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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Introduction**

The socio-political history of the South African context, according to research, influences both contemporary discourses of race and gender (Berger, 2002; Esprey, 2017; Jere, 2014; Luyt, 2011; Morwe, 2014; Segalo, 2015). However, some researchers argue that gender warrants equal attention, as the South African history is equally a gendering system (Booyesen, 2010; Luyt, 2011; Segalo, 2014; Segalo, 2015).

Nevertheless, there is often much focus on the racial history of South Africa, as the system of apartheid was formed on the idea of racial segregation and oppression. Under this system, power and governance were based on racial divisions and an intentional inequality amongst the country's citizens. This was the case under colonialism and later under the apartheid system. (Durrheim, Quayle, Whitehead, & Kriel, 2007; Bird & Garda, 1997). Under apartheid in particular, the government utilised different platforms to spread propaganda designed to facilitate racial inequality and oppression between the different racial groups in South Africa (Bock, 2014; Bock & Hunt, 2014; Esprey, 2017; Smedley, 1998). These tactics included using propaganda that was filtered into media reports and manufactured to spread ideas about Black people. These tactics then further ensured the discrimination of Black people (Durrheim et al., 2007; Bird & Garda, 1997).

Studies show that Black women possess two characteristics (race and gender) that have historically disadvantaged them in society (Crenshaw, 1989; Gay & Tate, 1998). Mayo (2010, p. 1) further highlights that the suffering of Black women is unique because the social order places them in a position where they are less likely to have power and control than "White men, White women and Black men". However, democratic policies were introduced as the foundation of the process of how the current government would function (Desai, 2010). These policies were set to rectify past wrongs such as those that undermined people based on their race and gender. As a result, twenty-four years post democracy, South Africa is considered a country based on racial and gender equality and fairness. As a result, the topic of Black women, a previously disadvantaged group is an area of interest (Berger, 2002; Segalo, 2015).

As the media was instrumental in shaping societal ideas under the apartheid system, it is instrumental in contemporary times (Bird & Garda, 1997; Leonard, 2014). As a result, there is increased significance on research of how the media portrays Black women through the different forms of media such as popular magazines, film and television (Masina, 2010; Mayo, 2010; Sanger, 2009). Furthermore, it is even more significant to understand how Black South African women understand and feel about how the media depicts them in a democratic era (Segalo, 2014).

The media has an extensive reach in contemporary society (Richardson-Stovall, 2012; Wood, 1994). Therefore, the current study has taken a view of the media as being a primary method through which representations of contemporary socio-culture are offered. A further advantage is that in contemporary society, mass media has become profoundly instrumental in influencing the way we make sense of our daily lives (Higginbottom, 2014; Leonard, 2014; Matsebatlela, 2009; I. A. Ndiaye & B. Ndiaye, 2014). Mass media apparently enables access into individual worlds, in ways previously not possible. On the positive side, the media allows us to learn about different cultures, races and subsequently, other people's lives. As a result, the media can tell stories of who people are, in ways that influence how they and others view themselves.

Furthermore, research suggests that media consumers may come to depend on media depictions to understand not only themselves but others as well (Green, 2012; Mayo, 2010; Tounsel, 2015). Thus, the media plays a significant role in representing people's self-images, teaching individuals to view themselves in terms of those images and in educating others about those images. However, media depictions are not always accurate depictions. For instance, the media can act as a conduit for dispersing powerful distortions and inaccuracies, which are then presented as facts (Amedie, 2015; Gibbons, 2009; Udeze & Uzuegbunam, 2013). For this reason, the current study sought to understand in particular, how Black women might feel about how the media, especially contemporary media, depicts them.

In this regard, several scholars argue that the media portrays the image of the Black woman in stereotypical ways (Gammage, 2016; Khan, 2007; Lues, 2005; Mayo, 2010; Tounsel, 2015; Ukadike, 1994). According to several studies, some media often stereotypically depicts the Black women as 'angry, crazy, hypersexual or ugly' (Ashley, 2014; Walley-Jean, 2009; Woodard & Mastin, 2005), or through stereotypes in relation to their general image, intelligence or even physical appearance (Sanger, 2009; Masina, 2010; Vambe, Chikonzo &

Khan, 2007). Scholars argue that these stereotypical media depictions have a negative implication in that they facilitate ideas about Black women that subjugate and discriminate them in their societies (Gammage, 2016; King, 2015; Tounsel, 2015). Thus, stereotypical representations may leave Black women with a gendered racial identity. This may expose them to objectification, sexualisation and debasing representations (Marco, 2012).

Research further shows that under the apartheid system, the most common way for Black South Africa women to make a living was through “brewing beer, domestic work and casual work on farms owned by Whites” as they struggled to enter the workforce (Booyesen, 2010; Hutson, 2007, p. 84). As a result, South African Black women formed their identity within these disempowering and displaced positions (Lues, 2005; Marco, 2012).

In this context, it is important to delve into a racial group, previously positioned at the bottom of the totem pole and understand how Black South African women feel about how contemporary media represents them. It is also important to understand the effects of stereotypical media depictions from the gatekeepers themselves, as they are the ones who experience them.

Through elicitation techniques, in the form of media prompts Black South African women were able to articulate their knowledge and authentic ideas in relation to the topic, comfortably (Barton, 2015; Glaw, Inder, Kable & Hazelton, 2017). Thus, the purpose of this research study is to understand how Black South African women interpret stereotypical depictions of themselves in the media as a racial group.

## **1.1 Research Aims**

This research study aimed to investigate three important aspects. Firstly, this research study aimed to understand how Black South African women perceived how they, as a group, are depicted in the media. In order to achieve this, the research topic partly relied on participants’ tacit knowledge (the unspoken or unexpressed) of their feelings and opinions of how the media depicts Black women. To access this knowledge a few popular media images were used as prompts as part of the data collection process. Barton (2015) defines elicitation techniques as a category of research tasks that use visual, verbal or written stimuli to encourage participants to share their ideas. For example, visual techniques were used to understand how the

participants interpreted how black women are represented in the media. These techniques were intended to enable the participants to bring in their own ideas and impressions (Barton, 2015). Therefore, this first aim was instrumental in allowing the participants to make their own interpretations of the topic.

Secondly, this research study sought to understand the thoughts and feelings that Black women reported in response to their perceptions of contemporary media depictions of Black women. This is imperative because there is a gap in the literature on this important topic. Existing research shows that issues of race are usually based on the experiences of Black men whilst the issues of gender are usually based on the experiences of White women (Crenshaw, 1989; Mayo, 2010). Thus, this aim sought to advance contributions into research with a specific focus on the experience of Black women who are marginalised based on both their race and gender.

Third, this study aimed to investigate the effects of stereotypical media depictions on Black women's self-image, sense of self and attitudes, should the participants report that these exist from their perspective. In consideration of much research indicating that contemporary media often depicts Black women stereotypically, it is imperative to understand the impact that these depictions may have on Black women. Research shows that stereotypical media depictions may have a negative effect on one's self esteem, self-image and attitudes (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015). Thus, some research shows that over the course of time, Black women may come to adopt stereotypical depictions of themselves (Patterson, 2004). However, some studies argue that positive examples of people in their interpersonal environments are more likely to influence Black women than external influences (Booyesen, 2010; Patterson, 2004). Thus, this aim sought to understand how Black women themselves interpret and experience the effects of stereotypical media images on their self-image.

## **1.2 Research Rationale**

Often, studies investigating media depictions, constructions and portrayals of Black women focus on the experiences of African American women (Harnois, 2010; King, 2015; Tounsel, 2015; Walley-Jean, 2009). Although there are some historical similarities between Black South African women and Black African American women, the histories of Black South African women differ due to their experiences under the governance of apartheid.

The apartheid system comprised of racist and sexist laws that directly affected Black women. Under this system Black women were prevented from access to employment, health and education (Durrheim et al., 2007; Ntwape, 2016). This meant that the ability of Black women's access to basic human rights was heavily delayed (Lues, 2005). Thus, the history of Black South African women warrants specific studies that focus on them. However, there is a gap of literature on the experiences of how Black South African women interpret media depictions of themselves. Thus, this study is significant because it serves to contribute to research based on the specific experiences of South African women from their own perspective.

Several research studies indicate that Black South African women are often the subject of stereotypical media depictions (Chiumbu, 2016; Leonard, 2014; Maree & Jordaan, 2016). According to Singletary, Ruggs, Hebl and Davies (2009) the effects of stereotyping may negatively influence the motivations and even self-esteem of the individual to whom the stereotype pertains to, especially when that individual faces stereotyping treatment. This is to the extent that the individual can perform worse in domains where the negative stereotypes exist for a group of which they are a member. This inferior performance can be in contrast to their actual abilities. Singletary (et al., 2009, p. 1) states that this "stereotype threat may create performance decrements that may ultimately impact major life decisions and may prevent individuals from reaching their full potential within a threatened domain". For this reason, it is very important to investigate how Black South African women interpret the effects of stereotypical media depictions on their own self-perception. This study specifically investigated the perceptions held by Black women on how they felt stereotypical media depictions affected their general self-conceptualization.

Mayo (2010) argues that stereotypical media depictions of Black women have the implications of positioning them in a narrative that perpetuates racial inequalities and biases, which then become prevalent in society. As a result, this may have an ominous effect on Black women in all areas and aspects of their lives, such as occupational, social, recreation and physical aspects. Furthermore, research on stereotypes indicates that stereotypes about an individual's group can influence individual and broader social opinion on stereotyped individuals (Booyesen, 2007; Singletary et al., 2009; Nguyen, 2016). Thus, it is of more significance to understand how Black South African women interpret negative media depictions of themselves considering that the negative effects of stereotypical depictions do not only affect the stereotyped individual directly but also how society views and treats them.

This study examined media depictions of Black women, as it seems that the media plays a crucial role in reframing progressive or regressive attitudes and practices. The hope would be that in post-apartheid South Africa, media representations would reflect race fairly or at least accurately. However, some studies highlight concerns about how the media still represents Black women as a racial category (Chiumbu, 2016; Leonard, 2014; Maree & Jordaan, 2016). Furthermore, studies indicate that research on thoughts and beliefs of Black women is lacking. (Kiguwa, 2006; McCallum, 2005; Segalo, 2015). Thus, considering much research indicating that the media often portrays Black women through stereotypes, it is important to investigate how Black South African women interpret these depictions. In this manner, this study advances literature on the perceptions of Black South African women and how they feel the media depicts them.

Some studies have specifically studied media constructions of Black beauty and the Black women's body image (Sanger, 2009; Masina, 2010). There have also been studies about how South African women are represented in popular African magazines such *Drum*, *True Love* and *Destiny* advertisements, the newspaper *City Press*, the popular South African daily soap *Generations* and in TV advertisements on the broadcast channel SABC 3 (Masina, 2010; Luyt, 2011; Sanger, 2009). Many of these studies have shown that although the media has adopted less pervasive racial stereotypes, subtle racial stereotypes, however, still exist in how Black women are represented in popular media platforms. This study differs from these in that it sought to contribute to literature on how Black South African women understand contemporary media portrayals of themselves and how they interpret the effects of these on their self-image as well as their perceptions of how others may be influenced.

Furthermore, as already stated, some research argues that the dominant narratives of race and gender are those of Black men and of White middle-class women (Berberick, 2010; Hammett, 2010; Harnois, 2010; Masina, 2010; Sanger, 2009). Thus, a further significance of this research study is that it sought to advance research on Black women through the lens of Black women. This gives a previously voiceless racial group priority in narrating their own stories (Segalo, 2015). In so doing, the rationale for undertaking this study is that there are social benefits to understanding these factors as a form of contribution to efforts to rectify past societal wrongs and further contribute to racially progressive ideologies.



## **Chapter Two: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The focus of this research study is on some of the ways that Black South African women might interpret and experience stereotypical media depictions of themselves. To understand the current context of media discourses, the first part of this chapter is a review of literature of some of the current socio-political discourses of race in South Africa in general. However, because the identities of Black women can be understood to take form, in whatever ways, in relation to the intersectional aspects of race and gender, the second part of this section reviews literature on this intersectionality.

As has become clear, the media is a core focus of this current study's interests. Hence, because race is a significant feature of the current study, in order to gain a historical understanding of the abilities that the media has in terms of societal influence, a review of the influence of the media during and after the apartheid era, follows. This part then leads to a review of literature on the current media influence in terms of how the media currently represents race and gender.

The last part of this section reviews literature on how the media currently represents Black women in the most popular discourses about them. This includes the impact that stereotypical media depictions may have on Black women according to the existing literature.

For the purposes of this research study, the term “media” refers to the different forms of media such as visual, digital, social or print in their different uses. Furthermore, the media referred to in this study is media that is available in South Africa, through the different platforms and not necessarily produced in South Africa.

### **2.2 The socio-political environment and the discourses of race in South Africa**

Some research suggests that currently a complex variety of discourses about race in both public and private spaces characterise the South African socio-political environment (Bock, 2014; Esprey, 2017). Research into media depictions of Black women in South Africa must engage with the broader social environment within which these discourses occur, as it may influence

them. This section will explore the concept of race in the South African context with considerations of pertinent aspects of its political history.

Firstly, over the last one hundred years and more, South Africa has been a country that based its socio-political stratifications on crude racial categorisations. These racial categorisations were formalised when the apartheid policy assigned racial categories within the legislation (Bock, 2014; Bock & Hunt, 2015; Durrheim, et al., 2007). These classifications fixed an individual within a specific racial hierarchy, which also positioned the other racial groups against Whiteness (Smedley, 1998). Through this process, the concept of Whiteness as a race was associated with privilege and added opportunities (Smedley, 1998; Seekings, 2008). Smedley (1998, p. 695) explains that this was to the extent that the laws of the country aimed to reduce the rights of non-Whites and to deny them access to “wealth, power, and privilege”. During these times, the lowest socio-economic and political racial group was that of Black people (Hammett, 2010; Kiguwa, 2006; King, 2015; Morwe, 2014; Sanger, 2009; Smedley, 1998). As already mentioned above, this was an era in South African history characterized by the system of apartheid, which segregated and oppressed non-Whites (Bryant, 2013; Hammett, 2010; Kiguwa, 2006; Morwe, 2014).

However, after the 1994 democratic elections, South Africa became a democratic society. This society was then designed with new policies sought to correct past injustices and ensure a more racially united South Africa (Lephakga, 2016). Many studies argue, however, that due to the systematic depth of the apartheid system it would be impossible for post-apartheid South Africa to be untainted by the experience of apartheid (Bock, 2014; Seekings, 2008; Segalo, 2013). Thus, even with the abolishment of apartheid, racial discrimination continues to persist in racial inequalities that reflect class stratifications, based on racial categories in societal structures within South Africa (Esprey, 2017; Seekings, 2008). As a result, race continues to be a subject of scrutiny and a ubiquitous topic in the country’s social environment (Berger, 2002; Hammett, 2010; Morwe, 2014). Moreover, Esprey (2017, p. 21) argues that notions of race in South Africa are synonymous with “class, power, privilege, guilt, shame, accountability, retribution, and reconciliation as well as a deeply embedded intergenerational transmission of trauma”. Bock and Hunt (2015) state that the socio-political environment of South Africa is characterised by debates of racial equality, notions of Whiteness, redress and racial transformation in both private and public spaces.

Seekings (2008) further states that South Africans tend to see their society in terms of race often categorizing themselves in accordance with the correlations of official apartheid-era racially assigned classifications. For example, many South Africans often refer to themselves as “Black people or Coloured people” as opposed to adopting the post-apartheid categories which define all South Africans as “Africans” (Chaka, 2013; Chiumbu, 2016). The effects of these factors create a social setting where emphasis is on people’s racial differences. Research shows that this is to the extent that these racial categories come to determine a person’s significance in terms of their social positions in society (Bock & Hunt, 2015; Masina, 2010; Turok & De Vos, 2015).

Some studies argue that consequently, ambivalence and difficulty characterise the social environment in which discourses of race in South Africa occur (Bock & Hunt, 2015). According to Hatang and Harris (2015, p.8) public discourses in South Africa are often “dominated by expressions of denial, alienation, obfuscation and even self-hatred” due to the generations of South Africans profoundly damaged around the issues of race. Furthermore, “spiteful chattering on social media and radio talk-shows, in letters to newspaper editors and at dinner parties” characterizes many public spaces in South Africa (Hatang & Harris, 2015, p. 3). Some scholars argue that common discourses and debates as seen on social media highlight that many South Africans carry past wounds and are polarized around issues of race (Segalo, 2015; Turok & De Vos, 2015). In her research paper entitled gender, social cohesion and everyday struggles in South Africa, Segalo (2015) suggests that currently, South Africans continue to carry persistent distress in relation to race, which in turns creates challenges concerning racial cohesiveness.

De Wet (2001) however explains that individuals who functioned under a racist society will typically express a degree of racialization within their discourses. Turok and De Vos (2015) argue that this factor contributes to the difficulties and discomfort of talking about more specifically inter-race prejudice. Furthermore, some studies suggest that due to the national investment in the peaceful processes of transformation in the era preceding apartheid, real engagement with and recognition of the violence of racism and the chronic experiences of trauma throughout the country were not adequately addressed (Esprey, 2017; Segalo, 2015). These studies argue that as a result, tense race relations and discourses currently characterize the country (Esprey, 2017; Segalo, 2015).

Therefore, in consideration of the complexity and ambivalence surrounding discourses of race as well as a political climate of racial unrest and “woundedness” around issues of race, it is important to explore the media discourses and stereotypical portrayals of Black South Africans in general, and Black South African women in particular. Research shows that in addition to a racial past, Black women also experience a gender oppression, thus an oppressive intersectionality of race and gender (Berger, 2002; Masina, 2010; Mayo, 2010; Segalo, 2013). The following section explores these issues further.

### **2.3 The intersection of race and gender identity in South Africa**

As already discussed, the socio-political history of South Africa is one of a heavily racialized society, with much value emphasised on one’s racial category. Thus, the racial categories that define most South Africans may highly influence their identity formation.

However, research shows that identity is a complex multi-faceted concept. According to Shields (2008), the concept of identity is the awareness of self, self-image, self-reflection and self-esteem. Higginbottom (2014, p. 5) identifies the concept of racial identity as “one’s self concept” which involves that person’s perceptions of their prescribed racial group membership. Furthermore, the process of formulating an identity occurs along changing social conditions (Berger, 2002). Thus, Berger’s definition considers social context.

Gaye & Tate (1998) further explore this notion by stating that an individual typically occupies more than one given identity at a time. This identity may shift according to their subjective experiences. People live multi layered identities based on their social relations, histories and the structures of power under which they function, which in research terms is the concept of intersectionality (Shields, 2008). The concept of intersectionality posits that individuals may simultaneously assume membership in a variety of communities based on the multidimensional roles they occupy (Crenshaw, 1989). Furthermore, this means that multidimensional identity roles may result into an individual experiencing both privilege and opportunity (Shields, 2008). Furthermore, this concept of intersectionality is often associated with the dual membership that Black women hold in terms of their race and gender identity (Crenshaw, 1989; Gaye & Tate, 1998).

However, much research argues that due to their intersecting identities, Black women experience a double jeopardy in that they experience dual marginalisation because of both race

and gender (Crenshaw, 1989; Gay & Tate, 1998; Higginbottom, 2014; Roysircar, 2016; Walby, Armstrong & Strid, 2012). Some studies argue that intersectionality for Black women may even mean a triple oppression, as they may also experience class discrimination (Motsaathebe, 2013). As already stated, within this intersectionality, is the concept of race, which is the foundation of a racial identity. Booysen (2010) argues that the meaning attached to gender, imbedded in the context of racial order still privileges some groups whilst placing others in a subordinate position. Research indicates that an individual's life experiences and perceptions of identity develop within the location of race and gender amongst many other factors (Booyesen, 2010; Shields, 2008). It is in this context of racial identity that Black women must also navigate their own self-image in terms of identity.

