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**Striving Towards 'Perfection'? Investigating the Consumption of Self-help Media Texts
by Black South Africans in Post-Apartheid**

By

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Declaration

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Abstract

This research project studies the consumption of ‘self-help’ media texts with respect to black South African audiences. The core objective of this project is to contribute to expanding debates on race, class, identity, and media consumption. Based on in-depth interviews with 10 avid self-help consumers, the paper develops an argument for the role of self-management in race and other social identities. The deployment of the qualitative methodology of a thematic discourse analysis of over seven hours of interview transcripts assists this paper in providing an account of where, when and how self-help media manifests in the lives of the chosen participants. The paper finds that participants are motivated to consume self-help media texts by a need to ‘know’ and ‘understand’ themselves and others in order for these participants to acquire what they express to be an atmosphere of inter-relational harmony. A growth of media texts forming part of a genre related to the practice of therapy in South Africa is owed to what I argue as a deep-rooted culture of ‘reconciliation’ and a preoccupation with emotions which stems from a particularly murky socio-political past still in a constant state of reparation (prevalent in discourses about reconciliation and forgiveness) in the democratic dispensation. As a key inspiration, the once-off yet pertinent process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa has noticeably inspired a genre which supplies its audience with an array of self-help, therapy-inspired media texts thriving on the practice of public confession and testimony (key principles of the TRC). This has paved the way for a culture of ‘treatment’ and ‘remedy’ becoming what this paper refers to as a ‘public affair’. Active participants on these self-help, often therapeutic, media texts on mass media platforms regularly do so at the expense of exposing deeply personal issues to ‘experts’ entrusted to assist with ‘healing’ what are deemed to be problem areas in people’s lives. Referred to by some of the interviewees as ‘brave hearts’, these participants (‘public confessors’) hold a complex position in the minds of the interviewed individuals who, ironically, express admiration and respect to the individuals who publicly testify and confess as they are a valued reference of ‘learning’ but at the same time, an expression of disappointment and shame is bestowed upon these ‘public confessors’ for allowing their argued exploitation by the media. Amidst all this, it is apparent that consumption of self-help media texts have particularly intricate influences on the patterns of self-identity as constructed by the participants of this research project.

Key Words: Self-help; Identity; Consumption; Popular Psychology; Popular Culture; Class; Media

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DEDICATION

To my mother, Irene Calvert, the late night conversations, your prayers and continuous messages of encouragement; I dedicate this paper to you. My grandparents, Mr Victor and Mrs Freda Rens, look you two, I've done it! Thembi Rens, Victor Rens, Lovetonia and Skhumbuzo Calvert, Kholiwe Noni, my aunt Mamoti Thomas, my grannies Zondiwe Mayekiso and Lisa Noni; I hope this will be a source of motivation to you that anything is possible no matter where you come from. A special mention to my aunt Xoliswa Monare whose believe in me and my abilities surpasses my own. Thank you all for the prayers and words of encouragement throughout this journey. To my home town of Koffiefontein (especially my teachers at Leretlhabetse Primary School and Reikaeletse High School), this is also dedicated to you for the support and love that I still feel and appreciate.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND AIM

The Genre of ‘Self-Help’: ‘Advisory’ Media Texts in South Africa and the African Continent

Has life got you down? Do you have trouble getting out of bed in the morning? Have you stopped eating? Or perhaps, you are unable to stop eating? Do you have trouble falling asleep at night or staying asleep? Have others expressed concern about your mental or emotional state? Have you wondered whether your sexual desires are normal? Do you experience feelings of helplessness, meaninglessness, worthlessness, or powerlessness? Are you worried about having an addiction to something, such as television, video or computer games, the Internet, sex, food, alcohol, shopping, a relationship, texting, pornography, sport, or anything else?

Rimke & Brock (2012: 182)

The extract above, taken from a chapter by Heidi Rimke and Deborah Brock, alludes to a number of questions that have become popularly attributed to the splurge of ‘self-help’ therapeutic material to have been introduced into society through significant dissemination by the media. The deployment of the term ‘self-help’ in this thesis is used to describe the process of obtaining information or advice for the resolving of one’s perceived problems; often of a personal and psychological nature. The information is mostly provided by an expert or professional other (through books, videos, and various other digital and audio-visual materials) who chooses not to grant any direct supervision but propose independent consumption of this information; with the said outcome being personally beneficial to the self-help seeker.

The likelihood, in contemporary society, of encountering surveys, quizzes or questionnaires with questions related to the ones highlighted above, is noticeably high when consuming various media texts. It is important to mention, at this point, that the dissertation’s use of the word ‘text’ is in line with media studies’ reference to “any kind of media material, such as a television programme, a film, a magazine, or a website, as well as a more conventional written text such as a book or newspaper” (Gauntlett 2008: 18).

An entry of the term ‘self-help’ into, for instance, the YouTube search tab leads to a wealth of videos relating to the self-help environment. These clips allow viewers the opportunity to explore this subject matter and adopt some of these self-help techniques to, presumably, ‘better’

their own lives. One such YouTube search done in line with my interest in this subject matter rendered about 9.3 million search results on this platform. Examples of existing titles to these videos include, ‘*Self-Help – How Self-Help can Revolutionize Your Entire Life*’ (49 406 views), ‘*Anxiety Attacks Cure – Self Help Anxiety Treatment*’ (598 981 views), ‘*Leo’s list of Top 40 Self-help Books*’ (56 829 views); ‘*Why You’re Not Happy – Self Help #8*’ (42 941 views). Judging solely from the amount of views these videos attract (in this case, a collective total of 748 149 views for just the above listed four examples from a list of many), it is plausible to argue for a notable popularity of the world of psychosocial (as well as psychosexual) self-help in modern society. A key aspect also herewith attached is the presence of questions within these videos similar to those highlighted as an introduction to this chapter.

Attempting to grant responses to these questions leaves a person with the responsibility to reveal, either to themselves or to an expert other, details of a personal nature. It is this process that is entrenched in a confessional culture intricately attached to a media genre that has gained vast popularity: the genre of self-help and ‘advisory’ media; specifically through texts such as talk radio programs, newspaper and magazine features, television shows, books and, more recently, online digital communities. Early traces of African literature and print media of an advisory and ‘self-help’ form is explored and documented by a number of scholars and researchers who grant insightful accounts on how this genre ascended. Segmenting the history of the emergence and development of what he coins South Africa’s ‘alternative press’; Les Switzer (1997: 3) provides an account of the birth of what can be regarded as evidence of press of an advisory, ‘self-help’ nature. This phase is marked “the independent process press” (from the 1880s to the 1930s). It is during this time where the beginning of an indigenous black literary tradition is witnessed to have ushered in, among numerous other forms, the advice column feature: a feature now broadly characteristic of modern self-help media texts.

While considerably developed and advanced in the West, traces of ‘advisory’ content as a media genre in the continent of Africa have been documented in academia with scholars such as Kenda Mutongi (2000) revealing the emergence and development of self-help through the ‘agony aunt’ approach in *Drum* magazine. Initially published in Cape Town, South Africa, in the year 1951; *Drum* founders expanded circulation to more African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya. The publication’s editors fostered vast readership ratings through a myriad of attributions and columns as well as a dedicated piece known as the ‘Dear Dolly’ feature (Mutongi 2000). Here, youth residing across East, West as well as Southern Africa took to writing to Dolly with many of their psychosocial and psychosexual concerns and questions in

an attempt to receive advice from ‘Dolly’ on ways to deal with and gain control over their compulsions; be they sexual, religious, psychological or related to love. It is such literature that speaks to an existence of self-help as a genre offered by the media within the African continent. Further historical traces of this genre are documented by Reuster-Jahn who writes of ‘advice literature’ as part of a body of literature to have emerged and flourished in mid-twentieth century Africa. Discourses to have taken popularity in these advisory texts revolved around the subjects of sexuality, love, and questions particularly related to how relationships can be managed (2014: 69). As Thomas and Cole (2009: 1) note: “English-language African newspapers have [...] long carried discussions of love, including advice columns.” It is such findings that stand to render a helpful historical account of the existence of a genre closely related to modern forms of self-help media texts. Africans with resources and access to these media forms have, evidently, been allowed to imagine and reimagine romance, courtship, happiness, sexuality – among various other topics – through these texts for decades (Cooper 2013).

In present-day South Africa, popular mainstream print, television and radio shows such as *Please Step in* (television), the *Redi Tlhabi Show* on *Talk Radio 702*, ‘Ask sis Dolly’ in *Drum* magazine (print), are but some of many other media texts which employ popular psychology and psychotherapeutic discourses on self-help as means of, arguably, attracting larger audiences so as to interest them in order for these audiences to continuously consume these products. South African television producers are introducing various self-help themed programmes which are booming when judged on viewership ratings. Take, for instance, a local TV show formerly aired on SABC 1 known as *Relate*. The show’s format is in line with the practice of psychological therapy aimed at participants of the show which range from partners in romantic relationships, siblings, friends, to estranged family members seeking expert guidance to deal with their publicly confessed ‘problems’ (Ndlovu 2013). I discuss this more closely later on. Programmes of this nature attract noteworthy weekly viewership figures which have often placed these programmes in top rankings on their respective channels.

The South African Audience Research Foundation (SAARF) via the TVSA website has been providing prime time television viewership figures since the year 2006. An analysis of viewership figures of *Relate* reveals a steady viewership trend which resulted in the programme placing in the top 10 ranking table with regards to highest viewership ratings on local television

and placing as top actuality programme in terms of viewership while the show was on air. Below are some images in support of this observation. Assuming that avid consumers/audiences of these texts do so for a number of reasons, perhaps including a genuine search for psychological advice on how to ‘cope’ with life’s pressures or even a mere avenue for entertainment; it then becomes increasingly “imperative that, as students of contemporary culture, we try to investigate the ways in which everyday popular media material affects people’s daily lives” (Gauntlett 2008: 3).

Top Shows By Channel

				
#	Show	Viewers		
1.	Generations	5,295,000		
2.	Zola 7	3,879,000		
3.	Montana	3,647,000		
4.	Zone 14	3,560,000		
5.	Jika Majika	3,435,000		
6.	So You Think You Are Funny	3,242,000		
7.	My Wife and Kids	3,165,000		
8.	Relate	3,146,000		
9.	Zulu News	2,977,000		
10.	Xhosa News	2,863,000		

Top Actuality Shows	
1) Relate (SABC1)	3,146,000
2) Speak Out (SABC2)	1,486,000
3) 3rd Degree (e.tv)	1,332,000
4) Fokus (SABC2)	1,081,000
5) Leihlo La Sechaba (SABC2)	907,000

Primetime television viewing figures for 21-27 September, 2009 (TVSA 2016).

