



**Exploring Media Influence on African Female University Student's Perceptions of
Themselves.**

By

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DECLARATION

I, **Nompumelelo Gcaza**, hereby declare that the following study entitled: “exploring media influence on African female university student’s perceptions of themselves” is my original work, and all work of others has been referenced and acknowledged accordingly. I affirm that this dissertation has not been previously submitted at any another university for any qualification.

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ACRONYMS

UKZN: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal

SEJ: Search Engine Journal

SAARF: South African Advertising Research Foundation

BMI: Body Mass Index

BDD: Body Dysmorphic Disorder

ED: Eating Disorders

MSD: Media Systems Theory

HICs: Higher Income Countries

LMICs: Lower and Middle Income Countries

ABSTRACT

Young women are the most impressionable demographic globally. This group of individuals is still in development and on their way to becoming adults. Much of how they are developing relies on their relationship with the outside world, as well as how they perceive themselves. Media plays an enormous role in the life of this demographic as they are continuously learning. Significantly, media can be influential in determining how a young woman sees herself. This study aimed to determine how media influences young African female students' perceptions of themselves. The research explored female students' self-perceptions in relation to the media's presentation of beauty. In this study, eight participants were chosen using the non-probability random sampling strategy. The participants were African female students from the Howard College campus, ranging between their first to fourth year of study. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected by using semi-structured interviews. The major findings of this study were that African female students were influenced by media's standards of beauty and felt pressured to adopt the characteristics of that standard of beauty. The participants revealed that they perceived themselves as not meeting those standards of beauty and have experienced psychological problems due to a lack of inclusivity in beauty as represented by the media. Based on the study results, it is recommended that it may be useful to conduct a broad quantitative study to enable the generalization of results to a large population. Secondly, it might be interesting to explore the influence of the media on male university students and their self-perceptions thereof. Finally, the study results indicated a high use of social media as compared to the other withstanding media platforms (television, magazines, billboards, radio). Therefore, it is recommended to specifically explore the psychological implications of the excessive use of social media.

Keywords: media, young African female, thematic analysis, standards of beauty

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Each individual has their own beauty standard that they hold in high regard. This can be attributed to their immediate social group influences such as their parents and peers, or to their exposure to outside influences. Every standard is accompanied by subtleties and spotlights on various viewpoints (Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks, & Araiza, 2016). These norms are set up by the media and projected to the public through TV programs, magazines, web journals, video blogs, as well as different types of correspondence. Hargro (2011) avers that bulletins, TV and magazines continually project the current norm of beauty. Over the long haul, the standard turns out to be increasingly unreachable for the average person. According to the Social Issues Research Center, the ideal of beauty in the late 1970s, for women in particular, is achievable by under 5% of the female populace (Fox, 1997).

Standards of beauty are affected by numerous variables, namely the media, entertainers, celebrities, style influencers and other public figures. In the United States, Johnson and Bankhead (2014) postulate that beauty norms are affected vigorously by the White populace and this incorporates lighter skin appearances and straighter hair. Since this takes place in one of the most influential nations, similar notions stand in other countries, simply based on the occurrence of this phenomenon in the USA (Hargro, 2011). South Africa is no exception as it can be seen that prominent public figures and influential celebrities in media are inclined to undergo treatments to achieve lighter shades of skin and they use hair pieces with a straighter texture. According to Akinro and Mbunyuza-Memani (2019), these preferences can be understood through the lens of globalization.

The idea of globalization proposes the trading of thoughts, preferences and societies just as innovations across worldwide lines (Beck, 2018; Croucher, 2018). Nonetheless, investigations have proposed that globalization conveys with it a single direction stream of "western" convictions and culture across media stages (Giddens, 2018). Kim (2010) posits that a piece of culture entails thoughts regarding beauty and a reception of "western" beauty norms by non-western countries. The globalization cycle can be regarded as a "western" driven task that, from one viewpoint, introduces itself as appealing and useful, while on the other it appropriates, homogenizes and sets norms for the global south. Globalization adds to the death of social personalities in non-industrialized nations, proposing that globalization

empowers a type of shared characteristic and acknowledgment of "western" societies over others (Akinro & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2019).

This may be particularly pertinent for young women who are influenced by standards of beauty from outside sources such as the media, and may be exacerbated by their impressionable nature. For instance, in an investigation of 5 577 models in women's media publications across twelve nations, Yan and Bissell (2014) found a move toward a homogeneous norm of beauty that is moored on the attributes of 'whiteness'. Additionally, in a cross-cultural investigation of impressions of female allure, Cunningham et al. (1995) discovered that sexual development or sexually engaging qualities were solid pointers of appeal assessments, again secured on "western" impact.

This phenomenon is also of concern amongst young women in developing nations since the predominance of "western" beauty standards contrarily influences women in non-"western" nations. This can lead to inadequate self-discernment (Hooks, 1993). Evidence of this stems from a global study of 32 000 adolescent ladies and women from ten non-western nations. The study found that a large portion of the surveyed populace were disappointed with their bodies, looks and hair (Etcoff et al., 2004). In particular, just thirteen percent of women were happy with their body weight and shape. Additionally, Etcoff et al. (2004) report that only two percent viewed themselves as beautiful, and the greater part of respondents saw their bodies as inadequate compared to the standard of beauty held by society.

Yan and Bissell (2014) found that South Africa is an illustration of a nation at risk of being absorbed into 'western' standards of beauty. This may stem from media portrayals of beauty. In a study by Akinro and Mbunyuza-Memani (2019), four African women's magazines from 2010 to 2015 were analyzed, to decide if the magazines set up heterogeneity in their portrayal of beauty or generally followed the famous "western" standard. The study revealed that women are not presented with different portrayals of beauty. Pictures of beauty that African women peruse are identical to standards that are revered in the "western" world (Mbunyuza-Memani, 2018). This is concerning, considering that African women have genetic traits that are in stark contrast to "western" beauty standards. This automatically reflects negatively on African women if these standards persist and become more popular. The beauty standards portrayed in the media are a narrow representation of women globally. However, these are still used as predominant markers of womanhood and beauty (Wade et al., 2004). With regard

to globalization, visual media is an unavoidable social structure that impacts on how young women comprehend and duplicate beauty.

In media, especially in the African context, beauty is represented by African models who are transcendently adorned with European traits. In the study by Akinro and Mbunyuza-Memani (2019), across each of the media publications analyzed, the models generally wore artificial hair or weaves; were lighter in complexion than the average African woman; and were of a slender appearance. Bissell and Rask's (2010) study found that the media portrays beauty with the slender body ideal. Medium- and plus-sized women are far less prominent in media. However, this is in contrast with the average African women who are genetically inclined to likely be medium- or plus-sized. In cases where medium and plus sized models are used in media portrayals, slender models are portrayed as youthful, while medium and plus-sized models are portrayed to be older. This proposes that slender body ideals are related with success and youth and is emphatically valued. Likewise, African hairdos, including natural hair or a bald head, are not as prominent in the media as weaves. A similar notion is applicable to skin tone. Mbunyuza-Memani (2018) asserts that the skin tone portrayed in the media is not diverse and is inclined towards the lighter skin colour. This demonstrates the treatment of a dark complexion tone as insufficient for magazine covers and for the media all the more comprehensively, which recommends a positive assessment of light or fair complexion. Such scenarios act in the conditioning of young women with darker skin tones to see themselves as inadequate since their skin colour is not portrayed as a beauty standard in the media. Such convictions are harsh and do not add to a positive self-insight, especially amongst young women (Akinro & Mbunyuza-Memani, 2019).

In view of these discoveries, this examination focuses on how media influences African women's cognition of their beauty; the standards that they hold for beauty subconsciously or consciously; and the types of media that influences their own standard of beauty. The implications thereof will also be investigated. This topic has not been thoroughly examined in the South African context. Within Africa and globally, the beauty standards in new forms of media's, such as the internet and social media, influence on women's perceptions of themselves has also not received much attention. This study will focus on university students who are at an impressionable stage of their lives and who are exposed to various media sources that expose them to beauty standards. The theoretical framework that guides this study is the Media Systems Dependency Theory and Ecological Systems Theory.

1.2 Problem Statement

This exploration intends to uncover the connection between media influence and perceptions of African female university students. The study focuses on the perceptions of the students on how media influences them. It delves into their perceptions of self under the influence of media's portrayal of beauty, and it investigates how the students' confidence and self-esteem are affected under the influence of media's standards of beauty. Historically, African women have been under mounting presentations of Western media portrayals of female beauty and resident advances identified with class portability and cultural assimilation. Shaw (2006) avers that South African women are credibly confronted with a specific trial in distinguishing and dis-relating both socially informed and worldwide depictions of beauty. Socio-cultural investigations and feminist studies have revealed that concepts of beauty are continuously evolving (Patton, 2006). In accordance with fluctuating beauty ideals, the body can be physically adjusted in order to fit popular beauty ideals or cultural standards. For impressionable young women, there may be lingering pressure from media and their immediate social circles to look a certain way. Present studies reveal that cultural assimilation to Western standards of beauty regularly occurs in social orders that were non-Western and numerous indigenous societies have become imperilled by western social impacts (Kelly, Bulik & Mazzeo, 2011).

Subsequently, these popularized beauty standards that are present in all forms of media may influence how Africa female youth perceive themselves and may likewise incorporate convictions about how people appraise them. It is critical to comprehend the centrality of the indicators of beauty that female youth try to achieve, since these standards and goals may not be totally shallow in their impacts. Profound psychological implications for the person can ensue. Consequently, the value that young African women place on their physical appearance corresponding to their ideas of self will be explored in two ways: The first being on how they observe the influence of media in relation to themselves, and secondly, how they are psychologically influenced by media depictions of beauty. The relevance of this study is depicted in an account by Shelembe (2014). The researcher explained the confines of her own life as a young black female formerly from Kwa-Zulu Natal and living in Soweto, Johannesburg. The researcher puts forward the conflicting beauty standards that exist in a traditional setting in a more urban locale. Shelembe (2014) states that traditional beauty goals in KwaZulu-Natal, which is more customary, are inconsistent with the beauty ideals in

Soweto, which is more urban and metropolitan. The perception of beauty in the urban area rejects the appearance of overweight women, which has negative components on a young woman's perception of self. Local media portrayals of beauty cater to this view. The researcher comments that being overweight is opined to be an indication of sluggishness, while slimness is an indication of young imperativeness.

Contrastingly, local media and community in the more traditional setting of Kwa-Zulu Natal hold the opposite view. An overweight woman is seen as prolific, strong and affluent whilst a woman who is thin is thought to be either experiencing sickness or a lack of healthy sustenance. A similar opinion is held by Baturka, Hornsby and Schorling (2001), who stated that there are unlimited perspectives with respect to body-shape and beauty standards in various settings. In this study, UKZN is presumed to be a more contemporary setting than the rest of Kwa-Zulu Natal. Many students come from a traditional background and this study will additionally explore how local media's portrayal of beauty is perceived by young women both in a traditional and contemporary sense, and if this has bearing on the perception of self. Psychologically, the pressure to conform to beauty ideals set out by society and local media representations of certain body types may result in tumultuous mental strain, especially in diverse settings. This study addresses the psychological impact of the media's influence on one of the world's most vulnerable groups – African female university students.

1.3 Aims

The aim of this study is to explore the influential role played by the media in the way in which African female students perceive themselves.

1.4 Objectives

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore female students' perceptions of media influence.
2. To explore female students' self-perceptions in relation to media presentations of beauty.
3. To explore the influence of media on female students' confidence and self-esteem.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. What are female students' perceptions of media influence?

2. What are female students' self-perceptions in relation to media presentations of beauty?
3. What is the influence of media on female students' confidence and self-esteem?

1.6 Conclusion

The intention of this chapter was to present an overview of the study. A problem statement has been provided, highlighting the intention to uncover the connection between media influence and the perceptions of African female university students. The focus of the study is on university students who are exposed to media's standards of beauty through various media platforms. The Media Systems Dependency Theory and Ecological Systems Theory have been noted as the theoretical frameworks which guide the study. Finally, the aims, objectives and the research questions that the study intends to answer have been included.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The media forms part of the society and has great influence on how people view the world, those around them, as well as themselves. The increased presence of media in people's everyday lives makes it a powerful tool to disseminate information and raise ideas which people absorb and hence become a part of them. This implies that the media plays a part in how people are socialized into thinking and behaving in certain ways (Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). One of the ideas that has been largely spread by the media is the "ideal" way women should look, which highlights certain features that women must have in order to be perceived as beautiful, including a certain body size and shape, type of hair, and skin color. Perloff (2014) states that in most cases, these features do not resonate with how African women look and rather resemble the features of Western women.

The media presentation of Western women's physical features as the ideal beauty for women allows Western women to be confident and have positive perceptions about themselves. However, for African women who do not necessarily embody these features, it may become challenging to share the same sentiments (Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). In order to attain power, some women change their behavior and appearance to conform to the ideal image in the society (Charles, 2003) and this is the image that is presented in media. To obtain the ideal appearance, African women get involved in the behavior of skin lightening, spending money on expensive hair and taking weight loss concoctions. According to Charles (2003), the act of changing one's appearance symbolizes low self-esteem or self-hate. It can also be due to pressure that comes from society to conform to the set standards of beauty.

2.2 The influence of media in society

Media exerts influential power in society through its ability to broadcast information instantly and bring ideas to the society. With this power, media is able to influence people and direct them to think and do things in a certain way. Since media is invasively part of people's daily lives during leisure time and even working time, it is one of the primary social agents in many societies as it conveys ideas, values, norms, attitudes, and behaviours that socialize and create a social reality for those who use them (López-Guimerà, Levine, Sánchez-Carracedo & Fauquet, 2010). In support of this, Maier, Gentile, Vogel and Kaplan (2014) point out that people can learn from the media, even if they did not intend to engage in learning, because of

the powerful influence the media possesses in the formation of attitudes and beliefs about the world.

One of the influential socializing roles that has been played by the media is determining the ideal way in which women should look in order to be considered beautiful, which involves having a certain skin tone, hair texture and length, and body shape. According to King and Niabaly (2013), throughout history, women have been pressurised to follow Eurocentric standards of beauty which were determined by the dominant culture of that time. This is enduring for Black women who are continuously being compared to White women who are perceived to possess this ideal of beauty. This standard of beauty is being portrayed in the different media platforms such as television, radio, magazines and billboards. According to Perloff (2014), it is also true in other social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram and Pinterest where there is instant creation and sharing of user-generated messages, as well as immediate interaction with other users via access of hand-held devices. Since the media is one of the major socializing agents, women are influenced to re-evaluate their appearance and are pressured to conform to the ideal of beauty that is portrayed in various media.

2.3 Traditional Media and Social Media impact on self-perception

Mass media, especially traditional marketing, and its effects on how males and females perceive themselves has been investigated by a range of researchers (Kilbourne, 2010; Wykes & Gunter, 2005; Tiggemann, 2003). The quote: “Glossy images of flawlessly beautiful and extremely thin women” by Kilbourne (1999) is an illustration of one of numerous mentions in the collected works that focus on the notion of the ‘ideal of beauty’. The ideal of beauty is documented by researchers (Tiggemann, 2003; Wykes & Gunter, 2005) as being the facilitator to promoting body discontent amongst women. This can consequently bring about self-destructive approaches and activities that can be the causality of dietary illnesses, for example anorexia and bulimia (Bissell & Rask, 2010).

There are frequently strong negative connotations with traditional advertising and its representation of the ideal of beauty (Myers & Biocca, 1992), especially with print advertisements. Jean Kilbourne is an American scholar who has directed all-embracing investigations in the field of traditional media advertisements and their consequences for women’s self-perception. Kilbourne’s works assess how women are represented in

advertising and how this concept of 'ideal female beauty' is entirely unachievable. In her most recent work, Kilbourne (2010) deliberated on how the representation of women in traditional advertising has deteriorated, stating that negative emotions and negative self-perceptions are unavoidable when comparing oneself with media images which are grounded on complete perfection, thus significantly impacting female confidence.

Research relating to how conventional media can influence a woman's self-perception is explored by Tiggemann (2003) as well. An exploratory examination was steered to investigate the connection regarding media exposure and body image discontent by observing both TV and Magazine portrayals of beauty simultaneously. Tiggemann (2003) distinguished that print commercials provoked the participants' opinion on the 'thin ideal' and had an unswerving impression on body image fulfilment. In this regard, internalization of the thin ideal determined the effects of magazine publicity on body image discontent. Grabe, Hyde and Ward (2008) further led literature that focused on investigating the connection between the media and body image concerns amongst women. Grabe et al. (2008) intended to establish how long-lasting and constant is the connection concerning mass media and body image. The authors determined that media acquaintance is associated with overall body discontent amongst women, which can induce the increase of investment into body enhancing products and lead to dietary abnormalities in an attempt to match the beauty ideals portrayed in the media.