The issue of racial identity is significant due to the socio-political context of race in South Africa. Booysen (2010) suggests that identity and gender should not be isolated from each other as both are amongst many factors that shape societal perceptions. Manicom (1992) highlights that the formation of the South African state is a gendered and gendering process which necessitates the exploration of the different institutional sites and ruling discourses through which gender identities and categories are constructed. Due to South Africa's history of apartheid, gender studies are equally important in the process of facilitating a country that is equal for all its inhabitants (Manicom, 1992). These views are in line with the interests of this study.

Richardson-Stovall (2012) argues that identity constructions of Black women form through various paths and are more fragile as they form in a society with a historical past of disadvantaging women and Black people. Thus, for Black women, the formation of self occurs within the struggle to find oneself through the double oppression of race and gender (Gay & Tate, 1998). Furthermore, some studies argue that due to the intersectionality of their race and gender, discrimination and subjugation experienced by Black women related to gender and race differs from any other marginalised groups such as those that of White women and of Black men (Crenshaw, 1989; Curtis, 2017; Mayer, 2017).

Thus, for the purposes of this study, the concept of intersectionality is important in that it allows for the exploration of the enmeshment of oppression and the Black women's identity and emphasises that these factors cannot be isolated. (Berger, 2002). Esprey (2017, p. 21) further states that it is impossible to understand racialized identities, outside of their context given that

they are “constituted by, manifested in relation to, and inextricably linked to the material, political, social and cultural milieus” within which they exist.

According to Monroe (2015) argues that studies on Black women tend to focus more on the general norms of race instead of the individuality that Black women can have within the context of their group identity. Thus, Monroe (2015) advises that gender studies on the topic of Black women should include their multidimensionality. Nevertheless, there are numerous studies that support the idea that racial identity is not monolithic but multidimensional even if the operational definition of racial identity tends to be group specific (Berger, 2002; Gaye & Tate, 1998; Monroe, 2015). Durrheim et al. (2007) explores this idea further and asserts that even during the apartheid era many South Africans actively opposed apartheid and resisted their prescribed racial identities. For instance, many White people born under that apartheid regime opposed and fought against its ideals. Richardson-Stovall (2012) further explains that it is important to acknowledge that individuals will come to understand their own racial and gender identity as well as interpret the meaning of it in many ways regardless of media representations of racial identity as being a monolithic subject.

Regardless, Mtose (2008) argues that the concept of Blackness as an identity has historical, political and psychological underpinnings based on oppression. According to her, the psychological effects of these factors serve to cause the Black identity to be one of perceived inferiority. Evidence of the concept of the association of the Black identity with inferiority occurred in early studies conducted on Black children in the 1930s. The studies found that due to the historic systematic unfair treatment of Black people in the United States, children had developed contempt for being Black and instead sought to be White (Mtose, 2008). This thinking was associated with wanting to acquire full personhood and avoid discrimination. Thus, others argue that these factors have historically set the standards against which one measures social norms as being those founded on Eurocentric standards (Durrheim, et al., 2007; Esprey, 2017; Puttick, 2011).

It is therefore very important to explore the effects of media representation of identity more especially in a racially polarized context such as that of South Africa. According to Morwe (2014, p. 22) in South Africa, race remains an essential benchmark of one’s “success, prominence and opportunity for social mobility”. Morwe further states that the emphasis of

race in South Africa is to the extent that people continue with stratifications of race more than they do about any other social issues such as gender.

Monroe (2015) states that the media plays a crucial role in identity formation through messages that both reflect the social world but also shape it. The enactment of citizenship occurs under this framework of racial discourses (Masina, 2010). Thus, through media depictions, racial representations of the different races, educate people about which stratum of society their race qualifies them in. Thus, Richardson-Stovall (2012) states that the understanding of the mechanisms behind the hegemonic media is essential in understanding identity, gender and the role of mass media in the construction which maintains the social hierarchy. Thus, the following section explores the media and its role in depicting Black women.

#### **2.4 Media influence on contemporary society**

In contemporary society, the role of the media is extensive with a far-reaching significance. Research shows that people in contemporary times consume media through different forms such as television, movies, popular magazines, surfing the internet and submerging in popular culture and advertising (Higginbottom, 2014; Leonard, 2014; Matsebatlela, 2009; I. A. Ndiaye & B. Ndiaye, 2014). Studies show that the significance of the role of the media extends to play a significant part in developing human ideas, life style and thought processes (Morwe, 2014; Richard-Stovall, 2012). According to Wood (1994), the media has quite an influential role into how we view others and ourselves. This influence occurs through messages, communicated into our consciousness. Richardson-Stovall (2012) argues that through the media, individuals may come to understand themselves through the depictions of others. Furthermore, people can come to formulate their identities, their sense of selfhood, class, ethnicity, race, and nationality amongst many other things, according to stereotypical media representations (Richardson-Stovall, 2012).

Newton (1999) further states that mass media has a very powerful effect on modern government, politics, and ideologies about class, social standing and positioning in society. Leonard (2014, p. 967) further elaborates that the media is so influential that it often even serves as a watchdog over “parliament, government and the judiciary, by investigating whether corporate and commercial interests respect the law, to raise concerns about environment pollution and to engage in conflict prevention and resolution”. According to Jere (2014), the

media may influence audience discourses, their values and even attitudes. Thus, the media is a powerful source of articulating, transforming or elaborating notions of race (Morwe, 2014).

The influence of the media on ideas of race is such that in the pre-democratic South Africa, it was associated with contributing and exacerbating racial ideas that caused divisions in South Africa. These included ideas about Black women, which served to suppress them through sexist and inequitable roles (Motsaathebe, 2013). In the following sections, this study will explore these factors further. Thus, it is even more important to locate the identity of Black women amidst these historical tensions. The first part of this section will explore the power of the media during the apartheid era.

#### **2.4.1 Media influence during the era of apartheid**

Morwe (2014) suggests that studies that contain a historical account of media representations of Black people in South Africa aid in assessing how far the media has come in terms of eliminating racial representations that facilitated racial inequalities. Thus, this section explores the historical account of the media functioning in apartheid South Africa.

In their study on the role of print media during the apartheid era Bird and Garda (1997) state that the apartheid system relied heavily on state propaganda which continually asserted the notion of separation and inequality as being legitimate. According to them, the system of apartheid depended on the media coverage of the social, political, and economic factors that favoured it. During this era, the media held the role of being responsible for persuading the public through the provision of “honest” information (Bird & Garda, 1997). These scholars however state that this does not imply that the propaganda of that time necessarily persuaded South Africans.

Nonetheless, the media had considerable influence because media coverage to a certain extent served as an indicator of public opinion for both the apartheid government and the people under it (Bird & Garda, 1997; Matsebatlela, 2009). Geertsema (2008) argues that the media faced severe restrictions under the apartheid government and especially during the states of emergency in the 1980s. Under this system, the government monitored what the media could report on through restrictions and the refusal of any media coverage that threatened the apartheid system. However, Lloyd (2013, p. 13) argues that the mainstream print media was still “accused of actively or passively colluding” with the then government during that era. A



main contributing factor was that the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was at that time controlled by the state and acted as “propaganda arm for the government” (Lloyd, 2013, p. 13).

It is important to note that this review is not implying that the media is responsible for instilling nor producing the racial ideas that created apartheid. According to Bird & Garda (1997) during the reign of the apartheid system, media coverage played a legitimate role in centralizing the apartheid system even though it was not responsible for initiating the political discourse of the apartheid system. The press was merely responding to the societal changes. Furthermore, Durrheim et al. (2007) state that even though the media played a vital role in dividing the country, the government and its supporters had tight control of the media and television during apartheid. They further state that the government created an environment, which controlled any information filtered to the public. This meant that the public received information that contained racial stereotypes, which promoted apartheid through these methods (Durrheim et al., 2007). Thus, the environment under which the media then functioned served to support a racially divisive system. Thus, the media was a tool to perpetuate and maintain these ideologies.

Currently, South Africa is a democratic country, with ideologies that promote equality for all races including Black women. This latter group is the focus of this study. Durrheim (et al., 2007) argue that the media functioned under a climate of racial divide during the apartheid era, and Bird and Garda (1997) argue that the media merely responded to that political climate of that time. Thus, it is important to evaluate the extent to which the media supports and facilitates the current political climate. Thus far, this review of literature explored the media during the apartheid era and how race was represented. Literature shows that during that oppressive era the media served to broadcast ideologies that facilitated and encouraged racial division. Then there was a review of the current racial climate with a special focus on the current discourse of race as well as the formation of a racial identity.

Currently the media is not under any of the restrictions of the past oppressive era. Furthermore, currently there are multiple forms of media, many of which are not under censorship or restrictions. Furthermore, in contemporary society, an added element in identity formation is that mass media knows no geographical boundaries nor time and space frames (Littsenberg & Roienko, 2015).

In view of these factors, it is significant to understand the effects of the communications of the media about Black women in contemporary times. Therefore, this research study will focus on understanding the role and significance of media representations of Black South African women in this, still racially stratified country. Some research highlights that the current South African context is engaged in a powerfully racialized moment with clear polarization along racial line (Esprey, 2017). Thus, it is even more important to locate media representations of Black women amidst these tensions.

## **2.4.2 Media representation of race and gender under the democratic South Africa**

### **2.4.1 Race in the media**

In order to gain a further understanding of the focus of this research study, which is on media representations of Black women as a social group, it is important to understand current discourses of race and gender in the South African media.

According to Desai (2010) from these policies emerged two approaches; restructuring and reformation. The strategy of restructuring focused on the attitudes of South Africans as it aimed to restructure society through economic redistribution. The second approach was through reformation, which emphasised reconciliation and co-operative governance (Desai, 2010). Government intervention occurred through both these models by a process of the de-racialization of the uppermost reaches of the class of hierarchy (Desai, 2010). According to research, these changes were all symbolic of the “rainbow nation” a concept that coined the notion of a racially unified and inclusive South Africa (Desai, 2010; Habib, 1997). In the media, subsequently, discourses changed and reflected this new status quo of post-apartheid South Africa (Morwe, 2014). A further contribution to these discourses was that of the establishment of the SABC as an independent regulator, declaring it a public broadcaster with a publicly nominated board of directors accountable to Parliament (Leonard, 2014).

The concept of a democratic South Africa included plans to rectify past social injustices previously experienced by racially excluded groups, such as Black people (Desai, 2014). As Black people, Black women are part of the racial group previously disadvantaged in South Africa. Thus, an understanding of media representations of race in South Africa enlightens an understanding of media representations of Black women.

According to Lloyd (2013) due to the lingering effects of the past socio-political history of the system of apartheid, racist ideas in the media persist in current South Africa through institutionalized racism. Maree and Jordaan (2016) state that racial representation in South African television commercials does not reflect the multi-culturalism inherent in the concept of the rainbow nation. Furthermore, although contemporary media has improved in how it depicts Black people, the presence of stereotypes of Black people persists and continues to influence their realities (Gammage, 2016; Mayo, 2010; Morwe, 2014).

However, some research has shown that there are still many factors involved in the content produced by media platforms, characterized by a wrestling between political spheres, government structures and media houses (Chiumbu, 2016; Leonard, 2014; Lloyd, 2014). For example, Chiumbu (2016) states that the media operates within the privileges of profit maximization. These factors influence what filters through to the public. As a result, a few studies argue that the media may not represent race fairly or accurately in South Africa, particularly in relation to Black women (Luyt, 2011; Maree & Jordan, 2016). To illustrate, in their study on racial diversity of women in South African television, Maree and Jordaan (2016) found disproportional representations of Black women in TV commercials in comparison to other racial groups. They found that television commercials did not mirror the socio-cultural composition of race in South Africa, with White women reflecting in 52, 2 % of the commercials although they only constitute 8% of the population. Maree and Jordan (2016) concluded that South African advertising in general does not reflect Black women proportionally in commercials.

In his study, Luyt (2011) found that in much of South African television commercials, the female characters were often of subordinate roles. Moreover, depictions of women were often of them occupying positions of social subordination in relation to males (Luyt, 2011).

Furthermore, these commercials often featured subtle prejudices against Black women by often featuring them in minor or inconsequential roles. For the most, Black women featured in television commercials for clothes, domestic items and food and personal care products. However, in the same study, there was evidence of South African women occupying more independent role depictions when compared to women in Ghana (Luyt, 2011). Jere (2014) suggests that advertising may reflect and shape the cultural landscape of a country and thus the advertising industry may be a source of information on the current issues around gender and race.

Additionally, the media has been accused of racism in certain instances. Durrheim (et al., 2007) and Matsebatlela (2009) both cite the case of the Black Lawyers Association and the Association of Black Accountants of South Africa laying charges of racism against the Sunday Times and the Mail and Guardian, two newspapers historically associated with liberalism. Moreover, a few studies argue that there is a pattern in the media of using race as a key marker and then to position Black and White people against each other (Durrheim, et al., 2007; Morwe, 2014; Govendor, 2015). During this process, both print and broadcast media overtly portray Black people negatively (Bock & Hunt, 2015; Luyt, 2011).

According to Durrheim et al., (2007) this method was utilised during the apartheid era, where the government used racist media images to legitimise the oppression and state violence against Black people. Morwe (2014) argues that the presence of these tactics is evident in current media such as the criminalization of Black people, portrayed as “subjects of fear and danger” which were prevalent during the apartheid era. Some research shows evidence of these portrayals in contemporary media, which may have contributed to the mistrust of Black men (Morwe, 2014; Smiley & Fakunle, 2016).

In recent times, there have been a few complaints against advertising in the media, perceived as containing racist imagery or ideas. There was the incident of the international retail store *H&M* being accused of racism when one of their advertisements depicted a Black boy wearing a sweatshirt adorned with the slogan ‘coolest monkey in the jungle’ (Lang, 2018). As a result, violent protests ensued outside the *H&M* stores throughout the country, forcing their shops to shut down (Lang, 2018).

The South African insurance company, *Budget Insurance* was accused of only portraying people of colour as having no insurance or prematurely cancelling their insurance by only using Black people to portray these characters (Gous, 2018). However, this insurance company explained that their target market was mostly Black people because based on viewership ratings Black people are the majority in their target audience.

However, research shows that there has been a significant shift in racial representation in the media in that images of Black people have adjusted in line with the changes in political, economic, and social spheres (Morwe, 2014). To illustrate, much of the South African media such as popular soap operas have come to occupy more notably racially inclusive and representative characters (Motsaathebe, 2013). In the media in general, there have been a few

people of colour and especially women cast in leading roles in popular television series, which have gained much success such as *How to get away with murder* and *Scandal* (King, 2015). The action movie *Black Panther*, whose plot centred on Black people, who spoke an African language and had a hidden treasured kingdom, may be an example of the shift in the media in terms of advancing a positive image of Black people in general (Hall & Tyler, 2018). Regardless, Berger (2002) states that full de-racialization in the media in South Africa is heavily dependent on the broader changes in society. Furthermore, Chiumbu (2016) argues that although there are changes in the political economy, the media itself is still in the process of full transformation. Chiumbu (2016) further states that the media, like the nation, inherited colonial ideologies that require time to rectify.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the significant shifts that have occurred in the media in terms of representing race accurately in the past 24 years of democracy although there is always room for improvement in this regard. Many studies have indicated that the nature of race and racial discourses in South Africa often drowns out the issues of gender, which are also pertinent. This is not the case with this research study, as a core interest in addition to race is that of gender representation. Therefore, the following section explores the media representations of women in the media.

#### **2.4.2 Gender in the media**

According to a few studies, gender inequalities are a feature of South African history (Berger, 2010; Leonard, 2014; Luyt, 2011). Thus, the issue of the representation of race and that of gender representation in South Africa's media are a fused problem. Although the focus of this study is on Black women, understanding gender representations of women in general is beneficial for this study interests. Thus, this section explores the concept of gender in relation to South African women in general.

According to a few studies, there is evidence of the presence of stereotypical media portrayals of women in South Africa and of Black women in present day media (Berberick, 2010; Masina, 2010; Motsaathebe, 2013; Sanger, 2009). However, research further shows that stereotypical depictions of women are a global issue (Collins 2000; Green, 2012; King, 2015, Springer 2007; Tounsel, 2015).

According to Kiguwa (2006) even within the alleged freedom of democracy, many South African women still find themselves in positions of patriarchal oppression. This is to the extent that some research shows that these gender inequalities are present in media depictions of women. Berberick (2010) argues that historically, media representations of women tend to be exploitative and in general objectifying to women. Monroe (2015) argues that blatant stereotypes and subtle gender stereotypes saturate the South African media.

To illustrate, in his study, on gender representations in post-apartheid South Africa, Overland (2002) found that South African TV and magazines normalized dependency and domesticity of women. Overland's findings were similar to those of Morna and Ndlovu (2007) who found a pattern of manifesting patriarchal stereotypes in mass media advertising.

Much research on gender representation in South Africa shows the presence of women as sexual objects (Govender, 2015; Brooks & Hebert, 2006; Jere, 2014). For example, a Johannesburg craft beer company, *Vale Bru* was accused of sexist advertising when they introduced a new range of craft beers with names considered derogatory to women such as "filthy blonde and easy Blonde" (Gous, 2018).

Furthermore, Morwe (2014) argues that there is a dominant patriarchal theme often present in various genres of the media. In line with these findings, Luyt (2011) also found that TV advertising in South African often represents males and females in hierarchical relations with one another. In recent times, the ballpoint pen manufacturer *BIC* was accused of sexism when they launched a campaign in support of women's day with the quote "Look like a girl, act like a lady, think like man, work like a boss (Payne, 2018).

Nevertheless, research has shown that the socio-political changes brought about by the democratic elections of 1994 have played a key role in challenging the status quo of women in South Africa (Connel, 2002; Motsaathebe, 2013). Furthermore, according to Luyt (2011) because of the dynamic socio-political milieu, shifting media consumption patterns and broader globalizing processes, gender relations are rapidly changing in South Africa.

In many ways, the introduction of the democratic South Africa has afforded many women the opportunity and spaces to exercise their agency (Kiguwa, 2006). Thus, there is evidence of a progressive shift in media depictions of women in the South African media.

Nonetheless, the argument of this research study is that due to the historical dual binds (race and gender) Black South African women have a unique media representation by comparison. According to McCallum (2005) due to the socio-political history of South Africa, Black women have often assumed positions atypical to their White counterparts. Although this section explored gender relations in the context of women in general, Gay and Tate (1998, p. 172) argue that Black women can be considered a special interest group as they continue to fight to overcome the twin barriers of racial and gender discrimination. Black women, battle both racism and sexism and thus experience the world differently from those who are not Black and female (Gay& Tate, 1998). Thus, the following section discusses exclusively the core focus of this study, which is the media representation of Black women.

## **2.5 Representations of Black women in the SA media**

Many scholars have researched the current social standing of Black women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an era of freedom and racial equality. A part of this interest is in how Black women are represented in the media. Consequently, there are a few research studies indicating the presence and prevalence of negative portrayals of Black South African women in media representations (Berberick, 2010; Masina, 2010; Motsaathebe, 2013; Sanger, 2009).

The list of negative media depictions of Black women is extensive. A combination of studies describes such depictions as “housewives, house servants, as being incompetent, ugly, funny, dull, immoral, uncivilised, flighty, moody, lazy, indolent, voluptuous, promiscuous or docile and dependent on the male head of the household for survival has a long history” (Khan,2007; Ndlela, 2005; Ukadike, 1994).