Top Shows By Channel



#	Show	Viewers
1.	Generations	4,543,000
2.	Montana	3,840,000
3.	Zone 14	3,609,000
4.	Home Affairs	3,396,000
5.	FIFA U20 World Cup	3,107,000
6.	So You Think You Are Funny	3,088,000
7.	Relate	3,010,000
8.	Zulu News	2,982,000
9.	My Wife and Kids	2,818,000
10.	Da Kink In My Hair	2,682,000

Top Actuality Shows

- 1) Relate (SABC1) 3,010,000
- 2) Cutting Edge (SABC1) 1,563,000
- 3) Fokus (SABC2) 1,428,000
- 4) Speak Out (SABC2) 1,293,000
- 5) Leihlo La Sechaba (SABC2) 753,000

Primetime television viewing figures for 28 September-4 October, 2009 (TVSA webiste 2016).

The popularity of the self-help text, important to note, has also been met with critics and commentators standing on the opposite end of this phenomenon. In particular, Dr Symeon Rodger, an internationally acclaimed authority on ‘warriorship’ and the ancient world’s strategies for personal development, has taken to YouTube where he has posted a clip – *Self Improvement Books: Why They Don't Help and What Will* (2009) – wherein he outlines why self-improvement books, courses, programmes and workshops have not transformed peoples’ lives. His analysis argues that, although self-help material and their authors/creators of “high integrity” yield “fantastic” techniques, the problem with these self-help texts lies with the fact that they often succeed in tackling the “symptoms” instead of the “root cause” which Rodger argues is human beings themselves. This illustrates that the practice of self-help is not without criticism irrespective of its noted prominence.

Be that as it may, self-help texts continue to flow across media spaces and are stable components of popular culture. So much so, that the entire process of psychological self-help consumption has become what this thesis cautiously terms, a public culture of therapy. The search for ‘answers’ and ‘guidance’ can be witnessed taking place on mass media platforms

such as radio and television. It is such observations that have sparked a curiosity and interest in investigating what could be the main driving forces behind *why* individuals decide to publicly seek ‘advice’ from self-help ‘experts’ by exposing their, often deeply personal, issues to these individuals in the name of ‘healing’? In addition, as media audiences; making the decision to access self-help media for consumption, I reiterate, may be motivated by key interesting reasons. Reasons that this thesis wishes to investigate and explore. With a vastly documented history of racism and oppression indicative of a troubled socio-cultural, psychological, socio-economic and socio-political atmosphere located in what was known as the apartheid system of governance (I explore this further in chapter two); South Africa provides for a particularly rich contextual backdrop against which to investigate this noted emergence and growth of a therapy-inspired media genre of self-help avidly consumed in present-day society.

Research Aim

The fundamental aim of this research project is to investigate the consumption of self-help media by a small group of black South Africans selected to participate in this study. A further intention of this paper is to explore the influence of self-help media consumption on the ways in which self-identity is construction by the study participants.

Research Focus

Consumption research has taken a myriad of intriguing routes within academic circles in South Africa. With numerous of these studies, to take an example, a key focus is directed towards critically exploring the notion of the ‘black middle class’ in this country. Besides the existence of a tension when it comes to conceptualising this label, these studies add tremendous knowledge to how black South Africans – due to continuous economic empowerment opportunities – navigate their way through an ever-growing culture of consumption as well as why, to a significant extent, they consume the way that they do. Whether it is the conspicuous consumption of the affluent black citizen (e.g, van Staden 2015; Morwe 2014; Iqani & Kenny 2015) or other forms of self-expression through the act of consumption; this thesis finds that the black citizen as a subject of critical exploration provides for a thought-provoking avenue for research purposes with the aim of making a valuable contribution to the academy because of South Africa’s historic and current racial and socio-cultural atmosphere.

Discourse pertaining to a history of segregation and racism in South Africa often follows a similar rhetoric situating the black South African citizen in a position that illustrates an

experience of suffering and oppression deemed more distinctly manifest even in the present socio-economic and socio-political landscape of the country (Goodman 2006; Balia 2004; Reddy 1997; Mda 2002; van Zyl 1999; Nebe 2012). Compared to their coloured and Indian counterparts, black South Africans are documented in ways that point to them having suffered high(er) levels of trauma as they often found themselves in direct disputes and clashes with the apartheid government which embarked on various fatal means to safeguard a political system promoted and idealised by the leadership of the day (Mathabane 1986; Wilson 2001; Goodman 2006). Goodman (2006: 182) in her work on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), provides helpful evidentiary details in line with the above stated observation by granting a brief citation from the Durban HRV Hearings of 1996 regarding how, usually, the Chairman of the commission would wrap up a day's session of testimony as per 'ritual' in the commissions:

The overwhelming majority of people who have suffered in this country and who have borne the brunt of the resistance are black South Africans. Sometimes it is not a bad thing to remember that here and there were white people, Indian people, coloured people, who dared to pay the price as well in putting this together [...]

Scores of black lives were lost during apartheid and, as I more thoroughly discuss in chapter two, even after the demolishing of this political system; there still exists an animosity (presenting itself through current displays of sometimes-violent interracial occurrences widely trending in South African news media and on social media platforms) which renders it challenging for the promotion of a racially-integrated nation across various social spheres in the country (Savides 2016; Pilane 2016). This, I wish to claim, motivates for a plausibility in an assumption that black South Africans were and still are faced with an on-going challenge of re-identifying and navigating their way as citizens in the democratic dispensation. Whether or not that could motivate a turn to self-help media in the case of the ten black South Africans selected for participation in this study; makes for a valuable investigation. Taking into account characteristics attributed to the self-help text such as its provision of techniques on how to deal with perceived social and psychological shortfalls (as explored in both the theoretical framework and literature reviewed in this paper), is this media genre perhaps considered ideal in providing helpful coping mechanisms to the black South Africans participating in this study? This further explains the particular focus on just black South Africans.

Additionally, the act of confession and testimony within black communities is becoming overtly public across numerous mass media platforms, as explored by Ndlovu (2013) and

Matlala (2013) in their studies pertaining to, specifically two, very popular South African television shows (*Relate* and *Khumbul'ekhaya*); both aired on one of the nation's largest free-to-air channels, SABC 1. These programs thrive on the 'discipline' of confession and therewith comes a great deal of 'drama' and an entertainment value hard to miss (Matlala 2013: 63). Black African communities are often imagined and portrayed (to a large extent by the media in local soap operas, dramas, literary material and movies) as particularly conservative in their ways of life; where privacy is deemed vital with regards to how families deal with their 'issues.' With the growing supply of media texts of a self-help, therapeutic nature, public confession is increasingly engaged in by numerous members of the black race which presumably trumps the idea and image of the black community as a conservative one. This, additionally, becomes an interesting avenue for academic exploration.

Research Questions

This dissertation develops towards answering one main research question, as well as a second question which stands to provide insight into another aspect of consumption – the notion of self-identity and how perceived ideas around 'the self' are fostered through engagement with, specifically, therapeutic media texts.

The paper will, thus, explore possible answers to the following questions, respectively:

1. Why and how do black South Africans consume self-help media?
2. To what extent does these individuals' self-help media consumption influence their self-identities?

Based largely on the visible popularity and devoted consumption of media texts of a self-help nature in modern society, it is, as noted in this chapter, a key interest of this dissertation to explore some of the reasons and role players acting as driving forces behind, specifically, ten selected black consumers of self-help media texts in South Africa. This insight is elucidated with the aim of granting a deeper understanding of this social occurrence while it is not a goal of this paper to generalise its findings to the entire country. This chapter of the thesis set out to introduce and showcase the research questions as well as briefly highlight the core motivating factors behind the existence of this research project. The chapter following this one aims to delve into a critical exploration of key literature in the academy pertaining to the theorisation and scholarly engagement with phenomena such as popular psychology, self-help therapy, media audiences, as well as discourses of 'public' and 'private' therapy with respect to the

media. These are in line with the dissertation's literature review. But first, an overview of the chapters is granted below.

Overview of the Chapters

Chapter one has outlined the contextual backdrop, the paper's aims, focus and the research questions this study seeks to explore answers to. The chapter provides an explanation behind its chosen particular focus on black South Africans. It locates this said focus in the country's history of segregation, discrimination and oppression which has arguably affected black South Africans more so than their counterparts of other races and, as plausibly presumed, may potentially promote a turn to self-help therapeutic media as a means to deal with this socio-cultural condition.

Chapters two, three and four will grant a focus on this study's research design. Chapter two will be focussing on the provision of a critical assessment of classical and contemporary literature pertaining to media consumption and media audiences, self-help media, and popular psychology in society where a core focus is to be placed on South Africa as a case in point. Chapter three prioritises a discussion of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which inform and guide the analysis of the data collected for this research project. In chapter four, an exploration of the research methods undertaken in the collection and construction of a body of empirical data analysed and theorized by this study, is rendered.

Chapter five embarks on an analytical evaluation of the data which is structured in a manner that outlines, firstly, *where* these participants consume self-help media texts. This discussion outlines the media platforms to have been shared by the participants as a preferred source through which consumption takes place. Online media platforms via search engines such as Google emerge as a preferred source of self-help material which ensures what the chapter refers to as a 'quick fix' to the issues self-help is often sourced for. I further discuss *why*, as per data collected, these participants consume these texts on the platforms they make mention of and this is where a discussion of a viewpoint held by the participants that the self-help text serves as an ideal tool to use if a person wants to 'find' and 'know' themselves among other benefits, develops. The discussion further outlines *how* and, to an extent, *when* consumption manifests as well as what the reported reasoning from study participants behind this is.

Both chapters five and a part of chapter six delve into a discussion of how these texts are approached as public forms and the implications thereof on the construction of identities by the study participants who are avid consumers and staunch audiences thereof. In extension, it is

this idea of the public that I analyse in relation to a key aspect of self-help: confession. As audiences of self-help media, I explore the responses from participants with respect to confession and testimony as core elements of the self-help process; elucidating what these participants make of the publicness (fostered by the media) of this practise. This understanding of the publicness tied to confession as a means of self-help I further probe with each participant; attempting to determine these individuals' own engagement with this practice. The chapters in question expose, in part, a striking line of reasoning from participants arguing for a lack of desire to; firstly, compromise their status as mere audiences of self-help media texts by becoming participants on these media platforms through publicly engaging in the process of confession that comes herewith. Secondly, according to these participants, the individuals that *do* go as far as participating on these platforms are 'brave-hearted' and appreciated, yet also frowned upon, in part, for their lack of knowledge and respect for black cultures, customs and traditions which renders them blinded by the media's exploitation of their privacy.

Chapter six additionally renders an elaborate discussion into the issue of self-identity with regards to how it is reflected upon by the ten interview participants and how consumption of self-help media texts informs this process, if at all. Chapter seven – the concluding chapter – reiterates the contributions of this study by granting an overview of the paper's analytic chapters before offering concluding remarks, and makes mention of the limitations of this research project while also providing brief recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

‘Pop’ Psychology, Media and Society

This chapter embarks on a discussion aimed at foregrounding literature which informs the research, analysis and arguments of this study. The notion of ‘pop psychology’ and other psychological discourses in everyday human relations and interactions in modern society is explored. It is discussed in relation to literature on the role of the media in the promotion of these discourses as popular cultural forms through the discursive construction of practices of ‘healing’ and remedy with respect to intra and interpersonal difficulties. Literature pertaining to South Africa’s history of trauma is also reviewed as it informs the study’s analytic evaluations of the empirical data collected. This leads on to a critical engagement with the notions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ in relation to media audiences and consumption of media texts of a self-help form.

