

How do Black South African women interpret contemporary media representations of themselves?



By
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Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Signed _____ on this day _____ 2018

Abstract

This study aimed to investigate how Black South African women interpret stereotypical depictions of Black women in the media. Due to the racial history of South Africa, Black women are doubly disadvantaged because of the oppressive intersection of their race and gender. Nevertheless, since 1994, South Africa transitioned into a democratic society based on the ideology of equality and aiming to promote racial unity amongst the citizens of South Africa. During this transition, the media played a critical role as a tool with which to promote these new ideals. Nonetheless, much research shows that the media continues to portray Black women stereotypically, which may enhance beliefs about them that may continue to position Black women at a disadvantage. Research further shows that stereotypical media depictions of Black women may negatively affect their own self-image, identity and attitude. However, much research often excludes the views of Black women on studies about Black women. This study addresses this gap as its focus is on the interpretations and perspective of Black South African women themselves. This was a qualitative study, which used visual media elicitation techniques and semi-structured interviews as a method of data collection. The sample was composed of seven, Black South African women, who were active media consumers, between the ages of 20-34. The research results were analysed through the method of thematic content analysis. The main finding of this study revealed that the participants felt that the media represented Black women through negative and inaccurate representations. Secondly, it emerged that participants had adopted combative defence strategies against internalising negative images based on media depictions about Black women. This was evidenced by the fact that participants spoke about the value of internalising positive self-images based on their own self-concepts of themselves. However, some reported to persistently struggle with maintaining these ideas outside of negative media depictions of Black women. Thirdly, the findings of this study further revealed that the participants felt popular perceptions of Black women influenced how others viewed them. They felt that these depictions made them feel less valued within their societies.

I dedicate this work to the Jwili babes and their Mayekiso (Mayeks).

Just look how far the Kokstad people have come.

Ndinithanda ngalo lonke uthando endinalo

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Lencwadi yeyakho, ndiyibhalele wena ngoba uyiNdlovukazi kum”*

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