Specifically, in South Africa, some studies find the Black South African woman represented as occupying a trivial ignorant role during important activities such as the apartheid era (Luyt, 2011; Motsaathebe, 2013). These studies argue that there is an absence of a portrayal of Black women as activists or in leadership roles. Subsequently, the argument is that such depictions marginalize Black women by portraying their roles as being to facilitate in the background whilst the men (Black and White) and the White women occupy significant narrative spaces (Luyt, 2011; Motsaathebe, 2013). Motsaathebe (2013) argues that these portrayals of Black women are problematic in that they serve to entrench gendered and racist stereotypes against Black women.

Perhaps because the United States of America is a much more developed society in comparison to South Africa, there is a wealth of research conducted on the image and representation of the Black African American woman in the media. However, Motsaathebe (2013) cautions against the comparison of Black African American women and South African women in that Black African American women have different privileges and preoccupations albeit both subjects of the double tragedy of colonialism and apartheid. Nevertheless, due to the rich research on media representations of Black women in American studies in comparison to the gap in South African research, it is significant to explore this comparison.

Several studies on media representations of Black women, although not done in South Africa, have suggested what they believe to be three common stereotypical representations used to depict Black women. These are the “mammy, jezebel and the sapphire” (Ashley, 2014; King, 2015; Masina, 2010; Walley-Jean, 2009). In her research on African-American stereotypes in television, which analyses the character of Olivia Pope, King (2015) explains that the mammy is the depiction of the caregiver who is in fact cold and callous towards her own children but overly solicitous towards White people and their children. This stereotypical representation is that of the inconsequential or passive Black women in South African media (Motsaathebe, 2013).

King (2015, p. 48) explains that the Jezebel is a depiction of a Black woman who is promiscuous, manipulative and seductive. In South African media, the popular social media terms of the “Slay queen or the blessee” fits the definition of the depiction of the Jezebel commonly used on social media. The Sapphire is the “stubborn, bitchy, bossy, and hateful” depiction of a Black woman (King, 2015, p. 48). The definition of sapphire seems to be more universally applicable under the depiction of the angry ‘Black woman’. Woodard and Mastin (2005) identify a fourth stereotypical image, “the matriarch” which serves to construct Black women as controlling, emasculating and dictating their roles. Such versions of Black women are evident in many South African soap operas such as Harriet Khoza in *The Queen* or MaNgcobo in *Uzalo*. These soap operas are popular amongst many South Africans (Matshaba, 2018).



Thus, although there may be many differences in media depictions of Black women across the world, there are also similarities. To illustrate, the stereotypical representation of the angry Black woman is contextually applicable for many Black women.

According to Ashley (2014, p. 28) the angry Black woman presumes all Black women to be irate and hostile notwithstanding their circumstances. Ashley further argues that the media reproduces this stereotype to the extent that it has become a prevalent belief in informal settings. In a similar study of the angry Black woman conducted by Walley-Jean (2009), the study findings revealed that the stereotype of “the angry Black woman” arose from a foundation of negative images, which then restrain the Black women’s expressions of anger. In his study, Motsaathebe (2013) investigated media representations of Black women in three post-apartheid South African films namely *Yesterday*, *Tsotsi*, and *Jerusalema*. This study revealed a tendency to confine Black women to a framework that represented them as naturally equipped in their makeup to bear difficulties. Motsaathebe (2013) argues that such frameworks position Black women as having to endure inequalities as opposed to fighting against them.

On the other hand, Motsaathebe (2013) puts forward that in contemporary South Africa there has been a clear and progressive shift in media portrayals of Black women. He proposes that South African television serials and soap operas depict women in a diversity of characters, which include “active, successful, vulnerable and ambitious” (Motsaathebe, 2013, p. 279). There has been an increase in positive images of Black women in the media such as the promotion of natural hair and dark skin colour. (Jackson, 2015; Higginbottom, 2014; Okeke-Adeyanju, 2014). While it is true that these stereotypical media depictions in general are applicable to women from all races, Wilkins (2012) argues that these representations coerce Black women into predetermined positions that may further endure persistent racial oppression and deny them the opportunity to exist in ordinary, unmarked social positions. As a result, the issue of how Black women grapple with controlling images in their daily lives or how they use them to make sense of their own first-hand experiences remains vague (Wilkins, 2012). The following section explores this issue further.

### **2.5.2 The impact of stereotypical media representations for Black women**

The primary interest of this research study is in how Black South African women perceive and interpret media representations of Black women. The review of literature has thus far revealed that there are issues with stereotypical portrayals of Black women in the media. This section explores literature in response to the effects of negative media representations of Black women on Black women. According to research, racist stereotypes influence individual level conceptualizations of self (Cohen & Garcia, 2005; Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015).

Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012, p.69) define one's self-conceptualisation as "what comes to mind when one thinks of oneself". According to Cohen & Garcia (2005), people base their self-conceptualisation and self-definition on their social group identity. Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012, p. 74) define social identities as the "knowledge that one is a member of a group, one's feelings about that group and knowledge of the group's rank or status". Thus, people may come to define their self-conceptualisation based on how others see their racial group.

Even more so, some research found that people are willing to dissociate from in-group membership should they feel that being of part of it reflects them negatively (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015). Thus, people could come to fear definitions based on their group members to the point of rejecting group membership. This means that they may then denounce any parts of their group identity that they feel might lead to them to being rejected by others outside their group.

Mtose (2008) explains that this process occurs for Black people when they feel a need to 'divorce' ideas about their Blackness that they dislike. Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto (2015) explain that this occurs when negative racial stereotyping and internalized oppression influence an individual's identity.

Thus, some research suggests that Black women are more likely to internalize powerlessness due to the racial and gender oppression they experience than other racial groups (Ashley, 2014; Gonzalez-Prendes & Thomas, 2011). According to Ashley (2014, p. 29) institutional racism, expressed through prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviour "provides the most debilitation impact on all facets of a Black woman's life" and constitutes a consistent stressor for them. Ashley (2014) further argues that women who do not challenge such beliefs may experience emotional incongruence and a negative self-worth. According to Esprey (2017, p.

24) disavowing one's race due to social pressures has been linked with "a deep sense of estrangement from self" amongst other factors.

According to Mayo (2010), the impact of negative media portrayals negatively affected Black women in their occupational lives. In her study on Black women and contemporary media, Mayo found that participants expressed feeling that they often felt that they had to work harder for their place in society in comparison to women of other races and did not feel as accepted in the workforce as other women who were their counterparts. This theme was present in a few other studies, which also found that Black women felt that they had to prove their abilities much to the surprise of those who had doubted their abilities (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015). This means that often, Black women must overcome perceptions and assumptions that they are intellectually inferior in comparison to others (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015).

Gammage (2016) further argues that such depictions of Black women are a restrictive account of the actual realities they face. Likewise, much research argues that often the racial imagery of Black women in the media - widely shown and accepted- may not involve the input of Black women (Masina, 2010). Researchers suggest that these ideas are prevalent and enforced because the producers of media content are far removed from their consumers –in this case Black women-that they subscribe roles that are "caricatures" designed to benefit the producers rather than the consumers (Masina, 2010, p. 11; Motsaathebe 2013; Tounsel, 2015). Such systems do not permit Black women to define themselves from their own points of view. Furthermore, some studies argue that this level of identity of the oppressed sense of self persists trans-generationally (Mayo, 2010).

However, as already discussed in previous sections, there has been considerable progress in how both the local and international media portrays Black women. As a result, there are also positive images of Black women in the media as seen in the study conducted by Motsaathebe (2013) among other examples. Furthermore, Hudson (2007) states that during the pre-colonial days, Black South African women enjoyed much status and authority, as they were the main agricultural producers, which at that time was a pivotal role. McCallum (2005) further highlights that Black women have been heavily involved in the economic production of the country in the past and in the present, therefore, the history of Black women is not of subjugation alone. Although it is important to focus on the domination of Black women Ntwape

(2016) argues that there is insufficient coverage on the general histories on women in South Africa and instead a tendency to center on their struggle for liberation during the apartheid era. Thus, it is important to consider the complexity of Black women's histories in making assumptions about the impact of stereotypical representations on their understanding of themselves. Hence, Booysen (2010) asserts that Black women as a group may hold images of women founded in strong leadership roles played out during and after the struggle against apartheid. Moreover, positive images of Black women depicted as successful in their societies may also evoke strong influential perceptions of Black women for other Black women (Booyesen, 2010; Patterson, 2004). Furthermore, in South Africa, the government's emphasis on legislative empowerment of Black women might also contribute significantly towards socio-economic progression (Booyesen, 2010; Motsaathebe, 2013; Luyt, 2011). The following section explores the influence that the media representations discussed in this section may have on society.

### **2.5.3 The influence of media representations of Black women on society**

Some research highlights the importance of studies of race and gender in post-apartheid South Africa as measures of progress from the era of apartheid and its ideologies (Berger, 2002; Morwe, 2014; Luyt, 2011). However, as this study has noted, there is a gap in literature on the impact of stereotypical media representations of Black South African women on Black South African women through the interpretations they may hold of the phenomenon.

A few studies suggest that certain ideologies of Black women in contemporary media distort how society views and understands Black women within popular culture and society (Collins 2000; Green, 2012; King, 2015, Springer 2007; Tounsel, 2015). Thus, the impact of any stereotypical media portrayals of Black women on Black women may transcend their interpersonal spaces and infiltrate their social environments. Schneider and Bos (2011) found links between stereotypes, prejudicial and negative attitudes that then influenced discrimination and negative behaviours. To demonstrate, Ashley (2014) proposes that race and gender-specific stereotypes such as that of the angry Black woman, may negatively affect mental health access and treatment for Black women. She argues that because the media fosters these notions as being accurate representations of Black women, health care practitioners' perceptions may be influenced as part of the media viewership population (Ashley, 2014).

Other studies highlight the effect of racist stereotyping on the occupational functioning of Black women. In their research on the experiences of Black women of racial micro aggression in corporate leadership, Holder, Jackson and Ponterotto (2015) found that because of gender and race marginalization, Black women are more likely to experience deceleration in their career trajectories. They argue that this social positioning has placed Black women in a position where they have a concrete ceiling. This concrete ceiling then reduces or removes any potential career advancements for Black women. Further findings revealed that Black women may experience limitations in terms of occupational opportunities because of “the belief that they lack the skills, leadership ability, savvy and drive to successfully compete in the executive suites” (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto ,2015, pg. 165). These beliefs linger, even though Black women are the largest minority group to receive educational degrees (Mophosho, 2013; Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015).

According to Manicom (1992, p. 457) another element of the influence of stereotyping on societal perceptions is the influence of political subjugation on the “churches, indigenous social organizations and familial relations”. Hence, media influence extends all the way into the home of the Black woman. In their study, Menon and Kotze (2007) found that some traditional Black men who held strong patriarchal roles in their own homes found it difficult to work under women in workplaces. These studies suggest that stereotypical thinking may well be present in the social fabric surrounding a Black South African woman.

The importance of understanding how current trends in the media affect the social standing of Black women from the lens of the Black women is crucial in post-apartheid South Africa especially considering studies that show that the apartheid era silenced Black women (Kiguwa, 2006; Motsaathebe, 2013; Segalo, 2013).

Therefore, studies on Black women provide platforms to assess the levels of redress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Much research states that there has been a considerable amount of focus on redressing past social inequalities and empowerment of Black women in the post-apartheid South Africa (Luyt, 2011; McCallum, 2005; Motsaathebe, 2013). As this study has highlighted, the role of the media in such initiatives is crucial and valuable. Monroe (2015) explains that the media plays a significant role in either the advancement or repression of racial stereotypes. Furthermore, the media provides frameworks through which all individuals interact in the context of set roles and established power hierarchies (Monroe, 2015). In their study of the

racial diversity of female portrayals in South African television commercials, Maree and Jordaan (2016, p. 6822) assert that TV commercials point to the “racial heartbeat of a nation” and have the power to strengthen relations between the different racial groups. This is important in South Africa. They further state that these portrayals of people in these advertisements can develop and exacerbate gender and racial prejudice if the advertised imagery does not reflect people’s social realities. Public reaction intensifies under high levels of prejudice. An example of this is the recent debacle that occurred because of the H & M monkey advertisement (Lang, 2018).

Thus, media representations may play a role in the production and reproduction of stereotypes and in fuelling certain attitudes in society. Furthermore, the constant exposure of audiences to an image or narrative renders them more prone to accepting that image as fact. Thus, it is important to understand how the media representations affect those represented by it. This literature review has attempted to highlight a gap in this area. According to Chaka (2013, p. 352) “nation building occurs through coupling political and socio-economic transformation with the social-psychological aspect of forging a broad and inclusive national consciousness”. Chaka (2013) further states that during this process, the role of communication in nation building and nation identity is critical in the socio-economic and social-psychological transformation of South Africa as a country. Thus, the medium of mass media offers the opportunity to formulate an inclusive national consciousness, one that fosters ideas that are progressive to the image of Black women.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Research design**

This research study adopted a qualitative research methodological design. Taylor, Bogdan and De Vault (2016) define qualitative methodology as research that produces descriptive data which is based on the participants' spoken words and their observable behaviour. They further state that a central feature of a qualitative research approach is to understand people from their own frame of reference and their experiences of reality from their own perspectives.

Moreover, qualitative data is concerned with developing explanations about social phenomena and thus creating a further understanding of the social world (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2009). Thus, this current study adopted a qualitative methodology in the hope of advancing current understandings of Black South African women's perceptions of media depictions of Black women, based on their experiences and observations.

According to Taylor, Bogdan and De Vault (2016) qualitative research occurs through systematic procedures that demand standardised procedures. Moreover, this research design focuses on the descriptions and interpretations of the advancement of new concepts whilst maintaining flexibility (Hancock, Ockleford & Windridge, 2009; Taylor, Bogdan & De Vault, 2016). Therefore, a qualitative research approach was the most applicable research design for this current study.

#### **3.1.1 Theoretical Framework**

This research study adopted a deductive, interpretivist theoretical framework. Gray (2014, p. 23) describes interpretivism as "culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world". The deductive approach is concerned with hypothesis testing with the aims of either confirming, refuting or modifying the hypothesis being tested (Gray, 2014). A deductive approach allows for the assertion of concepts that may explain the relationship between hypotheses (Gray, 2014). Therefore, the foundation of deductive studies is the process of deriving ideas, based on academic literature, then testing them through research design strategies (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). Thus, with deductive research, the researcher forms a tentative idea about the relationship between two or more concepts based on a few propositions prior to the data collection process.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) interpretivism is a “subjective philosophy, which places emphasis on that phenomenon of human beings creating their own meaning. Interpretive studies seek to explore people’s experiences and their views or perspectives of these experiences. Thus, interpretivism is relevant in order to understand how Black South African women experience and make meaning of negative depictions of themselves in the media.

In further explaining the principles of interpretivism, Gray (2014) asserts that interpretivists interpret the world through the classification schemas of individual minds or through the subjective experiences of individuals.

Thus, interpretivists suggest that the interpretation of natural reality, social reality should occur through different methods. Additionally, Willis (2007) states that interpretivists claim that subjective perceptions of subjective realities influence human beings. The assumptions of this research are in line with the assertion that Black South African women may hold certain perceptions about the impact of stereotypical media depictions of Black women in the media based on their subjective realities.

Furthermore, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) state that because people are from diverse cultural backgrounds they will, under different circumstances interpret life occurrences differently. Still, interpretivists attempt to derive and define universal laws that are universally applicable to everyone. In this way, interpretivists attempt to reduce these complexities of life into a series of law-like generalizations whilst still preserving rich insights into humanity.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) further state that empirically, interpretivists focus on individuals’ lived experiences and cultures artefacts and seek to include the participant’s interpretations into their research. Interpretivists assert that the meaning of the group studied is critical to good research in the social sciences. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) assert that the purpose of interpretivist research is to create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts.



### **3.2 Research questions**

The study investigated the following research questions:

1. What are the reported perceptions of Black South African women concerning media depictions of Black South African women?
2. What thoughts and feelings do Black South African women report in response to contemporary stereotypical media depictions of Black women?
3. Should any be reported, what effect if any, do negative media portrayals of Black South African women have on their sense of self, self-image and attitudes about themselves?

### **3.3 Sample**

Research suggests that in South Africa, the age group of 20 to 34 is part of the largest media consumers (Digital Statistics South Africa, 2017). Thus, the participants recruited for this study were Black South African women, in the age group 20 to 34 years old. They also needed to be active media consumers (social, digital etc.). A total number of seven Black South African women aged between 20 and 34 years old, comprised the sample.

This study adopted a purposive mixed sampling method comprised of both purposive and snowballing sampling methods. This was to ensure that there would be a sufficient number of participants.

According to Patton (1990), purposive sampling allows for the selection of information rich cases for in depth analysis. Furthermore, these participants provide rich information about the issues that are vital to the research study. As this research study's interests were on the views and interpretations of Black South African women, through this sampling method participants who met the criteria, in terms of race, gender and ages were found. According to Silverman (2008), a purposive sampling method enhances the sample characteristics.

Thus, this sampling method met the sampling characteristics of this research study. However, due to time constraints and finding reliable and willing participants who honoured the appointments, a snowballing sampling method was used as a second sampling approach. Snowballing sampling is a sampling method where the research participants recruit other participants who meet the criteria for the study (Patton, 1990).

### **3.4 Data collection procedure**

The non-medical ethical board at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) granted ethical clearance for this research study. Thereafter, the researcher approached the campus Student Representative Counsel (SRC) and obtained permission to place notices around the campus advertising for participants in this research study. The researcher placed these posters, advertising for participants on all the psychology boards and on notice boards in popular places, such as the cafeteria and around campus. In addition, through the word of mouth, the researcher asked people to participate in the study or refer her to people. Perhaps because there was no compensation for participating in this study, gaining participants was a challenge. Some people would not arrive at the scheduled meeting prearranged with the researcher.

However, eventually one of the students approached at the Witwatersrand East campus, directed the researcher to the two potential participants. The first participant aged 26 at the time of the research and the second participant aged 24. The first participant referred the researcher to two additional participants, aged 31 and 34. The second participant referred the researcher to 3 participants, aged, 23, 29 and 30 respectively.

The research process was that the researcher obtained the telephone numbers of the participant referred to her and then called the potential participant (after consent was obtained from them through the referring participant) explained the research and the research process, asked for the person to participate in the research and after consent was established schedule a meeting time that accommodated both the participant and the researcher.

The researcher conducted the research interviews either in the participants' work places or at the Emthonjeni Center situated in the University of the Witwatersrand, depending on what was convenient for both parties.

At the beginning of the research interview, the researcher asked the participants to read the information sheet (see appendix A) which contained information about the research study; the researcher explained the interview process to the participants and asked them for their signed consent (see appendix B). The interview, which lasted between 40 to 60 minutes, consisted of open-ended questions, which encouraged participants to share their thoughts and opinions. Appendix (E) is the interview schedule.

The researcher asked the participants for their permission to audio record for which they also signed (see appendix C). Subsequently all the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Furthermore, the researcher informed the participants that both the audio copies and transcripts would be stored confidentially in a secure password protected laptop. In compliance with the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of the Witwatersrand, the transcripts of this study will not be available in the appendices.

### **3.5 Individual semi-structured interviews**

According to Kvale (1996), a semi-structured interview is a set of broad questions that guide the interview process but allows one to probe deeper into relevant issues that emerge. As already explained, in this research study, the researcher used a semi-structured interview schedule to interview participants. The researcher consulted current literature on the discourses of media depictions of Black women in order to assist her to formulate relevant questions.