Self-Help Therapy and ‘Public’ Healing as Popular Entertainment in South African media

For ease of comprehension on the part of the reader, I recognise the pertinence of providing working definitions of certain key concepts deployed in this paper. Therefore, it is necessary to draw on relevant literature to grant a working definition for the notion of ‘therapy’ which is increasingly utilised throughout this dissertation. The term ‘therapy’ is derived from the psychological concept of ‘psychotherapy.’ Psychotherapy – which makes specific reference to therapy of a psychological nature – is defined as a general term that speaks to the treating of mental health problems through a process of talking to a professional known either as a psychiatrist, psychologist or mental health practitioner (*Mayo Clinic Staff* 2016). A typical therapy session, very generally, involves a process of learning about your said ‘condition’ (which motivated you to seek therapy); your feelings, moods, behaviours and thoughts by actively divulging such details to the professional conducting the session (*Mayo Clinic Staff* 2016). This is in line with assisting you to; for example, take control of your life and better deal/respond to situations deemed threatening to your healthy coping skills.

Due to their therapeutic characteristics, media texts inspired by psychological self-help manage to attract consumers with the promise of eventual healing from pain, trauma, confusion among others; as well as ‘fixing’ internal dysfunctions thereby leading towards some form of self-disciplined ‘perfection’ [whether psychological, psychosexual or otherwise] (Rimke 2000; Peck 1978; Rimke and Brock 2012). As will be unpacked in this chapter and the next, this

entire process relies significantly on the practice of confession. Without confession, the self-help seeker may be seen to deprive her/himself off the benefits of realising their goal of reaching a state of, for instance, emotional control over personal struggle.

In the South African media landscape, confession and testimony have been interestingly introduced on mass media platforms such as television and radio. With the popularisation of digital media, social media platforms such as Facebook now also host broad spaces where the practice of confession is actively engaged in. On television, four popular confession-oriented programs accessible to South Africans on free-to-air stations: *Relate*, *Nyan' Nyan*, *Khumbul'ekhaya* and *Forgive & Forget*; thrive on the discipline of confession (Ndlovu 2013; Matlala 2013). On each episode of these shows, participants seeking assistance with various personal and familial issues are required to openly confess before any expert involvement occurs.

Matlala (2013: 17) in a study which extensively looks into *Khumbul'ekhaya*, notes that we now constantly find ourselves having to navigate through a “confessional society”; often finding ourselves under pressure to continuously reveal emotions both in private and in public. Contemporary culture dictates quite a strong interest in others’ emotions (Foucault 1988). Mass media, Lupton (1998:6) expands hereon by highlighting how ‘confessional’ televised talk shows of a nature as *The Oprah Winfrey show*, expects of participants (whether prominent or not so well-known) to expose experiences, emotions and feelings of an intimate nature. Guests reveal some of the most private and distressing feelings on these vastly public platforms.

Curiously, Lupton (1998) observes, in such spaces, the disclosure of emotions becomes commodified for a number of reasons including the attraction of higher audience ratings. In South Africa, Matlala (2013) makes a similar discovery in one of the interviews engaged in with a producer and director of one of South Africa’s most popular programs, *Khumbul'eKhaya*. Quinton Kgositsile (show director) makes no excuse of the fact that, amongst the show’s core objectives, one of the aims is to make “television in an entertaining manner [...]” (Cited in Matlala 2013: 63). Entertainment, in this regard, may then be directly proportional to satisfactory audience ratings which are crucial in determining the ‘success’ of the programme as well as its sustainability as a brand within the South African Broadcasting Corporation [SABC] (Ndlovu 2013).

The prevalence of self-help consumption in the form of advice columns in print media platforms, self-help therapists as hosts or guests on popular television and radio programs, as

well as ‘agony aunts/uncles’ on internet communities, has led to therapy becoming a noteworthy and popular cultural phenomenon; which, although Illouz (2003: 4) argues for a shift in this way of thinking about popular culture, possesses an entertainment value difficult to turn a blind eye to. In South Africa alone, a myriad of empirical case studies with which to illustrate the existence of an element of entertainment linked to the culture of psychological self-help can be outlined.

3Talk with Noeleen is a local television talk show which previously aired on one of South Africa’s public broadcasting channels, SABC 3, until its end in April of 2015. This show was popular for taking on the form of daily discussions that the host, Noeleen Maholwana-Sangqu, had with different (very often celebrity) guests about a variety of issues which often revolved around or directly involved that specific guest on that particular show. Another feature of this popular talk show was that some of the studio guests were many a time also individuals from certain professions coming on the show to impart knowledge and ‘advice’ to viewers about whatever topics they specialise in. Among these professionals were psychologists and counselling therapists who were requested to advise individuals – live on air – who would call in to the show seeking psychotherapeutic assistance in order to deal with their ‘problems’. The show, which aired on weekdays at 16:00, often had guests in the form of in-house Clinical Psychologists to tackle an array of topics related to psychological well-being and how to identify, accept and ultimately ‘treat’ any psychological discrepancies as human beings.

Viewers of the show were exposed to a range of, often personal, issues (in the form of brief narratives) raised by individuals calling into the show for ‘advice’ and it became a public display of peoples’ emotions which were sometimes accompanied by an element of drama leaving the viewer entertained and intrigued while watching. Popular topics often included issues on how to deal with losing a loved one, how to deal with negative tensions in the family; even issues on how to psychologically deal with unaccepting in-laws and your spouse’s children from previous relationships outside your marriage. This show managed to incorporate a phenomenon which Illouz (2003: 90) refers to as “therapeutic storytelling”:

Therapeutic storytelling is [...] inherently circular: to tell a story is to tell a story about a diseased self [...] Therapeutic framing of biographical stories narrates the self in terms of its ‘diseases’. If failure is the result of a disease of the will, then it is self-made, it can be unmade, which legitimates and perpetuates the very existence of the show and the therapeutic institution that feeds it. Indeed, what is particularly interesting about therapeutic narrative about the self quickly becomes a ‘narrative in action’ a story about

the very process of understanding, working with and overcoming (or not overcoming) one's problems.

This process of therapeutic storytelling is often times coupled with an entertainment value due, more especially, to the nature of the details some of the 'storytellers' decide to divulge on these mass media platforms.

On radio, a popular talk radio station called *Talk Radio 702* also adopts the practice of therapy and captivatingly relies on therapeutic narratives of callers as a driving force behind certain programmes. Specifically, *The Redi Tlhabi Show*, named after its host, has weekly therapy-inspired features during which specialists within t

he psychotherapeutic and psychosexual professional environment are invited as guests responsible for assisting listeners with their concerns and questions. Two resident guests usually offering psychological and behavioural advice during these segments are Dr Helgo Schomer, a registered Psychologist and Director of the Behavioural Health Consultancy (Dr. Schomer & Associates) in Cape Town, and Dr Eve who is a widely known sexologist. Similar to *3Talk* (as outlined above), this radio show allows for live on-air call-ins, e-mails and SMS's by listeners seeking expert advice on personal and sexuality-related issues. These features take place weekly on Tuesdays and Fridays between 11:00am and 12:00 midday, respectively (*Talk Radio 702* website 2014). Once again, some elements of drama are attached to these discussions and the entertainment quality is at its peak.

An interesting case in point is drawn from a *Talk Radio 702* podcast of the 'Talking Sex' feature on *The Redi Tlhabi Show* on May 5th, 2014. Speaking on air to Sexologist, Dr Eve, on psychosexual self-help in relation to masturbation, a male caller in his mid-thirties freely opens up about his 'new-found' capability to psychologically motivate himself to engage in the act of masturbation. Something he confesses to have "struggled" with for years. The following is an extract from the podcast:

Caller: [...] You know, I didn't know about masturbation you know, until last year. Man, I must tell you, I am a man in my mid-thirties. I was trying unsuccessfully to do that, now I finally got it together, man [...] late last year. So, I must tell you man, it's a very nice thing to do, hey. To masturbate, it's very nice. You know, I've got this nice little toy that I use to relieve myself [...]. I must tell you, masturbation is doing it for me. I don't even look at ladies anymore, you know.

Presenter: You need to still be looking at the ladies. But in your mid-thirties, what was happening when your body was talking to you at a much younger age to say, ‘hey, touch me’?

Caller: You know, I’m a guy who was very shy with the ladies and stuff. Now, what happened is that ...uhh...finally, I was trying to masturbate but I couldn’t get to coordinate my concentration [...] until one day I was alone I finally came through and I was smiling all the way. I can’t even wait to knock-off, you know.

The extent to which this particular caller goes into detail about his ‘situation’ had many people entertained (perhaps even shocked) to a point where this very portion of the podcast was again played on the very same day on *Talk Radio 702*’s drive time show with host Xolani Gwala who, as part of his discussions, wanted to find out how much is too much? He asked listeners exactly how far they would go and how much they would confess to receive help on such public spaces such as radio.

There are other South African radio shows that also incorporate the theme of self-help in various manners; although not always on a weekly basis as is the case with *The Redi Tlhabi Show*. Shows such as *Home* with Mapaseka Mokwele on *Kaya FM*, *Power Life* with Masechaba Lekalake (*Power FM*) which “gives an opportunity to those who have gone through life’s stiffest tests enough to share their experiences with a view to help others caught up in the same, then bring in those who found solutions including specialists who will help us better understand each case, how to come about possible solutions” (*Power FM* website 2015), and *The Sacred Space* with Thami Ngubeni (*Metro FM*) “where she aims to inspire and empower people’s daily lives, to bring serenity where there is chaos, comfort where there is fear and understanding where there is ignorance” (*Metro FM* website 2015), are among those that sometimes incorporate the use of ‘expert’ advice to assist listeners with ‘coping’ with life’s challenges and leading ‘fulfilling’ lives. Again, on these shows listeners are almost regularly guaranteed instances of therapeutic storytelling (with elements of entertainment) by individuals seeking psychological ‘healing’.

In the print media landscape, popular local magazines such as *Move!* and *DRUM* have within them a few-page spreads of advice columns that involve letters, emails, and SMS’s from readers who (often on an anonymous basis) send these in as an attempt to seek advice from the publications’ resident therapists, psychologists and sexologists. These are then widely published within every edition of the magazine in the form of questions and answers. The

entertainment value here is also apparent when reading through these pages. In *Drum* magazine, this feature is referred to as the *DRUM* 'Better Life: Advice' section (*DRUM* 2015), whereas in *Move!* magazine, readers are informed to 'Ask the *Move!* Expert' in as far as this section is concerned (*Move!* website 2015).