A comparable study to Grabe et al.'s (2008) was completed by Smeesters and Mandal (2006). The research paper studied how acquaintance with thin or heavy images of models portrayed in the media can influence women's self-confidence. The authors explained that individuals have an ordinary habit of appraising their own characteristics and capabilities by contrasting themselves with other individuals. Smeesters and Mandal (2006) resolved that women equate themselves impulsively with the models they view in advertisements and this can have an undesirable impression on how women observe themselves. Similarly, it can have a different implication if readers perceive that they are able to accomplish the thin ideal by buying the magazine. Wykes and Gunter (2005) point out that women who view advertisements presenting good-looking women rate themselves low in appeal in contrast to women who viewed less good-looking women in advertisements.

Although traditional media still has a large stake in the corporate world, social media and the rise of online networking sites cannot be undermined. Similarly, advertisements have their

own place in the online world and the popularity of social media suggests that it has exceeded its initial resolve of being an individual communication network between friends, associates and family to becoming an indispensable tactical business implement. As indicated by the Search Engine Journal (SEJ), 93% of organizations presently utilize online forms of communication in order to effectively increase new users and produce positive leads (SEJ, 2013). As opposed to conventional media, at the core of social media is the sanctioning of image sharing and linking with friends, which shows how social media is heavily reliant on associations with others. In this way, the common threads still apply with regard to self-perception difficulties that one may experience after viewing unrealistic beauty standards set out by business advertisements. Another factor may come into play as well, which is that of comparing oneself to images of family and friends who are connected through social media platforms (Wallis, 2013).

2.4 South African Youth and Media Culture

African female university students are a part of the leading youth demographic in South Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2016). Youth as an explanatory classification is comprehended to be a social construct, a social gathering that is established by categorical individuals who are normally distinguished by particular physical and biological attributes (Smith, 2011). Age is the defining factor of whether or not one belongs to the category of youth. However, a significant part of the measures for having a place within this gathering depends on consumption habits and on those social articulations that reveal liveliness, for example the clothing that is worn; the hairstyle that is sported; and the media one consumes. There are different outlooks regarding what ages should be incorporated into the classification of youth. For instance, both the National Youth Commission Act of 1996 and South Africa's National Youth Policy for 2015-2020 characterize 'youth' as beginning from the age of 14 years old until the age of 35. On the other hand, the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) (2016) characterizes 'youth' as beginning from the age of 16 until the age of 24. In perceiving the difficulties of characterizing what is implied by 'youth', South Africa's National Youth Policy maintains that while the age group of 14-35 years is widespread, this characterization is believed to be comprehensive of youngsters' common encounters such as emotional fluctuations throughout their life conditions as they transition from adolescence to adulthood.

The exposure to media is a progression (cultivated and dictated by more extensive social, political and financial factors) that is a type of social creation and dissemination. Relating to media can only occur if one can associate with the creation, guidelines and portrayal of media proponents- the 'circuit of culture' as extended by Hall (1997). Dolby (2001) conducted an ethnographic investigation into learning, race and self-perception amongst South African youth. Although the study focused on high-school learners, it does provide indications on precursors that may present how media affects youth, as well as how it informs the ideas they have about themselves. Dolby's exploration distinguished that young people slanted towards international famous people, and American superstars particularly. They likewise will relate to international clothing brands, for example, Nike and Reebok. In terms of classroom culture, i.e. the physical representations that provide insight into the feelings and perceptions of students, it was found that learners display their preferences and encounters with celebrity culture by speckling their course books and pencil bags with images of their preferences. Dolby (2001) originated the idea that classroom culture depicts that adolescents are not indifferent recipients of commercially created mainstream media, but rather they cautiously handpick, form and consolidate distinctive products of mainstream media to shape their own characters.

Smith (2011) alludes to the 2002 Trend Youth Study which was a statistical survey study that was initiated to give South African advertisers an expanded comprehension of the nation's youthful purchasers. It was fundamentally focused on national youth themes and assessed them in comparison to the worldwide market. The sample population comprised 2000 eighteen to twenty-four-year-old males and females of all race gatherings from South Africa's three significant urban areas of Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg. The study revealed that inconsistencies exist in the ways of life of young people and stand out from worldwide patterns. For instance, there was proof of prominent consumption being pre-arranged before arranging for money-related security. This is a conspicuous difference when compared to the ambience of careful expenditure that confers to the previous generation of South Africans (Smith, 2011). When compared to the previous generation, the Trend Youth Study emphasized that youth are explorers and inventive editors of their own characters. The examination further expresses that youngsters are indiscriminate and have worldwide palettes that incorporate a taste for diverse music, style and media. This new translation supports the possibility of the evenness of social personalities and it explicitly features the idea that youngsters have the decision or alternative of adjusting to local and worldwide media trends

(Smith, 2011). Even though this is the case, exposure to international media patterns does not limit the fact that South African youth are the offspring of the struggle generation and are the result of vast cultural and political change.

2.5 Students' Media Preference and Consumption Effects

Young people utilize online sites recurrently since they have arrived at a phase in life when they have a great portion of recreation time by themselves (Larson, 1990). Arnett (2007) states that it is normal that students would be substantial web-based social users because they may be quite a distance away from family and are liberated from parental home supervision. They are additionally at a phase in life when they are attempting to build up their own characters and identify with themselves (Arnett, 2007). In a study by Wallis (2013), the social media preference of females aged 15-24 and the impact this has on various aspects of self was investigated. It was discovered that the measure of time spent on social media sites had no effect on social comparison practices. Nevertheless, the number of times social media accounts were accessed every day caused an impact on social comparison practices. By and large, participants checked their internet based accounts 5 to 15 times each day (Wallis, 2013). The more participants checked their online accounts, the higher the probability that they would compare themselves to what they saw. The comparisons occurred between themselves and fashion models, celebrities and friends, irrespective of what extent of time is spent on their social account. Akakandelwa and Walubita (2017) are of the opinion that the motivation that drives young people to join social media websites is to share data; talk about school and university material or themes; and to form a network to finish schoolwork assignments or term courses. Online sites additionally give helpful methods for cooperation amongst colleagues and the exchange of information amongst classmates. According to Tandoc, Ferrucci and Duffy (2015), university life can be a distressing experience attributable to the heavy workloads and examinations, hence social sites act as a gateway to decreasing pressure and stress for students. It is normal that students would effectively take an interest in internet social sites to encounter connectedness and bliss (Eid & Al-Jabri, 2016). Furthermore, students invest energy in internet sites to stay in contact with old companions and to fortify bonds with associates. By utilizing internet based social sites, Ellison (2007) states that people keep up and increment their interpersonal networks. Sharma and Shukla (2016) contend that youngsters are heavily reliant on web-based social networking on the grounds that the fast-paced intensity of a changing and dynamic world does not permit individuals to keep in contact by physical means.

Though most analyses on web-based media have demonstrated that involvement in internet based endeavours progresses one's social growth, others have displayed the opposing view. Yeboah and Ewur (2014) argue that internet sites such as WhatsApp diverted students' attention away from finishing their coursework; harmed their language aptitudes, for example, spelling and sentence structure; and distressed their attentiveness in class. Furthermore, Sharma and Shukla (2016) additionally found that students' scholarly execution was antagonistically influenced by online networking. Students confronted difficulties emerging from their continuous utilization of web-based sites, which incorporated the necessity to attend to personal messages quickly; contact with phony or unfettered information or media material; versatile availability; and addictive-like practices which disrupted their studies (Ahad & Lim, 2014).

Studies that endorse the utilization of social media convey that web-based social networking sites support correspondence that offers continuous updating, strengthening, feelings of belongingness and amiability, happiness, fast data sharing and money saving advantages (Bere, 2012; O'Hara, 2014). In terms of utilizing social sites, studies from Ghana (Mingle and Adams, 2015), Kenya (Ogaji, 2017) and Zambia (Akakandelwa and Walubita, 2017) initiated that the vast majority of students utilized WhatsApp as the most commonly utilized online site, shadowed by Facebook and Twitter. Ahad and Lim (2014) suggest that WhatsApp is popular due to its ability to offer real-time and ongoing messaging or correspondence, including the simplicity of sharing data (for example contact items) or media content (for example sound, video records, pictures and area information).

Akakandelwa and Walubita (2018) advocated that a large proportion of Zambian students in their study expended between half-an-hour to an hour daily on social platforms. As stated by O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson (2011), The American Academy of Paediatrics (AAP) characterize time expended on social networking sites (SNS) into three classes: the first being high usage (over 2 hours); the second normal use (30 minutes - 2 hours); and the third low usage (under 30 minutes). The reason behind students utilizing social sites for half-an-hour to an hour each day can be attributed to their requisites for obtaining new data and staying in contact with companions, as well as for schoolwork (Akakandelwa and Walubita, 2017). This conclusion is coherent with Sharma and Shukla (2016) who found that Indian students used web-based sites as a less expensive online option for having conversations with friends, staying in contact with family and for distributing images, documents and videos.

Akakandelwa and Walubita (2017) report that the greater part of the sample of students wound up saying "only a couple of more minutes" when utilizing online social sites; checked their sites in advance of accomplishing schoolwork; felt that their efficiency deteriorated due to social sites; neglected to eliminate time expended on social media; heard undesirable remarks from others about their utilization of web-based sites; and experienced stress because of social sites. Albeit just 22.4% of sampled students felt dependent on web-based networking sites, these perceptions amongst students were reminiscent of web fixation related practices (Sultan, 2014). As such, the students were recognized to be dependent on social media. Lee et al. (2009) emphasized that dependency on social sites has unfavourable impacts. Unfettered (compulsive) internet utilization amongst undergraduates destabilized regulation and control of self, and was related with pessimism.

Encountering different web-based sites has additionally been related with positive results, for example, expanded correspondence abilities, social association and even specialized abilities (Ito, 2009). Online social media users remain on the site for extended periods of time at low-cost (Sultan, 2014). Thus, web-based social networking users know about what is happening in the lives of loved ones. Furthermore, students can make new companions and trade thoughts by means of online sites (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Web-based activity cultivates specialized aptitudes, for example, the capacity to make online gatherings, interchange videos, documents, pictures, webcasts and sites, as well as creating imaginative and melodic accomplishments (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Sultan (2014) contends that online associations foster a setting that creates less restlessness than in-person gatherings do and are useful for socially on-edge people who will, in general, be apprehensive in up close and personal connections.

2.6 Media influence on body image

The first feature to look at in relation to the ideal of beauty that has been portrayed in the media is body shape. Body shape is a significant issue for many women in society as in most cases, women find it hard to measure up to the standard that is portrayed in the media. According to Slevec and Tiggemann (2010), the media's universal broadcast of unrealistic standards of female attractiveness has caused socio-cultural models to hold it responsible for the elevated levels of body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction can be explained as a "subjective disapproval of one's own body shape or form and the belief that it is unattractive to others" (Ferguson, 2013, p. 20). Body dissatisfaction can lead to low self-esteem in women

who are not able to maintain the desired body image, and may further lead to taking harmful measures to try and achieve this image. In light of this, López-Guimerà et al. (2010) state that in a study, girls who regularly read articles about diets and weight loss-related issues had a six times more probability of engaging in the riskiest unhealthy weight control behaviours such as using laxatives, taking diet pills, using diuretics and vomiting, as compared to other girls who did not frequently read fashion and glamour magazines. Furthermore, Perloff (2014) states that experiment scores indicated that exposure to images of the thin-ideal elevates women's discontent with their bodies and negative affect. This clearly indicates the influential role played by the media in body image and what women are willing to do as a means of conforming to the ideal of beauty.

A study by Davison and McCabe (2005) draws a few fascinating discoveries. The main finding is that in their exploration, women are less happy with their present self-perception and stress progressively over social physique simultaneously. This implies that women are progressively worried about how others assess their appearance in an adverse connotation. Another finding demonstrates that women additionally prefer to take part in comparing appearances. Furthermore, the exploration proposes that age distinction assumes a noteworthy job in fulfilment with regard to self-perception: people around their 30s to 40s are less happy with their present bodies. Grabe, Ward and Hyde (2008) conducted another investigation which proposed that the media, which portrays the flimsy perfect self-perception, is without a doubt connected to women's disappointment with their own bodies and contributes to their high interest in appearance. Besides, this exploration likewise demonstrates that women who have been exposed to thin-perfect media would score higher on measures that evaluate purging and bulimia. Each one of those indications are the consequences of women seeking after the ideal self-perception.

Paquette and Raine (2004) recommend that the media has ground-breaking and unconscious effects on women's view of self-perception and this was interceded by women's fearlessness and self-confidence, just as their associations with accomplices and other women was. Body disappointment does not solely happen with the youth, it additionally showed up amongst moderately aged women and mature women. Lewis and Cachelin (2001) recommend that moderately aged women have more drive for slenderness and disinhibited eating, contrasted with older women. Altogether, their exploration likewise shows that older women announced body disappointment and size that inclinations were similar to the more youthful women. In a

distinctive view, a few researchers found that females with diverse work or social roles have a more assorted recognition of body disappointment.

For instance, Swami, Steadman and Tovee (2009) proposed that track competitors have the most elevated body disappointment scores and the most noteworthy internalization of athletic media messages. This exploration infers that women who take an interest in leanness-advancing games as a rule have more elevated levels of body disappointment than females in different games or non-competitors. The risk of body disappointment has additionally been analysed by Mitchell, Davis and Crow (2001), who contend that depression might be a superior decision of being a prognostic marker of whether an individual has body disappointment. In addition, further research (Stice & Shaw, 2002) demonstrates the threat of body disappointment. It proposes that body disappointment will expand the hazard for bulimic pathology and subsequently, that counteraction and treatment mediations ought to be improved by concentrating on self-perception aggravations.

2.7 Media influence on skin tone and hair texture

Skin tone is another feature of appearance that is highlighted as an ideal of beauty in the media. Shankar and Subish (2016) maintain that media advertisements aim to create a hierarchy of values founded on the idea that fairness is an object of desire by trying to project the idea that fair skin is an essential requirement for professional and personal success. The notion of fair skin becomes a challenge to people who do not have this trait because unlike body shape which has healthier ways of achieving the desired weight such as exercising, a skin tone may be impossible to change in a healthy manner. As a solution to this problem, the media advertises creams which are stated to achieve a fair skin tone and according to Shankar and Subish (2016), these creams portray fairness as a desirable trait in countries where the majority populace has a dark complexion. This clearly shows how media actively constructs and distributes ideas that socialize people in the society to think and act in a certain manner.

Snares (1996) contends that black women have the challenge of addressing issues of race and portrayals about "good" and "bad" pictures of black women in order to decolonise the psyche in the impression of the body. Skin shading stays a marker of magnificence amongst many black women in South Africa. Right now, the lighter the skin composition, the more alluring a woman is seen to be (Motseki & Oyedemi, 2017). The ideal of beauty further involves the kind of hair women should have in order to meet society's standards of beauty. According to Thomas (2013), the description of beautiful hair in terms of Western standards is that it must

be long and straight, and this standard constructs a hair hierarchy with long straight hair at the top. This notion of hair beauty clearly favours Western women as African women's hair does not fit this description which, according to Thomas (2013), is usually dry, curled or tightly curled.

Consequently, African women chemically straighten their hair in an effort to measure up to this Western idea of beauty portrayed in the media (Thomas, 2013). Conforming to these standards of beauty poses a challenge to the identity of African women as their hair is a part of who they are. In this regard, Ellis-Hervey, Doss, Davis, Nicks and Araiza (2016) state that in all cultures, hair is a traditional standard to signify religion, marital status, social rank, age and other status symbols, and in Africa, wearing hair in a certain way symbolises these standards. African women who conform to the Western ideal of beauty may miss out on an opportunity to express their cultural standards, which are expressed through their hairstyles. Patton (2006) avers that hair is both a marker of race and excellence, and it is attached to organic, political and chronicled procedures. In South Africa, many black women have grasped the worldwide pattern of wearing weaves produced using synthetic or natural human hair (Oyedemi, 2016), which is related with class and a Western idea of excellent hair. Wearing weaves of Indian, Brazilian or Peruvian roots have become a wonder pattern in South Africa. Numerous famous females in South Africa advance common Brazilian and Peruvian weaves as the "new" search for a "beautiful" black African woman.

2.8 Internalization of Media that Influences Self-perception

As person-to-person communication prominence has expanded through time, numerous scientists are directing their concentration toward contemplating the associations that may exist between internet-based life impact and self-perception and dietary problems. Bell and Dittmar (2011) discovered that the introduction to thin 'body perfect' goals in the media is unequivocally identified with negative self-perception in young girls and women. Body disappointment is regularly corresponded with the drive for slenderness and the perfect body (Bell & Dittmar, 2011). The facts confirm that connection is not causation. Specialists propose that there is certifiably no immediate intention between web-based life and the development of negative self-perception and body disappointment, but instead it relies upon one's internalization of the material being exhibited. A few women internalize data, particularly with regard to self-perception, more than other women. Individuals who internalize data more than others are at an expanded danger of encountering negative self-

perception and body disappointment (Ridolfi et al., 2011). Women revealed being essentially progressively disappointed with their own bodies subsequent to reviewing exquisite and excellent pictures and messages than in the wake of surveying normal size or oversize ones (Yamamiya et al., 2005). A few women internalize data more than other women and everything relies upon how one deciphers the messages and pictures being introduced to them through social media communication. In spite of the fact that Yamamiya et al. distributed their work in 2005, Klein (2013) talks about how these speculations and cases are still valid in the present society.