However, Frances, Coughlan & Cronin (2009) explain that semi-structured interviews allow unanticipated responses and issues to emerge during the interview process. Furthermore, this method of interviewing provides the participants with the opportunity to narrate their own story as opposed to answering a series of direct questions (Frances, Coughlan & Cronin, 2009). Lastly, an important part of this process is to preserve the participants' rights in terms of their consent and through the maintenance of confidentiality (Frances, Coughlan & Cronin, 2009).

#### **3.5.1 Research Procedure**

As part of the data collection process, and in addition to the semi-structured interviews, certain prompts or elicitation techniques, in the form of media samples were used to facilitate the participants' engagement with the research area.

For this research study, the researcher chose to use media prompts that are easily accessible in South Africa. This depended on the individual having access to the internet and television. The prompts used in this study depicted typical media representations of Black women according to the available literature in order to stimulate the discussion related to the topic of this research study (Ashley, 2014; Mayo, 2010; Motsaathebe, 2013; Walley-Jean, 2009; Woodard & Mastin, 2005).

The researcher chose the prompts based on whether they contained some aspects that touched upon typical stereotypical interpretations of Black women in contemporary media as per

literature. Thus, the data collected was of responses elicited from the participants using prompts provided by the researcher. The prompts are listed and discussed thereafter:

- 1) YouTube compilation of an example of typical stereotypical depictions of Black women
- 2) YouTube video clip of Viola Davis
- 3) Google search depicting Black women as having unprofessional hair (no captions just pictures)

According to Barton (2015), topics that touch on ideas that may be largely tacit or those around ethnical issues may be difficult to discuss in formal interviews and thus elicitation techniques, as opposed to straight questions, may be useful. Furthermore, using these techniques may enable elaborative answers from participants, while balancing power dynamics between the researcher and the interviews by eliminating the desire to make a positive impression from participants (Barton, 2015).

Barton (2015) further states that participants may know a lot and have many views about a specific topic but may need added effort in order to surface their ideas and encourage them to articulate their ideas in a deeper and more complex way. Through elicitation techniques, the participants comfortably engaged with the topic of how the media represents Black women in a manner that allowed transparency and authenticity. The researcher would explain to the participants what each media prompt was about, then explained that she was showing it to facilitate a discussion about the topic but would like the participant to express their own views in relation to what they saw, thought and felt.

A description of the media prompts used in this study follows in the order in which they were shown to the participants:

The first prompt used is a YouTube video, which is a compilation, of the most common stereotypical depictions of Black women. According to Jewitt (2012), video elicitation can be used as a method of data collection along with interviews or focus groups to prompt discussion. Video elicitation interviews are useful in that they generate accounts of the characteristics of invisible phenomena where it may be hidden in day-to-day activities (Jewitt, 2012). Although the participants were all active media consumers and Black women, this video allowed them to reflect on the distinct types of depictions by focusing on an external stimulus, which did not

feel directive or invasive for them. This is a YouTube video titled, Black women stereotypes in the media. It is three minutes, 31 seconds long and contains at least six different depictions of stereotypes with accompanying visual examples of each. This video was useful in that it is a compilation of all of the different stereotypical depictions from the different media platforms in one video. This video was published in 2014 and had been viewed 20, 771 times at the time of the study.

Although the depictions presented in the video aligned with academic literature on the most common stereotypical depictions of Black women, the participants were asked about how they interpreted these depictions. Due to the different aspects of the depictions, the participants were able to express their own views and also whether they agreed or disagreed with the clips. Furthermore, the questions were structured in such a way that they allowed the participant to express their own thoughts.

The second media prompt used was a Google search for unprofessional hair. Upon entering the words ‘unprofessional hair into the Google search engine, mainly images of Black women appeared in the results of the search. The researcher showed the participants the results of the search and allowed the participant to scroll through the different images that appeared.

The researcher then used open ended questions to engage their perceptions and feelings in relation to the search results. This prompt allowed participants to express their thoughts and feelings in relation to how they felt about the imagery depicting Black women in relation to the key words. According to Barton (2015) the reactions of participants to images may reveal their attitudes and beliefs about the topic of interest. Thus, this method allowed participants to freely express their own ideas and interpretations of the images. Additionally, asking a variety of participants to react to certain images may be useful in eliciting a range of ideas from participants as they may not respond in the same way. Barton (2015) further notes that because visual images may be emotionally charged, they may stimulate dialogues from participants which may lead to a specific fluency and a deep reflection that may not occur through verbal prompts only. Moreover, it allowed participants to be able to reflect deeply about the topic of interest. Hence, this technique is a useful method to compliment the method of unstructured research interviews.

The third prompt used was a video clip. In this video clip, Viola Davis plays a strong willed Black advocate who is also a professor of law. However, in the clip, she is seen removing all

her cosmetic beauty such as make-up and her wig, revealing only her natural face and hair. The intention of this clip was to show the opposite idea of the Google images which might allow a comparison of the participants' responses. This clip also allowed ambiguous interpretation of how the media represents women. Furthermore, at this particular point, participants were able to refer to all of media prompts used.

According to Glaw et al., (2017) visual methods enhances the data collected by producing richer data which is different from data generated only through verbal methods. However, Glaw et al., (2017) argues that these techniques will not eliminate all of the power dynamics between the researcher and participants. In order to ensure that these media prompts did not avert the participants from freely expressing themselves, prior to showing the participants the media prompts, the researcher explained to the participants that these prompts were intended to help stimulate responses and associations to the area of interest for the research based on their views. Furthermore, she asked them to share their own interpretations of the media prompts directly, and also facilitated this by not structuring the interview schedule in a rigid manner. The links to the media prompts can be found as appendix (Appendix E).

### **3.6 Methods of data analysis**

#### **3.6.1 Thematic content analysis**

The data for this research project was analysed through thematic content analysis. According to Braun & Clark (2006, p. 79) thematic content analysis is a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns or themes within data. Through this method, the data in this research study was organized and described in rich detail. Thematic analysis can be a method that reports experiences, meanings and the range of discourses operating within society. Thus, the analysis and organisation of the material collected, which were the participants' responses of their reported experiences, was all performed through thematic content analysis.

Lastly, thematic analysis fits in with a deductive, interpretivist framework which is the study's theoretical framework because it allows research to examine how events, realities, meanings and experiences are attributed to social action as products of discourses that exist in society (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The following are the six steps used in the process of analysing this research study as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006):

### **1. The first step is for the researcher to become familiar with the data**

The fact that the researcher collected the data gave her an advantage in terms of the knowledge of the data, some initial analytic interests and thoughts. Furthermore, the process of transcribing, reading and re-reading the data allows the researcher to further have an idea of the direction of coding the data.

### **2. The second step involves generating initial codes**

After having thoroughly read the research data, the researcher then started producing the initial data codes. The codes for this data were data-driven, meaning that the researcher approached the data with specific questions in mind. However, the researcher gave each data item and all its interesting aspects equal attention. The researcher manually wrote notes on each of the texts analysed to indicate potential patterns. During this step, the researcher copied as many extracts as possible, collated and flagged as potential themes, from each individual transcript.

### **3. The third step involves searching for themes**

After the first two steps, the researcher had a lengthy list of codes, identified from across the data set. The researcher then sorted different codes into different potential themes, and then collated them within the relevant coded data extracts from the identified themes. At the end of this stage, the researcher decided on the codes that would then form the main themes, sub-themes and discarded those that were not relevant to the research question.

### **4. The fourth step was to review the themes**

At this point, the researcher had devised a set of candidate potential themes, which she then refined. This step contained two levels, the first phase was to review the coded data extracts and decipher whether they formed coherent patterns or not. Once coherence was established, the second level was to code any additional data within themes, some possibly missed in earlier coding stages. At the end of this phase, the different themes were clearer as well as how they fit in together and the overall idea of the direction of the research.

## **5. The fifth step involved defining and naming the themes**

During this step, a clear thematic map of the data was evident. The researcher then defined and further refined and arranged the data for analysis. The researcher then wrote a detailed analysis for each individual theme. In addition, the researcher analysed the themes in relation to each other and subsequently established sub-themes. The researcher gave initial themes working titles that she later refined for the final analysis.

## **6. The sixth and last step was to produce the report**

The last step was to write a concise and coherent account of the story of the data within and across themes. This occurred by providing sufficient evidence of the themes using extracts derived from the transcripts. The write up included imbedding the extracts in an analytic narrative about the data, which made an argument in relation to the research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.7 Ethics**

As already stated, the researcher obtained ethical approval for this research study from the Wits non-medical ethics committee. The data collection process began after the Wits non-medical ethical committee granted ethical clearance. This ethical committee espouses a set of internationally accepted research guidelines, which guided the procedures of conducting this research study. After attaining their consent, the researcher informed the participants about the research through an information sheet (see Appendix A) describing the details of the study. Prior to conducting the research interview, the researcher discussed this information with the participants and answered or clarified any questions that arose.

The researcher asked participants to sign a consent form (see appendix attached B) attached to the information sheet as well as a consent to audio record form (see appendix C). This consent form served to provide participants with informed agreement to their participation. These documents (information sheet and the consent form) informed participants that they may withdraw from the study at any time provided the research report had not yet been written up, that their participation is voluntary, and they are not being coerced into participating. All the participants who were part of this study were above the age of 18 years, legally and mentally competent. There was thus no need to obtain assent and proxy.



The researcher protected the anonymity of all research participants in all transcriptions and in the report. She used a pseudonym during the interview write up and in this research report. Furthermore, there were no incentives offered for participation in this research study and participants did not benefit directly from this research.

Although the participant population for this study did not fall under a vulnerable population group, the researcher was aware that the nature of the topic might have elicited distress due to its sensitive nature. Therefore, the researcher provided the participants with the numbers of free counselling services to contact if they experienced any distress during the research process. The results of this study have been reported in the form of a master's thesis. It will be available online through the library of the University of the Witwatersrand. At a later stage, these results may possibly be written up for publication in a scholarly journal. These outputs will be accessible once the research project is marked and completed. No identifying information or names of participants will ever be released in any form or format.

### **3.8 Self-Reflexivity**

The process of conducting qualitative research may influence the researcher in a few ways and it is therefore important for the researcher to acknowledge these effects (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017).

As a Black South African woman, I was similar to my participants in terms of racial background, gender and some cultural influences. Furthermore, these similarities between the participants and I meant a lot of similarity in our lived experiences. Firstly, quietly realising the similarities I had with my participants, allowed me to feel a sense of ease that helped build rapport. This rapport seems to have aided the research process because it enabled the participants to speak freely and openly about the topic.

However, as the researcher, I had to take great caution that I did not communicate these assumptions of commonality of lived experiences to the participants. Indeed, I had to constantly self-reflect as I engaged with my participants as neutrally as possible at all times. Therefore, this research was conducted in a way that allowed me to learn from my participants rather than assume I knew what they were sharing, based on my own experiences. Thus, for me, as the researcher to give my participants a voice, I had to listen, and therefore suppress my own ideas. This was not always easy as I could relate with many of their views and opinions. However,

my priorities, as the researcher, were to ensure that the process entirely prioritised their ideas. Nevertheless, as a researcher, I acknowledge that absolute neutrality is not possible; however, I was aware of this goal throughout. I had to be self-reflexive regarding my own opinions and personal biases at all times thus I kept a journal during the research process as a further mechanism to try to ensure neutrality and self-awareness.

## **Chapter Four: Discussion of the findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This is the discussion chapter of the current research study. In this chapter, the analysed data will be presented under three main themes and sub-themes; it will then be discussed in relation to pre-existing relevant theory. The first main theme is 'Responses to negative stereotypical depictions in the media', this first theme presents the participants' responses to negative media depictions of Black women.

The second main theme is the 'Perceptions of negative media depictions and self-conceptualization', which explored the effects of negative media depictions on self-image and identity. Six sub-themes fall under this second main theme. These sub-themes are entitled: 'I do not really like to think about it', 'We cannot be waiting for people to allow us to breathe', 'Love yourself as you are', 'To be a coconut or to be in that Black *box*', 'Black women are strong' and 'Don't love me, just respect me'.

The third theme is the 'Perceptions of negative media stereotypes and societal re-enactments' which explored the participants' perceptions of the negative media stereotypes and their impact on participants' social realities. This third theme is divided into three sub-themes: 'Black women are undervalued in the society', 'Black women are not smart enough' and 'Black people re-enact negative stereotypes'.

### **4.2 Themes**

#### **4.2.1 Theme one: Responses to stereotypical depictions in the media**

A primary interest of this research study was to understand the thoughts and feelings of Black South African women in relation to stereotypical depictions of Black women in the media. As per the research method outlined in the previous chapter, the researcher began each interview by showing the participants video clips and imagery that contained a few examples of typical contemporary stereotypes that have recently appeared, proliferated in popular media. These images are associated with stereotypes of Black women as described by literature (Ashley, 2014; Gammage, 2016; Tounsel, 2015; Walley-Jean, 2009).

Participants were then asked for their reflections, thoughts, opinions, and feelings. The first theme presents participants' responses to how the media depicts Black women. The media clips

provided served to ‘kick off’ the interviews with a few easily accessed popular media representations of Black women.

From their responses, participants indicated that they felt that popular media depicts Black women in a negative manner. They expressed that the depictions as they appear in the media prompts by the researcher were examples that the participants were familiar with. The participants believed that the negative depictions were the norm in the media. To illustrate, some of the examples that mostly resonated with the participants were how the media often depicted Black women as ‘angry, crazy, vocal or loud’ and ‘violent.’ The participants’ observations are in line with much research conducted on Black women. Research shows that it is common phenomenon for the media to depict Black women as ‘angry, crazy, vocal or loud’ and ‘violent.’ (Ashley, 2014; King, 2015; Walley-Jean, 2009; Woodard & Mastin, 2005).

Furthermore, participants expressed that these depictions proliferate a negative image of Black women within the South African society. In addition to this concern, it was further notable that many participants felt these depictions did not define them personally. A discussion of these concerns follows.

In the following extract, Thabi feels that:

*The media has helped form opinions about us as women, Black women; it is just that those opinions are not good.*

She continued:

*Yes, because the media is the one thing that connects us. We watch things on TV or the movies or listen to music, or whatever and we form ideas about things. So, I think the media has helped form opinions about us as women, Black women, it’s just that those opinions are not good.*

In her response, Thabi says that she believes that the media is influential in formulating opinions about women and Black women in particular. These opinions, she feels, are negative. They are negative in that the media does not seem to portray Black women in a “good or powerful” manner but “mostly angry”. In this way, Thabi feels that the media perpetuates a

certain idea about Black women, which might in turn influence how others in society view them. Her perceptions are in accordance with existing literature that shows that Black women are often the victims of stereotyping in mainstream media which then facilitate discriminatory ideas about them (Gammage, 2016; King, 2015; Tounsel, 2015). To illustrate, in the following extract, Thabi shares her own experiences of others perception of her as violent because she is a Black woman.

*Thabi: ...For example, if there is conflict, other races will say don't fight with the Black girl because she is violent and ratchet (uncouth).*

*Interviewer: How does that make you feel?*

*Thabi: I feel like I'd rather be seen as a coward. I don't like to be boxed into anything. I'd rather they say - Thabi is a coward - than that she is Black and so is ratchet.*

In her response, she seems to be saying that because she is a Black woman, people of other races will naturally perceive her as a violent person. She relates an experience in which people of other races avoided any conflict with her because they considered her “violent and ratchet” (uncouth) based on the fact that she is a Black girl. Her statement implies that the media’s negative depiction of a Black woman as violent in nature creates in her audience’s mind a perception that Black women are violent. Thus, according to her, media depictions of Black women as “ratchet” or uncouth have influenced how others view Black women. This suggests that people from other races feared her perceived anger as they felt that anger was consistent with how the media depicted Black women. They felt that anger indicated that she was emotionally unstable. This, to the extent that others feared altercations with her. This means that people in her social circles perceived her anger to indicate that she was out of control, to the extent that she could be a dangerous to them.

In her study of the angry Black woman, Ashley (2014) found that negative media depictions of the crazy angry Black woman problematize their exploration of anger. Ashley (2014) further found that this issue might even distort mental health workers’ view of patients who were Black females. These perceptions may further hinder societal trust of Black women’s abilities, especially in relation to their intellectual and emotional capabilities.

It further emerged from the participants that they felt that popular contemporary media depictions of Black women did not represent the actual reality of the experiences of Black South African women. The majority of the participant’s felt that these depictions did not relate

to how they, as Black women, viewed themselves. They were unable to relate to them. In the following extract another participant, Mbali, discusses this idea further.

Mbali, like Thabi, said that she also believes that Black women are negatively portrayed in the media. However, she does not relate to these depictions of Black women. Thus, she does not “recognise or identify” with them and, therefore does not like how the media represents Black South African women. Moreover, she finds it difficult to see herself in the Black women characters as portrayed by the media.

*Mbali: Oh, I see. Well, let me think. Uhm, as I said, I don't really like to think about it but since I'm being interviewed here. I don't really like it, I think of the big mammas or the ghetto queens or the women who are Black on the outside and White on the inside. It's hard to watch a Black woman and see me as her, you know what I mean? Like watch maybe, like uhm, eh, a TV show, see someone acting and recognise or identify with. So, no, I don't like how Black women are portrayed.*

Similarly, in the following extract, Pam says that she feels that many of the stereotypes are true but are not who she is. However, she further states that at some point in her life, she subjected herself to many of these stereotypes and put herself under a lot of pressure. This pressure was based on popular assumptions of who she should be, and she experienced a lot of pain as a result.

*Pam: Some of those things (stereotypes) are true but it's not who I am and I've been through too much...even when I tried to lose weight...at some point I went through a lot of actual pain.... I wasn't proud of who I am, it's a waste trying to be someone else but then I realised there are many lessons...you don't want to put yourself under so much pressure across the board even from your own family and not just because you are Black, everyone.*

She further shares her own experiences of being influenced by popular media depictions of the weight of the ideal woman by wanting to be a size 24 like Christina Aguilera. She later realized that this was not possible for her. She further states that due to being historically oppressed, she felt pressured to conform to a ‘norm’ that was not attainable to her. She now feels that if

these depictions affected her, it will be because she allows them (self-inflicted) and not because of people's assumptions of what she should be.

*Pam: I think that like...like we...it's like what I don't know I just feel like this kinda topic has been going on and there's a lot of things that we assume people want us to be and we don't have to be that way and this is the thing about it like even if ...I don't know I somehow think some of it is self-inflicted, ok granted we have a history of oppression and fine even- I growing up wanted to have Christina Aguilera's little size 24 body and it was sad to realize that yho- for me it was very...like I tried hard I tried my best to not be that girl but ja I feel like, you owe yourself a certain level of self-love.*

In the following extract, the extent to which the participants felt that popular media depictions did not represent them is advanced further by Amanda. In her response, Amanda states that she does not relate to the stereotypes in the media but admits that she herself has ascribed some of the stereotypes onto other Black women. She too, "objectifies" other Black women who dress or act provocatively. Thus, she distances her reality from that which is depicted by the media to the extent that she stereotypes 'other' Black women. She feels that she does not relate to specific stereotypical representations of Black women in the media and does not feel that she or her friends are like that. However, she believes that she too has seen "other" Black girls that are, "mostly angry" "violent and ratchet" (uncouth). Thus, she completely separates her reality from the image of the Black girls in the media.

*Amanda : I mean ever since I can remember, I have seen Black girls dancing and gyrating to Snoop dog, Tyrese...you know all these famous American artists and even here in South Africa now it's happening you get these girls wearing these tight fitting, see-through type of clothes and dancing whenever I see that I never, I never... look at myself and think that's me...or a friend of mine I...also I feel I also objectify unfortunately...cause I've grown up watching videos like that ...and women are objectified...and whatever its chicks, it's not people with feelings, I honestly don't think all Black women are like that, I myself make sure before I leave the house make sure what I'm wearing isn't too tight or too short or see through. I'm very particular with what I wear, and my friends as well and my family as well...I don't know anyone in my close circle that is like that....but I have seen that ...I saw it in your video, I have seen*

*that ratchetness...I've seen it walking down the street....you know? It's not untrue but to generalise and say all Black women are like that, no.*

Similarly, Zinzi, another participant completely dismisses the issue of media depictions and Black women to just being about the nature of the industry. She feels that one can translate it to being about Black women, but she sees people who want to participate willingly.