Studies and literature on popular psychology illustrate that not only has the practice of therapy escaped the 'privacy' of the therapist's office, it has also become a form of popular culture driven staunchly by the media (Cherry 2008), who also successfully influence peoples' consumption patterns of these psychotherapeutic and self-help material on a regular basis. Literature also implicitly alludes to the fact that some of the key factors influencing individuals' consumption of self-help media texts could be linked to the strong entertainment value carried by these texts (Lilienfeld, et al 2010; Cherry 2008; Illouz 2003).

Globally, numerous television programmes thriving on psychotherapeutic self-help-driven foundations are widely distributed to millions of consumers. The *Oprah Winfrey Show* (Illouz 2003), the *Dr. Phil Show*, South Africa's *Forgive & Forget* and *Relate* (Ndlovu 2013), among others, have become major promoters of a culture of therapy within society. These media texts are among those examples of self-help therapy as popular culture within the public space. Audiences of these television shows are exposed to the practice of therapy and the involvement of an 'expert' in the self-help process. *Dr Phil*, for instance, is a qualified psychologist and thus confidently takes on the role of the expert other whose advice to those in need of psychological 'healing' is highly sought for, as is evident when watching his studio-based programme packed to capacity with immediate audience members (in-studio audiences). This, yet again, exemplifies this dissertation's observation that the therapy session has taken on a public persona in modern society.

Media texts such as the ones discussed above have been receiving scholarly attention, and academic literature pertaining to these texts brings certain thought-provoking criticisms to the surface. *The Oprah Winfrey show*, to take an example, has been subject to criticism from media commentators and scholars such as Robert Thompson (cited in Illouz 2003: 4) whom, in his capacity as director of the Centre for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University, went as far as referring to talk shows (Oprah Winfrey's included) as exemplifying the fact that "Tv has so much on it that's so stupid."

Further critics have argued that the brand that is the *Oprah Winfrey Show* is somewhat problematic towards society at large (Illouz 2003: 3 – 4):

In a 1993 Chicago Magazine article, Ms Harrison, an essayist and fiction writer who in 1989 had written an in-depth profile of Oprah, was quoted as saying: “Her show...I just can’t watch it. You will forgive me, but it’s white trailer trash. It debases language, it debases emotions. It provides everyone with glib psychological formulas. These people go around talking like a fortune cookie. And I think she is in very large part responsible for that”

Yet despite these criticisms, of which numerous exist (also see Squire 1994; Masciarotte 1991; Cloud 1996; Peck 1994) the show continued on a successful streak for many years, and can still be considered as part of the leading pack of heavily consumed popular cultural texts in many parts of Europe, Asia, the United States and Africa (Garson 2011).

In South Africa, not many studies have been done with regards to exploring the role of the media in promoting a public affair of the psychotherapeutic process. However, a blind eye is not turned to academic contributions from Thabisani Ndlovu (2013) who investigated three local television programmes – *Relate*, *Khumbul’ekhaya* and *Forgive & Forget* – of which the first two ran on SABC 1, one of South Africa’s biggest public broadcast channels, and the third on e-TV. *Relate*, hosted by Angie Diale, popularly known to viewers as Sis Angie who, according to Ndlovu (2013), refers to herself as a professional counsellor. Sis Angie takes on the weekly task of ‘solving’ the family issues brought to her by her guests. The solutions are highly therapeutic and a considerable amount of self-help therapy poses as one of the major techniques adopted on the programme. Interestingly, Diale manages to switch from professional counsellor to publicly vulnerable human being when she is witnessed to go as far as testifying her own private matters (HIV Positive status amongst other things) on national television (Ndlovu 2013).

A thought-provoking description of this television programme is summarised in the following words:

Such is the paradoxical nature of the publicness of private human intimacies on television with regard to therapy talk shows; those shows informed by the trauma-therapy approach and whose focus is conflicted human intimacies located in the family, or broken familial relationships (Ndlovu 2013: 1-2)

Similar to shows such as *Dr. Phil* and the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Relate* manages to break down the walls which, historically, ensured privacy between therapist and client (Ndlovu 2013) with regards to the traditional therapy session. Again, the practise of therapy becomes a public event much for the voyeuristic consumption of mass television viewers across the country. Gamson’s (1998: 7) observation regarding talk shows manages to capture the argument that various

literature makes about the presence of an entertainment value in excessively public self-help themed talk shows:

Talk shows are show business, and it is their mission to exploit. They commodify and use talkers to build an entertainment product which is then used to attract audiences who are then sold to advertisers, which results in a profit for producers. Exploitation thus ought to be the starting point of analysis and not, as it so often is, its conclusion.

Taking a key focus on the institutional practices and production intentions and objectives behind shows such as *Khumbul'ekhaya* and *Relate*; Thabisani Ndlovu and Sylvia Matlala are among a very few scholars to have delved into the South African arena of therapeutic television/media programming in post-apartheid. Unearthing various pertinent issues through their work, these scholars have contributed to the academy in ways beneficial to researchers such as myself who possesses a keen interest in the debates around race, identity, class, the media and their evident role in specifically promoting a culture of 'public' confession and testimony under the auspice of 'healing' and 'fixing': as characteristic of a process of psychological therapy. This paper, as a result, is guided by a motivation to add to literature which speaks more closely to the motives behind the active consumption of such media texts as well as uncovering, to some extent, how this may or may not contribute to self-identity construction for the individuals chosen as interview sources based on their avid consumption of media texts of a 'self-help' confessional/testimonial nature.

South Africa's History of Trauma and a Culture of Public Confession

Prior to what became known as the 'transitional' period in South Africa (the years that marked the beginning of a shift from a 'segregatory' socio-political and socio-economic ideology into the new democratic dispensation), the country had faced a lengthy era of oppressive, racist and other gross human rights violations. Termed 'Apartheid', this system of governance ensured the segregation of citizens based, most significantly, on race (Bornman 2005). Apartheid, an Afrikaans term meaning 'apartness', was formally enacted into law in the country in the year 1948; promoting (often repressively so) the institutionalisation of racial discrimination and segregation (Balia 2004: 295).

This separation ideology was not only of little to no socio-economic and socio-political benefit to those who were classified as non-European or non-white, but black South Africans found themselves at the very bottom of what Mda (2002) refers to as a racial 'pyramid'. Whiteness, within this pyramid had been assumed and somewhat accepted to reside at the very top,

therewith followed by people of mixed blood – coloureds – who were then tailed by those of Asiatic descend. Black South Africans, as per this mental pyramid, took up the bottom portion because “in the eyes of the Apartheid regime, these people would have been considered as less than human, their suffering made silent, and the violations to which they had been subjected kept secret” (Goodman 2006: 175). Indeed, as a result thereof, a sense that black South Africans are less human and undeserving of some of the humanly benefits granted to their white or generally lighter-skinned counterparts discursively took form (Mda 2002: 283).

The resulting treatment of black bodies within this system of governance had often been characterised by a narrative embroiled with details of ruthless violence, atrocity, torture and a wide-spread trauma among both adults and youngsters present at the time of this system of governance (Reddy 1997; van Zyl 1999; Mda 2002; Balia 2004; Garman 2006; Nebe 2012). A number of white South Africans had also lost their lives as attempts to retaliate against the system arose and strengthened across the country or, in other times, through their attempts to stand with and support black South Africans. Warren Nebe (2012) alludes to an existence of a two-fold trauma to have emerged from South Africa’s historical ‘atmosphere.’ A socio-political trauma brought on by the apartheid regime and a psychological/psychosocial trauma sparked by the on-set of the transition from apartheid into a new era of ‘freedom.’ It is this latter aspect of trauma that received a specific focus as soon as the new African National Congress-led (ANC) government took office following its landslide victory in the country’s first general elections after apartheid. The focus on this said trauma took shape via a wave of reconciliation discourses which informed the very fibre of the country’s transitional period. This particular reconciliation narrative possessed traumatic elements as the act of reconciliation in and of itself required of the reconciling parties (white and non-white South Africans previously divided) to collectively expose, tackle and deal with what was at some point an inter-relational hindrance (a system of government that perpetuated racist policies which resulted in a loss of many lives) in order to allow an interconnected outlook forward as the ‘rainbow nation’ (Goodman 2006).

The most prevalent hallmark of reconciliation emerged in the form of a commission coined the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996. In a bid to unravel, directly face and eventually ‘heal’ a troubled past, the ANC (led by President Nelson Mandela) made provision for a platform that were to play a key role in assuring the first steps are taken on the country’s new journey towards reconciliation and healing. The medium decided upon “was a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which was given legal status through an Act of Parliament

in 1995” (Balía 2004: 295). The Act became known as The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act (van Zyl 1999). The TRC, Mda (2002) summarises, was essentially the mediation of trauma dressed in the regalia of reconciliation and a ‘fixing’ of a murky past. Taking into consideration its reported core objectives, the TRC stood to provide a platform for comprehensive public therapeutic interventions directed at the survivors of human rights abuses. van Zyl (1999: 647-648) writes of the TRC as representing a “‘third way’ in dealing with a legacy of human rights abuse and attempting to institutionalize justice.”

The media, at the time, played a key role in their capacity as platforms of information, education and, very ironically in this instance, entertainment. A significant portion of the TRC was based on a process of public hearings which were broadcasted across the country (Goodman 2006). As noted by Mda (2002: 279), the “TRC itself was a unique experience that brought the excess of the apartheid past into the living rooms of South Africa through television screens.” Citizens with access to this medium, as well as radio and print media (Garman 2006) were exposed to the victims of gross human rights violations as they were re-living – in the presence of their torturers – their experiences of torture. These hearings, Reddy (1997: 268) stipulates, were reflective of “therapy sessions” wherein the leading commissioners took a keen interest in the narratives as they were shared by individuals directly involved in these stories.

The broadcasting of these hearings became characterised by heightened emotion and a dramatic effect which made for intriguing and emotion-stirring viewing/witnessing. So dramatic and emotional were these broadcasts that citizens in some communities went on to coin the TRC as the ‘Kleenex Commission’ – presumably a symbolic play on a tissue brand to indicate the many instances of crying to have happened in these hearings (Reddy 1997: 268-269). In effect, the TRC can be viewed as having offered, at times, a ‘theatrical re-enactment’ of torture and pain through the reliving of the memory of the past (Balía 2004: 296). This occurred more especially during moments when victims or so-called perpetrators were requested to demonstrate (both verbally and physically) how the acts of violence – for instance, ‘the wet blanket method of torture’ – were carried out (Balía 2004). Goodman’s (2006: 180) take summarises this observation as she notes that “once the opportunity was opened for victims and perpetrators to offer their testimonies in the form of a public narrative, the significance of performing for an audience came to the fore.”

A key aspect of the TRC was the commission’s division into a number of committees responsible for ensuring the successful running of the process of reconciliation and ‘healing.’