Klein (2013) denotes how more young people are encountering repeated exposure to social media and the internet while additionally confronting the desire to become popular on various web-based sites. This is expanding their exposure to picture-based online life, for example, Instagram and Snapchat, which both use, post and offer pictures. This makes categories that focus principally on pictures and can add to the possibility that women need to appear just like what they see in photographs, particularly of famous people and well-known figures. Commonly, pictures are photo-shopped, artificially glamorized and furthermore, changed to flawlessness, particularly when they are of big names or for business use (Diller, 2011). These pictures are advancing standards dependent on women that do not exist in actuality, in light of the fact that their bodies are definitely adjusted through photo-shop. Hence, women are receiving and disguising false beliefs dependent on pictures that do not precisely speak to reasonable human bodies. Another significant perspective that adds to internalization is exhibited by Social Comparison Theory. People make social parallels with others when they are looking for data about how their bodies contrast in connection with the perfect body (Ridolfi et al. 2011). Ridolfi et al. (2011) portray how people make upward social correlations with people who are seen as predominant, for example celebrities, just as they make descending social correlations with individuals who are seen as being equivalent or lesser to the person. Women are more probable than men to encounter pressure from companions to accomplish the perfect body (Helfer & Warschburger, 2013). This can lead women to have more significant levels of internalization than others if their friends share the equivalent magnificence measures as them. Ridolfi et al. (2011) iterate that social correlation is essentially identified with body disappointment.

2.9 Psychological effects of social media on the desire for cosmetic surgery

In accordance with the expanding pattern of online use, there is an expanding number of youngsters having corrective surgeries, supposedly ascending from 17.2% in 2014 to 18.2% in 2017 according to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2017). Corrective medical procedures include the preservation, reclamation or upgrade of one's physical exterior through invasive and clinical techniques (Walker, Krumhuber, Dayan & Furnham, 2019). Cosmetic medical procedures contrast from reconstructive medical procedures since reconstructive surgery is done to re-establish capability or usual form. It is regularly performed on unusual conditions brought about by injury or contamination. Conversely, a corrective cosmetic medical procedure is performed on usual structures of the body and is performed to advance appearance (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2018).

Cosmetic medical procedures have developed into an undeniably well-known method for upgrading one's look, and is a business that is dynamically affected by mainstream society. For instance, the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Medical Procedures (2013) revealed an expansion in demands for medical procedures because of web-based social networking photograph sharing sites. Of the techniques prone to be mentioned because of web-based impact were rhinoplasty, Botox and facelifts, mentioning that youngsters might be impacted to experience corrective techniques by what they perceive on the web. Correspondingly, an investigation revealed that amongst cosmetic medical procedure patients, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram are being used in excess for the purposes of retrieving information on procedures, previous and post pictures and challenges (Sorice, Li, Gilstrap, Canales & Furnas, 2017).

The social and psychological variables that impact perspectives towards cosmetic medical procedures are yet to be completely investigated. In addition, there are a few factors that have been accounted for to anticipate a person's longing to experience cosmetic medical procedures. Steadfastly, body disappointment has been demonstrated to be a crucial inspirational factor for cosmetic medical procedures amongst both males and females (Sharp, 2018). Body disappointment relates to the adverse considerations that an individual has about their body. According to Grogan (2008) this includes sentiments of error between the real body shape and a perfect one. In actuality, females who were happy with their bodies were, to the least extent, liable to want substantial change (Lee, Damhorst & Ogle, 2009). It might be that body disappointment goes about as an arbiter between youthful women's impression of

their bodies and endeavours to change them. In that capacity, women who see themselves adversely may be disappointed with their appearance, which thus causes them to express a more prominent need for appearance altering procedures (Markey & Markey, 2005). Furthermore, confidence has been demonstrated to be identified with the probability of experiencing cosmetic medical procedures, with individuals who have lower confidence being fundamentally bound to require cosmetic surgeries (Furnham & Levitas, 2012). Self-esteem has been found to fundamentally increment in certain people due to them experiencing cosmetic medical procedures, proposing that their low-confidence works as a propelling component for choices initially (Walker et al., 2019).

Weight and diet are identified with the inspiration to have cosmetic medical procedures. For instance, heavier ladies want more restorative surgeries (Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009). Alternately, an analysis focusing on female college students discovered that a low Body Mass Index (BMI) anticipated a more noteworthy thought of cosmetic medical procedure (Swami, 2009). Accordingly, there might be an expanded inspiration for cosmetic medical procedures at either end of the BMI scale. Moreover, Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) has reliably been identified with the longing to experience cosmetic medical procedures (Walker et al., 2019). Amongst people who look for cosmetic improvements, it is assessed that 7- 15% have the disorder (Crerand, Franklin & Sarwer, 2006). People with BDD have a distraction with an envisioned or negligible deformity in their appearance (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Appearance altering methods, for example cosmetic medical procedures, are frequently considered as an approach to dispose of this apparent imperfection. Incomprehensibly, people with BDD who take part in corrective medical procedures as an approach to treat their BDD regularly show negative results, for example, being disappointed with the after-effect of the medical procedure; showing more significant intensities of psychopathology; and minimal confidence (Mulken, Bos, Uleman, Muris & Mayer, 2012). Corrective vanity treatments seldom settle the indications of BDD and can aggravate the effects. The assessment of the psychological state and inspiration of the patient in cosmetic treatment alternatives is elementary. Moreover, the media has an all-around recorded impact on the need for cosmetic medical procedures (Walker et al., 2019).

The socio-cultural premise acclaims that individuals learn beauty standards within the social and cultural setting (Walker et al., 2019). The media is one network through which

communications about beauty goals are depicted and this affects how females see themselves, as well as whether they take part in appearance-evolving procedures (Cafri, Yamamiya, Brannick & Thompson, 2005). For instance, more prominent psychological interest in physical looks and more prominent internalization of media communications of beauty are found to foresee increasingly propitious mentalities towards cosmetic medical procedures (Sarwer, Cash, Magee, Williams & Thompson, 2005). Correspondingly, media (corrective medical procedure allied and appearance associated TV shows and restorative medical procedure advertisements) and family and friends impact (companion discussions about appearance) foresee mentalities towards cosmetic medical procedures (Walker et al., 2019).

2.10 Psychological effects of media: Eating Disorders (ED)

The consideration of Eating Disorders (ED) in the Global Burden of Disease Study in 2013 added to their more prominent acknowledgment in the worldwide health network (Terhoeven et al., 2020). It has been proposed that ED will increment in non-high-risk populaces, for instance, those living in lower-and middle income countries (LMICs), because of continuous development, expansion and globalization (Pike, Hoek & Dune, 2014). One threat factor adding to the advancement of ED in high-income countries (HIC) is media contact, especially in young people who are increasingly defenceless against messages arranged by means of media that makes unreasonable self-perceptions a norm (Levine & Murnen, 2009). It is likely that media contact is additionally a significant risk factor in LMICs. A Tanzanian report initiated that expanded media contact such as through television and web access, and acquaintance to HIC culture, anticipated ED side-effects (Eddy, Hennessy & Thompson-Brenner, 2007).

One likely fundamental instrument for media influencing ED signs in LMICs is changes in self-perception (for example self-perception of body and body ideals) because of the appropriation of HIC beauty goals (Terhoeven et al., 2020). A review was conducted by Toselli, Rinaldo and Gualdi-Russo (2016) and Szabo and Allwood (2006) that demonstrated that young women and women who live in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) favoured a heavier body, contrasted with African women who had relocated to HICs. The researchers stated that media contact might scatter HIC beauty beliefs in SSA, causing variations in self-perception (Toselli et al., 2016). The variations would include youthful African women moving from heavier beauty ideals to a slenderer beauty ideal. Such a modification may stimulate more prominent body dis-fulfilment, which is thud perceived as a crucial factor for the initiation

and upkeep of ED (Franko & Striegel-Moore, 2018). The tracking of ED in Africa is still in its early stages. Van Hoeken, Burns and Hoek (2016) elaborate that bulimia nervosa (BN) in youthful African women has been evaluated to be 0.87%, which is in the range detailed for youthful ladies in HICs and Latin America (Striegel-Moore, Dohm & Kraemer, 2003; Kolar, Rodriguez, Chams & Hoek, 2016). Terhoeven et al. (2020) found that ED symptoms were rare in rural Burkino Faso. However, it might be problematic in future years since respondents from their study were discontented with their bodies and felt that they did weigh more than they would like to weigh.

2.11 Psychological effects of social media on mood and self-esteem

A few investigations have proclaimed that a connection exists between excessive online networking and low state of mind (Pantic, Damjanovic & Todorovic, 2012; Primack, Shensa & Escobar-Viera, 2017). It has been suggested that individuals with psychosis might be especially powerless against distrustful thoughts after utilizing web-based social networking sites (Berry, Emsley, Lobban & Bucci, 2018). Case reports reveal that social media intensifies manifestations related with serious emotional wellness issues (Veretilo & Billick, 2012). Berry et al. (2018) argue that web-based socializing may evoke prevailing online social correlations- that is, looking at oneself in a manner that is unattractive when compared to other people, which prompts antagonistic emotions. Social comparisons guide the development of social ranks (SRs), whereby people contrast themselves with others based on social appeal. Ostergaard (2017) advocated that people who are acquainted with mental medical issues might be bound to be affected by the social contrasts that internet social sites evoke due to negative subjective inclination. Appel et al. (2016) point that negative social correlations on social networking sites are related with sorrow and low confidence. Moreover, Verduyn, Ybarra, Resibois and Kross (2017) stressed that dynamic online networking use can upgrade emotional prosperity, while passive online networking decreases emotional prosperity.

2.12 Conclusion

Media has an undeniable impact in various areas of the society. Literature in this chapter indicates that the media has influence in women's standards of beauty. These standards of beauty are internalized and thus influence how women perceive themselves. African women have been noted to be the least represented in the ideal of beauty presented in media. The

psychological effects have been demonstrated which include desire for cosmic surgery, eating disorders, and effects on mood and self-esteem.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 The Media Systems Dependency Theory

The Media System Dependency (MSD) theory was created by Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976) during the 1970s in light of weak effects models of mass correspondence. MSD recommends that the subjective, social and perceptive outcomes of media use are built on features of people and their social condition (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). The theory is founded on classical sociological work which postulates that media and their spectators ought to be considered with regard to larger social frameworks. Individual mental qualities and properties of media subjects are viewed as significant, but however not adequate to completely clarify the nature and starting point of media impacts in society (Ball-Rokeach, 1988). With an ecological viewpoint, MSD elects to elucidate power associations amongst different social actors. The theory centres on reliance: a relationship wherein the accomplishment of objectives by one set of individuals is dependent upon the assets of another set of individuals (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976).

Media impact is viewed as acquired from the ownership of rare information properties which dictate the limit with respect to information gathering/constructing, preparing and scattering (Ball-Rokeach, 1998). The power structures focused on by MSD works at various degrees of investigation. The media framework has a two-way asset reliance relation with people (on a smaller scale, micro-level); gatherings and associations (meso-level); and other social frameworks (macro-level). As per Ball-Rokeach (1985), the most important macro-level media reliance connections in present day industrialist social orders are those with the financial and political frameworks. These relations are viewed as moderately symmetric as every one of the three frameworks depends on the other two for its endurance (Luo, 2018). The political framework, for example, relies upon media to strengthen social qualities and standards, bolster the support of order and help mobilize residents. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will evaluate the participants' responses to measure if this is in line with the objectives of the study.

Media, conversely, depends on political establishments for legitimation, legal and authoritative insurance, along with a steady stockpile of important story material. A significant part of the MSD texts investigates the indicators and outcomes of smaller scale relations (micro) (Ball-Rokeach, 2008). The force of individual media reliance is affected by large-scale factors (macro). It is additionally influenced by the structural constancy within the

general public and the degrees of vulnerability experienced by spectators (Ball- Rokeach, 1998; Luo, 2018). As the unpredictability of exploring a social situation expands, media takes on a more extensive assortment of significant roles. MSD contemplates individual dissimilarities in demographic and mental attributes to the degree that they decide on individual objectives, perceived usefulness of assets and access to information (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993). The study will evaluate how the media affects young African women through the application of MSD Theory.

The theory contributes a conceptual typology of dependence measurements reliant on the idea of objectives achieved by people through media use. Under that characterization, significant information objectives incorporate comprehension of one's social condition; direction with a view to important and successful activity; solitary and furthermore, social types of play (Ball-Rokeach, Rokeach & Grube, 1984). Reliance on media for those reasons has appeared to foresee an assortment of mentalities and practices, together with selective exposure, newspaper readership, item acquisitions contribution to public dialogue, political observations and voting choices (Davies, 2009). Inspecting the function of online media, MSD takes a locus that gives the impression that it is nearer to social constructivism than to innovative determinism. Computerized times are viewed as essential inside the set-up of the full-scale structure of interrelated social frameworks (Ball-Rokeach, 1998).

Indeed, even on the internet, people are set in asymmetric reliance relations that benefit manufacturers over purchasers. Simultaneously, the theory takes into account the likelihood that individuals who have the fundamental assets may take on the role of content creators (Yang et al., 2015). With the initiation of new communication advancements, micro MSD relations are moving towards a different form as audiences engage in the creation and broadcasting of information (Loges & Jung, 2001). In this procedure of renegotiating reliance structures, legacy media have prevailed with regard to holding onto their customary impact (Kelly, 2008). Internet reliance and associated constructs have been utilized by researchers as an ideal method to clasp the significance and setting of utilization patterns (Melton & Reynolds, 2007). Media Systems Dependency relations are relied upon to decide both one's media consumption and the resulting impacts on mentalities and conduct (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, 1998).

Consumers depending intensely on a source for the satisfaction of individual objectives will encounter more noteworthy impacts, regardless of whether their exposure is restricted. News

perusing, for example, has been found to deliver diverse psychological reactions in individuals who report comparative exposure time yet dissimilar reliance levels (De Boer & Velthuijsen, 2001). In their extensive MSD field study, Ball-Rokeach et al. (1984) exhibit that reliance patterns, in actuality, foresee selective exposure. Research by Pinkleton and Austin (2001) has affirmed that media importance measures have more noteworthy legitimacy and more grounded connections to efficacy compared with media usage. Media Systems Dependency Theory postulates that there are various manners by which people become reliant on media in order to assist them in associating with their social world. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleu (1976) mention that there is a scope of the categories of reliance which encompasses the need to comprehend one's social domain,; the need to conduct one's self definitively and viably in that domain; and the requirement for escape from everyday issues and strains. Media assists people to generate thoughts on their social domain, and that of social media is no different. An example is that of secondary school pupils who are attracted to individuals who think as they do or who have had comparable encounters. Pupils will, in general, sort themselves out into factions or social gatherings to communicate and connect with the individuals who are socially like them (Moran & Gossieaux, 2010).

Print and visual communication media in social situations assist people in the same groups of friends to arrive at comparative decisions about their general surroundings. People with a similar group of friends will generally have comparative enjoyments that must be satisfied. Social media at that point impacts media reliance in order to satisfy the requirement for information on others who are similar (Jackob, 2010). Ball-Rokeach (1998) postulate that Media Systems Dependency Theory propositions a necessary relationship amidst crowds, media and the greater social framework as it predicts that people rely upon media information to address certain issues and accomplish certain objectives, but conjectures that the individual does not need to rely upon the different kinds of media similarly.

3.2 Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1989) developed his Ecological Systems Theory by attempting to portray and grasp the concept of human improvement within the framework of the associations that form the person's condition. According to Bronfenbrenner's fundamental theory (2002), the environment is confined to four stratum of structures which interface in a multifaceted mode and can mutually impact and be affected by the person's progression. He subsequently incorporated a fifth stratum that includes the element of time. The Ecological Systems Theory

can be used to depict the progression of an individual and is particularly reasonable for portraying the inconsistent systems that contribute to the forming of opinions and perceptions of individuals. All of the four system layers are discussed below (Bronfenbrenner, 2002).