*Zinzi: So in my opinion ja it is what it is (yabona)...but I really... it might be like Black women are portrayed this way or that way...but most of the people that are participating within this ((lento)) it's mostly people that want to participate (yabona)?*

*Interviewer: want to...*

*Zinzi: Because it is all a moneymaking thing...*

In the following extract, she further states that the whole issue is people wanting to make money, so they put “that side of themselves” out there. Thus, she completely rejects the idea of the media representing her reality.

*Interviewer: Business...*

*Zinzi currently...(yabona) if it was 20, 30 years back then we could talk about it laughs...(yabona)...but today it's out there...people are making...trying to make big bucks...and then they don't mind showing those kind of sides of themselves on TV, so what I see..... just to make a buck....*

However, the rest of the participants also felt that the media often sensationalised and exaggerated things but that this then distorted some parts of reality. For example, in the following extract, Kwam states that she feels that the media portrays Black women negatively; this then undermines some of the elements of truth in the representations. This issue might then lead to the media portraying Black women negatively. In the following extract, Kwam states that she was not shocked at the media depictions shown to her, as these are common in the media. However, Kwam feels that some aspects of these depictions are accurate. There are some qualities that she identifies with and relates to, such as Black mothers being “out there and vocal”. She also implies that Black mothers will use physical punishment, which according to her is not violent. She relates that her mother would “show her” if she did something wrong,



thus describing her mother as strict- which she then associates with the violent depiction of the media. She states, however, that this does not fit with her experience of a strict mother. However, the media clip shown to her, depicted a violent woman. She links the depiction of the angry Black woman as being related to her experiences of her strict mother, who would use physical punishment when necessary, which the media might then interpret as violence. Thus, there is a link between media depictions and her different more nuanced interpretation of her experience. She suggests that the issue is that the media presents a distorted view of this reality, thus she says that she partially agrees with the representations shown to her.

*Kwam: No (Laughs)....no not shocked...that's what the media portrays a Black woman to be ...crazy ...as I said...they are out there vocal and violent...mmmh yeah sometimes...mmh agree... not really...partially ja...I do agree for example when something happens and then I'm going to think mmmh...if it was my mom ja she would show me! (laughs)... not really violent.... but a Black woman has been portrayed as a strict type of mom you know? (laughs). The law upholder...you don't do that! Laughs...you know? are you crying for a sweet in a shop? Black mom would have showed you that crying for a sweet ... so partially I agree not really violent...*

Thus, the media depiction of the angry Black woman emerged in two different portrayals. The first was that it created a specific idea of the Black woman who is violent or uncouth. These two depictions manifested themselves in settings where others, specifically those from other races, anger the Black woman. The second portrayal was that it was the norm for Black mothers to use physical punishment to get their children into order. This might also be linked to the idea of the 'violent Black woman'. Consequently, both of these images created an idea that Black women were not to be provoked, as they would most likely retaliate in a violent manner. However, in her research on the angry Black woman, Walley-Jean (2009) found that, although it had no empirical basis, this depiction of the angry Black woman is prevalent and accepted as fact. Gammage (2016) argues that images of this nature continue to be prevalent in popular media even though Black women feel that these do not accurately represent them.

Sasa, similarly to Kwam chose to focus on the parts of the depictions that stood for her reality. Unlike the previous participants, Sasa felt that the depictions of the 'loud Black girl' was not negative as expressed by the media. She further related it to herself and felt that it was true and harmless.

In the following excerpt, Sasa relates to this depiction because she is “known as the loudest girl at work”. She identifies positive connotations of this depiction and says to her, they mean that she brings the fun element into things by “laughing out loud and being crazy.” She clarifies, however, that this does not mean that she likes to fight, which she feels is an inaccurate assumption painted by the media. She elaborates that being Black can contribute to being “loud” although other races are loud as well. Sasa does not seem to associate this stereotype with negative depictions but says it is based on some truths as well. The ‘sadly’ is in relation to the media clip she viewed listing “loudly” as a negative depiction, which she disputes. She explained:

*Sasa: Sadly I’m known as the loud girl at work, even if I go back tomorrow I will get told that it was very quiet cause I wasn’t there...not that I like fighting...but I bring life into a place like laughing out loud and being crazy*

*Interviewer: Is that because you are Black?*

*Sasa: No, it’s my personality*

*Interviewer: So being Black has nothing to do with it?*

*Sasa: It adds to it but no...you get loud White people...but ke it can be perceived as - when you’re Black you’re loud*

Therefore, Sasa agrees with elements of the media depictions but similar to the other participants she has her own personalised experience. This experience is different from how the media typically portrays Black women.

Under this theme, many participants felt that the media portrayals of Black women are either untrue, or at least exaggerated, in a way that can be seen to be negative. Participants further felt that these media depictions shaped opinions about Black women in society. These opinions advanced a general negative image of Black women. The participants, though, felt that these depictions did not always, or never, relate to their realities nor those of their contemporaries.

Most notably, the stereotypical images of Black women that the participants identified with the most seemed to be gendered, and related to their emotions. These stereotypes create a sense that because Black women are women, they are not capable of emotional stability. Furthermore, much research argues that the issue is that negative media depictions of Black

women have a historical foundation based on historically gender oppressive ideas such as those of distorted fantasies about Black womanhood (Collins 2000; Green, 2012; King, 2015, Springer 2007; Tounsel, 2015). Some of the participants dismissed the portrayal of Black women as just being about media sensationalism. To the extent of saying that Black women in the media do not necessarily represent Black women as a group but are just about the individual. These views may show the process by which negative stereotypical depictions infiltrate the unconscious mind of the viewership audience.

Nevertheless, although much research on stereotypical representations of Black women is based on African American women, the findings of the present study seems to indicate that South African Black women feel that society imposes many of these stereotypical depictions onto them. It is therefore very interesting that several studies have highlighted the fact that the Black women's voices are often missing in research about them (Richardson-Stovall, 2012, Segalo, 2013; Tounsel, 2015; Gammage, 2016). Thus, many more research projects that present the Black women's opinions with regard to the images created about them in the media are needed.

#### **4.3 Theme two: Responses to negative media depictions and self-conceptualizations**

One of the foci of this research study was based on the perceptions of Black South African women with regard to the effects of negative media depictions on their self-conceptualization including their attitudes. Therefore, this theme is significant because it is based on the interpretations, feelings and opinions of the lived experiences of the participants, who are the focus of this study.

The theme is further significant because it explored the impact of these representations on the individual, from the participants' perspective as Black women, which is an essential focus of this research study. It further offers the opportunity to relate participant's personal experiences with literature assumptions of the effects of these negative depictions. These sub-themes emerged from the participants responses. Under this theme are these sub-themes 'We cannot be waiting for people to allow us to breathe', 'Love yourself, as you are', 'I do not want to be boxed into that Black Box', 'Black women are strong', 'Don't love me, just respect me'.

#### 4.3.1 I do not really like to think about it

The title of this sub-theme is a quote from one of the participants' responses. This quote captures the idea that participants tend to avoid engaging with the issue of how the media depicts Black women.

Under this sub-theme are participants responses to the ways in which Black South African women navigate the self, in terms of self-conceptualization, image and identity in order to respond to mass media constructions of what it means to be a Black woman. According to Govender, Rawjee & Govender (2014) the media plays a significant role in influencing how women understand their own worlds, recognise their sense of self, and find their place in society. Furthermore, studies postulate that the state of the media's representation of Black women would cause them to view themselves in the same light (King, 2015; Hairston, 2008). This theme presents the unprocessed responses of the participants, thus allowing insight into how they manage depictions.

This study's research findings reveal that firstly, some participants said that they did not think that the general negative images of Black women in the media reflect their own identity. These responses indicate a level of disownment, possibly resulting from the complexities involved in engaging with the topic. In the following extract, Amanda says that she was not aware of the stereotypes behind the media until she participated in this research study. This implies that because she was not aware of these depictions, they could not have affected her prior to being a part of the research study.

*Amanda: I actually wasn't aware of the stereotyping behind the media, but I was looking at it from that lens now for the first time. I did think some of it was funny, some of it was offensive uhm and some of it hurt. I was actually genuinely hurt by Black women being portrayed as cheeky, violent – fighter types as much as I do think... you know?*

The level of disownment ranged from participants saying that they were not aware of these depictions, to participants indicating that they did not want to think about it, thus actively avoiding engagement. In the following extract, Mbali states she did not really think "too much" about the impact of stereotypical depictions of women in the media. Similarly, to Amanda, this implies that her participation in this study, caused her to engage with these depictions. Her

expressed thoughts imply that she had not consciously faced these ideas before, but she admits that after viewing the media clip these stereotypes are something she could no longer disavow. It is also possible that exposure to this research process may have evoked a different thinking process about the intentions or outcome of the media influence.

*Mbali: Making a song out of it and having the whole world dance to it. So many people see these videos, so many people. I'm shocked, traumatised actually, I must be honest, I didn't really think too much about how these women are seen or make other women look.*

Upon further probing, it appears that Mbali actively avoids thinking about these depictions as opposed to being unaware of them. She further states that thinking about them makes her angry. She further explains that she avoids thinking about these media depictions as they make her angry and bitter. Thus, due to the emotions they evoke, she avoids them.

*Interviewer: That's interesting, you didn't think about it?*

*Mbali: (laughs) No! I don't like to think about these things, they make me so angry. Just how it all makes one feel, angry and bitter. When I was watching that video, watching these (Black) women twist their heads, being called loud if they wanna send a message across -they become loud and violent, they are like animals...it's not true, it's not but it also doesn't really matter because everyone believes it.*

In the following extract, Zinzi says that she does not engage deeply with the idea of the media portraying Black girls stereotypically as she believes it is the realities of today. She further says that she herself does not take it personally.

*Zinzi: (sighs) Well....Ja, it is defined as a stereotype...stereotypical way of showing Black girls but at the same time I guess it's the realities of today, you know? Back in the day we didn't have that kind of exposure to people you know? and we didn't know eer anything behind a stereotypical way of showing (yabona)) Black women in general, (yabona, mhlawubi)) we'd just hear about comments being made but it's never been out there in your face like it is in the media now but as much as it is what it is ((mna)) I don't really take it personally...*

She further states that she believes popular depictions of Black girls are intended to attract viewership. This is to the extent that she believes that these girls may be “professionals” in their real lives thus, she believes that the media is staged reality and not a true representation of reality. Thus, she does not take it personally.

*Interviewer: Personally?*

*Zinzi: Ja ... because currently we have all these like what you have showed also...  
...some of the clips come from these reality shows so it's another way of making  
money and then you'll find that these women that are actually portrayed there  
...they're professionals in their own right so that's not their real lives...although what  
we see thina...yabona...I saw a word called “ratchet” there  
(yabona))...yes...that...even the word itself will attract viewership... (laughs)*

Pam also says that she does not entertain popular notions of Black women because her own life experiences are different, and those experiences influence how she views herself. Moreover, people in her support structures boost her confidence, thus making her confident amidst opinions that may bring her down. She concludes that one needs to hear the “right stuff” which she gets from other platforms other than the media, such as the streets or from her home. These findings are in line with those of Patterson (2004) who found that the primary source of Black women’s self-esteem are their families, friends, churches, communities all of which are mostly composed of other Black people.

*Pam: I can't afford not to think I am not the best because I have me for the rest of my  
life, everyone at home boosts my confidence, you leave home feeling like you look  
proper...you do get approval on the streets...I have a cousin who's mom always told  
her to get a nose ring cause her nose is too big. You need to leave home feeling  
proper, I feel like I don't crawl into the room ....I look people like “good morning  
guys” I don't doubt myself...I think I'm beautiful...even though some people try to  
bring you down...you need to hear the right stuff*

Similarly, Thabi says that she immediately felt that the media depictions shown to her did not relate to her own life experiences and behaviour. Thus, she did not allow herself any time to engage with these.

*Interviewer: So, what did you think when I showed the ones you said weren't true*

*Thabi: Ok, so I felt that I can't make people feel otherwise but I'm not a violent person. I immediately felt that this wasn't me.*

This sub-theme revealed that some participants resisted engaging with how the media portrays Black women by either being somehow *unaware* of negative depictions, or choosing to avoid thinking about them. Nonetheless, Govender, Rawjee and Govender (2014) argue that the effects of the media, whilst subtle, maybe compelling to the psyche of the individual. Thus, participants may not always be overtly aware of the effects of media depictions of Black women on their self-conceptualisation but can still be affected. This issue is evidenced by the fact that some participants felt that engaging with such issues may evoke emotions of anger or bitterness in them, thus they chose to avoid thinking about these issues in order to suppress these emotions. One participant completely refused to acknowledge any links between media depictions and reality. It is possible as Gammage (2016) suggests that negative media representations of Black women may become integrated into the conscious and unconscious minds of its viewers, thus the effects thereof cannot be expected to always be easily accessible. This participant may not be aware of how the media influences her or may not believe the media influences her thinking. Thus, upon reflection in the interviews, all participants were able to access their thoughts on the topic. The following sub-theme presents participants' feelings on the coping strategies that they have adopted to avoid becoming affected by negative media depictions of Black women.

#### **4.3.2 We cannot be waiting for people to allow us to breathe**

The title of this sub-theme is a quote from one of the participants responses, which captures the feelings that participants held about owning a sense of autonomy in relation to how they define themselves outside popular media depictions. This second sub-theme emerged from the participants' responses when asked directly to reflect on how they felt that media stereotypes personally affected them. These responses are based both on the media representations discussed above as well as the participants own independent thoughts and opinions.

Many of the participants seemed to emphasis the value of not adopting a negative attitude of one's self based on the perception of others. They expressed views that one must form an opinion on themselves, outside of media depictions. The findings indicate views of self-

empowerment and self-determination based on views outside popular media depictions of Black women. It was notable that some of the participants felt that Black women would often position themselves in situations that caused them to be stereotyped based on what they assume others feel about them. This is evidenced by their responses as presented in the extracts below.

In the following extract, Pam, speaks about a story related to a community's outrage around a Black girl being discriminated in her school based on perceptions that her natural hair is unruly<sup>1</sup>. According to Pam, she was impartial in the debate because she felt that: "We can't be waiting for people to allow us to breathe." She continued: "Instead of wanting someone else to tell our story, start putting up our own pictures on Google". In her response, Pam says that she feels that Black women should be responsible for the images of Black women presented in the media, instead of waiting for others to do so.

*Pam: To be honest I was just like ok, this is good...we were expected to rally behind her, I was quite impartial, I just admire her afro...I was thinking what she uses I wonder...she must share her secrets, I feel like we can't be waiting for people to allow us to breathe, instead of wanting someone else to tell our story, start putting up our own pictures on Google, even in the media, we can't wait for someone else...if you had to control what Chinese people watch you would probably put inserts about Sushi...meanwhile Sushi isn't even Chinese.*

In the extract that follows, Zinzi's directly blames Black women for being responsible for how others label them. According to her, media portrayals of Black women may not necessarily influence how others view them. Therefore, she felt that as much as there was social pressures and perceptions on them to act in certain ways, Black women are free to exercise autonomy in most cases. In this way, Gammage (2016) suggests that the negative images of Black women in the media have caused some Black women to be more susceptible to internalizing negative images which may lead to their participation in their own damnation.

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<sup>1</sup> See article by Ngoepe. K. (2016, August 29). *Black girls in tears at Pretoria school hair protest*. Retrieved from <https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/black-girls-in-tears-at-pretoria-school-hair-protest-20160829>



Zinzi seems to agree with this notion because she feels that there needs to be an investigation into how other races view Black people instead of an assumption by Black people that they are viewed negatively. She states that Black people “have put themselves in that bracket”.

*Zinzi...That will be our view like oh you're portraying us this way and then now this is how the other races will view us.....But have we really gone and spoken to someone of a different race...and ask their opinions about... Usually, usually which is....probably very high [lento]...chances that someone hasn't....didn't really go to a White person and ask them what they think about that... if they actually think that that's how all Black people are....*

*Interviewer: how all Black people are...?*

*Zinzi: that's never been the case...but we usually think that that's how they view us but we haven't really spoken to them and checked. Yes, as Black people, we have put ourselves under that bracket. You see?*

In her response, Mbali advances similar sentiments in that she felt that some of the prejudices are self-inflicted and that one has “...a right to let go of what you think other people want to think of you”. Thus, participants felt that when it comes to the issue of self-conceptualization, Black women needed to acknowledge their own self-worth prior to expecting other people to do so. Patterson (2004) supports these ideas in that she states that Black women have developed implicit and explicit behaviours in constructing their lives. These behaviours enable Black women to possess internal sources of self-esteem based on a resilience developed by social oppression.

*Amanda: But like...half of it is self-inflicted that's what I think I feel like you have a right to let go of what you think other people want to think of you.*

In response to the question of how Black women are affected by negative media representations of themselves, Thabi similarly to the other participants feels that women have a level of control over whether they allow these depictions to shape them as “no one can force another into a role of life”.

*Thabi: If they allow it, women are to blame because no circumstances can force you into playing that role in life. I don't want to die and recognise a person that did such. Like I said, I can't change how people see me, but I know what I am and am not.*

She further came to identify her own level of control, in that she felt that she personally can choose what she is and what she is not. This endorses the notion that one does not have to subscribe to widely accepted notions of self, based on stereotypes. However, it becomes clear that this is an ongoing struggle as she says that she at times does feel pressured to behave in a certain way.

*Thabi: Yes, I sometimes feel pressure to behave a certain way. Sometimes because I'm Black and other times because I am Xhosa but we all have choices, I do not have to act in that way.*

Kwam further highlights the idea that people must be realistic in their own expectations in that we do not all want a "Halle Berry" body because it is not possible for everyone regardless of the effort they put into it.

*Kwam: we don't want to be Halle Berry's your body is fine as is I'm not encouraging unhealthiest but if you are...like my sister in law is big boned she exercises twice a day but that body doesn't drop does it mean now that she has to view herself negatively? No. if you are big boned and healthy good and well, that's your body type, your body shape accept it, run with it.*

In her response to whom she feels is behind dominant views of Black women, Sasa feels that control could be in the hands of other Black people and not necessarily White people. Thus, she repositions the power behind the media as being an agenda of an individual rather than it being about race.

*Sasa: It could be another Black person who's maybe...has a weave on or is uncomfortable in their own skin...I don't want to say White...it could be another Black woman...who wants to make other people feel bad.*

The tone in the participants' responses indicates strong feelings in relation to whether or not they take on the stereotypical perceptions and beliefs about themselves. With some participants, their responses extended to blaming Black women for using media created labels to define themselves, thus allowing others to define them or for not being responsible for their own public image. Although some participants admitted that they did at times feel pressure, the majority of participants still felt that Black women should not adopt stereotypical media depictions that would affect them negatively. As per the participant's responses, instead of adopting widely held views about oneself, learning to accept oneself is more important. However, this study's participants' responses are in line with research by Patterson (2004), which indicates that Black women feel a need to resist oppression in ways that empower them. Similar to Patterson's participants the participants in this study felt that even though they are members of a subjugated group, they are able to affirm their own self-worth and withstand the assault of racial discrimination and forms of inequality (Patterson, 2004). Patterson argues that this prolonged socio-cultural, racist and sexist 'attack' on Black women can result in a survival mentality and a multiple consciousness as well as the will to oppose it. These findings show a difference in how others view Black women and how they view themselves. Under this sub-theme, participants express that there are certain social stereotypes imposed onto Black women by those who are not them. They feel that Black women should not feel coerced into being defined by those stereotypes. The subsequent sub-theme differs in that participants express the need to be responsible for the image of Black women from the perspective of Black women.