One such committee was the committee on Amnesty (Reddy 1997). The Amnesty Committee was tasked to consider and evaluate all applications for pardon (van Zyl 1999). It comprised of members from the TRC and other legal practitioners chosen from across the country (Reddy 2004; van Zyl 1999). One of the basic preconditions required to be satisfied in order to qualify for amnesty was that the applicant “had to provide full disclosure of the act for which amnesty was sought” (van Zyl 1999: 655). Here, within a therapeutic atmosphere, emerged a procedural engagement with confession and testimony which was deemed crucial as an attribute of reconciliation and a driving force behind the ‘healing’ that Archbishop and lead TRC commissioner, Desmond Tutu, often alluded to (Reddy 1999). These public testimonies of anguish, suffering and pain inflicted, mostly on black bodies, were not missed by the media and mass dissemination thereof took centre stage (Garman 2006; Goodman 2006). This, literature informs, rendered confession and testimony (in this case, of a public nature) as important in the plight towards fostering healing and reconciliation. This testimonial aspect of the commission is something Anthea Garman (2006: 325) – who refers to it as “the confessional mode” – also finds interesting and particularly due to how it has gained particular prominence on a global scale as an integral aspect of ‘transitional justice’ aimed at dealing with the aftereffects of human rights violation and other socio-political conflict.

Through a genre strongly tied to that of the talk and actuality show media text, present-day media producers in South Africa are integrating elements of this practise of public confession and making available an array of material thriving on these integrated testimonial and confessional aspects. It is arguably an ethos that is engaged in by considerable percentages of black South Africans in post-apartheid South Africa. The South African free-to-air and paid television platforms are rife with programs that incorporate the practice of confession as a means to an end; that end being the eventual ‘fixing’ and healing of the emotional and psychological problems of the individuals involved (Matlala 2013; Ndlovu 2013). In drawing a comprehensive interpretation, literature leads towards stipulating that media coverage of the confessional practices during the TRC acted as a springboard and ‘inspiration’ for present-day media text producers in their plights to, as literature would often point out, draw audiences. Ndlovu’s (2013: 3) contribution assists in supporting this claim in his highlighting of “three factors that have shaped the focus and form of South Africa’s ‘serious’ talk shows [...]” These three factors, he notes, are Apartheid, South Africa’s political independence in 1994, as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Matlala’s (2013: 61) work, more specifically, informs us of an explicit reference to the TRC by the producers of a popular South

African television show called *Khumbul'ekhaya* (on one of the largest local free-to-air channels, SABC 1):

[...] the show is dubbed the truth and reconciliation process of the soul by its producers [...] *Khumbul'ekhaya* adopted the reconciliation and healing elements from the TRC and brought them to the family structure. From the description of the TRC, one notes that the producers view the show as a parallel to the TRC and have modelled the show in this regard.

That the producers specifically dubbed the show as the truth and reconciliation process of the soul, indicates that they identified an opportunity to nurture and emphasize a genre of media which is evidently becoming vastly popular in South Africa: a genre of confessional, 'self-help' and therapeutic media packaged and disseminated to a generation of citizens of a "traumatized but triumphant emerging democracy" (Goodman 2006: 183).

The popularity of this genre can be seen in the on-going splurge of television and radio shows incorporating confession and testimony as is highlighted in the section prior to this one outlining how self-help therapy has been adopted in South Africa as popular entertainment. The consumption of these texts render its consumer exposed to various psychology-related discourses which are becoming deeply embedded in society as they are reproduced by audiences in everyday conversations about the contents of these media texts. Herewith do we witness the popularisation of psychology (as I discuss below) blossoming in modern society.

Pop Psychology, 'Audiences' and Society

The term 'popular psychology' – commonly referred to as 'pop psychology' or 'pop psych' – refers, broadly, to concepts and theories regarding human mental life and behaviour that are, supposedly, based on the knowledge and ideas emerging from the discipline of psychology. These theories and concepts attain popularity among the general population, and thus become entrenched within everyday public dialogues. The popular psychology sphere has, in more ways than one, been vigorously shaping "the landscape of the 21st century world", and continues to have visibly significant influences on human interactions in modern society (Lilienfeld et al 2010: xii)

With increased engagement with psychology in daily practices, communities with direct access to this subject matter are largely influenced to become accustomed to the idea that human beings should understand themselves in psychological terms of adjustment, empowerment, fulfilment, good relationships, and personal growth, to name but a few (Rimke and Brock

2012). As a result, Rose (1998) stipulates, individuals often actively seek the insight of experts and cling to their promises in an attempt to assist themselves in their quest for self-change which the individual ‘freely’ undertakes.

Rimke and Brock (2012: 183) summarise the prominence of pop psychology and the prevalence of psychological discourses in modern society:

The popularity of psy discourses reflects a deeply held belief that psychology in one way or another can make one happy, and that at the root of our difficulties are psy problems that can be treated with professional therapy, self-help, and/or prescription drug use.

Studies to have delved into psychological discourses make it directly and, often indirectly, clear that: whether or not we are taking active note of this, psychology is all around us (Rimke & Brock 2012; Rimke 2000; Lilienfeld et al 2010; Cherry 2008). Topics on love and hate, forgetting and remembering, sadness and happiness, even mental illness and health, are fluidly flowing within societies and, to a significant degree, becoming “the daily stuff of our lives” (Lilienfeld et al 2010: xii). The media are playing a significant role in driving these popular psychological and other therapy related discourses to multitudes of individuals often referred to as ‘audiences’ or ‘the public’ and sometimes even through ways highlighting a conflation of these references. It is worthwhile, this paper maintains, that a discussion of these notions is granted to give the reader some insight with respect to how these notions are deployed in this dissertation.

The notion of the ‘audience’ has received noteworthy scholarly attention as McQuail (2005) notes. Defining the term is a contested process which has resulted in varying conceptual and theoretical approaches. These varying approaches are helpful in rendering a multi-layered lens through which to comprehend the notion. Audiences are described by McQuail (2005) as a culmination of axis (or ‘typologies’) as proposed by Nightingale (2003; cited in McQuail 2005: 396-397) that provides various overlapping ways by which to reflect upon the concept. The four proposed ‘typologies’ refer to audiences as ‘the people assembled’, as ‘the people addressed’, audiences ‘as happening’ as well as audiences as ‘hearing’ or ‘audition’. The proposition of the audience as people assembled points to the notion of ‘spectators’ which, essentially, makes reference to a collective that is measured as paying attention to a granted media product at a given time. An example would be a group of people assembled in the same venue watching a boxing match and collectively paying attention to the occurrences in the match. Or to use the TRC as an example, the ‘immediate’ audience (comprising of victims,

perpetrators, observers) as well as the ‘intermediate’ audience comprising of the media who reported the proceedings (Goodman 2006); helpfully capture the idea of the ‘audience as people assembled’ (McQuail 2005).

Audiences as the people addressed makes reference to the imagined or actual group of people for which content is shaped and packaged along certain ideological lines, often even prior to the dissemination thereof; resulting in what is also referred to as the ‘interperllated’ audience (McQuail 2005: 397). The process encompassing the reception of a given text – whether alone or interactively with others – against the contexts rendered by, for instance, place or area; captures the idea of the audience as ‘happening’. Whereas the audience as ‘hearing’ or ‘audition’ is making reference to the active/participating audience experience which sees the audience embedded in a media presentation by remote means or to even provide response to viewed occurrences as collectively heard/seen (McQuail 2005).

What is apparent as being a constant characteristic throughout the above rendered contributions and explanations of the notion is the existence of an object/subject upon which some form of attention is placed whether by one person or a group of people and this is helpful in clarifying how this dissertation shall be deploying the concept of the audience. It shall be deployed and referred to as a collective of people directing their attention to given media objects or subjects and in this case, the object/subject is tied to a genre of media that incorporates the practice of psychological therapy: self-help media.

Debates on whether audiences and publics are the same is a further issue of interest and noteworthy academic concern (Silverstone 2005; Dayan 2001). It is proposed in bodies of work by scholars such as Silverstone (2005) that an objective to draw distinctions between the concepts is not to be taken for granted. Livingstone (2003) sets the scene for a viewpoint that the audience and the public have become increasingly difficult to distinguish as media have become further embedded in all spheres of society (2003: 35). The distinction between the audience and the public has often been drawn on the basis that the audience merely *receives* media products within spaces deemed private: living room, bedroom, apartment and so on; and are ‘served’ by the media for their enjoyment instead of necessarily relying on the media for ‘participation’ or appearance which are deemed characteristics of publicness as I discuss more closely later on in this chapter.

However, contemporary society proves otherwise. In practice, this distinction is increasingly diminishing in that the public is argued to be reliant on the private issues (of audiences) to

sustain (Silverstone 2005). Public debate/discussion in modern society increasingly comprises private subject matter such as sexuality, family feuds, intimacy, and other intimate relations subject matter imagined to be private in kind. Self-help media texts (specifically through the mediation of therapy), when analysed in this light, are aligning more with a publicness reliant on private subject matter. These texts, whether on television, radio, print or digital platforms make use of the private domain (through the promotion of testimony and confession of personal details) to sustain the public participation occurring through active platforms for audience interaction by call-ins, SMSes, e-mails etcetera. This displays, as I discuss more closely later in this chapter, a noteworthy form of publicness. This publicness is carved through the staging of these private details to audiences with access to these media 'stages' (TV, radio, print and digital media platforms).

Media and the Public Sphere: Therapeutic Media in South Africa

Prior to proceeding, it is pertinent that I provide further working definitions of additional terminology deployed in this thesis. The concepts of the private and the public have been used in my discussions; and this is how they are conceptually approached in this dissertation. The idea of the 'public' deployed here is linked to how the notion has been theorised as a politically-inspired term closely linked to the manner in which Jürgen Habermas (1969; 1989) theorised it which, in essence, spoke to the viewpoint that the public – or more directly, the public sphere – can be viewed as a 'space' for open deliberation in the promotion of continuous rational and critical debate and discussion among free and equal human beings about issues of the day (Baker 1992). In this space, critical debate and deliberation are centralised to be the order of the day with little else involved thereafter as these 'sites' would be neglected in pursuit of returning to one's 'private' life activities. Thereby, almost completely drawing a wide separation between what is public and what is private. Also relevant is the way the public is theorised by more contemporary scholars such as Mehita Iqani (2012) who's working of the notion of the public is inspired by scholars such as Hannah Arendt. For Iqani (2012), a media-centric approach to the notion of the public is helpful in carving an idea of the public as spaces of appearance accessible to mass society through the aestheticized arrangement of an array of media texts 'illuminated' with an aim by their producers of perpetuating the consumption thereof. Thereby the public, in this sense, can be imagined as sites of visibility. The aestheticized object(s) takes on this public element through a positioning thereof that allows for collective moments of attention placed on it by masses (that are identified as audiences) gathered out of interest or as collectively interpellated towards consumption.