3.2.1. Microsystem

Bronfenbrenner (1989) emphasizes the possible criticalness for the development of the individual qualities of people in their prompt condition, which is what has contributed to the principal significance of the microsystem. The microsystem is portrayed as the amalgamation of activities, occupations and social associations experienced by a growing individual in a particular setting with well-defined physical and material features and comprising various individuals with specific characteristics of aura, character and structures of conviction (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This layer shapes structures with which an individual has immediate interaction, wherein the effects between the individual that is growing and these structures are bi-directional. The individual is affected and influenced by the microsystem. For this study's situation, it would be the closest condition that the student is in contact with and plays a direct role in how they see themselves and, additionally, how they perceive media (Berk, 2000). Paquette and Ryan (2001) decipher Bronfenbrenner's contemplations and attest to the interactions between individuals at this level happening in two distinct manners – from the student and towards the student. For example, a student's parental support structure and academic mentors affect their feelings and behaviour. Nevertheless, the student can similarly affect the parental support structure and academic mentors' feelings and behaviour. Bronfenbrenner terms this phenomenon a 'bi-directional effect' and he raises the point that such associations occur from the standpoint of equality. From the beginning, the student's association with others is dyadic or two-fold and as development progresses, the student can manage more synchronous intelligent associations (Puroila and Karila 2001).

3.2.2 Mesosystem

The mesosystem comprises the associations between microsystems, as well as the course of effect between the student and each configuration within the microsystem, which is bi-directional and incorporates bi-directional effects between these various configurations (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). Paquette and Ryan (2001) portray the mesosystem in a way that describes it as a layer which delivers the relationship between the students' microsystems, for instance - the relationship between the academic mentor and the parental support structure. An instance of the mesosystem of a university can be found in the associations and

components between two of its microsystems, students and the parental support structure. Parental presumptions about the academic and extra-curricular accomplishments of their children who are enrolled in an academic institution can consistently create an effective condition and climate of the university experience. Unreasonably extraordinary requests and reduced versatility for dissatisfaction can create an association between parent and student that is characterized by burden and fear. This dynamic, as a representative of the mesosystem, impacts students' involvement with their academic activities in various hasty and atypical means. This comprises, for example, the student's behaviour in the academic environment, the pressure they feel to perform well in their academic endeavours, and may dictate the actions of academic institutions in disallowing parents' access to the students' academic accomplishments, such as their results (Penn, 2005).

3.2.3 Exosystem

The exosystem addresses the greater social system and incorporates events, conceivable outcomes, decisions and methodologies over which the advancing individual has no influence. The exosystem, as such, applies a uni-directional effect that clearly, or by suggestion, impacts the developing person. The exosystem of an academic institution might be engaged with structures such as instructive rules, budgetary issues, government request, and nearby catastrophes (Harkonen, 2003). The description stimulates a recognition that different conditions where the individual is present but not involved in many circumstances may be under scrutiny simultaneously. The probe is on whether or not the description can infer that while the individual is not an individual from any condition hitherto, the associations between the circumstances would form his/her exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2002).

3.2.4 Macrosystem

The macrosystem can be speculated as the social plan of an assumed culture, sub-division or general social background and contains the general case of characteristics, conviction structures, lifestyles, customs and resources introduced in that society. This system is usually well-thought-out to apply a uni-directional effect upon not simply the individual, but the scope of micro-, meso- and exosystems as well. The macrosystem of an academic institution is epitomized not simply in the social, political and money-related environment of the close by community, but is included in that of the nation. Bronfenbrenner (2002) re-hashes that the social and hypothetical models that are typical for the macrosystem are progressed, beginning

with one age then onto the following by the strategies for different social foundations like family, school, workplace and institutes that moderate the techniques of socialization. Berk (2000) asserts that the macrosystem is the furthestmost stratum for the student. It has no specific structure however, as it embraces inside it the social characteristics and laws. The impact of the macrosystem can be seen in each and every stratum. Saarinen et al. (1994) express that the impact of the macrosystem will regularly be seen in the wake of making assessment amongst youngsters, encountering youth in different social settings. Correspondingly, the environmental factors of a student, their exposure to media, their condition at home and their childhood will straightforwardly influence their impression of themselves.

3.2.5 Chronosystem

The chronosystem addresses a time-sensitive estimation that impacts the movement of all degrees of the common structures. The chronosystem can imply both short-and long stretch time estimations of the individual through the range of their future, similarly as the socio-recorded time estimation of the macrosystem in which the individual lives. The chronosystem of an academic institution may be addressed by both the regular and year-to-year developmental changes that occur in its student population, academic personnel, curricular choices and so forth. Subsequently, the challenges that come about with regard to media perception and self-identity amongst the student population can differ from age to age over the course of the activity of the academic institution (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

3.3 Conclusion

Social media is turning into a famous outlet for people and is a distinct advantage for current correspondence. It additionally takes into consideration ceaseless access and introduction to various kinds of media, for example, television, magazines, promotions, celebrities, and so on. Numerous organizations that fall under these kinds of media have their own social media accounts that connect users to their sites. Consequently, online life takes into account consistent connections with a wide range of all sorts of media. Media frequently depicts unattainable beauty norms through pictures, advertisements and articles. These benchmarks are normally focused on females and disclose to them how they should view themselves and how to be acknowledged by society, which can result in a risky impact. These beauty guidelines are frequently unattainable and advance ill-fated thinness, impeccable body image and flawless physical highlights. The media can impact on a female both in terms of their

physical appearance and also in terms of their capability in the corporate world. For an African female, it is vital to be aware of oneself and secure in who one is so that negative perceptions would be dealt with internally, instead of through self-harm tactics.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a description of the research procedure. It provides information concerning the strategy that was utilized in performing this study, as well as a justification for the utilization of this method. The chapter likewise depicts the different phases of the exploration, which incorporates the choice of respondents, the information assortment process and the procedure of information analysis. The chapter discusses the role of the investigator in subjective research corresponding to thematic analysis. The chapter closes with a discussion of credibility and trustworthiness in subjective research and examines the manner by which these two prerequisites were met in the present investigation.

4.2 Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative research method informed by the interpretive paradigm which sought to explore and generate subjective knowledge and give an in-depth understanding of why and how things happen (Babbie, 2015). Qualitative research is based on the interpretation of experience and the meaning that is attached to it (Walters & Freeman, 2010). This is fitting for small sample studies that cannot be evaluated or broken down numerically (Alzahrani & Bach, 2014). The qualitative research strategy is reasonable for this investigation since it is fitting to contemplate unquantifiable information articulations, for example, motivation, discernments and behaviour of an investigation phenomenon (Stebbins, 2001). With the aim of this investigation, it is ideal to embrace a qualitative strategy as it permits broad conversation with an in-depth look into participants' perceptions, which is best communicated under the qualitative research technique. Qualitative research is described as seeing a few parts of public activity and its strategies, which (generally) create words instead of numbers as information (Patton & Cochran, 2002). Qualitative research inspects genuine circumstances to create narrative depictions and involves the explanatory clarification of an idea (Alzahrani & Bach, 2014). Qualitative research utilizes a sensible technique to comprehend a phenomenon in its normal state (real-life settings), where the investigator accepts a subjective position towards the discoveries from the investigation (Patton & Cochran, 2002). Qualitative research is utilized when human factors, for example, convictions, motivations, outlooks and discernments are widely examined, which cannot be broken down quantitatively.

Another purpose behind embracing the qualitative technique is that it affords the investigator the chance to create a total and precise depiction of a research theme or interest, which does not limit the contributions or the reactions of its participants. Moreover, this investigation utilized the qualitative technique since it provides a cavernous meaning to the investigation. Therefore, the qualitative research strategy gives space for investigation and understanding an essential social issue (Cresswell, 2014). For this investigation, the qualitative technique permitted the investigation and comprehension of the participants' thought processes and perceptions of themselves after consuming media content. Essentially, for clear research discoveries, the issues identified with motivation, enjoyment and recognition cannot be quantified. Rather, looking for opinions, directing exploration, posing inquiries through meetings and questionnaires, an audit of cultural communal observation and acknowledgment of a phenomenon are crucial in picking up information.

The chosen methodology benefited this investigation in the following ways: It gave a superior comprehension of the way in which individuals look at the idea of media imagery and message, inspecting the ideas of similarity and differences towards their own selves. This is chiefly on the grounds that people are exposed to various types of media which frequently gives them encounters to clarify the messages and images compared to their own views, particularly towards themselves. This investigation gives a normal setting of students' behaviour, with the semi-structured interviews being held in the university location (Howard College Campus) amongst college students distinguished as the research focal point of this investigation. Moreover, Creswell (2014) depicted the adaptability of qualitative research as an additional preferred position, since information accumulated is at the most cooperative time for study participants, particularly as the investigation engaged with participants one-on-one.

4.3 Location of the Study

The area of investigation is the Howard College Campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The Campus is arranged in the waterfront city of Durban, in KwaZulu-Natal, near the downtown area of Durban (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2020). The Howard College Campus accommodates students within the Colleges of Social Science, Engineering, Law and Applied Human Sciences (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2020). The institution is pertinent to the objectives of the investigation and above all, the decision of the investigation area cannot be detached from the approach that it gave simple access to participants. Some portion of this

investigation embraced purposive sampling because of constrained time and assets (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). Since the investigation is especially focused on college students, there is an imaginable chance that UKZN (Howard Campus) female students may impart a characteristic understanding that they possess in this study area.

4.4 Sampling

The study used a purposive sampling technique. This is a sampling technique that is utilized in collecting information for a qualitative research study and it is described by simple identification and opportunity to choose the rich occurrences of data in an informational index for research reasons (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling includes choosing or distinguishing a sub-group of people or objects that are proficient about a phenomenon (research) to partake in the investigation (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Notwithstanding information and experience, purposive studying offers a goal of giving a sample that can be considered as a portrayal of the populace, especially on the significant attributes of the populace being considered. Purposive sampling is fitting for this investigation as a result of the idea of the investigation and target populace. Only participants who met the criteria of the investigation were chosen.

Maree (2007) clarifies that there are two kinds of sampling: the probability and non-probability sampling strategies. Probability strategies are grounded on the conviction of randomness and probability theory, while non-probability techniques depend on the judgment of the investigator. This investigation receives the non-probability random sampling strategy in light of the fact that not all the populace can be recollected for the analysis. Hence there must be a choice of participants and this was completed by non-random sampling techniques. The study consisted of 8 participants from the first year to fourth year. African female students were approached around Howard College campus and asked to participate in the study. The researcher explained to students the title of the study, objectives and what is expected of them in order to make an informed agreement.

4.5 Data Collection

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews which consisted of several key questions that helped to define the areas explored, but also allowed the researcher and participants to diverge in order to engage in an idea or respond in more detail (Gill & Johnson, 2010). This was an appropriate data collection technique for the study because it was systematic for all participants whilst allowing the researcher to obtain rich data. Each interview lasted 45

minutes to an hour and was audio recorded for data analysis purposes with obtained consent from the participants. Neuman (2014) contends that interviews are significant strategies for gathering information in qualitative research. One-on-one semi-structured interviews permit the investigator to connect with the participant and to watch non-verbal signs during the consultation process. Through the selection of interviews as a strategy for information collection, the investigator gained a more profound comprehension of the participants' developments through exchange and through the language they used in building the various discussions. The interview strategy permitted the investigator to look for unambiguity and test for more profound understanding. Therefore, the proclaiming and investigation of data is reflective of the perspectives OF the participants. The investigator had assembled trust and familiarity with the participants and the trust in the communication or relationship made it, to some degree, simpler for the participants to share their own encounters, fearless of being judged (Lincoln, 1995).

4.6 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is defined as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). Thematic analysis is a category of qualitative information investigation that is utilized to break down, characterize and present patterns that identify with the information (Ibrahim, 2012). It is an illustrative strategy that gives extraordinary detail to various subjects through understandings (Boyatzis, 1998). Patton and Cochran (2002) portray thematic analysis as a strategy in which the researcher communicates all information accumulated in the study in order to distinguish normal issues that recur in the reactions from the participants of the investigation and which are afterward condensed by themes. Thematic analysis gives an in-depth comprehension to planned research thought to comprehend the possibilities of research issues (Marks & Yardley, 2004). The utilization of thematic analysis equipped the exploration with a potential connection to think about different points of view and to contrast these thoughts with previous information that had been accumulated by various investigations and circumstances in the writing and theoretical part of this study.

Ibrahim (2012) posits that thematic analysis has the nature of having the option to accomplish distinctive informational collection and has the capacity to distinguish factors that impact issues communicated about by the participants. Subsequently, the support and interpretations are significant in order to give important clarifications to the behaviour, recognition and

undertakings of the participants (Ibrahim 2012). Thematic analysis proves to be capable to comprehend complex information in view of its degree of viability in creating rich and detailed information translation which gives the whole research a topical depiction of the information gathered and would give the reader a description of significant themes from the information. Thematic analysis analyses information without connecting with existing themes. This proves that for each datum set, themes and codes are made for elucidation. In this manner, each proclamation or thought of the participants contribute towards understanding the issues, which offers importance to the entire research. The researcher used the six phases of thematic analysis, namely familiarizing herself with her data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Clarke and Braun (2013) present six phases of thematic analysis in detail as follows:

1. **Acclimation with information:** This is the underlying stage where the researcher retains the information accumulated. This absorbing of information is accomplished through listening to the taped audio account, perusing and re-reading the information assembled. The process with building up familiarity with the information.

2. **Coding:** This is where the researcher represents information with the utilization of labels, which is fundamental from the informational collection. It is imperative that the researcher searches for specific attributes (from the informational index) that will address the exploration question, and furthermore thinks about both semantic and premeditated perusing of information.

3. **Quest for themes:** A theme gives an outline of something that manages basic significance through a calculated reaction approach and through the themes, there must be responses to the examination questions. The researcher can now effectively scan for codes that can be related to the likeness of the gathered information and developed themes. At this stage, the researcher must comprehend the themes and be familiar with the focus areas. This is done to avoid a mix up of issues.

4. **Returning to themes:** the researcher returns to the subjects initially scanned for, in this way choosing a theme that will work for a full informational collection. During this stage, a few themes are probably going to be extended, while some will be decreased to suit the informational index.

5. Characterizing and naming themes: the researcher previously created topics that are preferred and comprehended by the researcher. These theme(s) are named by the inclination of the researcher. Furthermore, this stage gives space for an itemized examination of each theme that has been recognized, which along these lines continues to be composed and gives the researcher capacity to comprehend the story that each theme tells and makes a relationship amongst the general information gathered.

6. Reviewing: This is the last phase of information examination and is the significant piece of the entire research, which implies that this is where the information accumulated is being communicated in literary structure. It implies that the researcher puts informational index into a point of view and figures out which part of the informational index responds to the examination questions. In this way, this stage is the place the researcher can give a point by point and investigated and steady report of the information discoveries.

This investigation adopted the use of a thematic approach for dissecting the qualitative information, which was planned for distinguishing patterns in and making relationships between discoveries to arrive at resolutions on the investigation issue (Snape & Spencer, 2003). This was an appropriate method of analysis because it minimally organizes and describes the data in rich detail, which is relevant to a qualitative study. The data was transcribed verbatim, which means that everything in the audio was written down word-for-word. The textual interviews were imported into NVivo 11, which is a software package that assisted the researcher to analyse and handle data. As the researcher, commonality with the information was the primary point to unmistakably comprehend the understanding of the constituents. This was accomplished by constant listening to the taped reactions from the participants, as well as continued perusing of the transcripts.

Initial codes and marking were created for the reactions. Coding was done physically by denoting each interpreted content with a dark pen (each investigation question in turn) and information-driven codes were composed into significant groups. Dates and times of conversations were marked and hued, whilst featured examples were utilized to separate information for simple access to guarantee that there was no re-using of information that had been recently utilized. This was faultless in creating a pattern for the information gathered. Another factor of thematic analysis is to continue returning to the themes or thoughts made by the researcher by a ceaseless survey of information (Ibrahim, 2012). This was accomplished through consistent perusing of the audio taped reactions from the participants.

Notwithstanding, it ought to be noticed that the investigation was summed up as each theme identified was utilized to address each inquiry of this investigation. Finally, the investigation was worked out to give an outlined, discerning and non-monotonous record of the story told by the information.

4.7 Credibility and Trustworthiness

The researcher is cognisant of the fact that it is dishonest to include personal beliefs and goals in the examination. In this way, the researcher guaranteed that viewpoints and perceptions in the field of study were separated and she maintained objectivity all through the exploration procedure. Each exertion was made to guarantee fortitude and consistency in the examination procedure, including documentation, which guaranteed that information that arose out of this investigation is dependable (Simmons, 2009). The study has demonstrated validity which may be explained as the use of the appropriate tools, processes, and data (Leung, 2015), which are accordance with qualitative research. Lastly, the study achieved reliability which is the employment of analytical procedures in a consistent manner (Noble & Smith, 2015).

4.8 Ethical Consideration

The researcher acquired a gate-keeper's endorsement letter from the office of the Registrar at the University of KwaZulu-Natal before the start of information gathering. This letter offers endorsement to the researcher for information assembling before utilizing the students of the University of KwaZulu-Natal for information gathering purposes (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2020). Ethical clearance was acquired from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee. The researcher guaranteed that consent was made accessible for the participants to sign after disclosing to them in detail what the examination involved. Furthermore, confidentiality of the participants was maintained to guarantee that participants' privileges and opportunities were not bargained in any way (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2016).