#### **4.3.3 Love yourself, as you are**

The title of this sub-theme emerged from the participants expressing that it was important for Black women to prioritize their own perceptions of one's self above those of others. Under the theme of the impact of negative media depictions of Black women, a sub-theme emerged from both the questions of personal perceptions, societal perceptions and treatment of Black women as a result of stereotypical media depictions.

This sub-theme presents the perceptions Black women hold in relation to balancing negative media portrayals and defining oneself outside of these. Many of the participants felt that Black women should define their own perceptions of themselves, thus not allowing how the media depicts them to do so. The following details some of the participants' responses.

Pam feels that, because of how the media depicts them, Black women do not value what they have and that it is indeed, important to treasure what one has and who they really are. She

further said it was important for parents to impart their historical legacy onto their children instead devaluing such. Thus, she implies that it is the parent's responsibilities, instead of the media, to impart knowledge and appreciation of self onto their children.

*Pam: I have a thing like we don't treasure what we do have ...there's leaders like Shaka...I actually cried cause how can I not know leaders who were important in my line?...We haven't really found the gist, fathers leave their kids cause they don't see the need to share the present of culture...*

This was evident because some participants felt that there was a need to educate younger ones to love themselves, including their own children. As a result, in their study about the messages that Black women impart onto their daughters about Black womanhood, Mayo (2010) found that these mothers often have to be combative when teaching their daughters about their culture and self-identity, especially in contrast to how the media negatively portrays the Black women. Black women fought hard to teach their daughters to transcend negative beliefs and portrayals. Mayo (2010) found that Black women are faced with the challenge of having to debunk stereotypical beliefs that have sustained the social position of Black women as subordinate based on their gender and race

Kwam shares how she has taken it upon herself to educate her son about race whilst he is in the process of learning about it at school and in his social environment. She has even spoken to other children about the differences in accepted notions of colour as opposed to their reality. She feels that the problem everything will boil down to "self-esteem" regardless of the era in which you are born. Kwam further states that, even in this era, women are still struggling with the same issues.

*Kwam: My son is learning about White and Black and I want to teach him that humans are humans, so I don't know a way of saying to him - don't look at the colour. We were talking with little girls, they were talking about White girls...I took out the paper and said if there anyone this colour that you have seen and they said no, and I said well why do you call them White? They said well they are not that colour maybe they are peach and then we googled peach skinned women and the pictures that came up where White women in peach dresses and they said yes! They look light peach so that was their conclusion about the skin colour and I said why do you call yourself Black? And I*

*showed them the table and said do you look like this? And they said maybe dark brown, obviously it will boil down to self-esteem be it you're the <sup>2</sup>born frees or be it you know? Those who were born during rough times (laughs) because find women are still struggling with the same issues...*

Kwam states that things turned around for her when she started to value herself. She explains that she no longer values another person's opinion of her above her own. This means that she uses herself as a measure to determine her self-value.

*Kwam: dreadlocks? Ja I had that before. I'm actually a person that's comfortable in my own skin as a teen girl I struggled with my body image, but I think that was a learning curve for me I was getting to know myself and understand myself so now I'm ok. It doesn't matter what you think I'm fine with this and someone actually thought I'm not combing my hair because it's too kinky, but yeah, I am combing it*

Another participant, Zinzi, shared the same notion. In the extract below, speaking about how the appearance of an individual changes when they apply make-up, she suggests that it is better for one to be seen in their natural state and not 'put on a mask'.

*Zinzi: Kanti, wouldn't it be better to let people get used to you the way you are....as yourself you know? Than putting this mask on? Because that's what it is...it's almost like a mask.... because now you go back and then the mask is off, I mean who are you there? Laughs...*

In the following extract, Sasa's response is in relation to one of the media clips shown by the researcher, which is a popular media clip of a black actress Viola Davis. In the clip, Viola Davis takes off her make-up, thus revealing how her face looks without make-up. In response to how Black women, including herself should view themselves considering how the media depicts them, Sasa says that these women "must accept themselves".

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<sup>2</sup> According to the Collins English Dictionary, the term 'Born Free' is an African expression used to define a member of a generation born in a country after its transition to democracy (in particular post-apartheid South Africa). In South Africa this term is widely used to refer to those born in 1994 and thereafter.

*Sasa: She was putting another face and people accepted her, some maybe preferred her with makeup*

*Interviewer: Producers discussed whether she wanted to do that scene, she wanted to, she didn't have to*

*Sasa: I think she looks beautiful without, they [Black people] must accept themselves, [and] it's fine to go out without makeup, it's fine to be seen without lipstick*

In addition, to the other participants, Amanda's response indicates that she puts her opinion of herself above other people's opinion of how her appearance should be.

*Amanda: Confused, is that how people look at me when I walk down the street?*

*Interviewer: does it affects how you see yourself?*

*Amanda: no, I'm not gonna shave off my hair based on someone else's opinion, if a person has a problem with the hair that comes out of your skull, I can't help them.*

Nevertheless, the research findings reveal messages of self-love that were discussed under a theme of participants' own beliefs of what being a Black woman means to them. They spoke as if negative media depictions of Black women had blinded them to their value. Thus, a common response was of their own struggle to find worth in one's own Blackness. They said they try to achieve this through some of the historical triumphs experienced by Black people. These views are in line with those of Hudson (2007) who argues that historically Black women have had instances of personal triumph. Moreover, Booysen (2010) argues that Black South African women have positive examples of other Black women who fought against the apartheid system. Thus, positive reinforcements by other Black people (men and women) may prevent Black women from internalizing dominant negative societal views. However, some participants struggled with notions of positivity in concepts of Blackness. This following sub-theme presents this issue.

#### **4.3.4 To be a Coconut or to be in the Black Box**

This sub-theme was taken from the terms some of the participants used to define the struggle they experienced when attempting to position themselves in relation to their Blackness, in light

of stereotypical characteristics associated with being a Black person. This sub-theme is then a discussion of how the participants felt about how, as Black women, popular negative media depictions of Black people affected their own notions of Blackness.

Puttick (2011) argues that, as part of the legacy of the apartheid era, Whiteness became constructed as supreme, pure and intelligent, whilst Blackness was presented as unintelligent, lazy and licentious. Furthermore, studies found that although the concept of Whiteness, as constructed by the apartheid era, is no longer politically dominant, it is still set as the socio-cultural norm and still persists in the modern society. (Esprey, 2017; Puttick, 2011). According to Gammage (2016), the media plays a critical role in advancing these notions of Blackness in societies.

This sub-theme emerged when some of the participants related instances where they had felt personally disadvantaged by their Blackness. These disadvantages were based on people's (non-Blacks) perceived assumptions about the participants' way of being as Black people and what this might imply about them and for them. The extracts below present participants' feelings about this subject.

From their responses, it seemed that there were certain unfavourable traits associated with the identity of Black people in general. Sasa expresses this notion in the following extract, especially when she speaks about how Black people themselves also have come to believe these perceptions. Sasa says that popular depictions of Black people may influence their own beliefs about themselves. This belief, she says, may lead Black people to act according to these perceptions, thus augmenting these perceptions as part of the Black identity.

*Sasa: It's a perception that people have about us Black people, sadly... and somehow, we tend to act like that because that is how we are perceived or that's how we have to be like because that's what makes us Black...sadly.*

*Interviewer: ok...When you say that's how people ...Which people are you talking about?*

*Sasa: Even us as Black people perceive ourselves like ... (laughs)*

In the following extract, Thabi explains that she feels that the idea of Whiteness is associated with high status whilst the idea of Blackness is associated with a low status. This notion is

explained by Puttick (2011) who argues that Whiteness is contingent with social hierarchy, which may grant differential access to economic and cultural capital in South Africa.

*Thabi: I think its apartheid, like your hair is bushy, it's one of those impacts that apartheid had, they can't see that out natural hair is actually beautiful, Black people want to be friends with the Whites because of status...if you have your natural hair you are seen as poor because if you have Brazilian hair you are seen as rich, it's a status thing.*

Mbali advances the idea of Whiteness being associated with status by saying that there are expectations that one is taken seriously if they act in a manner associated with White people (Caucasian). For example, tying your hair back or looking decent, are traits associated with Caucasian people. These findings are in line with those of Puttick (2011) who found that Whiteness is often seen as the standpoint against which the self and others are perceived and understood. However, Mbali feels that the media depiction of Black women's hair as unprofessional is not true and argues that not all White women are professional looking. She feels, that straight hair (as per the media depiction shown to the participants) should not be seen a characteristic of Whiteness.

*Mbali: Then there was the part that said you're taken seriously if you present yourself in Caucasian type of manner...I suppose I was raised in a very... you know? The school I went to was very strict, you'd tie your hair back, be neat, wear decent clothes, look decent if that is identified as Caucasian, I think then there is a problem with society because I don't think every White woman is you know? Professional, if you straighten your hair all of a sudden, you're trying to be White? I don't believe in that...*

In the following extract, the idea of Whiteness being associated with superiority is further explored by Zinzi. She brings out the notion that if a Black person is of 'mixed race' origins, then they are considered more attractive than other Black people who do not possess mixed raced features. She states that people will ask if that person has any 'White' "in them which, in her view, implies that looking like a Black is not good enough.



*Zinzi: First of all, I don't like it if a Black person has beautiful hair and they ask if they have Indian in them you see? I don't like it when a Black person has beautiful skin or is light skin, they get asked if they have Coloured or White in them? Ancestor? ... no, I don't like that myself ... and I'm usually, I'm usually .... If I can overhear that kind of conversation, I try to chip in and ask why isn't Black good enough? You know? Why can't a Black person also come up with blue eyes and everything else other people have? Why can't we have the sleek hair? Without someone wanting to touch and check if it's a weave or not, why? Why? people will ask is it your real hair? I mean really? People will ask, is it your real hair...for it to be good enough it must come from a European side, Asian side you know why does it have to be like that? If its African we're not good enough to have good genes? with good skin, good hair? Good everything? We're capable of having beautiful features...and there's plenty Black women with all the above and, none of them have any White in their ancestor in their line, you know. But they still have decent hair, good looking hair and its all authentic.*

In the extract below, she further disputes the belief which she feels is held by people that White or Indian people are behind beautiful features in Black people. She states that if one has features that are “nice” they are questioned about their ancestral lineage because of the belief that Black people alone, as depicted by the media, cannot possess those features.

*Interviewer: And good skin and whatever?*

*Zinzi: Ja and it's all authentic, ja...it doesn't come from the great, great, great White grandfather or Indian or whatever, you know? So, it's just that... so I hate the questioning behind, if you got you know? If you got nice that it must come from a different race or you must be mixed, or if you don't know, there must be an ancestor in your family I mean it's so unnecessary*

AS seen in the extract above, hair seemed to be a big factor in advancing the idea that Whiteness is better than Blackness. In the extract below, Kwam explains that the Afro is referred to as a “breadwinner’s hairstyle,” thus, indicating that one is struggling financially. She further states that the issue is that society was happy with Black women looking like White people and that

Black hair became some issue as soon as Black women became comfortable with their natural hair.

*Kwam: someone said hey you have a breadwinner's hairstyle and I was like ok is that what they call it now? It means I'm struggling so I'm keeping my afro because yes, the struggle is real. I think the reason it's a topic now is because Black women are now finding themselves and maybe society was happy with us looking like White people and being in a box so now when I'm saying I don't like this box it has to be a topic. I'm comfortable with my curly kinky hair I go to the office with it maybe the women that are now in boardrooms are comfortable being as they are no makeup, not trying to look like somebody else so yes, it is a topic.*

This sets up notions that when Blackness is juxtaposed against Whiteness, it emerges as inferior. The juxtaposing of Blackness with Whiteness is an ongoing challenge in contemporary South Africa (Puttick, 2011; Mtose, 2008). Furthermore, due to the past systems of oppression, dominant forms of thinking may permeate Black people's mind-sets and their behaviour resulting in them internalizing negative ideologies about themselves (Mtose, 2008). However, participants in this study indicated that they resisted negative ideologies about Black women circulated by negative media representations, which manifested in their societies.

In the following extracts, it appeared that the traits associated with Black people positioned some participants as outsiders even in their Black communities.

In the following extract, Mbali relates her experiences at school where other Black people ostracised her for not being Black enough. Black people said she was "not White" because her hobbies, such as playing the "guitar" were not in line with their ideas of Blackness. Mbali said that other Black people accused her of acting like a "coconut."

*Mbali: Sometimes I'm disrespected too, harassed, sometimes other women see you as a threat and you get side-lined, you are being called fat as if that is a compliment and now I am being called skeleton, skinny. At school, I was always told that I think I am White, wake up you're Black as ever, why do you own a guitar, you act like a coconut.*

According to Rudwick (2010), the term ‘coconut’ is associated with an external Blackness in terms of skin colour but an internal Whiteness in terms of values. A ‘coconut’ is perceived as a Black person who speaks English in a White accent, one who is too comfortable in White people’s company and disagrees with African values. This is a derogatory term and reflects a negative sentiment towards those Black people who are perceived as wanting to be White in their communities (Rudwick, 2010). Thus, it is an insult to be called a coconut, which may shame the ‘accused.’ In her extract, Mbali brings out that activities such as playing the guitar are not considered things that a Black person can do. Thus, for Mbali, these traits position her as an outsider in her own community.

However, some participants felt that in some settings, being Black meant that one was associated with unfavourable characteristics. Some of these characteristics were that Black people tend to be underprivileged in relation to White people. This perception then positions Black people in an unfavourable light in the eyes of others (namely White people). Furthermore, they felt that being associated with these ideas of Blackness would hinder any opportunities they might have gained. As a result, some participants felt that they did not want others to perceive them as underprivileged Black people and worked to distance themselves from such associations. This view is evident in the following extract from Pam.

Pam spoke more personally about the issues she has with Blackness. Firstly, she says that facing the ongoing disadvantages faced by Black people “is boring” to her. She further states that she noticed that other races (Whites), tend to accept Black people that are “well off”. She says that she does not want to be in “that Box” of Black people as they are not associated with success or acceptance.

*Pam: I can't keep watching Black people being at a disadvantage...its boring...like in my class...what you realise is that the people who are accepted into White groups are those that are well off...so now this girl can't be accepted into that group because of that. I don't want to be in the Black box.*

Pam states that the disadvantages faced by Black people bore her. This may be her way of distancing herself from the possible pain evoked by these experiences. Furthermore, she expresses both the shame associated with being in the Black Box and the shame of being outside the Black Box (a coconut) and thus, accepted into the White groups.

Pam takes the idea of the shame associated with being outside the Black Box further. She explains that she does not want to be in that "...box to the extent of distancing herself from associations with it, such as explaining that although she originates from Soweto, she moved out of there.

*Pam: Low and behold you're from Soweto...I even make a point to explain that we moved away from Soweto...its surprising that you can dream, kanti eSoweto kukho umntu ofunda i-novel (Is it possible that there are people in Soweto who enjoy reading novels)...if you're a Black person you're probably a bit angry because of the disadvantages of the past, I feel like a lot of people think we force ourselves to be strong but life has dealt us such a card.*

She further states

*Pam: Other people assume that you tried to escape being Black...*

Her statement above speaks to the significance of the idea that Black people are characterised by lowly social traits and that a Black person not assuming this lower social status is trying to escape being Black. However, these views may place the individual in a crippling position of choosing between being seen as lowly and disadvantaged, by people of other races and shunned, or being seen as not characteristically Black and being shunned by other Black people. Thus, it is a no-win position. There seemed to be a sense of guilt and shame associated with the idea of a Black person who was seen as different or privileged within their communities. Smedley (1998, p. 695) highlights that historically, the laws of the past system of racial oppression served not only to reduce Black people's rights, but also to dent them access to "wealth, power, and privilege". However, for the participants, the cost of being accepted into different racial groups and being afforded opportunities that other Blacks in the "Black box" did not have, evoked ostracism from fellow Black people.

This sub-theme explored the perceptions held by some of the participants and the findings indicate a level of shame associated with some of the perceived stereotypical characteristics of Blackness. Research shows that because of South Africa's past, the meanings attached to

Blackness as a concept, are negative. Thus, Blackness is magnified (negatively) in relation to the concept of Whiteness (Rollock, 2007; Mtose, 2008). Puttick (2011) highlights that these ideas are relayed in nuanced ways through different platforms such as the media and these ideas then manifest themselves in daily conversations. This is evidenced by the fact that race continues to be the dominant form of how the media identifies individuals.

Subsequently, participants indicated that they struggled with having to choose to be Black because this placed them at a disadvantage. They also indicated that they struggled to be associated with characteristics typically related with notions of Whiteness that represented privilege because they may result in them being shunned within their Black communities. A consequence of South Africa's history is that Blackness and the meanings attached to it as a concept, were negative, and thus magnified in the context of Whiteness (Rollock, 2007; Mtose, 2008).

Maybe as a response to the feelings expressed above with regard to being in a seemingly impossible position, the following sub-theme presents further ideas of how Black women feel about strength as part of the definition of the image of Black women.

#### **4.3.5 Black women are strong**

The fifth sub-theme emerged from the interviews with all of the participants who felt that due to all the issues experienced by Black women they have had to become strong. According to participants, they see themselves as virtuous and strong because of suffering and enduring so much racist and gender-based oppression. It emerged that although many participants experienced mistreatment or discrimination, they felt that those experiences inevitably contributed to personal strengths. This strength was perceived as encompassing all spheres of the Black woman. Participants expressed that the mistreatment of Black women at the hands of society, family and others had caused them to become strong. Thus, they perceived social mistreatment as producing personal strength.

In the following abstract, Mbali shares these thoughts. She expresses ideas about Black women being mistreated by “society, peers, family, everyone really” and as a result, Black women are strong because they have had to - and still must - endure a multitude of hardships. She further advances the idea that Black women need to be strong as a form of ammunition.

*Mbali: I think that honestly, Black women are mistreated by society, peers, family, everyone really. That's why we're so strong. We have to be tough; the whole world mistreats us (laughs). Ok, maybe I'm exaggerating but maybe I'm not.*

Thabi, shared these sentiments and felt that due to their historical endurance related to raising families on their own, Black women were strong. Thus, she includes the family structure as an oppressive system for the woman as well.

*Thabi: Yes, because of the things they can endure...during apartheid, they have 7 kids and can provide for those kids. Yes, some of them their husbands left them, but they are strong.*

According to Manicom (1992, p. 457) another element that adds to the negative stereotyping of Black women in society is the influence of political subjugation on the “churches, indigenous social organizations and familial relations”. Hence, the media influence extends all the way into all of the contexts of the Black woman’s being.

In the following extract, Zinzi echoes the same idea and emphasises the belief that Black women go through “the most”. These ideas might be linked to the notion that Black women tend to suffer more than their counterparts due to their intersectionality of identity and gender.

*Zinzi: Very! Among all the craziness, they are the ones who go through the worst, whether its life, relationships, child bearing. Everything...Black women go through the worst, even amid the stereotypes, and how they are viewed...and, they are viewed as being the strongest...Even those who want to see it differently, all have to agree Black women are strong.*

Kwam further discusses the idea that Black women are strong because of the trials they have faced. According to her, Black women are stronger than anyone and are able to carry others whilst “forgetting themselves” in the process. The following extracts expand the idea of the Black woman who, as an example of her strength, sacrifices herself to take care of others.