The idea of a collective experience of audiences as a form of publicness is helpful in carving this paper's view on how self-help media texts embody a public dimension. Helpful is a broadened approach to conceptualising the notions of the 'public' in relation to the concept of the 'audience' or, the reverse, the notion of the 'audience' in relation to that of the public. Daniel Dayan's (2001) contribution – which contains a notably similar line of argumentation to Iqani's (2012) highlighted above – also appreciates that element of attention being collectively focused on an 'object' that is placed in a position of visibility. What Dayan (2001) suggests is that a conflation of the 'public' with that of the 'audience' is not entirely feasible in that most audiences are not public due to a lack of visibility. A visibility, he argues, largely possible through professional mediation which renders the media as sources of mediation crucial. The most vital role of the media alongside making things visible is their ability to invite audiences (who, as I highlighted in the section above, are within their perceived private domains) into being 'publics' by shaping, managing and continuously directing collective attention on to subjects to be collectively experienced/viewed/heard by these people.

The self-help text, in the view presented by this dissertation, embodies a publicness in a way that illustrates an intersection of public as a site for participation (Habermas inspired) and public as spaces of appearance, visibility and collective attention (Iqani's and Dayan's propositions). I mentioned earlier that I closely consider two South African media texts for empirical exemplification purposes in support of arguments to be made in this paper: *Relate* (Television) and *The Redi Tlhabi Show* (Radio). A typical episode of *Relate* is organised along the basic structure of the problem identification/ solution discovery narrative popular in the talk show genre (Ndlovu 2013: 13). Key in every episode is how, during the problem identification process of the show, participants on the show are encouraged to engage in the expression of their 'issues' for which help is sought. These 'issues' – private and intimate – are then publicly analysed. Publicly, due to the fact that they have been illuminated and placed on the media stage for the show's audience to collectively pay attention to.

Relate presents an interesting account of a complex yet significant indication of a blurring and, ultimate blending, of the private and the public. Shot in a television studio space, the show's main decorative setting resembles that of a domestic space (presented to viewers in a manner that suggests it is the host, Angie Diale's home) wherein issues of a private nature can be comfortably evaluated and discussed. Drawing on an argument by Moorti (1998), Ndlovu (2013) highlights just how this approach is in line with a goal of creators of such shows to mask the publicness of the programme by creating a sense of hospitality and homeliness. That being

so; the televising of *Relate* to mass viewers across the country renders it public as the television medium is one of the platforms that allow for the mediation and ultimate illumination of a subject on which audiences as ‘people assembled’(spectators), as people ‘hearing’ as well as audiences as ‘happening’ are directing their focus.

Similarly, on the radio show highlighted here; the host (often joined in studio by an expert in psychological wellbeing [Dr Helgo Schomer] and another one in sexuality and psychosexual subject matter [Dr Eve]), engages in a process of discussion of various themes around psychological/psychosexual issues with the experts. What drives these discussions is the host’s active invitation directed at ‘listeners’ (audiences) in motivation to engage with the experts by calling in, SMSing or e-mailing the show’s producers with their personal issues deemed, for instance, psychologically crippling/problematic to their wellbeing. The mere action of calling in, I argue in line with Dayan’s (2001) proposition, shifts the individual from ‘private’ audience member to active ‘public’ citizen as professional mediation is instigated through the medium in question.

Furthermore, when in this state of publicness, the individual on whom collective attention is placed by the audience; illuminates her/his ‘issues’ which are managed and guided by the mediation process. Following the ‘staging’ of the caller’s issues in need of self-help advice/techniques; the expert is given the opportunity to intervene and advise accordingly but it does not end here. The host ‘opens’ the discussion to the ‘public’ (as is often expressed by the host in synonymous terms with audiences) to share – through various forms of communication – their thoughts and advice regarding the illuminated subject. This call for participation of ‘private’ individuals (audiences) renders the self-help text a public sphere wherein private human intimacies are openly discussed and debated. Lunt and Stenner’s (2005) proposition of an ‘emotional’ public sphere captures this observation and line of argumentation I render here.

The popularisation of therapy on talk shows has played a significant role in fostering the start of a blurring of the real or imagined boundaries between the private and the public. Shattuc (1997) extensively writes on the popularisation of therapy as an integrated aspect of certain programmes within the talk show genre. Careful not to claim these therapeutic elements as directly reflective of, for instance, a Freudian psychoanalysis session of ‘thorough’ analysis and treatment; Shattuc’s work nonetheless paints a helpful picture to imagine therapy as a public affair delivered on mass media through, for instance, talk television.

In the cases of texts such as *Relate*, and *Khumbul'ekhaya* as adopters of the practice of public confession, when queried about the main motivations behind the shows, creators of these programmes point to a similar objective that involves the usage of the television medium as a means to teach members of the country important lessons on personal and familial improvement and healing (Matlala 2013; Ndlovu 2013). Through mass dissemination of these programmes, the producers hope to offer a form of community-building service to the entire nation. Through televising the confession of private issues, these shows aim to foster a situation where South Africans may learn from each other's situations and adopt the solutions provided to improve their own lives. In effect, emphasizing a pedagogical aspect, these shows arguably position themselves as some form of national classrooms or lecture halls opened to anyone willing to step in (in this case, tune in).

This chapter has provided a discussion of key contemporary and classical literature pertinent and relevant in assisting this dissertation with its aims. The literature reviewed and discussed herein covered self-help therapy as popular entertainment in modern society, South Africa's history of trauma, and a culture of therapy as facilitated by the media in modern society. The chapter to follow will provide a discussion of the concepts and theoretical contributions which will inform the analysis the data collected.

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Confession, Identity and Monitoring the Self

Overall, this paper relies upon three scholarly grounds. These are broadly described as follows: Psychological discourses and Foucault-inspired literature on ‘caring’ for the self; media and consumption of media texts; and interdisciplinary literature pertaining to race, class and other socio-cultural identity formations later attributed to the black citizens in post-apartheid South Africa, selected to participate in this research project.

As a result, the key concepts and theories that form part of this paper’s theoretical framework comprise of scholarly contributions on psychological discourses and confession in ‘public’ societal spaces, the emergence of a culture of therapy within social spaces outside of the traditionally ‘private’ space of the therapist’s office, as well as the role that the media play with regards to the promotion of this therapeutic-inspired culture through the widespread dissemination of, specifically, self-help media material. As far as possible, such conceptual and theoretical contributions shall be contextualised to the South African public and media activity within this country.

Confession: A Look into the Power and Social Relations

Rimke (2000) using a Foucault-inspired theoretical foundation, discusses the use of confession in various texts she coins ‘self-help technologies.’ During the process of therapeutic self-help, the ‘self-helper’ is motivated to believe that through confession comes some of the first steps towards unpacking the ‘true’ self and, ultimately, initiating a form of healing when remaining disciplined throughout this process. Garman’s (2006) work which emerges from within the literary academic fraternity also draws on Foucault’s theorisation of the notion of confession. A claim by Foucault that scholars such as Garman (2006) do not neglect to helpfully highlight is that “confession has, since the Greco-Roman period, been used to shape a particular type of self-disclosing, self-knowing human subject while at the same time compiling bodies of scientific knowledge about the human subject itself” (Garman 2006: 323).

The motivation to confess the ‘truth’ about oneself is typically presented as an essential practice for self-diagnosis which often occurs via expert or self-surveillance through the monitoring of the self-helper’s testified (whether to the self or bodies outside the self) behaviour and activities for the purpose of influencing, directing or managing them. The contextual backdrop against which confession usually occurs, Rimke (2000) outlines, consists of priestly/authoritative

confessions, peer confessions, as well as self-confession. Self-confession, quite simply, points to the practice of self-interrogation – often privately so. Its counterparts, peer and priestly confessions, present a slightly less private sense of ‘coming clean’ where the former typically involves the practice of confession based on shared experience and understanding; for instance, the twelve-step groups and so on (Rimke 2000). The latter, occurs to some form of authority or expert; which sees the confessor ‘opening up’ to this other individual. Again, the proceedings of South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996 pose as a striking example of the confessional mode (Garman 2006) as rendered through a priestly/authoritative approach.

From this, emerges a principled, prominently-supported cultural belief that the ‘real’ and ‘ultimate’ truth about oneself can only be told with the assistance of experts and/or support from peer groups (Rimke 2000). Dark secrets housed within the self are required to be brought to the surface, and often through self-help technologies such as surveys, questionnaires, self-assessment scales and interviews located in the modern self-help text; is this achieved.

Foucault, through his influential body of work around the historicization of knowledge systems, renders valuable critiques of the therapeutic discourse and the act of confession intricately embedded herein. Illouz (2008) notes how a key approach by Foucault in his work is preoccupied with exposing the manners in which power is woven into society. Departing with the psychology-driven project of psychoanalysis made prominent by proponents such as Sigmund Freud; Foucault’s (1976; 1994) contributions point to how the act of confession is deployed where subjects are encouraged to search for and speak the ‘truth’ about themselves to foster a movement towards an ultimate freedom from contents from the ‘psyche’ [laden/subconscious site of human thoughts and actions] (Illouz 2008)

Problematically - in the discipline of confession – as the confessor, Foucault (1976) notes, the individual is intricately bound to the judgement (moral, ethical, social or otherwise) of the receiver of the confession (whom we shall sometimes refer to as the ‘confessee’). Intricate power relations are said to be present in this process (which is seen as a major driver of self-discipline); where the subject of confession (confessor) falls at the mercy of others to ultimately be disciplined by being held responsible (often times by the confessee) for her/his social conduct and experiences in society (Rimke 2000). By suffering through the often emotional discomfort brought on by the process of confession, the self is engaging in what Peck (1978: 180) has coined the ‘techniques of suffering’

A striking observation rendered by Garman (2006: 324) as directed by Foucault's work, points out that "in the modern disciplinary society in which the crafting of a particular type of individual has become the focus of concentrations of power, confession is an important technique in the aim to instil within each person a self-disciplining, self-policing mechanism" What Foucault (1976) essentially argues for in this body of work is a consideration of the discourse/project of psychoanalysis as a political technology of the self which, although fervently promising emancipation to those deploying it; actually makes the individual disciplined and manageable for the ultimate political rationality and benefit of, for instance, the state (Illouz 2008: 3). This has inspired contemporary work by scholars such as Heidi Rimke (2000) and work she shares with Deborah Brock (2012) looking into the emergence, popularisation and continuous deployment of 'psy' discourses in society which have inspired a therapeutic ethos carrying forms of interpersonal influence ultimately promoting responsible citizenship at the benefit of liberal governments who do not have to work extra hard to govern citizens in modern society.

'Psy' Discourses and 'caring' for the self: From the therapist's office to the public domain

So popular have therapeutic ethos and psychological discourses come to be, that individuals often find themselves freely using terms such as "psycho", "insane", "crazy" in their daily conversations with others (Rimke and Brock 2012). Human interaction in modern society is more and more 'governed' and driven by what Heidi Rimke and Deborah Brock refer to as "psy discourses", which involve psychiatry, psychology, and psychotherapy among others (2012: 183). The everyday lives and practices of present-day human beings are largely influenced by the increasingly popular 'psy' discourses which yield such great power over humans that practices such as therapy and psychological intervention have become popular cultural forms engaged in by many who are able to access these practices.