The written informed consent regarding participants was acquired preceding the beginning of the interviews. All composed data was made accessible in English as the conversations were led in the English language. The participants were educated regarding that they were not compelled to participate and they could decide to withdraw from the conversation whenever they needed to (Lorell et al., 2015). Utmost privacy and anonymity was guaranteed during participation and the translation of information. The researcher found a way to guarantee that the data (information accumulated) was stored in a secure place. Information gained is stored

in the Department and will be destroyed following five years upon completion of this examination (Lorell et al., 2015).

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter illustrated the exploratory research plan that was utilized for the examination. The qualitative research strategy, the site of the investigation, target populace, non-probability sampling systems, purposive sampling and sample size were outlined in detail. Moreover, the chapter introduced consecutively the interview method of acquiring data, thematic analysis and how the data was analysed following these guidelines. Ultimately, the chapter ended by delineating moral contemplations that the researcher practiced during the course of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter comprises the data analysis. The findings of the present study incorporate the interpretation of semi-structured interviews with African female student participants who met the inclusion criteria. The findings of the study were generated from seven qualitative semi-structured interviews. Through thematic analysis, seven themes were identified.

5.2 Theme one: Media presentation of beauty

The participants perceived that media depicts beauty as being physically attractive. This incorporated views of the ideal body image which were specifically linked to Westernized standards of beauty.

Participant 1 expressed that being slim has been portrayed as the ideal image on media:

“Hmm, ok so I’m a person who is mostly on Instagram, and I also see a bit of magazines cause most stuff is now advertised on Instagram, they usually put those really super thin ladies like those super model kind of ladies which can actually end up making a person feel like they are not good enough, cause they don’t look like those girls who are up there and making it in life.”

In agreement, Participant 2 stated:

“The thing is in all these media platforms beauty is presented as being light skinned, you must and it’s a must that you have straight hair, you must be silky, you must be wavy just silky hair, and you must be slim. Uhm but now there’s this new trend also that has started, people are more transitioning to a more curvier look where they do all these plastic surgery and stuff and do implants on their breasts, to enlarge their butts so that they can look more curvaceous. So, I think in the olden days it used to be thin people and I think it hurts...I’m black and because now the society tells me, the Instagram post, and the media tells me you know what to be considered to be a model you have to whiten your skin, use creamers, use makeup to cover yourself up, even because you can use makeup nowadays to cover yourself up. So uhm beauty is misconstrued and in the social media platforms because it is taking away your identity to sacrifice yourself for another identity for me which really stands and roots to the fact that when you go back to your roots of our culture as South Africa we’ve

come from an apartheid era and all those things start from there, it still gonna take a long time for us to recover.”

This was also in agreement with participant 5, who stated that:

“Mmmh, well uhm on the media beauty is actually presented in the more westernized views where we see the most beautiful girl in the crew with the one with the long hair, the slim body, straight hair and uhm light in complexion. So basically, as much as we can speak about diversity in uhm the presentation of beauty, the truth is beauty is still presented in like the more westernized ways.”

Participant 3 declared that social media has the most impact on beauty standards, which women attempt to meet one way or the other:

“I don’t watch tv a lot, but I am most of the time on my phone and uhm like a twitter account, Instagram and sometimes snapchat and yeah. There’s that expectation that you have to be skinny, you have to be tall, you have to have straight hair, you have to you know have sharp cheekbones and big eyes, so there’s definitely fixed perception of what beauty is and if you don’t fit in that mold then, it just means...it’s an unspoken but it just means then you are not beautiful. Uhm so it’s definitely like social media that set the standard of what beauty is and if you don’t fit into it then you start feeling like you not good enough, or you not beautiful and most of the time you get girls trying to become that, so they exercising excessively or they always in heels, or they’re always wearing their straight weaves just to have some of the characteristics of that beauty if not the whole package.”

Participant 6 and 7 were of a similar opinion.

Participant 6 expressed:

“...okay I’ll speak in terms of image and what I see, usually people are...what’s beautiful is seen as thin okay? It’s thin people, it’s usually people with long straight hair, uhm makeup, nice nails, I’m talking about ladies obviously. Uhm what is perceived as beautiful, yes beautiful ladies, elegant, uhm yeah make up, straight hair, skinny. That for me is a message I receive, that okay this is beautiful, makeup, straight hair and elegant looking people, yes that’s beauty in social media, magazines, long legs (laughs), flat stomach...”

Participant 7 also expressed:

“Beauty in the media is light skin and pure, it mustn’t have any pimples, mustn’t have any dark spots, they’d be giving us products like Ponds, “wear Ponds, wear Garnier, wear Gentle Magic and it will remove your spots.” so I didn’t mind it. So the media didn’t have any influence because the confidence that I had was

Contrary to other participants, Participant 4 clarified that the media presents beauty satisfactorily as it guides the standards of beauty while also providing ways in which to attain them:

“uhm I think they represent beauty very well because not only do they say this is what is beautiful but they also give tips on how to you know become beautiful or how to maintain being beautiful...”

5.3 Theme two: Self-perceptions in relation to media presentations of beauty

Most participants felt that their own beauty was not aligned with what has been shown in the media, which has an impact on how they view themselves.

Participant 3 explained that she does not meet the media standards of beauty as an African woman. Rather, an alternative label is given to her type of body image:

“Uh, well a straightforward answer to that is no because I have a different body shape, uhm I’m what the modeling agency will call plus-size, uhm so there’s already a different label put on me when it’s related to beauty that I don’t have a say in just because I don’t fit the mold of or the standard of what beauty is, so yeah. The answer is no I don’t fit that criteria as an African woman, uhm however I am labeled as uhm a characteristic such as plus-size or curvy...”

This was corroborated by the views of the other participants.

Participant 5 acknowledged that she finds it difficult to follow her natural beauty. Instead, she attempts to follow the Western standards of beauty due to society’s expectations:

“...to be honest uhm lately there is a lot of African women that are presented in the media but the truth is every time, well when I think for an example when I take a selfie

of myself uhm I have a bit of meat on my tummy but uhm all the time I'm always conscious because I have this beauty standard of the western world where my tummy must be tucked in uhm, I must stand in a certain position and uhm sometimes I'm even shy of taking pictures with my natural hair, I quickly rush for my weave, my daily inch weave in order to look good and uhm not that I'm not accepting of who I am but I feel it's about society and society's expectations uhm therefore, I still find myself uhm struggling with conforming to who I am therefore I go to the westernized views."

Similarly, Participant 2 expressed that she is not able to relate to the media's standards of beauty as she is required to alter her natural features in order to be considered beautiful:

"I can't, I can't relate to it. I certainly do not relate to it because uhm I'm being told that if I want to look beautiful I should burn my hair for it to be straight so that I can consider myself as a beautiful person, that I have to contour my nose because it is in a shape of a button like it's not straight as other races are. That I have to lighten my skin up to be considered beautiful and I cannot present myself up there as my own, uh how do I put it? As in my own self, I'm very passionate about hair and for me I think people mostly think hair is just hair but I'm mostly passionate about hair because I've travelled a bit and a bit exposed to another country where I felt the most that was the moment for me. I realized that we undermine ourselves as Africans and we look down on ourselves and on our beauty."

Participant 6 further expressed that generally, she does not relate to the media's presentation of beauty, and in order to find relatable content, she has to look for specific individuals:

"Mh-mh no I can't, uhm but I think on social media because now on social media it's people that I specifically follow, that I've chosen to follow, I've specifically chosen to follow people that look like me, but generally if I'm trying to look for a trend maybe that I like or I'm not trying too hard, the images that do come out don't look like me, for example say I'm trying to look for ideas for hair...if I don't specify or I don't specifically look for someone that looks like me, what's readily available does not represent me, so even like with just the product that are sold in magazines or billboards, beauty products, you have to, I have to specify for something that is more representative for example, because if there's an advert for make-up it's not make-up

for a skin color that's mine, it's not an advert for my hair type, or the model that's being used because the product is not mine, the person doesn't look like me, uhm so I don't think it's representative unless I'm on social media and it's because I'm following people that specifically look like me. But generally mainstream, no."

Participant 7 substantiated:

"I don't. I don't relate entirely, like I would say that I relate a biiiit in the part of being light skinned, but either than that even the skin tone that I have is not really what is being portrayed in these social media platforms. So what happens is that in these social platforms uhm if you are chubby you'll be in the advertisements where you are advertising food, or maybe they are advertising something that will relieve your stomach...(holds back laughter) so like...(laughs), I'm sorry but this can be hilarious, so like if they are showing...(laughs), can't you pause?"

These views were in contrast to Participant 4 who clarified that she can relate to the media's standards of beauty as she has the physical attributes that are glorified. However, she also acknowledged that this is not true for other African women in her life:

"I was just saying like you know I've been fortunate because I do qualify uh to meet the standards of what the media has portrayed as beautiful. However most of my friends and my family members don't qualify and that's because you know the beauty that the media portrays has very strict rules on appearances and if you don't meet the appearances it doesn't mean you not beautiful it's just maybe labelled differently, maybe it's inner beauty, because the beauty that the media portrays is only based on looks, they don't start looking at a personality, they don't start looking at the values, whereas one can describe themselves as beautiful based on like their inner personality, their inner values, how they treat others, so I think that's just called inner beauty. But to look at someone of the African population uhm the media wouldn't say that they are beautiful because they don't meet those appearance, uhm you know characteristics and stuff like that, whereas I do like I said, that's why I feel confident because I do feel like my appearances are beautiful."

5.4 Theme three: The influence of the media on beauty standards

The media plays a crucial role in how people perceive and define beauty. Participants expressed how the media has influenced their physical appearance. It was highlighted that the efforts made towards physical appearance were related to a need to fit in as African females into the standards of beauty portrayed by the media, which are westernized.

Participant 1 acknowledged the impact of the media on her:

“yeah I’m not gonna lie, honestly sometimes I do feel influence by this and feel like oh yeah I should be looking like this or maybe I should be looking like that, but then other times actually when I undo my hair I actually see a crown in my head.”

Participant 6 gave a detailed description of the media’s influences, highlighting the fact that this influence happens covertly as the change happens gradually until it is noticeable to those around the individual:

“Girl... yes (laughing) yes, yes, because I think to an extent all of us have accepted that what’s in, what’s current right now, the way we dress, the way we dress, the way we look, the way we do our makeup, uhm what colours are in, what colours are out besides the fact that this is what’s available in terms of what’s beautiful. Uhm in terms of the shops, media will say okay this is the fashion range for spring, this is what if you’re in this shape you should wear, this type of pants and so on and so forth. I myself I know I succumb to things like that when I look, when I go to social media. I’m like “yho guys summer bodies”, I mean as soon as the season changes it’s “yho summer bodies”. You’ll be you, didn’t even think of summer bodies, and you look at summer and you look in your body and say “yho its not summer body, maybe I should start jogging”. The amount of pressure, I’m like okay jogging, hashtag healthy lifestyle, hashtag this or...I don’t know. Nails recently, what I’ll make an example of, what’s influencing me recently. I don’t know, I started like seeing people with beautiful nails and I was like...I’ve never been a nail person, but because it just somehow bombarded me on my phone in social media, so I think what else was looking like that, I was like maybe I should do my nails. I’ve never on my own thought about that, so content from....so maybe I’d be watching a movie and see someone with beautiful nails, or someone holding a glass or whatever and I’m just like wow this lady is so beautiful, this person is so pretty and what does that person have? Your brain, it’s almost like your brain automatically checks and you look at yourself, and

you compare yourself and be like huh she's pretty, I think she's pretty, and because she's pretty she has nails, she has straight hair, so slowly you start moulding yourself to become what you perceived to be pretty, do you know what I mean? Uhm it happens subtly though, it's very subtle. I know there's a big difference in terms of how I look. I look through my pictures and my sister comments like "your style has changed, the way you dress has changed", and I if I think about it, It's just small things that you see, that oh okay she has the same shape as my face and she's wearing hoops you know, maybe I should wear hoops you know...all these models, sometimes it's people who send me pictures like a picture in the magazine that "yho this person looks like you, they're so tall look you, what they're wearing", do you know what I mean? Its something that is not internal, it's not an internal decision, it's influenced by external. You saw a picture on a magazine, and you thought this body shape looks like mine so the next time I go to the shop I'm going to buy a coat that's like this and that, this is how I'm gonna look. So, I think the way we look is very much determined by what is around and also the need to fit-in to feel accepted.

In agreement, Participant 7 revealed that the influence of the media is also perpetuated by the people around the individual who impose the media standards of beauty on her at a personal level:

"So, when I got to tertiary, in my class there was this girl who was coming from the deep rural areas, she was classified and called names. There was this term that was used mostly in this uhm TV programme in SABC1 called uZalo, so this girl was called Farm Juliya, a term that says you are from the rural areas. And like I was always someone who was proud of where I'm coming from because of my sister who inspired me a lot in the sense of knowing who you are, where you come from, and to take care of yourself, and be neat and clean. So when I got to tertiary I was clean, I was nice and everything, and that girl was also coming from the villages and I was like "I'm also from the villages, and my village is Qokolweni" and people would say "no Qokolweni is not a village, there is a difference between you and this girl, this girl is Farm Juliya" and everything that was nasty. So it does change a person's way of perceiving themselves because after that I noticed that the girl started wearing skimpy dresses, and because she didn't really have the idea of what she was doing she'd wear a skimpy dress and sometimes long boots, and at that time that trend was not in and not really nice. For me it didn't really affect me because I had already known what I

was supposed to do, and also these girls are girls that posted their pictures on Instagram and twitter, so that kind of beauty would have affected me if had really low self-esteem. So media does change the way people perceive themselves, and I feel like it doesn't only change the way people perceive themselves but also how they start acting and wanting people to look at them in a certain way that will make them feel as if they fit in this type of category that the media portrays to people."

Furthermore, Participant 2 highlighted the challenges related to the influence of the media, which include a lack of knowledge on how to obtain the desired body image and the unfavourable consequences of using unsuitable techniques:

"You gonna see a thin model and you want to be thin or lose weight, they gonna send you to it or they gonna send you to gym, you go to gym you can't cope and you can't keep up because you don't have enough consistency, it's not something you want, you dealing with the pressure of just wanting to lose weight without the necessary education to know how to lose weight and how to become consistent in the gym. You don't have that... you don't have the discipline for it, they make money out of you then you resort to tablets, the pharmacies they make money out of you because you buy those tablets and so people keep going to them and most people say these tablets make them fat and they make them more hungrier, so do you see the connection? You get more, you get this treatment and these uhm tablets you drink then you take them, then you get fat go to gym, come back, it's connected to the food industry because you eating the wrong food and here social media is telling you...you should be curvaceous, you should have big bums, you should have round silicon breasts, you want to do surgery. So it's affecting you that okay uh I'm a black female but you know what I feel like? I need to fix somethings, I need to fix somethings with my body, but there are certain races that...uhm this is deep (laughs), this is deep for me...there are certain races that are looking a certain way and we are all supposed to look like them and they don't wanna bow down to us and they want us to bow down to them because of social injustices in the past, but everyone just wants us to...to look like them, even the beauty industry wants us to look a certain way."

Furthermore, Participant 4 also highlighted some of things she does for beauty in relation to the influence from the media:

“Yeah so like with the media not only do they describe what beauty is but they also give tips on like how to be beautiful, so I do follow those tips. I do have long hair and I straighten it uhm you know, uhm most of the advertisements they have white people and stuff but like whenever they do have a black person representing beauty it’s mostly people that are fair skin and I have fair skin and I do everything that I can to maintain you know my yellow bone, that’s a tone I get used to maintain my complexion. I use skin products, uhm some of my friends might say I’m obsessed with skin products but that’s because I know what the standard is and I’ve been inspired to reach it and to always meet it because when I look myself in the mirror I do feel beautiful because of my skin, uhm because of my size of my body size, because of my height, uhm and even the little things you know sometimes.”

5.5 Theme four: Body shaming vs. Positivity

All the participants believed that the media impacts how different body shapes are regarded. There was still a general trend toward the ideal body shape being thin and slender.

Participant 5 explained that the manner in which African women are presented in the media is westernized and it is not accepted well by the African audience because it ignores the African culture, which leads to reviews that contribute to body shaming:

“Alright, uhm I’ll just make a practical example, last year there was a campaign by Ackerman’s where we had African females of different body sizes who were representing uhm the African population. we had women such as Busiswa, Rumi Tshwane and other African women with different body shapes. Uhm there were critiques from our very own black people in terms of...but to be honest it’s not even let me not even talk about other people, let me talk about my view. I find it so...embarrassing to see someone as old as Rami Tshwane standing there wearing bra and panties. I don’t know why because we do see Christiana whose sixty something year old and there is nothing wrong with her wearing a bikini and still uhm...it made me uncomfortable seeing the African presented that way. So I’m not sure whether is it uhm our own stereotypes or is it our own stigma or our own issues that we have about how we are presented in the media because I did not hear actually why people having a problem with it. It was yeah us it’s like I was just seeing my mother on tv wearing a bra and yeah, it’s not African.”