*Kwam: Yes. Actually, Black women are stronger than any other person I can imagine be it Black men, White men, White women, they are able to carry everyone else and forget themselves.*

She explains that the Black women's strength emanates from two life choices; "either toughen up or you die".

*Kwam: things have not been easy so either toughen up or you die, law of the jungle survival of the fittest you look at women in upper Africa they do a whole lot. We are actually spoilt compared to them we say we can't walk a kilometre we get a taxi (laughs) they walk such a long distance, carrying babies, they fish, they are strong...so compared to Black, White they are the strongest according to me.*

Pam clarifies the definition of this strength because she says it encompasses their whole being. In fact, she says the strength is "physical, emotional and mental".

*Pam: the strength is not just physical it's emotional. Black women are strong. You've got 7 kids the husband decides to leave for a younger version of yourself and because older women never worked believed women must stay at home, now you have to get ideas of how to feed these 7 kids so emotionally Black women are stronger definitely. Mentally, emotionally physically ...Black women are strong*

In the following extract, Amanda echoes the sentiments stated by all of her fellow participants that there are perceptions that Black women have much more strength in comparison to other races. Amanda feels, however, that Black women are perceived to be stronger than they actually are.

*Amanda: Black women are seen as stronger than other races, I'm thinking of Black women in the movies who go through hardships, they just pick themselves up...they are seen as stronger than they really are*

However, much research argues that these depictions of a strong Black woman actually serve to prevent resistance against any forms of opposition to the unfair treatment of Black women in their societies (Offutt, 2013; Motsaathebe, 2013; Patterson, 2004).

Studies found that the image of the strong Black women is also linked to the extensive demands placed on Black women's lives and that when they succeed under unfavourable social conditions, they are viewed as an honourable (Offutt, 2013). This is proven by the fact that the participants in this study identified the strength of Black women as a virtue. Thus Offutt (2013, p. 1) disputes this notion of strength, arguing that this idea is used to "define and maintain a stratified social order by obscuring Black women's experiences of suffering, acts of desperation and anger". Nevertheless, the participants' responses indicated that they perceived themselves as resilient because of the hardships that they had encountered and denoted their perceived strength positively. From the participants' responses, it became clear that they also felt that others viewed them as strong or resilient. This enabled them to view the enduring of mistreatment and the overcoming of it as a personal virtue instead of an injustice. A critical component of this research study included asking the participants how they would like to be viewed and treated in a manner, which reflects the reality they know. The following section explores their responses.

#### **4.3.6 Don't love me, just respect me**

The title of this sub-theme captures participant's tone as it relates to their views on how society should see Black women especially in light of negative stereotypical portrayals. Participants seemed to feel that they did not expect to be valued in their societies and had resigned to requiring respect instead of acceptance. Notably, all of the participants reported that they would want people to respect them.

These following extracts present these responses. In response to the question of how she would like to be treated, Pam responded that she would like to be in an environment where Black women were not concerned about being accepted based on their race. She states that the most important thing to her is respect from others.

*Pam: I think I would portray that we're not trying to be other people, I had my afro, so this guy gave me this look...like I didn't grow my afro in one day...this is just a human being...I would change it to we really don't care for acceptance on the basis of race, as long as you respect me that's fine.*



Zinzi echoes the same views saying that for her, respect is the most important thing. She also adds that people would treat (black) women much better if they respected them.

*Zinzi: With respect. Respect takes you a long way in other avenues, even with the hair thing, people can be more accommodating if we just respect one another, respect leads to acceptance, it would be easy to accommodate each other and accept our differences, that's all there is to it.*

The notion of respect is viewed as being so important that some participants, such as Pam, cited earlier, as well as Thabi said that they would prefer to be respected, rather than being loved or liked.

*Thabi: I would like them to respect me more than anything else, I don't even want to be loved, that's it.*

Quoting the late African American human rights activist, Martin Luther King, Amanda says that she would prefer that people focus on her character and not on her looks.

*Amanda: Martin Luther King said: Judge me by the content of my character not the colour of their skin. We could share ideas, if we could get out of each other's way, life would be much better.*

This sub-theme indicates participants' feelings in relation to how, as Black women, they would want to be treated. All of the participants expressed that they would like people and society to respect them. Within this request, they voiced that they did not expect things to change nor did they expect to be liked, but that they desired to be respected as equal humans to others. However, Brink & Nel (2015) argue that stereotypical beliefs are resistant to change (Brink & Nel, 2015). This is because people seek information that confirms existent stereotypes rather than attempting to challenge or test their existing beliefs (Brink & Nel, 2015). This is evident in the case of the media stereotyping of Black women. For the participants, this means that some members of society will, still enact stereotypical beliefs about Black women, as presented by the media. The findings of this study suggest that the participants felt they, as Black women,

were not respected in their societies, hence, the emphasis on the need to be respected more than being loved or liked.

#### **4.4 Theme three: Responses to negative media stereotypes and societal re-enactments**

Participants expressed views that how the media depicts Black women influenced how people, even within their own communities, viewed Black women. As Black women themselves, the participants confirmed that they had first-hand experience of this treatment. Accordingly, this theme emerged through participants' reflections and interpretations of how popular media depictions of Black women informed the way society viewed Black women. This is not new because as early as 1979, studies found evidence of a correlation between images about oneself in the media, the individual consciousness, and collective social life (Gaye, 1979; Higginbottom, 2014; I. A. Ndiaye & B. Ndiaye, 2014).

Subsequently studies have shown that ideologies of Black women in contemporary media distort how Black women are viewed and understood within popular culture and society at large (Collins 2000; Springer 2007; Harris-Perry 2011, King, 2015, Tounsel, 2015). The theme is important because it explored the participant's perceptions of the influence of popular stereotypical media representations of Black women on society.

This theme is composed of three sub-themes. These sub-themes are the 'The undervaluing of the Black woman'; 'Black women are not smart enough' and 'Negative stereotyping in the Black community'. The first sub-theme, presents these ideas from the participants responses.

##### **4.4.1 The undervaluing of the Black woman**

This sub-theme captures the ways in which the participants believe media depictions of Black women inform others about Black women and their general image. This sub-theme is important because it allowed participants to express how they felt or imagined others viewed them considering stereotypical portrayals of Black women in the media.

Some research suggests that how the mass media constructs the image of the Black woman may not only affect Black women directly but also perpetuates stereotypes that shape how others see and treat the Black woman (Gammage, 2016; Green, 2012; King, 2015;).

Significantly, this sub-theme emerged in relation to men (Black and other races) and in relation to White women. Research shows that historically Whiteness has been positioned as the standard against which other races are measured (Hammett, 2010; Kiguwa, 2006; King, 2015; Sanger, 2009; 1998). This was evident in the participants responses as the bulk of the comparisons were in relation to White women. The following discussions delve deeper into this issue.

The following responses show that participants strongly felt that people in society undervalued Black women. Furthermore, these views were mostly related to cases where people of other races were involved. In the following extract, Thabi, says that in her experience, White people do not “regard her as a person” or a fellow human being whilst “Black guys” demand respect. Thus, she feels that, as a Black woman “there is a need for her to fight for her rights.”

*Thabi: White people tend to not regard me as a person, they just don't care. Black guys constantly demand respect, there is a need to fight for my rights.*

Other participants, echoed the same sentiment as seen in the following extract from Kwam. In this extract, she expresses that she feels that (society) does not put “much value on Black women” and has “no value for Black women”. She further states that she feels that this forces Black women into a position where they constantly have to prove themselves.

*Kwam: Like I said they don't put much value on Black women and for you to get up the ladder in a company or if you are a business owner you work three times more to prove yourself to say I belong here. No value on Black women.*

The idea of a lack of appreciation for Black women, extends to perceptions that Black women would not be afforded equal opportunities in relation to their peers. In the following extract, Mbali says that she thinks that if there was to be an order of preference for a professional opportunity, Black women, unlike their peers, are more likely to not be considered as the first option.

*Mbali: I think that if a Black woman wants to get something, they will be second choice. I definitely don't think so [that there are equal opportunities].*

The following extract is a continuation of the one above, where Mbali explains that she feels that Black women are “two times more” disadvantaged than women of other races. In this extract, she states that although she believes that all women will always be at a disadvantage, Black women suffer more. Research shows that due to the fact that Black women are both women and Black, they experience significantly more marginalising than women of other races (Crenshaw, 1989; Gaye & Tate, 1998; Roysircar, 2016; Shields, 2008). The two characteristics create a double oppression for them.

*Mbali: Seriously, if we're all honest, a woman will always be disadvantaged, but a Black woman! Two times more. Maybe that's why those poor girls have no choice but to use their assets to be noticed, joking, joking.*

In the following extract Amanda says that she feels that as a Black woman the expectation is that she must just be “present” and will be considered unruly if she goes against that. There is a sense that she does not feel able to openly express herself as this will be considered negatively.

*Amanda: If you're a Black woman you're supposed to just be there, just be present and if you go against that you're unruly you're disrespected.*

The idea that Black women experience double marginalisation further emerged when participants' responses indicated that they did not feel that people in their own societies encouraged the idea of Black women becoming something noteworthy in their societies. They expressed ideas that society at large resisted the empowerment of Black women. Perhaps, this resistance is due to the fact that Black women have suffered subjugation for decades and that the processes that facilitated this subjugation cannot disappear within a brief period. In her research on stereotypes of Black women in television, King (2015) highlights that certain opinions of entire racial and gender groups persist regardless of their merit as is the case with Black women. Furthermore, the identity of Black women is complex and imbedded in discourses of societal marginalization and inferiority due to the intersectionality of race and gender (Gandy, 2001). Research shows that due to this intersectionality of race and gender, Black women may experience a double oppression (Shields, 2008). This double oppression is further exacerbated, especially within their own communities, by negative media representations of Black women.

These stereotypical media discourses appear through institutional racism, which permeates all sides of Black women's lives, through prejudicial attitudes or discriminatory behaviour (Ashley, 2014). These ideas are clear in the following extract of Kwam's thoughts as she expresses that she feels that society does not want to see Black women succeeding and as a result, Black women continue to struggle to get "recognition and all those things". In addition, she also further states that she feels that "general society does not value Black women". Kwam's extract is lengthy and thus divided into parts to highlight her main ideas.

*Kwam: No one wants to see that Black woman go into that school, so evening is good enough for you...anyway the bottom line is they fought through whatever challenges so Black women are still struggling to get recognition and all those things and I feel that the general society doesn't value Black women.*

According to her, the reason there is now a lot of hype around the success of Black women (first Black woman to...) is because Black women struggle more to acquire recognition in comparison to their peers. This idea, as already mentioned above, is also supported by existing literature.

*Kwam: (giggles)...mmh.....a Black person has struggled for a long time be it a woman or a man but I feel Black women are struggling a lot more in terms of recognition whether at work or in society hence the minute I achieve something they are saying the "first Black woman to..." I was watching the movie hidden figures...there's a movie ....so first Black women engineer in NASA...and I'm like ok and they had to struggle shame, they went to whatever school they went to and before you become an engineer to have to have gone to that school which was a White only school and then she goes to court to appeal if she can go to the school and the judge says she can go to the school evenings only.*

Kwam further states that she feels that society thinks Black women belong "in the kitchen cleaning" or "cleaning someone's plate". She further shares an experience of someone telling her friend that, as a Black woman, she did not deserve the salary and the job she had acquired, thereby devaluing this friend's value. Although in the extract Kwam does not say whether the person speaking to her friend was a Black man or from another race, Kwam gave the answer

as part of the context of the discussion of Black women. According to some scholars, societal views such as these are a product of the lingering effects of oppression experienced by Black women (Gandy, 2001; Tounsel, 2012). Thus Green (2012) explains that the constructions of the Black woman's image in mass media may not only affect Black women directly but also perpetuate stereotypes that shape how others see and treat the Black woman.

*Kwam: They will only see you as sis Dolly who was supposed to be a domestic worker somewhere, you don't belong here, you belong somewhere in the kitchen cleaning someone's plate. They will always...ja... cause I remember there was a friend of mine, she went for an interview at some company and when the guy looked at her salary he said to her "you don't deserve this salary if you come and work for me I will actually drop that salary to this much." So, he was like you're not even supposed to get that salary this is what you do...that job is with that much to me I won't even interview you, I won't offer you that much or more.*

The research findings indicate that participants often felt that they were not valued nor considered significant members of their societies. These views are in line with research that shows that Black women have historically been marginalised due to issues of gender and race (Bryant, 2013; Sanger, 2009; Berberick, 2010). Participants spoke about their struggles for equality and recognition against a society that they, as Black women, perceived as undervaluing them.

Therefore, this intersectional oppression affects not only their social status but the professional opportunities they would like to pursue (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015). This has direct impact on the slow pace of socio-economic empowerment for Black women in South Africa. This sub-theme is important because it demonstrates that the experiences of participants is in line with negative stereotypes that inform people about the image of Black women.

#### **4.4.2 Black women are not smart enough**

This sub-theme is important in that it presents the experiences of participants in line with negative stereotypes that inform people about the image of Black women. Participants felt that

they view others as mistrusting their abilities and capabilities, especially in occupational settings. For the most part, participants expressed having experienced the most stereotyping when some in society challenged their intellectual capabilities. Additionally, this brought out the issues faced by Black women in relation to men (Black and White) and in relation to White women, thus the intersectionality of race and gender which participants felt positions Black women at a double disadvantage. This second sub-theme presents the participants' responses, which revealed thoughts and feelings that negative media depictions often portray Black women as less smart, which society enacts.

The title of this sub-theme captures the general feelings expressed by the participants that, in the eyes of South African society, Black women are not considered to be intelligent. Many participants shared experiences where others - based on preconceived expectations of Black women and their intelligence - did not perceive them as intelligent. This sub-theme further links to the participants expressing that they did not feel valued within their societies and thus, felt a need to constantly prove their intellectual abilities.

Participants shared other instances where they were seen as less intelligent than their peers. In the following extract, Thabi says that as the only Black person in her social group, her friends from other racial groups, regard her as the "stupid one" amongst friends of other racial groups (Coloured people and White people). This is to the extent that she feels that others view Black women as easy to trick. She further speaks about men as being more powerful which implies notions of men as being superior in relation to women.

*Thabi: I associate with Coloureds and Whites and they regard me as the stupid one, Black women are seen as easily tricked, men are more powerful....*

Another participant, Mbali shared her experience, which dates back to her high school days but still resonated with her at the time of this research study.

In this extract, Mbali relates that, because she was a Black girl, she was not publicly acknowledged as the smartest girl at her school even though she had attained the first position. To this end, because she beat a White girl whose mother was the school principal, Mbali says her achievement was not announced to the school.

*Mbali: Yes, but the one time that it stands out the most for me was when I once came first in my grade at school and this was supposed to be announced at the assembly but not. The announcement was cancelled because the principal was the mother of the girl who came 2<sup>nd</sup>, and that girl was White. The announcement did not happen because she was beaten by a Black girl, it made me feel angry cause that was my moment. I had worked so hard and was the only Black girl in in the top achievers. This girl and I later became friends and she has since apologised for this, we are still friends.*

This example seems to underscore how malignant this stereotype is and the extent to which people may go to uphold it. These participants shared experiences that left them having to overcome perceptions and assumptions that they are intellectually inferior (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015).

In response to the same questions, Zinzi, in the following extract feels that Black women are not typically depicted as having significant intelligence, thus they believe society will not consider them to be smart. Zinzi appears to justify these notions by stating that the media feeds into people's preconceived ideas about Black women because that is what people want to see. She seems to imply that people want to see Black women as less smart in the media.

*Zinzi: Maybe not, no, to be seen as smart you must feel ... there must be a certain image you see? And that image us Black women don't have that image and that's why us Black women try so hard to make sure we fit the image and whoever came up with the image, even on the media is driven by public viewership, so obviously what they're show what people out there want to see. That then makes us the enemy in a way, media only feeds off of what we want, they take what we like and turn it into gold. So we can't really blame the media...the media feed off what we want...to if the ratings are going towards this, this is what we will get.*

She further states that she feels that, although she would most likely be viewed as strong, it would be hard for her (as a Black woman) to be treated as smart in South Africa (geographically).



*Zinzi : ((Long pause))... well depends on which part of the world you're at ,  
(laughs)....it depends on which part of the world you are... in general I would be seen  
as strong but geographically its hard ... its hard ...to be treated smart, its hard...its  
hard...geographically its hard....I suppose to be strong will be there but all the other  
ways I don't want to politicize this.*

In the following extract, Sasa shares that she does not fully think it is currently exists the possibility for Black women to be portrayed as intelligent. She further shares that she has experiences of others considering her “dumb” until she proves herself. Proving herself largely depended on the role she played at work in that time.

*Interviewer: Do you think it is possible for a Black woman to be portrayed as smart?*

*Sasa: Not fully*

*Interviewer: I'm also thinking about you now at work...are you expected to be smart?*

*Sasa: laughs...depends on the role that you play before you can be seen as smart....  
people go oh you're not so dumb after all*

It further emerged that some participants felt that the issue of intelligence and Black people dates from the days of oppression. Mtose (2008) links this issue with the fact that historically, the notion of Blackness has always been associated with inferiority. Thabi, touches on this idea in the following extract.

When asked to elaborate on why she thinks others treat her as less smart than they are, Thabi explains that the past generation “old people” tend to be viewed as unintelligent as they “did lowly jobs” which has translated to how others see her now. In this extract, Thabi seems to speak of Black people inheriting circumstances that place them at a disadvantage from the parents (older generation).

*Interviewer: Why do you think that you are not treated as the smart one?*

*Thabi: Old people in our society are the maids, they did lowly jobs, there's no way they  
would do those jobs if they were mentally strong...so they tend to think because my  
father is a gardener, or my mom is a maid there's no way they can produce an engineer.*

These perceptions may set limits upon the abilities and potential achievements of Black women. From the participant's responses, it emerged that they felt that society has perceptions that Black women are not intelligent, especially in relation to their peers from other races. Some participants expressed that they did not feel that Black women in general have the image of intelligence, which in fact influences how society and the media perceive and portray them. Furthermore, there was a sense that some participants experienced mistrust in occupational settings, where they had to prove their intelligence in light of doubts associated with the ways that historical oppression has filtered into media stereotypes.

*Kwam: like I told you. Some look at you and think you don't deserve to be there you to be there as sis so and so doing the dishes and cleaning third house ja. There was a time someone was like "do you own a house, how come?" I was like what do you mean is it something wrong to own a house so ja sometimes...he could say I'm Black and I'm young I shouldn't be owning.*

In the following extract, Amanda explains that she herself believes that the women she sees in the media clips shown to her by the researcher are not smart.

*Amanda: First of all, the women the women that are gyrating to those hip-hop songs, I don't think they are smart.*

Under this sub-theme, participants spoke about how they struggled for equality and recognition against a society they perceive as undervaluing them. One of the stereotypical characteristics of being a Black woman is that of not being seen as intelligent in relation to their other peers (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015). This is to the extent that this perception persisted even in cases where a Black woman occupied a senior position in their occupation (Holder, Jackson & Ponterotto, 2015). The overall competence, intellect and capabilities was often challenged and undermined. As a result, Black women felt undermined and undervalued in their societies. In their study of gender role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics, Booysen and Nkomo (2010) found that their participants (Black women) said that they often felt that they had to work harder for their place in society than women of other races and did not feel as accepted in the workforce as their peers.

The third sub-theme relates to how the participants experience stereotypical treatment of what it means to be a Black woman in a Black community. Thus, the third sub-theme emerged from the participant's responses of how they perceive negative stereotypes are re-enacted in the Black communities by Black people.