To further explain the phenomenon of psy discourses, Rimke and Brock (2012: 183) highlight some important observations:

The now-pervasive presence of "psy" in our everyday lives and practices [...] can be seen in the widespread acceptance of a particular psychotherapeutic ethos that shapes social practices, which has become known as the culture of therapy. As modern subjects, we have at our disposal an immense medicalized vocabulary for speaking about our inner selves. Modern individuals speak with ease and confidence about their thoughts, memories, beliefs, emotions, and the like through psy discourses.

The cultural popularity of psychological discourses and therapeutic ethos has facilitated some form of a 'pathological approach' to reflecting on one's experiences. The idea of being psychologically disordered or unwell is prominently employed to refer to personal problems which are assumed to be individual as well as biological (and/or psychological) in cause (Rimke 2000).

Presumably objective distinctions between 'normal' and anything other than normal have, as a result, become particularly entrenched within our cultural beliefs and practices that people often find themselves, as earlier noted, seeking 'expert' assistance whenever they are faced with experiences that they consider to be outside of this ideal of "normalcy" (Cherry 2008). Strikingly, due to the psychologically-driven belief that the self (together with other psycho-biological factors) is responsible for the development of mental 'sickness' and 'disorder' which are considered abnormalities, it comes as no surprise that experts suggest that the self should in turn be relied upon for leading the individual towards 'normality' (Riessman and Banks 2001).

Heidi Rimke (2000: 61), in a paper around the nature of self-help literature, utilises the words of Samuel Smiles (1859); who also puts forward that help for the self is greatly reliant on the self:

Men [sic] must necessarily be the active agents of their own well-being and well doing; and that, however much the wise and the good may owe to others, they themselves must in the very nature of things be their own best helpers.

In an attempt to facilitate this 'healing' process, psychology practitioners actively produce an array of 'self-help' material for individuals to engage with, more especially outside of the therapist's office which offers a perceived privacy (Cherry 2008). Herewith have we witnessed the vigorous emergence of tumultuous varieties of self-help media texts, such as, for instance, the proliferation of self-help discourses on television, the internet (through websites and webcasts), in autobiographical books, in celebrity interviews (disseminated to large audiences), in magazines and newspapers, radio shows, psychology-related books and texts, movies, and documentaries (Rimke and Brock 2012).

In these media texts, a strong focus is taken on the individual and the responsibility is placed on the individual to 'take care' of the self. This is an element of individualism that Foucault's (1976; 1990) work also alludes to. Interestingly, as literature informs, with these self-help media texts, much of the individual's 'solutions' to whatever complaint, disorder, ailment,

weakness or condition they may have, are derived from an expert other who is entrusted by the individual with their process of ‘healing’:

Self-help ‘lessons’ appear to teach a subject to rely exclusively on oneself, simultaneously to rely exclusively on an expert other, and then also to become an expert in some aspect of one’s own self-hood.

Rimke (2000: 62)

What is also interesting in this regard, is how even when the individual has become this said ‘expert’ of her/his own self-hood, the role of the expert other by no means becomes irrelevant in the self-help process. As media consumers, individuals thus find themselves continuously at the mercy of an array of mental health experts, self-help gurus, among others, who dispense psychological advice for their consumption (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Ruscio and Beyerstein 2010: xii)

All the while, consumption of self-help material carries a strong element of ‘choice’ and agency. In some way, the individual is made to feel that they are given the autonomy to either engage with this material or not, and this places a sense of responsibility on the self to consciously make the decision to ‘improve’ by seeking assistance from an expert other. Rimke (2000) notes thus, that self-help is an activity accepted to be voluntary and individualistic. It is the very notions of inherent choice, autonomy and freedom that self-help relies upon to promote the principle of individuality in the process of self-modification and ‘improvement’ (Rimke 2000).

Gill (2009: 357), in a study exploring sex and relationship advice in a popular UK women’s magazine - *Glamour*, introduces us to an interesting phenomenon she coins the ‘men-ology’ repertoire which she outlines as being utilised by magazines of this nature to ‘empower’ readers in as far as “constructing a lovable persona, learning to read men, and paying attention to their sexual and emotional needs” is concerned. The women reading this magazine are encouraged to constantly ‘study’ and ‘learn’ effective ways to help ‘transform’ them into well-informed selves that can successfully ‘understand’ men, know how to please them, and at the same time take full responsibility for managing the emotional relationships they (women) have with the men in their lives (Gill 2009). This article makes distinct mention of how ‘expert’ discourses take precedence in these texts wherein advice “is dished out by counsellors, sex therapists and authors of self-help books” (Gill 2009: 354).

Notions of self-modification and self-improvement are linked to a key aspect of the psychological environment: the practice of therapy. A therapy session is broadly defined as a

process focused on assisting an individual in healing and learning further constructive ways (self-help techniques) of dealing with the problems or issues within their lives (Grohol 2013). Although robust traces of this process being a private affair between therapist and ‘client’ exist in various psychological literatures, an evident movement of this therapeutic practise from the privacy of the therapist’s office into the public domain for the consumption of any individual (with means of access) in the public, has surfaced within modern society.

Having become a sprawling network of everyday sources of information about human behaviour, the self-help media environment has become a strikingly successful industry within numerous markets across the world (Rimke and Brock 2012). Self-help themed published books very often make the ‘best-seller’ lists in leading global economies such as the United States and the United Kingdom. This, Cherry (2008: 337) notes, has been the case for over ‘70 years’. Consider, for instance, books such as *The Secret* (Rhonda Byrne), *23 Anti-Procrastination Habits* (S. J. Scott), *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Dale Carnegie), and *The Power of Positive Thinking: 10 Traits for Maximum Results* (Dr. Norman Vincent Peale); which have all had a run as best-selling books on a global scale (full lists available on <http://www.amazon.com/Best-Sellers-Books-Self-Help>). These texts continue to flourish as more and more individuals are exposed to them on a daily basis. Additionally, with some access to these self-help media texts being readily available online, “those who prefer their psychological advice for free, there’s no end of it on the Web” (Lilienfeld et al 2010: xii).

The media, in their key capacity as transporters of information, entertainment and education (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler 2012), are playing a crucial role in the devoted dissemination of psychological information to mass segments of society. This is largely achieved through the publication and production of psychology-related texts which may come in the form of, re-emphasizing the ones discussed above, self-help books (Cherry 2008), and advice columns as features in popular magazines, as well as similar advice features and segments within the broadcast media spheres of radio and television programs.

As forerunners of cultural dissemination, media have paved the way for the self-help book, for instance, to be “recognised as an icon of popular culture; it is, in effect, popular culture itself” (Cherry 2008: 337). These literatures are prevalent across a myriad of spheres of cultural life, including, among others, the marketplace, the home, relationships, health and illness, as well as recreation (Cherry 2008). A random visit to a close-by bookstore would, more often than not, reveal to a person innumerable varieties of psychological literature based on popular

psychological discourses pertaining to “self-help, relationships, recovery, and addiction books that serve up generous portions of advice for steering our path along life’s rocky road” (Lilienfeld, et al 2010: xii).

Foucault’s works focused on ‘caring’ for the self in which he highlights how techniques of self-fulfilment are deployed by human beings with the aim of facilitating a process towards developing a ‘healthy’ self-image (Foucault 1984; 1990a; 1990b). Literature cited in this chapter outlining ideas of a preoccupation with the self and the deployment of psychology in this regard, largely including Rimke’s (2000) work and, to an extent, Garman’s (2006) contribution; provide contemporary accounts of Foucault’s classic studies. These current accounts are based within Foucauldian frameworks and a similar attempt is made in this thesis through the use of studies such as the one’s done by Rimke (2000); Garman (2006) and Rimke & Brock (2012) which are theoretically based on the works of Foucault. These scholarly contributions I deploy as key conceptual lenses through which I specifically explore the empirical data collected from conversations with ten study participants; seeking to extract ways in which these individuals discursively present themselves and their own perceptions of well-being. The main claim emphasised and adopted is Foucault’s (1984; cited in Rimke 2000: 61) observation that, humans, “[...] in the name of psychological science we seek fulfilment.”

Tensions between the self and one’s “true” self provide modern subjects the opportunity to engage in what Foucault (1990a) broadly refers to as confessional practices as earlier discussed. Through the adoption of psychological sciences, which promote confession (to oneself and often to an expert other), human beings will attempt at seeking this ‘true’ self even if it means baring the inconsistencies that one regards as secret. As noted in chapter two, the media genre of self-help manages to successfully incorporate this confessional element which is imposed on the ‘self-helper’ in ways that promote notions of self-examination as being subtle techniques towards self-fulfilment (Rimke 2000). Caring for the self involves a conscious decision to actively engage in the act of confessing one’s perceived “ethical incompleteness,” and often even one’s lack of ethical substance (Miller & McHoul 1998: 129).

Literature examining the idea of caring for the self, emphasizes the need to ‘know’ oneself well enough to succeed in this quest (Foucault 1976). “Knowing oneself entails a kind of rule-governed conduct which advances the care of the self and which is intimately connected to the search for the ‘good life’” (Rimke 2000: 69). The self-help text is a strong driver towards this ‘good life’. Foucault (1988) further outlines that within this tradition of self-help, self-

examination provides one with worthy self-knowledge deemed vital for self-fulfilment. This occurs through a process wherein the ‘truth’ about the self is superimposed through memory; most often by memorising the ‘rules’ of self-regulation (Foucault 1988: 43), and aiming towards mastering these rules and regulations throughout the course of life. This is a life that expects of the individual to know who they are and how that knowledge of the self (identity) shapes their interaction with other identities in their immediate or distant environments. This is a theoretical observation that validates a need for an exploration of theoretical and conceptual contributions in the academy around identity – and in line with this dissertation’s focus – a particular focus on the conceptualisation of the concept in South Africa as will be referred to in the analysis of data collected from conversations with the South Africans participating in this research.

Identity in South Africa

When it comes to identity, South African society presents a noteworthy case that has been eagerly evaluated by many academic commentators. In this section of the chapter, I seek to briefly sketch out some of the key scholarly contributions that speak to identity construction in South Africa: with a focus on both the collective identity and the influence thereof on individual identity formation, as well as the media’s argued role in this process.

Identity, as a concept, is defined at the level of the person as well as at the level of the collective. As an indication of both personhood and collectiveness, identity makes reference to forms of individual personhood or self-image as well as to the collective self-image shared by the members of social groups and communities (Rousse 1995). As an indication of personhood on the individual level, identity can be understood to refer to the markers of individuality and uniqueness that differentiates the person from other people; as well as at the same time – when looking at the notion as a collective definition – referring to the sameness or continuity of the self across space and time (Zegeye & Harris 2003).