In agreement, Participant 1 reiterated:

“Yes, she is also plus-size, they asked them to model lingerie, and people were making negative comments about their bodies, like why are you undressed, uhm go get something to cover up, your body doesn’t look that good but then when they saw pictures of aah, who is this lady? Itss Pearl Modiadie if I’m not mistaken, she is got a thin kind of a body so they were actually giving more compliments to her than the others, so basically uhm a thinner body image is seen as something that is cool or more appropriate.”

Participant 3 explained that when the media’s standards of beauty are unmet, the individual is labeled differently from what is stated as ‘beautiful’:

“Uhm not really, I think when you don’t fit the mold of what beauty is...that’s being set by the media, then you become uhm the other, and then they have to kind of make sense of what you are so then they start putting labels on you, uhm whereas if you fit the criteria then you just labeled beautiful, there’s no other labels given to you other than beautiful, uhm but if you don’t and you become the other. Then they have to kind of explain what you are and their language which is then using labels such as plus-size, curvy and stuff like that.”

However, Participant 6 acknowledged a gradual shift towards body positivity:

“I think there has been a shift, like I was saying that uhm the whole movement that’s happening now and affirmation that as much as the media might push that this is the ideal, I’ve become okay with being a thick black girl. I mean look at Zozibini, even though she’s black she’s the alternative, and the narrative that you still have to be long legs and tall, it’s still being pushed a little bit let alone that it’s the pageant, it’s still that ideal that you have to have a flat stomach, you have to be...but not all of us are like that, some of us are round, and have you know hips, and we are thick, and that’s fine. I mean there is a bit of the movement affirming thickness and thick bums and hips, and it’s now in, thick is nice and it’s okay, but I think one of the things that happened is that we can’t rely on what is an ideal in that time and movements, there has to be...because those things change, I mean in the next ten years something else could be in, it’s taken a very long time for ideals to shift a little bit so I think what’s important for me is just to accept myself and who I am and define that I’m black and this is the skin color I have, this type of body and it’s okay in spite and despite, but I

won't lie it has been nice to see people that look like me pitching in magazines and popping up in social media, and you know being faces of whatever's, but yeah, there's...we still have a long way to go.”

In agreement, Participant 7 revealed:

“...right now although I'm still a bit confused, right now though I see myself as part of the beauty because there has been a change, a slight change but people who have been looking deep into this media uhm thing that is happening, it makes us happy because we see that something is coming along, in few years to come the next generation will have a different way of seeing things and will be people who are happy, and will be a community, a social media or a social platform where everyone is united, in there sense that there has been a change where now suddenly we see a lot of uhm people who are not skinny, people who have curves, people who have big butts, and actually people who are dark skinned. So, I started noticing this with uhm with radio hosts. People who are radio presenters don't have cameras on their faces and we tend to think that they don't really put effort in how they look and everything because we don't see them, but these are the people who wake up in the morning and prepare to go to work. So we started with that, uhm there started to be a bit of filming calendars of those radio stations, so there would be nice group pictures of all the presenter, and when we see them we'd be like “oh ok”. There is Amaza, I thought he sounds like a skinny person, then you like Amaza has a lot of people who look up to him in the radio, people would call and say I just love your show, I love you and everything, so I want to look like Amaza but now when I see his picture he is big, snap what do I do? And then if you are a person who likes him you still like his personality even though he is big, suddenly you start having a different perspective that people who are in the media don't have to be skinny.”

5.6 Theme five: African female celebrities/influencers and their Impact on beauty

Social media and the cultural ideology of beauty traditions continue to structure certain ideals of beauty. Celebrities impart their notions of beauty to their followers on social media accounts. In South Africa, following international trends, celebrities have taken to social media to communicate their beauty ideologies to their often young fans. The participants

identified prominent African celebrities and influencers who they believe play major roles in influencing beauty standards in the media.

Participant 5 expressed her observation on the physical transformation of celebrities from when they first started their careers in media, which gives the impression that only a specific form of beauty is accepted:

“...the other example that I will make is for years when Bonang Mateba started in the industry, she was dark skinned and today she’s one of the light girls and she is doing ad. campaigns with Woolworths and all these brands, she’s an ambassador of these brands that are like white supremacy and all those things, and if you can look back to her pictures she’s getting lighter and lighter, and uhm it’s very rare to find actually dark skinned girls in the media or anywhere else making it. So that also plays a major role in us if you want to be in entertainment industry because it’s more welcoming to light skinned girls than dark skinned girls, so it’s also unconsciously praising the modernized version of beauty.”

Similarly, Participant 1 expressed:

“the influencers are not only based on body size, they also try to make us so bad basically about our hair, the kinkiness of African hair, and the make-up, like people having to hide behind make-up all time and if you’re not wearing make-up then you’re not pretty, if you’re not wearing a wig you’re not pretty, you need to always have like your straight hair, you have to have your brows on fleek all the time. So, I feel like media has actually created those standards of beauty, they have taken away the beauty of African hair, as much as others are trying to bring that back into sty... to bring that back into style, but ahh people with straight hair are actually considered as the most beautiful.”

Positive influence from celebrities/influencers has also been noted, as Participant 1 acknowledged:

“Inspiration I have had from the media, Hmm, there are quite a few pages on Instagram that actually do ethnic care, so from those ones I do draw inspiration on how to appreciate my African hair more, and there is this lady I follow on Instagram she calls herself Body Posy Panda, she actually speaks about body positivity and

stuff, so every time I actually read her posts and everything on her page it actually motivates me to appreciate myself the way I am.”

This was corroborated by Participant 2, who said:

“they’re not so many but there are women that I consider uh as...you know what this is eye opening, take for instance Oprah. uh she was very big in her younger days and stuff but she represents black women, the black minority in the media, and she’s up there and she’s making it big so, and I like her because she’s gonna tell you that you just don’t have to be someone else, you just have to be yourself and because it’s at the end of the day we all trying to fit in so that we can look a certain way and be accepted in a certain way...there are advocates like Luya, Yara Shahidi, and people who are actually standing for blackness and saying you know what we are here and we’re not ashamed of who we are, people who go and post themselves without makeup, like Alicia Keys, she’s off makeup now and we need more of that in the media, and it is really truly empowering because they have given me that courage to actually come out and say I actually am tired of just trying to be someone else I’m not. This is me, accept me or don’t.”

Participant 6 further detailed some of the positive influences from various celebrities she follows deliberately in the media:

“Uhm I don’t know people but I deliberately look at how people are dressed in the movies or the apartment that they live in because it kind of sells a standard of sorts depending on what the movie is about. Uhm so it has, it has helped me, like also, also, because in social media it’s people’s lives so people sell a certain lifestyle and they celebrate their goals like Dj Zinhle coming out to say this is what I’ve done, this is what I’ve bagged. So whatever portrayal that they do of their lives it has opened up my mind that okay things are possible, you can be black and enter spaces like these and slay and be a mother. I mean look at Basetsana that I follow deliberately, her and Carole Bouwer, Khanyi Dlomo, Connie Ferguson. I deliberately follow black women in social media, people that see on tv and as a result of seeing them on tv, maybe on interview, I’ll go follow their lives, and you know you eat up their lives without realizing you doing it, and you kind sort of shape that actually it’s possible, you can be a mother, uhm you can be an entrepreneur, you can be a wife and you can slay, be

beautiful, uhm so you look at Basetsana, she has twist on and she's got millions so it's fine I can do twist, it's okay I don't have to own I weave so..."

Similarly, Participant 7 also acknowledged the positive impact she has experienced from a social media influencer:

"But the inspiration of coming back to myself, of remembering "you are not the person behind the make-up sisi, why must you be the person who people want to take a picture with because you are wearing make-up?", so the inspiration came back again from Instagram mostly because there was this girl, I think its Snikiwe. Snikiwe is a beauty content creator but she would part-time doing eyebrows and people like her that way, and I was like wait, isn't this whole job that you are doing on Instagram to give us content, but she would be like "yho today I'm lazy and I have to go, I still look beautiful without the eyebrows". So I started to reflect, its been 6 months of doing make-up, I came back from campus and quickly go and wash my face and stay in my room. Most of the people in my floor only saw me with make-up, and they don't know me without make-up and a weave. I started to reflect on that if someone who is Snikiwe, who is known by a lot of people in the world, she can say as a person that is working and getting paid for what she is doing, today I am lazy to do my eyebrows and she goes out, that's when I reflected and said no."

5.7 Theme six: Psychological implications

Psychological difficulties have been associated with the internalization of perceived failure to conform to standards of beauty. Psychological issues noted included depression and body dysmorphia.

Participant 2 acknowledged her psychological difficulty, which resulted from the strain of attempting to keep up with the standards of beauty presented in the media:

"I thought what was being trendy because everyone was doing makeup, you know what I'm gonna do it as well, but now when I stop I noticed this is me shifting from who I am, this is me trying to cover myself because there were days where I find difficulty going to campus without makeup on and I felt very ugly without makeup on, and I was like you know what I'm just done with this and to be quite very honest there was a point somewhere I was just depressed. I was just depressed I was uh...I used to

call my mom, my dad used to drop me off in campus and I'd drag my feet to class I just...it affected every aspect of my life because now I see myself as this ugly person and all the negative thoughts come that urgh man I'm so ugly, I'm just a no good person, what kind of a girl I am or am I even, I was just unmotivated in every area of my life but I had to grow up and I learnt from it.

Similarly, Participant 4 revealed the struggle she faced psychologically:

"...so when it started for many many years I was just like quite angry with uhm my African parents because of the meals that we would have at home you know, they contributed in my weight uhm whereas when I was visiting maybe my white friends in their homes and stuff like that...they were having small portions and that made me realize that it's because of the small portion that they're not gaining weight, whereas I keep gaining because you know of the cooking style that's happening in my house. Uhm so it started there, the whole starving myself just because I was trying to uhm get control over the portions uhm and then when I started seeing the results then I kind of just became very obsessed with not eating because I wanted to see more and more results so it was a... it was a pattern that was working for me until it stopped working for me. Uhm because then I fell ill and uhm yeah it got to a point where I didn't know how to stop or I didn't want to stop because with more weight loss the better, I felt good about myself of it, it was definitely yeah uhm a thing about control, because I was controlling how much food I was eating and I was controlling you know my appearances, the body weight, uhm and with less and less fat on me the more and more beautiful I felt."

5.8 Theme seven: Need for inclusive representation

Every individual has his or her very own ideation of beauty. The participants all wished that the definition of beauty should be all-inclusive, especially by the media. Even though the participants have reiterated that the media's beauty standards are westernized, a shift towards a diverse presentation has been noted. The participants further expressed a need for more inclusion in the presentation of beauty.

Participant 5 expressed a need for the presentation of African women in the media in a manner that is relevant to the African culture in order to be relatable:

“I would say I want the media to present African women within our context, not take African women and force westernized uhm activities or westernized views on them. If I’m an African woman, I must be represented with what I normally do as an African. It should not be that I’m an African woman trying out a westernized view. Like I said going back to uhm example I made of the media, those women were shown off with their bodies whereas we normally see women like that in bikinis with flat stomachs, no stretch marks, so for me honestly that was sort of humiliation on them as African women, I would rather see an African women dressed in a respectable and portrayed as an African not as if we are we are trying to be something that we not, because at the end of the day it does not look good, the message is not well received but instead we get more criticized. It’s as if we are trying our best to be modernized whereas they are inviting us and portraying us to be what we are not. So, I would like the media to remain true to who we are and make uhm make African culture also marketable portrayed in the social media platforms not force blacks to be westernized.”

Participant 3 highlighted that even amongst African women, there are various forms of beauty, all of which must be presented as far as inclusion is concerned:

“So, definitely start showing the differences in people, so instead of having one person up there and describing that as beauty, have a whole lot of variety. Uhm because even amongst Africa we also different you know, someone might have straight hair because they’ve relaxed it, someone might have an afro, someone might have short hair and they’ve dyed it red you know, even amongst Africans there’s differences but it’s...I’d love for the media to portray that even in the differences there’s beauty in each and every one of us.”

Participant 1 acknowledged that she has observed some efforts to include various body types, and expressed a need for the inclusion of women from all racial groups in relation to the standards of beauty:

“Yes, actually there are some changes I would love to see like having more campaigns and having more models who are basically plus-size. I saw uhm I was watching something fashion week on Instagram where Khosi Nkosi was actually embracing large size models. They got very body shape, every height, very size, every type of hair, and I feel like they also tried to bring some changes with Miss South Africa with the diversity where they tried to bring in not like you really thin kind of

super models we normally see on T.V, they actually tried to accommodate more bigger ones, they tried to accommodate every type of hair they tried to accommodate different heights. Yes, so uhm I feel like there should be more social media campaigns that uhm are based on bringing out positivity to women, not only just Black women but then just every race, to accept yourself as you are.”

This was in agreement with Participant 4, who said:

“uhm definitely because like I said it does make me sad when I see my friends who don’t meet the body type or the height feel bad about themselves and even when I try to motivate them like they would turn their anger towards me just because you know I know best of what media is saying, what the tv is saying I am beautiful you know, so what I experience I wish they could experience it too so I do hope that the media starts uhm portraying other body types as beautiful uhm not just you know that model size, not just runway but yeah, and for media to start you know showing what inner beauty is, uhm then I think it would reach more and more African people uh because we don’t all fit the appearance uhm that they portraying, but if they start talking about values and you know how to treat others and stuff like that to celebrate women, so if they start portraying that more than a lot of people that are African and female will start feeling a lot better about themselves.”

Participant 7 further acknowledged that she has observed some progressive changes in the media, and expressed a need for continuity in this regard:

“So, like I started to have acceptance, I got so encouraged, and people who go to gym I’d see in their captions saying “I’m toning, I’m not losing weight”. Maybe it is the people I follow, I’m really building my confidence. I feel like social media has changed, I hope they keep going, I hope they are not pretending or trying to do something that along the line will just vanish because a lot of people are really going with this change that is happening. The same social media is now trying to fix things because Black people are fighting for spaces. Zozibini showed us that in fact Black people start. You are dark and you don’t have money to buy hair then rock your short hair. Now we are fighting that the same Western people have to absorb themselves, because now as African people who are big, who are dark skinned, who are poor and trying to win back our lives, we are really working, we are pushing.”

Participant 2 emphasized a need for celebrities/influencers to be active in advocating for inclusion:

“So if we could have those people that are already up there in the social constructs and social media, if we can have them really truly coming out and saying guys this is not what you think it is, this is actually how it is and how things are. Even in the acting space just truly come out, you’d see so many change in how young women, I’m gonna take an example...when miss South Africa won, Zozi Ntunzi, she changed a lot of women’s lives, that girl she’s inspiring because she just came out with her natural hair and it was a game changer and it was shocking because even the black people on twitter were saying that she is ugly because of her hair because she didn’t have weave on.”

Furthermore, Participant 6 acknowledged the positive impact of the current African celebrities, and highlighted that the narrative must evolve in the sense that there are new and people visible in the media platforms:

“uhm I think it’s been refreshing to not see the angry black bitter women in the movie, in the shows, or the we see black Africa women only when it’s heritage month, or being the face of Africa, that’ been refreshing. There’ a new wave of that okay as much as we are representing this, there’s been a diversity in the representation as well, there’s light skinned African women that are represented there are you dark skin, different tones of black women that are represented but I do still feel like uhm there should be more diversity. I mean uhm I don’t wanna be making the same examples using the same people in the next 5 years so we need, we can’t be quoting people like Basetsana, there needs to be other people and I mean those...which is why I think uhm the biggest change I want is the lives of black people and black women to be specific and beauty and anything that concerns them should not be the alternative, you see? I almost want to remove the whole exotic vibe that surrounds black lives you see...as if black beauty is alternative like (sighs) I don’t know when we can get to a point where it’s just mainstream, where our lives are not an alternative to whiteness you see? Uhm I want, I wish for a time where it’s just oh okay you know, it’s Nompumelelo whose on the magazine, it’s not oh, such that we don’t need to be saying words like representation...it’s just a person who is on there because it’s

normal, do you know what I mean, uhm yeah just to take away the alternative, we are not the alternative we are the mainstream, our lives, all of us are the mainstream.”

5.9 Conclusion

This chapter provided insight related to how the participants perceived the media's presentation of beauty and the implications thereof. Most participants expressed that the definition of beauty was governed by Western interpretations. They all recognized the potential for more modern and all-inclusive definitions of beauty- a representation that embraces African beauty in its natural form.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on a discussion of the results generated from seven qualitative interviews that sought to explore the media's influence on African female university students' perceptions of themselves. This discussion incorporates literature control in order to validate the findings from what the participants have shared. The discussion will be done in the light of The Media Systems Dependency (MSD) Theory and Ecological Systems Theory (EST) discussed in Chapter Three of this study.