#### **4.4.3 Black people enacting negative stereotypes about Black women**

This last sub-theme emerged from the participants' response to how media depictions of Black people may influence the beliefs and ideas held by Black people and how these may then shape how they treated Black women.

In this study, the participants felt that these beliefs and ideas were then enacted out towards Black women by other Black people. The sub-theme is important because the participant's responses included their perceptions of how the Black community (peers that are men, older Black women and older men) including other Black women of the participant's same age acted towards Black women. This is crucial because Black people in Black communities also consume different forms of media. Thus, it is important to explore how the participants felt other Black people, including Black women may come to be influenced by stereotypical media portrayals of Black women as seen by how they may re-enact these stereotypes towards the participants. Thus, this sub-theme presents their responses to this regard.

The participants expressed feeling that some Black people's beliefs around notions of Blackness were influenced by stereotypical representations that the media proliferated as fact. Furthermore, participants held opinions that in South Africa there were cultural elements that were oppressive to women. They felt that the cultural factor and negative media depictions have exacerbated the negative treatment of Black women in South Africa. There was a sense that the combination of these issues implied that the participants (Black South African women) felt a sense of mistrust in other Black people.

In the extract that follows, Thabi's says that, in order to attract viewership, "nobody" wants to see [Black women] in their natural state in the media. This includes Black people.

*Thabi: To be catchy, to trend to make money. Nobody wants to see us as we really are. I think they think that's too boring. I think it's about money, control and power.*

Thabi further indicates that she does not trust that Black people are not behind the negative representations of Black people in the media. She elaborates that she believes that Black people may be behind these media depictions so that they can “fit in” and “be regarded as high class”. Interestingly, she shares these sentiments based on the assumption that whoever it is that is behind the media, is not interested in the progress of Black women.

*Thabi: It could be Black people or White people...remember when I said that Black people want to be regarded as high class, they can do whatever to fit in. It's probably someone who has no investments or interests in Black women progressing, mostly likely not a Black woman. If it is, it's one who has been brainwashed.*

In the following extract, Zinzi takes the idea of Black people mistreating Black women based on stereotypical beliefs also present in the media further by saying that she feels it is a South African thing. Based on the issue of the media depicting Black women as unintelligent, she feels that undermining Black women is a “South African thing” and that even “Black people will contribute” to this phenomenon. This means she perceives other Black people (men and women) as having adopted the belief that Black women are not intelligent.

*Zinzi: It's a South African thing, just to put things at ease, it's an overall thing... I will excuse not being viewed as smart, intelligent because of our history it's not a Black and White thing, it's overall, even Black people will contribute, it all has to do with history, it's not race, its primarily our history and background...there is a view of women in general, a Black person will treat me the same across genders, there is a history to it, I usually excuse it because I deal with it when it does. I won't complain that a White person treated me this way, because a Black person will do the same. There are perceptions that have to do with our history.*

She goes on to say that, it is too high of an expectation for ‘people in our country’ regardless of race to respect Black women. She seems to be speaking of Black women discovering ways

to adjust to other people's perceptions of Black women. Black women, she seems to believe, should either accept or excuse these perceptions.

*Zinzi: In most cases if you are smart, you just prove you are smart, you try to not leave it as the perception, I do not have an expectation to be treated like that way. Our people of all races, you just meet them half way, they will not have a good opinion of you then try to put things in a good light but then you move on, that's how you deal with it. It's too high of an expectation for our people in our country...you address it and you move on.*

In the following extract, Amanda shares that she feels that there is a specific “lane” that Black women must stay in, such as being ‘submissive to men’ or be in an occupational setup such as that of a “cleaner” or ‘non -professional’. She says that the problem only arises when a Black woman attempts to be more than these expectations rise above these expectations, such as when she becomes more ‘educated or a professional’, ‘then you are breaking the rules’

*Amanda: I think its Black women trying to fight back, if you're submissive you let a man do whatever they want then hey you are fine, or if you are a cleaner or you are less than professional than you are fine, I just feel that way. People only start having problems with Black women who are educated, who are professionals, if you come across as bossy then already you're breaking...the rules...it's like no, no, no stay in your lane something I experienced at work.*

However, the idea of a designated ‘lane’ in which Black women must stay in, as per popular contemporary media representations, may be linked to the influence of past oppressive forms of thinking about Black women that limited opportunities for them (Booyesen, 2010; Hutson, 2007). Furthermore, Gamma (2016) argues that experiences such as these serve to compress the experiences of Black women in terms of narrating their own accounts of their own lives.

Amanda further explains that in her occupational experience, whenever, she interacted with other Black women who were less educated than her, they perceived her as “acting better than

them”. Her level of education, they felt, made her feel more entitled and privileged than those who were less educated than her.

*Amanda: When I started working I had no idea what was expected of Black women, I knew what I had studied and what I was trying to do for myself but I was exposed to other Black women for example, most Black women that I worked with did not have a university degree so they would work in maybe a call centre environment and whenever I interacted with them it was always... ” Oh you guys think you’re better than us ”.*

Thus, these research findings reveal that participants expressed that they all felt that Black people, including Black women (even some participants) often re-enacted or perpetuated popular media stereotypes on Black women. This, to the extent that the participants suspected that Black people might be behind negative images of Black women in the media. Thus, the participants experienced other Black people as part of the community that resisted social actions that may lead to the emancipation of Black women.

There was a sense that participants experienced other Black people as monitoring them according to notions of what it means to be a Black person, which participants felt confined or restricted them in terms of expressing themselves, as they wanted or as required by whatever the circumstances warranted.

Additionally, the experiences shared by the participants may indicate the level to which Black communities have internalized popular stereotypical notions of Blackness as perpetuated by negative images of Black people in the media. This issue was particularly evident in the older generations of Black people as seen and experienced by some of this study’s participants. However, Rudwick (2010) argues that in contemporary times, it seems that the definitions of what it means to be ‘Black’ vary within South African societies and are based on subjective notions of reality. Furthermore, Gammage (2016) argues that the prevalence of these historically constructed and evolved stereotypes in a media-saturated culture can worsen problems of racism and sexism. In addition, if internalised these beliefs can lead to destructive assumptions about Black women by confirming negative assumptions that may intensify their oppression (Gammage, 2016).

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion, limitations and recommendations**

### **5.1 A synopsis of the research findings in relation to the research questions**

This research study explored how Black South African women interpreted and made meaning of stereotypical depictions of Black women in the media. The study focused on their opinions, feelings and thoughts. The research findings seem to show that Black South African women feel that negative stereotypes about Black South African women exist in the media. They felt that the media is a powerful method of communication that has largely been responsible for spreading ideas about Black women, a good deal of which is exaggerated, incorrect and/or negative. The participants, who all were Black women, felt that the media did not accurately depict them and their image. Participants felt that in the media, Black women have been depicted as less intelligent than men and women of other races. As a result, the participants interpreted these depictions to mean that Black South African women are undervalued within societies. They felt that this creates an enduring perception that Black South African women are less important in society when compared to their peers (Black men, White women and White men). These feelings were underlined by participants saying that they felt that due to being Black and being female, they were more marginalised than their peers of other races. Thus, they feel that this intersectional disadvantage positions them at the lowest end of significance within society. As per the research findings, participants felt that these beliefs predominantly manifest themselves in occupational and educational settings.

The findings further revealed that participants felt that Black women are often depicted stereotypically in terms of their emotions. With regard to emotions, the participants felt that the media often portrayed Black women as emotionally unstable. This perception was perpetuated through the media depicting Black women as angry, loud or violent. Participants felt that these popular media portrayals then shaped people's beliefs about Black women resulting in people adopting these perceptions as fact. Participants then felt that these depictions can result in people distrusting and questioning the mental stability of Black women. They feel that perception, as presented by the media, then exacerbates notions that Black women cannot be trusted with major responsibilities in occupational settings or any other setting that may require their abilities. Moreover, these factors, from the participants' view point, exacerbated feelings that Black South African women are undervalued within their societies.

The research findings further revealed that the perceived negative depictions of Black women by the media had a negative effect on the participant's own sense of self, attitudes and self-image. The participants revealed that they had struggled to form a self-image that they identified with as they did not relate to popular media depictions of Black women. It emerged from the research findings that they had developed defensive coping mechanisms in order to avoid internalising negative stereotypical representations about themselves. This indicated that participants felt that they needed to adopt combative strategies against popular negative stereotypes of Black women as presented in the media.

In the study, it also emerged that because they are Black people and therefore belonging to an 'inferior' race, participants felt that they, as Black women had to struggle against this stereotype. Part of popular media depictions were that participants perceived others as associating Blackness with unfavourable qualities. This related to perceptions that Black women were less intelligent and thus their contribution would not be as pivotal in society. These perceptions affected participants' attitudes towards themselves to the extent that they would not want to be associated with these notions of Blackness.

On one hand participants felt that there were popular notions that Blackness is inferior when compared to Whiteness. The media is seen to perpetuate these stereotypes which according to participants were then adopted by others, including other Black people, as facts. These others, Black people included, then acted in ways that supported these stereotypes.

It emerged that participants felt that popular notions of Blackness in the media were used by other Black people to define (and constrict) the concept of Blackness as a whole but most especially as it relates to Black women. The concept of an oppressive intersectionality of being both a Black person and a woman emerged with participants feeling that they often had to fight against a society that compared them negatively to their White peers. As a result, they experienced societal perceptions of success being related to Whiteness. However, they felt that as Black women, they are disadvantaged in a society, which through the media proliferated popular ideas associated with Whiteness as the ideal from which to measure oneself.

Participants however revealed that they too had once accepted these popular notions of Whiteness especially regarding their physical appearance. As a result, many participants expressed felt that they too are in the process of needing to overcome many negative beliefs about their own self-image and sense of self and that they often have to do so through painful experiences. This led them to taking ownership of how they now define themselves as Black women. Furthermore, some participants pointed to family support and close interpersonal



relationships as part of the strategies to ensure that popular negative depictions of Black women do not affect them. This included opinions that one should not marinate one's self in negative self-beliefs about Black women based on ideas and stereotypes constructed by the media. Thus, participants expressed that they did not engage with these thoughts in their daily lives and avoided ruminating about the negative image of Black women in the media. Some of the participants dismissed the portrayal of Black women as just being about media sensationalism and therefore did not necessarily represent Black women as a group. These views may show the process by which negative stereotypical depictions infiltrate people unawares.

Nevertheless, these notions often confined the experience of participants in terms of their own ideas about what it means to be Black. Furthermore, participants felt trapped between a perceived societal juxtaposing of these popular notions of Blackness and Whiteness, as perpetuated in the media. This extended to participants' sense of self being affected as they felt ashamed of not wanting to be associated with negative qualities of Black people which they felt was then perceived as them escaping being Black and wanting to be White. This dynamic created a conundrum for the Black women's sense of self and self-image as they experienced media, familial and social coercion in terms of how they define themselves within their race. This struggle meant having to define oneself, as a Black woman, against popular notions of what it meant to be Black in a society, which did not fit with definitions of self.

On a more positive note, participants felt that others, including themselves perceive Black women as resilient. This was because participants expressed feeling that historically Black women had conquered many tribulations, which they interpreted as an indication of their strength. Within these perceptions was a desire to acquire respect from society, not restricted to their strength and resilience, but the full breadth of their potentialities.

## **5.2 Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research**

According to Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge (2009) qualitative research methods do not aim to utilize data collection methods that allow for statistical level generalizability. Therefore, due to the small sample size, this study cannot be generalised to all Black South African

women. This is not a shortcoming of the method but a specific aspect of it because qualitative research aims for rich and nuanced material.

In order to extend the *reach* of the findings of the current research, to achieve a more general view, a first recommendation would be for a quantitative method to be used in a future research project.

Secondly, a limitation of this study was this it was not able to quantify South African specific media stereotypical representation of Black South African women. Due to the unique historical culture of the South African system, it would be useful for future research studies to advance knowledge in this regard. Future research could specifically focus on media that is produced and a unique reflection of the South African media culture and how stereotypes about Black women are represented in it. However, South African women are exposed to local and international media, which complicates the process of isolating purely South African stereotypes. Thus, it is not clear that a focus on local only media, would afford additional value to the research questions.

Lastly, this study sample comprised only of urban Black women and students. This is a limited sector of Black South African women and thus future studies should look at women of different ages and women from different settings (for example rural vs urban women), educational backgrounds and socio-economic sectors.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Information sheet form



Psychology  
School of Human & Community Development  
**University of the Witwatersrand**  
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050  
Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559



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#### Introduction

Hello, my name is Olwethu Jwili and I am a Clinical Psychology Masters student at the University of Witwatersrand. I would like you to participate in my research study.

Brief outline of the study: I am conducting a research project on how the media represents Black South African women. This study will also look into how Black women feel about how the media represents them as well as how they are treated as a result.

What you will be required to do: The study will take place in private and I will ask you a few questions about your personal experiences as a Black woman. I will also ask you about your feelings and thoughts in relation to how Black women are portrayed by the media. The discussion will take up an hour of your time. I will need your permission to record your responses and to take notes during the session.

Voluntary participation: Your participation is voluntary, and you are not being forced to take part in this study. The choice of whether or not to participate is yours alone and there will be no consequences of choosing not to take part. You may withdraw from the research at any time by telling me that you do not want to continue. There will be no penalties for doing so.

Anonymity: The only personal information we require from you is your gender and race.

Your participation will remain confidential and references to what you say will be reported under a pseudonym in any research report and or publication.

Contact details pertaining additional concerns or assistance required: Should you have any questions, queries or complaints about any aspects of the research or feel that you have been harmed through participating in this study, please contact:

Research Supervisor: Faculty of Humanities, School of Psychology, The University of the Witwatersrand: Dr. Yael Kadish ([Yael.Kadish@wits.ac.za](mailto:Yael.Kadish@wits.ac.za)) or the researcher Olwethu Jwili ([0501789J@students.wits.ac.za](mailto:0501789J@students.wits.ac.za))

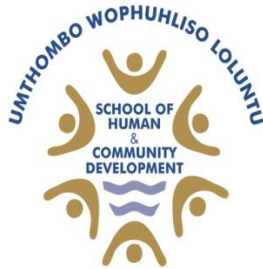
If you feel the need to seek psychological council after participating in this interview, you are welcome to contact the Emthonjeni Center to make an appointment with a psychologist. An arrangement for such assistance has been organized in advance.

The contact details are:

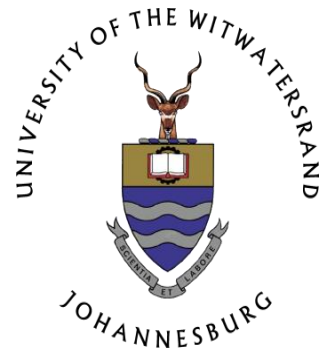
Emthonjeni Centre: Phone: 0117174513



## Appendix B: Consent form



Psychology  
School of Human & Community Development  
**University of the Witwatersrand**  
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050  
Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559



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### CONSENT FORM

I hereby agree to participate in research on how the media represents Black women. I am aware of what is required of me, and I understand that

I am participating freely and without coercion

This is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally.

I will remain anonymous and my participation in the study will remain confidential.

I have a right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty

I agree to the results of my participation being used for research and I agree to the interview being recorded for research purposes.

---

Signature of participant Date

## Appendix C: Consent to audio record form



Psychology  
School of Human & Community Development  
**University of the Witwatersrand**  
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050  
Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559



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### CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO RECORDING OF INTERVIEWS

I hereby consent to the audio-taping of the interview discussions with the researcher. I understand that my right to confidentiality will be respected at all times and that the tapes will be stored safely in a password protected computer.

I am participating freely and without coercion

I will remain anonymous and my participation in the study will remain confidential.

I have a right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty

I agree to the results of my participation being used for research and I agree to the interview being recorded for research purposes.

---

Signature of participant Date

## Appendix D: Letter to the Emthonjeni Community Centre



Psychology  
School of Human & Community Development  
University of the Witwatersrand  
Private Bag 3, Wits, 2050  
Tel: 011 717 4503 Fax: 011 717 4559



Emthonjeni Community Centre  
1 Jan Smuts Avenue  
Wits University  
Braamfontein  
Johannesburg  
2000  
30 March 2016

Professor Karen Milner  
The Director: EC  
Emthonjeni Centre  
Private Bag X3  
University of the Witwatersrand  
2050

Dear Professor Karen Milner

### **MEASURES TO SECURE PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH STUDY**

This letter concerns the notification of a Clinical Psychology Masters research project regarding Black women and race. The research seeks to explore how Black women are constructed by the media. It is a qualitative study which is in an interview format.

Discussions of race qualify sensitive topics as implications of one's race; gender and class are of salient. Even though issues will not be made explicit, there is the possibility of social and or psychological risk to the participants. This is due to the possibility of the research having room for participants being able to share some negative racial experiences. This in turn might evoke sensitive issues.

In an effort to minimize these risks, arrangements are requested for the counselling services that your institution provides should participants develop these feelings. Participants in the study will be made aware that they will be able to make an appointment and seek counsel from a psychologist at your institution.

This is a precautionary measure taken in the event of such an outcome during the research study. A reply to the request may be communicated via email to the researcher, Ms Olwethu Jwili at 0501789J@students.wits.ac.za

Your immediate response will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Olwethu Jwili

---

Signature Date:

## **Appendix E: Interview Schedule**

Observations and background information

Age:

Occupation

Education level

**Show visual no .1 YouTube video depicting common media depictions of Black Women**

Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsey\\_9ItH6E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xsey_9ItH6E)

Please share your interpretations/views/ beliefs and feelings in relation to the video you have just viewed.

What perceptions/observations do you see in terms of how it relates to the image of Black women?

Probe for participants own beliefs/ views

How do you feel as a Black woman watching that?

Does it affect/not affect how you see yourself as a Black woman?

Does it affect/not affect how you think about Black women

Probe for links to self-esteem and popular social depictions

Probe for personal experiences

What perceptions do you think others who see these images might believe of Black women?

Probe for links between societal thinking and media depictions

Probe for personal experiences

Probe for participants own beliefs/ views

**Show visual no. 2 Viola Davis taking off her make-up on screen**

Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MveYqOO06Ic>

Please share your interpretations/views/ beliefs and feelings in relation to the clip you have just viewed.

What perceptions/observations do you see in terms of how it relates to the image of Black women?

Probe for participants own beliefs/ views

How do you feel as a Black woman watching that?

Does it affect/not affect how you see yourself as a Black woman?

Does it affect/not affect how you think about Black women

Probe for links to self-esteem and popular social depictions

Probe for personal experiences

What perceptions do you think others who see these images might believe of Black women?

Probe for links between societal thinking and media depictions

Probe for personal experiences

Probe for participants own beliefs/ views

**Show visual no. 3: Google Search showing images of Black women's hair as unprofessional found at**

[https://www.google.co.za/search?q=unprofessional+hair&rlz=1C1GCEA\\_enZA775ZA778&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiMuL6u1YvfAhV8SxUIHViFB-QQ\\_AUIDigB&biw=1600&bih=704](https://www.google.co.za/search?q=unprofessional+hair&rlz=1C1GCEA_enZA775ZA778&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiMuL6u1YvfAhV8SxUIHViFB-QQ_AUIDigB&biw=1600&bih=704)

Please share your interpretations/views/ beliefs and feelings in relation to the Google search results.

What perceptions/observations do you see in terms of how it relates to the image of Black women?

Probe for participants own beliefs/ views

How do you feel as a Black woman seeing these images?

Does it affect/not affect how you see yourself as a Black woman?

Does it affect/not affect how you think about Black women

Probe for links to self-esteem and popular social depictions

Probe for personal experiences

What perceptions do you think others who see these images might believe of Black women?

Probe for links between societal thinking and media depictions

Probe for personal experiences

Probe for participants own beliefs/ views