to make those judgments wisely, they also need to be better informed about the ways in which their opinions, beliefs and desires are constantly being courted and lured by commercial forces.

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