The MSD Theory focuses on the effects of the media on audiences and the interaction between the media, audiences and social interactions. According to Riffe, Lacy and Varouhakins (2008), this theory provides a theoretical basis for explaining the relationship amongst individuals, institutions and media at both macro and micro levels. MSD Theory assumes that individuals are goal-oriented and active in the selection and use of media content. It suggests three dependency areas, with two sub-areas each, in which different individuals depend on media to varying degrees: 1. for solitary play and social play; 2. for self-understanding and social understanding; and 3. for action orientation and interaction orientation. In particular, the action and interaction orientation dependencies assume that people act purposefully in deciding how they will behave in order to obtain goals (Riffe, Lacy & Varouhakins, 2008). The Ecological Systems Theory describes patterns of social interaction and how this alternative might be applied in the context of the development of individuals (Neal & Neal, 2013).

The discussion below will highlight the assumptions set by both theories in order to find a link and relatedness to this study. Conclusions of the findings of this study will be drawn in line with what these theories highlight about the media and its impact on beauty in view of young African women in University, and then compares them to the findings of the study.

6.2 Summary of themes identified

Seven themes were identified during the process of data collection from qualitative semi-structured interviews through thematic analysis. Table 6.1 below summarizes the themes which form a basis of the findings that will be discussed below.

Theme	Summary of the theme
Theme One: Media presentation of beauty	The participants perceived that media depicts beauty as being physically attractive. This incorporated views of the ideal body image, which was specifically linked to Westernized standards of beauty
Theme Two: Self-perceptions in relation to media presentations of beauty	Most participants felt that their own beauty was not aligned with what has been shown in the media.
Theme Three: The influence of the media on beauty standards	The media plays a crucial role in how people perceive and define beauty. Participants expressed how the media has influenced their physical appearance. It was highlighted that the efforts made towards physical appearance were related to a need to fit in as African females into the standards of beauty portrayed by the media, which are Westernized.
Theme Four: Body shaming vs. Positivity	All participants believed that the media impacts how different body shapes are regarded. There was still a general trend toward the ideal body shape being thin and slender
Theme Five: African female celebrities/influencers and their Impact on beauty	Social media and the cultural ideology of beauty traditions continue to structure certain ideals of beauty. Celebrities impart their notions of beauty to their followers on social media accounts. In South Africa, following international trends, celebrities have taken to social media to communicate their beauty ideologies to their often young fans.

Theme	Summary of the theme
	Participants identified prominent African celebrities and influencers who they believe play major roles in influencing beauty standards.
Theme Six: Psychological implications	Psychological difficulties have been associated with the internalization of perceived failure to conform to standards of beauty. Psychological issues noted included depression and body dysmorphia.
Theme Seven: Need for inclusive representation	Every individual has his or her very own ideation of beauty. Participants all wished that the definition of beauty should be all-inclusive, especially by the media. Even though the participants have reiterated that the media's beauty standards are Westernized, a shift towards a diverse presentation has been noted. Participants further expressed a need for more inclusion in the presentation of beauty.

Table 6.1: Summary of themes from qualitative interviews

6.3 Media presentation of beauty

The Oxford Popular School Dictionary (2008) defines beauty as the quality of being very attractive to see, hear or think about. This definition affirms that being attractive or being youthful is a value of beauty. This is based on the emphasis that one's appearance and body is equivalent to beauty. The media portrays beauty as physical attractiveness and its own definition of beauty is rooted in westernized standards. These Westernised standards prescribe beauty as being slender and light skinned. According to Markey and Markey (2012), the media places emphasis on the importance of physical attractiveness as benefits of beauty. This emphasis has an impact on the description of beauty that young women align

with. A study conducted by Heiman and Olenik-Shemesh (2019) about how media portrays beauty affirms that most young women become more concerned about their physical appearance in an attempt to define what beauty is through standards set by the media. The media's presentation of what beauty is shapes the audience's mind in a way that they feel the need to fit into the categories or standards placed before them in the various media channels like magazines, movies, advertisements, music videos and television programming in particular. At times, individuals get involved in costs that might be expensive, with the aim of being classified as beautiful (Akintayo, 2018).

In many parts of the world, standards of beauty are highly racialized, with features and characteristics such as lighter skin designated as the ideal. Media representations of women highlight the desirability of White features such as fair skin and smooth, straight hair. Women of Colour, therefore, are socialized in environments in which their natural features are deemed less attractive than that of White women (Harper & Choma, 2019). According to Foo (2010), the media portrays women who do not conform to these Westernized standards as “unattractive” or “incapable”. The study further revealed that the media represents beauty in relation to physical standards which only a few women can achieve. These standards deny the value of non-Westernized beauty and fuels pressure for young women to be thin. Foo (2010) alluded that there is over-representation of the idealized Western beauty through media and advertising, especially towards Westernized women.

According to Akintayo (2018), media can be said to be a strong conveyer of socio-cultural ideals and a contributor to the adaptation of common socio-cultural standards related to physical appearance or attractiveness. The images of slim or voluptuous women with spotless faces, waxed skins and lush, voluminous velvety hair are constant on various media platforms and these images are often integrated subconsciously into the minds of the viewers (women) as the standards for beauty. The study by Akintayo (2018) further revealed that Nigerian women's perceptions of beauty are wrapped around the standards of beauty set by the media, as a majority of the respondents believe that the media presents a standard of beauty for women. The above is validated by a study conducted by Robinette (2019), that often Black women are forced to conform to these westernized standards of beauty in order to fit within the society. The discussion in this study further alluded that Westernized standards of beauty have always prevailed in defining attractiveness, which are inherent in judgements of beauty. This portrayal gives a sense of perfection, which develops an expectation and desire amongst young women (Hu, 2018). A study conducted by Silvestrini (2020) indicated that university

students were particularly affected by beauty standards based on race, as portrayed in the media. The students further affirmed that these beauty standards are built to serve the White community and have harmful effects of the idealization of Whiteness. In this regard, a significant number of students affirmed that this shapes what young women find attractive, as is perpetuated by the media.

In view of the above studies, the study participants validated the above as they view beauty as how it is presented to them. It was further confirmed that the media depicts beauty as being physically attractive. This incorporated views of the ideal body image, thus supporting the idea that the beauty of African beauty women is not well represented by the media. This view is in line with the macrosystems in the Ecological Systems Theory, which stipulates that individuals are affected by environmental factors, which in turn affects their impressions about themselves. The macrosystem constructs a social plan of an assumed culture, subdivisions and social background containing lifestyles, customs and resources introduced to individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). This corresponds with the view that the media forms part of the environmental factors, which helps the African women at University to conform to a social plan as constructed within the media. With the Media Systems Dependency Theory, the macro-environment is deemed to influence smaller scale relationships pertaining to the micro-environment (Ball-Rokeach, 2008). In this case, the macro-environment is made up of political and financial frameworks. South Africa has a unique history in terms of its political and economic background. With the racially segregated political construct of apartheid being in effect for many years, people of colour were treated unfairly and White standards were elevated throughout the media, politics, economics and almost every aspect of life in South Africa. Participants were of the opinion that White characteristics are perpetuated in the media and serve the White community more, as compared to the African community. This is due to the many years of political and socio-economic conditioning that, according to the participants, is still being propagated by the media in the macro-environment, and which affects the standards of beauty that they are exposed to.

6.4 Self-perceptions in relation to media presentations of beauty

External factors have an impact on how an individual views themselves. An individual who does not necessarily fit into the body image predominantly presented in the media may perceive themselves as inadequate. Foo (2010) affirmed that the narrow representation of beauty not only makes beauty ideal, but leaves young women trying to conform to unrealistic

ideals and being dissatisfied with their bodies. This shapes how women perceive what it takes to be beautiful (Akintayo, 2018). Choi (2018) informs that women engage in social comparisons by analyzing what they see in the media and making judgments of their own bodies and selves. This comparison can result in negative self-evaluations when the comparing factors are not similar.

It is affirmed that self-esteem plays a big role in body satisfaction and acceptance towards self-beauty, and acts as a promoter for an individual's self-esteem. The frequent portrayal of unrealistic images of beauty ideals affects how women perceive themselves, especially when their bodies are considered as flawed. This portrayal of beauty leads to women feeling less confident with themselves, which may be detrimental to how they perceive themselves (Foo, 2010). A study by Oberdick (2017) posited that there is a belief that young, thin and attractive women are the ideal, and also that they are the norm according to how the media portrays them—a false belief that leads to low levels of self-esteem and low body image in women. According to Naz, Abid, Naz, Tariq and Aleem (2019), self-image is the manner in which one takes into account one's own physical, psychological and emotional characteristics; the dimensions of one's ego; and social position. Therefore, accurate self-perception is important. The Media Systems Dependency Theory postulates that consumers depend intensely on a source (media) for the satisfaction of individual objectives (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993). One can therefore conclude that the media has a direct influence on young African women at University, affecting their self-esteem, self-image and how they change their standards of living in order to conform to the social plans as formed by the media. In this case, African women's self-perception will not be positive since their individual image of beauty does not match what is presented in the media. The Ecological Systems Theory is focused on the systems that are present that act to inform the opinions and perceptions of individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). In this instance, it is the forming of opinions by African women of themselves in relation to what the media shows as beauty, and their own self-perception regarding their beauty. It also takes into consideration time and the progression of an individual. By consistently being exposed to standards of beauty in the media, individuals' opinions can be reinforced and persist over time. Participants in this study have been continuously exposed to a particular standard of beauty that does not include their own characteristics. By being exposed to this standard continuously, their own opinions of their own image and self-perception are reinforced each time they are exposed to what is

shown in the media regarding beauty. To a certain extent, this added and even amplified negative self-perceptions.

6.5 The influence of media on beauty standards

Undeniably, the media plays a role in directing the society towards what is considered as ideal concerning beauty. According to Foo (2010), advertising using models who are thin or slender, with fair complexions and big eyes denies the existence of real women's beauty. In a study conducted by Yahla in Naz et al. (2019), university students, particularly young women, were found to have important concerns about body image perception because they want to have weight and appearances according to the social preferences that are portrayed in the media. This is because the media raises consciousness about body image in the youth's mind. Whilst social media sites introduce an entirely new technique of self-presentation, beauty has been described as purely attractiveness (Thomson & Stace in Awais, Campus, Maqbool & Ali, 2020).

The literature reviewed has confirmed that the African audience mostly does not relate to the standards of beauty presented by the media. As literature suggests that the media plays a crucial role in how people perceive and define beauty, participants in this study expressed how the media has influenced their physical appearance from who they were to changing the way they look in order to fit into what is described by the media as beautiful. It was highlighted in this study that the participants made efforts to work on their physical appearance related to a need to meet the characteristics of beauty as presented by media. The views of the participants in this study are shared with the MSD Theory in that the media assists those using it to associate with their social world (Pinkleton & Austin, 2001). The social world of participants in this study is the media. One can therefore conclude that the participants associate with what the media portrays in terms of beauty standards. This was highlighted by the students when they alluded to the fact that at times, they change their social values and norms of beauty standards in order to comply with those set by the media. This can also relate to the MSD Theory, whereby the constancy of being exposed to the media's ideal beauty standard affects participants' perceptions of what ideal beauty is. As the participants stated, they feel influenced by the standards of beauty shown in the media and this could be due to their degree of vulnerability (Ball-Rokeach, 2008). The Ecological Systems Theory, specifically the microsystems, also alludes to this by asserting that the microsystems (media) shape structures (standards of beauty) in which individuals (young

women) have immediate interaction (Berk, 2000). The individuals (young women) are affected and are influenced by the microsystems (media). The media shapes the standards of beauty that the young women progressively adapt themselves to meet, according to their own self-perception. Hence, the media plays an immediate and unswerving role in how the participants view themselves in relation with what is shown in the media.

6.6 Body shaming vs. Positivity

The media reflects the bodies of women in a narrow scale, hence the impact of such discrimination of young women by the media is immeasurable (Robinette, 2019). A study by Bruer-Hess and Lin (2019) indicated that body shaming encompasses unpleasant emotions, including embarrassment about one's body. The study further revealed that this is often an overwhelming form of shame applied to the presentation of one's physical being. This can be seen in how most participants perceive their bodies due to the impact the media has and how it portrays beautiful bodies. On the other hand, a study by Awais et al. (2020) revealed that to some extent, social media use has a positive relationship with appearance. This is related to the fact that some women still think that the way in which the media represents beauty helps them shape their own beauty. Therefore, the media can also serve as a powerful tool in developing a positive image of women in people's mind when used effectively (Verma, 2016). A study by Harper and Choma (2019) compared how Indian women and African American women internalised White ideals. The results revealed that the media portrays women in both negative and positive images. The negative impacts were confirmed by African-American women who mentioned significantly more negative psychological effects which include dissatisfaction about their bodies and could be related to body shaming. On the other hand, the Indian women mentioned more positive effects, which could be related to positivity, as they identified in this study.

According to Naz et al. (2019), physical appearance is more noticeable in young women. In this regard, self-image has a significant impact, particularly for these women as this guides their thoughts regarding social and emotional behaviour. Literature revealed that the media influences how young women view themselves. They at times draw positivity from how the media portrays beauty, at the same time contributing negatively to body shaming those who do not meet the ideal image presented. In this study, all the participants believed that the media impacts how different body shapes are regarded, drawing conclusions that the media can influence both negatively as well as positively. There was still a general trend towards the

ideal body shape being thin and slender. The Media Systems Dependency Theory states that there is reliance on the media to satisfy requirements for information (Jackob, 2010). For the purpose of this study, this narrative fits well because the media is used for the purpose of gaining information to satisfy the requirements of beauty. The participants confirmed that they use the media to draw their own conclusion about beauty, whether negative or positive. It is also in line with the MSD Theory as the unpredictability of exploring beauty standards by young African women in relation to themselves is continuously expanding (Luo, 2018). With regard to the Ecological Systems Theory, the guiding of participants' thoughts and perceptions of themselves in terms of beauty standards forms a part of their association with the media (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). The theory advocates that a person's associations form their condition. This also applies to their thinking and their perception of their physical body as related to what is shown in the media.

6.7 African female celebrities/influencers and their Impact on beauty

According to Foo (2010), celebrities and models are seen as gatekeepers who represent ideals of beauty and young women attempt to imitate or merge their own characteristics with those of endorsers. Findings of a study by Hu (2018) revealed that the body images of influencers suggest that women should be slim and sexy. This image is viewed as appealing and subsequently leaves impressionable individuals with the desire to look like their favourite celebrity. The message communicated by these images on social media constantly tells young women what it means to be beautiful and that their natural beauty is not enough (Kelly, 2017). This is indicative that there is no authenticity by the media and influencers or celebrities on how beauty is portrayed, and triggers a sense of unrealistic expectations of body image. Washburn (2018) alluded that the measure of beauty on social networking seems to be distorted and superficial due to image augmentation, which may lead to decreased satisfaction. It can be argued that this is unrealistic for some women due to various factors including socio-cultural backgrounds. The participants in a study conducted by Eshiet (2020) indicated that social media and society impose unrealistic beauty standards on young women. In this study, it has been confirmed that social media and the cultural ideology of beauty continues to structure certain ideals of beauty. Celebrities are seen to impart on their notions of beauty to their followers on social media accounts and overall media.

In South Africa, following international trends, celebrities have taken to social media to communicate their beauty ideologies to their often young fans. The participants of this study

identified prominent African celebrities and influencers who they believe play major roles in influencing beauty standards, which to some extent they attempt to keep up with. This is validated by the MSD Theory, which states that there is reliance on the media to strengthen social qualities and standards (Luo, 2018). Participants in this study, to some extent, confirmed that they identify with African female celebrities or influencers, which in turn means that the media indeed strengthens how they view themselves in accordance with the social qualities and standards of beauty as portrayed by these influencers. Furthermore, the MSD Theory emphasizes the lack of prediction that can occur in terms of social situations that arise. The emergence of influencers and social media celebrities is one of the outcomes of media taking on a socialized form on the internet and the introduction of social media (Loges & Ball-Rokeach, 1993). The phenomenon of altering images to fit the ideal standard of beauty as per the celebrities' viewpoints, and also what is popular, can be related to their interest in attracting attention from corporate brands and not for the point of influencing young people, which comes as a consequence. This aligns with the MSD Theory, as their alliance is asymmetric and caters towards corporate interests and their standards of beauty (Loges & Jung, 2001). Social media celebrities are also an example of micro MSD relations as the audience becomes more prominent in creating and sharing information, becoming a part of the media (Loges & Jung, 2001). With regard to the Ecological Systems Theory, the individual is affected and influenced by the microsystem (Paquette & Ryan, 2001). The microsystem forms structures that an individual has immediate interaction with and due to social media, individuals now have immediate interactions with this type of media through their cellular devices (Puroila & Karila, 2001). This further reiterates media's standards of beauty which influence young women's perceptions of themselves. Furthermore, this theory puts forward that the effects between the structures of the microsystem and the individual is bi-directional (Berk, 2000). This may be more evident for social media influencers, where they see the beauty ideal set out in the media and change themselves or their own pictures to fit that ideal, thereby portraying the media's standard of beauty.

6.8 Psychological implications

Excessive reliance on media regarding one's appearance can pose threats to the individual's mental health. A study conducted amongst Brazilian female college students by Kelly (2017) concluded that there is evidence that the media often acts as an important factor in weight and eating problems because it is known that frequent exposures to thin bodies by the media could lead to body dissatisfaction. Psychological and social factors can increase an

individual's risk of developing eating disorders (Tiggerman, 2003). The mental health issues in this case may centre on feeling adequate in terms of one's physical appearance, believing that their physical appearance as it stands will not get them the life that they want, and that they are less valued because of it (Tiggerman, 2006). The two types of eating disorders that can develop are anorexia nervosa, where an individual avoids food completely or eats only small quantities of a particular type of food and bulimia nervosa, where an extraordinary amount of food is eaten and then purged out of the body in a variety of forms (Terhoeven et al., 2020).

Kalender (2020) affirms that seeing images that represent ideal beauty over and over again in the media make ordinary women compare their body proportions and have upsetting emotions when they do not meet these standards. Thus, the media, which creates a fantasy world with the ideal beauty, makes ordinary women feel envy towards the illusionary representation, leading them to feel discontent about their bodies (Kalender, 2020). This study further corroborated that young women are introduced to beauty standards set by the media from all angles, and they cannot separate the unrealistic representations of beauty in the media from daily life reality. Subsequently, this leads to developing major stress, feeling inadequate, with low self-esteem due to attempts to conform to beauty standards that are difficult to attain. Kim and Lennon (2007) assert that the standards of beauty that surround these young women give rise to an occurrence of the individual comparing themselves to those standards and then allowing that comparison to form part of their self-evaluation. If a woman's self-evaluation leads to the conclusion that she is overweight and she has a perception of body dissatisfaction, this is a predictor of low self-esteem (Kim & Lennon, 2007).

Body image is characterized as a perception of the image of the body, which is formed in the mind. This is continuously influenced by the media and may lead individuals to recognize and internalize these ideals as desirable social standards, making them feel dissatisfied with their own image (Uchoa et al., 2017). Achieving the ideal of beauty can cause body dissatisfaction and may lead to low self-esteem. Body dissatisfaction appears to be a growing public health problem and the experience of body dissatisfaction may threaten the psychological and physical well-being of women. A study by Trekels (2018) concluded that the media sets an unrealistic appearance standard and exposure to such media messages is associated with negative feelings about the body (i.e., body dissatisfaction) as a result of the perceived failure to meet the ideal standards. Kim and Lennon (2007) posit that these

psychological disorders can take on the form of anger, depression and body image disturbance viewpoints.

Consumers experience a discrepancy between the actual and ideal physical attributes and this is often considered a predictor of social appearance anxiety. The findings of the study by Trekels (2018) further indicated that young women who fear negative evaluations display further symptoms, including depression as well as distorted body images, as a result of unmet needs of beauty portrayed by the media. A study conducted by Washburn (2018) suggests that although social networking appears to infiltrate women's thought processes due to its accessibility and social relevance to young women, there seems to be damaging effects of social media. These include alterations in self-concepts and social stereotypes regarding body size and shape. Social media seems to play a role in the mental regulation of young women which leads to an inability to regulate emotions. Thus one may end up presenting with psychological challenges as they try to fit the social standards of beauty portrayed by the media.

This study confirmed that psychological difficulties are associated with the internalization of a perceived failure to conform to standards of beauty. Psychological issues noted included depression and body dysmorphia. The findings of this study concur with both the Media Systems Dependency Theory, as well as the Ecological Systems Theory under chronosystems. The MSD theory points out that media has diverse psychological reactions by individuals who report comparative exposure (De Boer & Velthuisen, 2001). This was confirmed by the participants of the study, that exposure to media beauty standards is linked to psychological implications for the young women, especially if they cannot meet the criteria for the standards portrayed by the media. The Ecological Systems Theory links the findings of this study to chronosystems. Chronosystems cites developmental changes in the student population as well as challenges that come with the media and self-identity which differ from age to age (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Women at University are viewed to be at a developmental stage where external factors affect how they view themselves. These external factors in this study can be viewed as the media. The study in question confirmed that the media to some extent psychologically affects women at varsity, including how they identify with themselves. Their physical appearance and their perception of their own physical self is under scrutiny, which leads to psychological consequences.

6.9 Need for inclusive representation

According to Kelly (2017), the media causes women to have unrealistic expectations of beauty, but women can reclaim the media as their own. The power of the media in terms of how beauty is seen by young women is immeasurable. It is therefore important to acknowledge the power that the media has as the first step to reclaiming beauty. The definition of beauty can be re-contextualised by acknowledging women across all cultures, traditions and standards. Kalender (2020) suggested that it is important that the media should use more diverse representations of beauty, especially that of women, without causing damage to women's health. Young women should be taught to love their bodies and not think that they need to fit into the thin and young ideal body image seeming to be valued in society. As much as media is used to portray women's bodies in a narrow scale, the very same media can be used to empower women. A study conducted in India by Verma (2016) on the role of the media in empowering women concluded that the media could be used as a powerful tool in developing positive images to improve women's image. The study further suggested that women must not be portrayed in stereotyped images. Naz et al. (2019) affirm that the media can restructure the self-perceptions of beauty of women if women's beauty is portrayed in a positive direction that is inclusive of all forms of beauty. Whilst the media has harmful negative effects on an audience of young viewers, media literacy could become an effective tool for helping young viewers translate the stereotypes portrayed in how the media defines beauty to the young audience, particularly young African women (Goodall, 2012).

The literature reviewed in this study has interrogated different views about how women, especially young women, define beauty and how they structure their definitions according to how the media sets its ideal beauty standards. It is the view of the participants in this study that every individual has his or her very own ideation of beauty. The participants all wished that the definition of beauty should be all-inclusive, especially by the media. Even though the participants have reiterated that the media's beauty standards are westernized, a shift towards a diverse presentation has been noted. The participants further expressed a need for more inclusion in the presentation of beauty.

The MSD Theory highlights that individuals depend on the media for fulfilling their own objectives, such as gaining information and determining their individual social condition (Ball-Rokeach, 1998). If inclusive representation is portrayed by the media, it can result in individuals having a positive view on their social condition. Media Systems Dependency

relations influences young women's media consumption and the effect on their thinking and behaviour (Ball-Rokeach, 1985, 1998). If inclusive representation is portrayed by the media, this allows these young women to develop a positive viewpoint about themselves and may allow these women to gravitate towards corporate brands that represent them. They may even consume more media that is inclusive of their beauty standards than brands that do not represent them (Smeester & Mandel, 2006). With regard to the Ecological Systems Theory, the macrosystem would be the central focus since the assumed culture of the media would be incorporating inclusive representations of beauty standards (Bronfenbrenner, 2002). If inclusive representation is to be achieved wholly, it should be achieved at the micro-, meso- and exosystem levels as well.

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings of the study in relation to contemporary literature. The chapter also presented the theories underpinning this study in relation to the findings. The Media Systems Dependency Theory and the Ecological Systems Theory were expressed based on the participants' perception of the media's standards of beauty. It was also discussed based on the participants' perception of themselves with regard to their own beauty standards. Ultimately, it was found that young female African students do feel negatively about their own selves as they perceive media beauty standards to be far from their current physical appearance. The participants also feel that representations of different standards of beauty should be included in mainstream media.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a short conclusion on the study carried out. It expresses the achievement of the research aim and objectives and provides the limitations of this research project as well. Recommendations for future research are presented, along with a personal reflection that gives insight into the researcher's interest on this study topic.

7.2 Conclusion

In a globalized world, the pressure on young women to take on certain characteristics and abilities to succeed is not uncommon. However, the same pressure is extended when it comes to beauty standards. These beauty standards are further propagated by the media and social media through which young women have constant access to these beauty standards. The aim of this study was to explore the influential role played by the media in the way in which African female students perceive themselves. The objectives of this study were to explore female students' perceptions of media influence; to explore female students' self-perceptions in relation to media presentations of beauty; and to explore the influence of the media on female students' confidence and self-esteem.

According to Paquette and Raine (2004), the media has leading and unconscious effects on women's views of self-perception. The findings of this study revealed that the media does play a role in influencing African female students' perceptions of themselves. Their perceptions of media influence centered on beauty being physically attractive, and that the beauty ideal set out in the media portrays thinness as beautiful. In concurrence, the results of a study by Bissell and Rask (2010) also indicated that the media portrays beauty with the slender body ideal. The young women's self-perceptions in relation to media presentations of beauty were found to be negative. They put forward that their own beauty was not aligned with standards of beauty as shown in the media. This is corroborated by Bell and Dittmar (2011) who pointed out that the presentation of thin 'body perfect' goals in the media is undeniably equated with negative self-perceptions in young girls and women. Similarly, the results of a study by Perloff (2014) suggested that exposure to images of a slim-ideal increased women's dissatisfaction with their bodies and affected them negatively.

Lastly, the influence of the media on young women's confidence and self-esteem cannot be denied. According to case reports by Veretilo and Billick (2012), social media intensifies

symptoms linked with serious issues of emotional wellness. In a study, university students were especially affected by the standards of beauty portrayed based on race in the media (Silvestrini, 2020). Participants acknowledged that they felt pressure to conform to the media standards of beauty and the strain to keep up with those standards. The psychological impact of this resulted in depression, eating disorders, body dissatisfaction and body image disturbances. The results of this study further indicate that the media portrayal of beauty is not inclusive of African women's characteristics and that the constant bombardment of media depicting a narrow standard of beauty does affect young women's psychological well-being. Robinette (2019) substantiated that time and again, Black women are required to conform to westernized standards of beauty in order to measure up in society.

7.3 Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

This study was intended to be conducted with more participants, but only 7 participants were interviewed. This is owed to the difficulty in scheduling a convenient time for the interviews with various participants, which later ended up not happening as the university closed in March 2020 following the national lockdown due to the Coronavirus. However, this did not cause major disadvantages to the study.

Recommendations are made based on the results of this study. The study was qualitatively focused on a few individuals who offered in-depth descriptions of their experiences, thus it may be useful to conduct a broad quantitative study to enable the generalization of results to a large population. This study focused on African female university participants, thus it might be interesting to explore the influence of the media on male university students and their self-perceptions thereof. Finally, this study looked at the media as a broad medium of communication and socialization in the society. However, the study results indicated a high use of social media as compared to the other withstanding media platforms (television, magazines, billboards, radio). Therefore, it might be interesting to specifically explore the psychological implications of the excessive use of social media.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Gatekeeper Permission



Ms Nompumelelo Gcazu (SN 215034519)
School of Applied Human Sciences
College of Humanities
Howard College Campus
UKZN
Email: nompulelogcaza3@gmail.com

Dear Ms Gcazu

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

"Exploring media influence on African female university student's perceptions of themselves."

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by conducting interviews with African female students on the Howard College Campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book. Identity numbers and email addresses of individuals are not a matter of public record and are protected according to Section 14 of the South African Constitution, as well as the Protection of Public Information Act. For the release of such information over to yourself for research purposes, the University of KwaZulu-Natal will need express consent from the relevant data subjects. Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely


MR SS MOKOENA
REGISTRAR

Office of the Registrar

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0) 31 260 8005/2206 Facsimile: +27 (0) 31 260 7824/2204 Email: registrar@ukzn.ac.za

Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

Appendix B: Ethical Approval



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

09 September 2019

Ms Nompumelelo Gcaza (215034519)
School Of Applied Human Sc
Howard College

Dear Miss Gcaza,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00000317/2019

Project title: Exploring media influence on African female university student s perceptions of themselves.

Full Approval – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 26 August 2019 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid for one year from 09 September 2019.






To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)

/spm

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix C: Informed Consent

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:

Good Day

My name is Nompumelelo Gcaza, a Master of Social Science (Clinical Psychology) student in the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Howard College Campus.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research on "Exploring Media Influence on African Female University Student's Perceptions of Themselves". The purpose of this research is to explore the influential role played by the media in the way in which African women perceive themselves. This is significant because it is proposed that the perceptions African women have of themselves, which may be as a result of Media influence, are one of the leading factors to the behavior of changing their appearance. The study is expected to enroll 8 participants from first year to fourth year within the UKZN Howard College Campus. It will involve the following procedures; meeting the researcher in a venue at Howard College Campus, and answering questions in an interview which will be audio recorded. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be 45 minutes to 1 hour. The study is not funded and is conducted as a requirement for the Master of Social Science Degree.

There are no major risks involved in the study, accept for possible emotional reaction which may occur as a result of participant's own internal thoughts and reflections. The study will provide no direct benefits to participants, however we hope that the study will provoke thoughts about African women's identity and possibly review any form of influence from the Media. If participants experience psychological harm as a result of the study, they will be referred to psychologists within the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC/00000317/2019).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at; 215034519@stu.ukzn.ac.za or 0735717354; or Mr M Hlengwa (research supervisor) at Hlengwam1@ukzn.ac.za or 0312607982. The UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee may also be contacted at:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in the research study is voluntary and participants are free to refuse or withdraw anytime when they feel the need without any negative consequences. No costs will be experienced by participants as a result of participation in the study.

Confidentiality will be ensured by protecting the identity of participants by using pseudonyms and all information will be only used for the purpose of the research study. At the end of the study, the recorded data will be saved in an encrypted USB which will be kept safe in the university's school of Applied Human Sciences for a period of five years, including the transcripts made from the recordings, and after this period it will be disposed.

CONSENT

Ihave been informed about the study entitled 'Exploring Media Influence on African Women's Perceptions of Themselves' by Nompumelelo Gcaza.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

I have been informed that should I experience psychological harm as a result of the study, I will be referred to psychologists within the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at 215034519@stu.ukzn.ac.za or 0735717354, or Mr M Hlengwa (research supervisor) at Hlengwam1@ukzn.ac.za or 0312607982.

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent,

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness
(Where applicable)

Date

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Greetings/Salutations

My name is Nompumelelo Gcaza, I am a student in the School of Applied Human Sciences under the discipline of psychology at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Howard College. I am working under the supervision of Mthokozisi Hlengwa on a research study entitled "*Exploring Media Influence on African Female University Student's Perceptions of Themselves*". I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for availing yourself to be part of this study.

For this interview session, I have scheduled questions that I would like to discuss with you and you are welcome to add any other additional information that you might find valuable to the study. This interview is scheduled for 45-50minutes and there will be a five-minute break if needed.

Please take note of the following important points before we commence with the interview:

- Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time. In the event of withdrawal or refusal of participation, you will not incur any penalties

- The information you will provide will remain confidential and anonymous as we will not request any personal identification. Moreover, a pseudonym will be used.

- The information will be used for research purposes and related publications where applicable.

Questions

1. What are African female university student's perceptions of media influence?
 - In view of the different media platforms such as TV adverts, billboards, magazines, social media, what are your thoughts about how beauty is presented?
 - Can you relate to the media presentation of beauty as an African female?
 - Do you think what is portrayed by media has an influence on people's physical appearance?

2. What are African female university student's self-perceptions in relation to media presentation of beauty?
 - How do you see yourself as an African female in relation to what media portrays as ideal women's beauty?

-
- What inspiration have you had from the media about your physical appearance?
 - Are there any practical ideas you have tried based on inspiration from the media?
3. What is the influence of media on African female university student's confidence and self-esteem?
- What effect does the media influence have on your confidence as an African female?
 - What effect does the media influence have on your self-esteem as an African female?
 - Are there any changes you would like to see in media in terms of how African females are represented?

Appendix E: Editor's Report

EDITING LETTER

696 Clare Road
Clare Estate
Durban
4091
22 March 2021


To: Whom it may concern

**Editing of Master's thesis: Exploring media influence on African female
university student's perceptions of themselves.**

This letter serves as confirmation that the aforementioned thesis has been language edited.

Any queries may be directed to the author of this letter.

Regards

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the sender.

MP MATHEWS
Lecturer and Language Editor
Mercimathews4@gmail.com

Appendix F: Turnitin Report

Master's Thesis			
ORIGINALITY REPORT			
12%	8%	1%	9%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS
PRIMARY SOURCES			
1	Submitted to University of KwaZulu-Natal Student Paper		3%
2	Submitted to Middlesex University Student Paper		1%
3	Submitted to Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh Student Paper		1%
4	researchspace.ukzn.ac.za Internet Source		1%
5	trap.ncirl.ie Internet Source		1%
6	link.springer.com Internet Source		1%
7	Submitted to Federation University Student Paper		<1%
8	www.researchgate.net Internet Source		<1%
9	www.dpublication.com		