Discourse pertaining to the concept of national (collective) identity has been characterised by a myriad of opposing opinions over the years. Defining the concept of national identity, Baines (1998) notes, has always had competing configurations; that is to say, scholars and academic commentators have not always reached common ground in as far as settling for a ‘universal’ definition is concerned. For the purposes of this paper, a descriptive definition of this concept from Kolakowski (1995) cited in Wodak et al (2009: 26) deployed. National identity, here, is

seen as the identity adopted by individuals in a nation due to their historical or ‘collective’ memory regarding their nation.

The content of this collective memory may be completely true, partly true, or merely imagined (Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl, and Liebhart 2009: 26). Nonetheless, the mere existence of this historical memory is noted to be the major driving force behind the construction of a national identity. In line with this definition, the formation of a post-apartheid South African national identity is also firmly rooted within the existence of a strong collective memory of the country’s history. Notice my use of the term ‘constructed’ when speaking to the idea of developing or forming identities. This is in line with an approach that has become popularly adopted within the social sciences. In summary, Neville Alexander (2006) stipulates that the common approach within the social sciences today is that social as well as individual identities are, in fact, constructed and not ‘given.’

In South Africa, following the inception of democracy, the country was faced with a quest for a ‘new’ national identity. The African National Congress (ANC) government under the leadership of the first democratically-elected president Nelson Mandela has vigorously encouraged the ritual celebration of the ‘rainbow nation’ among citizens. This metaphor is usually credited to Nobel peace laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Bornman 2005; Baines 1998; Reddy 1997). Tutu is closely associated in the minds of the public with the process of reconciliation and nation-building, and had appeared in a series of television slots during which he spoke about the ‘rainbow people of God’ (Baines 1998).

This ‘rainbow nation’ metaphor is said to both inform and reinforce the vision of nation-building within South Africa (Goodman 2006). The term, at a basic level, highlights the coming together of people of different races, ethnicities, and cultures, to name but a few, as one nation (Bornman 2005). South Africa’s diverse population have adopted this metaphor as a symbol of national unity, as a result. Together with the rainbow metaphor, there are other symbols of the new dispensation such as the new national flag and the new national anthem which was modified to include more South African languages. Additionally, the new national anthem - which has further been revised through the integration of part of the old national anthem titled *Die stem van Suid-Afrika* – has also become quite pervasive at national and international events. These symbols strongly became the reflections of an expectation of national unity and a common South African identity (Habib 1997).

The construction of identities, as Stuart Hall (1997) notes, relies on an interplay of discursive resources involving history, language as well as culture among others. This stands to emphasize how identities are a process of becoming rather than being; that is to say, identity is indeed not a given but a construction instead. Storey and Turner's (1999: 210) approach further supports this frame of reference in line with Hall that history, context and routines of everyday life (culture) form part of the key aspects in this "symbolic project" that is the construction of the self. Literature related herewith paint a picture of self-identity as far from being one-dimensional. Instead, identity development is viewed as a process symbolised by a mat or scarf interwoven with various 'threads' that range from gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and many other aspects (Nebe 2012).

Along with this multifaceted veracity of identity, Krueger (2010) writes of identity as a concept which, over time within scholarship, shifted from being viewed as a product borne from a stagnant set of traditions, cultural and communal beliefs; to being viewed as an impermanent, instable construct. This impermanency renders identity as in a continuous state of flux (Zegeye & Harris 2003).

Gauntlett (2008) writes of the existence of several other aspects which individuals in modern society deploy to aid in their construction of an identity. These aspects, referred to as 'other axis of identity', are key in helping us understand the complex nature of identity formation and informs us of a much broader sense of imagining the process of developing and carving an individual identity. So informs Gauntlett (2008: 15):

Identities, of course, are complex constructions, and gender is only one part of an individual's sense of self. Ethnicity is obviously an important aspect of identity, and like gender may be felt to be more or less central to self-identity by each individual, or might be made significant by external social circumstances (such as a racist regime or community). Other much discussed axes of identity include class, age, disability and sexuality. In addition, a range of other factors may contribute to a sense of identity, such as education, urban or rural residency, cultural background, access to transportation and communication, criminal record, persecution or refugee status

It is thus helpful to think of identity as a complex, ever-changing social construct that involves intricate internal and external influences of which the media – through their dissemination of discourse-laden material – are forerunners.

Contemporary academic commentary exploring identity in post-apartheid South Africa take on an approach bound, to a great extent, to the idea that memory (expressed also as history when

considering Hall's contributions above) plays a key role in facilitating identity formation. Mda (2002) argues explicitly that identity may not be constructed at the expense of memory as we are, in fact, products of the past that is carried by a memory still lingering today. Identity formation in the aftermath of apartheid, segregation and racism is said to happen in the shadow of historical trauma. This historical trauma (which I have explored more closely in chapter two) is argued to have a hand in how identities are formed in post-apartheid. As Nebe (2012: 156) stipulates:

The democratic transition had failed to acknowledge the full extent of the historical trauma of racism and division within the country, and that this failure had begun to have a profoundly negative impact on the identities of a new, young generation.

The media, through a popularised culture of remembrance; play a defining role in the enhancement and perpetuation of the country's historical memory which, in effect, is exposed to the younger generation citizens – descendants of various of the racial groups – who were not directly present in the state of affairs under the apartheid regime. It is through these moments of remembrance in the form of, for instance, television media's mass dissemination of documentaries and films about the 'struggle' faced, to a significant extent, by black South Africans (and those of other races who stood in solidarity with them) that the identities of the current generation is partly constructed. Herein, we witness, the widespread deployment of socio-politically embedded notions such as "previously disadvantaged" and – although mostly imposed through discursive 'force' – white identities being tied to ideas of 'privilege.' This is just one way in which the media are directly involved in the construction of individual and social (collective) identities.

Performing the Self: Identity and 'Fitting In'

The idea of a 'collective identity' as explored above points to an incorporation of a sense of 'us' and 'them' determined along varying lines of, for instance, race, language and culture among other things. As a member of the 'us' group, an individual is likely to possess attributes that enhance this differentiation between an 'us' and a 'them'; they presumably also behave and socially carry themselves as expected and collectively affirmed by all the 'insiders.' These collective identities are also not permanent and should be understood as not being fixed but rather as being in constant flux (Zegeye & Harris 2003). Even so, a desire to closely align the self with members of the 'inside' collective may pose as motivation enough to strive to always fit in. Fitting in, one imagines, will be determined by the nature of interaction between the self and others in close proximity.

A classic body of work by Sociologist Erving Goffman exposes his approach to human interaction. In essence, Goffman (1959) argues for the world as a stage. Because humans are not passive but knowledgeable and active beings, we possess information that accounts for the decisions we make with regards to how we behave in various settings. 'Setting', as explained by Goffman (1959: 32-33), refers to the idea of a setting in the form of a performance background encompassing elements such as physical layout, décor and furnisher. He suggests:

First, there is the 'setting', involving furnisher, décor, physical layout and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it. A setting tends to stay put, geographically speaking, so that those who would use a particular setting as part of their performance cannot begin their act until they have brought themselves to the appropriate place and must terminate their performance when they leave it.

In essence, we take on a specific performance which we deem appropriate for the 'audience' (in this case, members of a social category we wish to be accepted in) within the setting we find ourselves. This process of devising our own conduct relies on oneself. However, there is no turning a blind eye to the existence of external influences. There are external factors responsible for enhancing or, perhaps, facilitating our interactional behaviour with others. These influences vary but are inclusive of a variety of things such as stereotypes that drive how 'insiders' mark one another's membership in particular social categories; which, in effect, promotes the development of certain social identities.

Social identities are crucial as they provide the individual with an opportunity to 'belong' and fit in to social categories deemed desirable to them. However, certain constraints may hinder the successful incorporation of an individual into certain social categories. One such constraint occurs in the form of stigma. The notion of stigma as approached by Goffman (1963) informs of the manner in which society is organised in ways that see human beings often drawing on mental categories that determine their attribution of certain characteristics perceived to be 'ordinary' or natural for the members of a particular social category on to, for instance, a stranger who initially occupies a new social collective. If the stranger in question, after a virtual process of assessment by insiders using stereotypical signposts as a guide, is found to not fit the 'natural' or ordinary characteristics known to be carried by members of the social category; the stranger is immediately reduced in these peoples' minds "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one. Such an attribute is a stigma" (Goffman 1963: 12). As a potential to take on the role of a 'stranger' at some or other time in one's life through 'invading' novel social groupings, human beings often strive to avoid the chances of being stigmatised by the

people they initially come into contact with. In attempt to ‘dodge’ this potentially crippling effect, striving to fit in by any means becomes a key focus point in this regard.

Class Identity

With South Africa’s history of racial and socio-economic segregation, many citizens not of the white race were disallowed the opportunity to, engage in the consumption of certain cultural products or merely could not afford the economic means for participation in the consumption of these products (Bornman 2005). The dispensation of democracy saw more people within black populations in the country engaging in the consumption of an array of cultural products as opportunities for, to take an example, ‘black economic empowerment became’ vastly available (Southall 2004). And although a highly contested phenomenon (an academic area which this paper does not delve into), the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) project is potentially playing a key role in “creating a prosperity-making, ‘patriotic’ bourgeoisie” in South Africa (Southall 2004: 313). Often theorised as the emerging black middle class, these developments make for thought-provoking scholarly interrogation. Does this socio-economic label, then, have any implications on the consumption patterns of black South Africans in post-apartheid?

Class in South Africa has made for significant scholarly attention over the years. Numerous academics have taken it upon themselves to examine issues of class within this country, and a great deal of these studies coming across as having been inspired by South Africa’s rich political and socio-economic history (see Cobley 1990; Southall 2014; Southall 2004; Alexander, Ceruti, Motseke, Phadi & Wale 2013). Mosa Phadi (2011), in a documentary titled ‘*Phakathi: Soweto’s Middling Class*’ manages to investigate peoples’ self-perceptions of class identity within South Africa’s largest residential area, Soweto. In this study, the researchers make some discoveries about peoples’ perceptions of their positions in the economic class structure within the country. Phadi (2011) reports, as part of the findings, that in a large representative survey of adults living in Soweto, it was discovered that 66% of Sowetans consider themselves as middle-class (Alexander, Ceruti, Motseke, Phadi & Wale 2013).

A phenomenon still strongly contested in a myriad of academic literatures, the notion of middle-class has been reported in certain literature as linked, in some way, to ‘affordability’ (Iqani 2015). Alexander (et al 2013) helpfully summarise that lower, middle and upper class distinctions were based, to a large extent, on the concept of affordability. This concept is explained to have been derived from prominent perceptions noted to link identity with

categories of employment (Alexander et al 2013: 3). ‘Affordability’ and class have received a significant degree of academic attention and continues to be investigated in academic circles (Visagie 2011; Alexander et al 2013; Phadi & Ceruti 2013; Mabandla 2013; Iqani 2015). The connection drawn between the notions of consumption and class is noteworthy in the academy illustrating how scholars are keen in exploring the influence of these notions on each other. That is to say, how does consumption influence class positioning and, equally as important, how does class position influence consumption? A question I deem pertinent in guiding my own study into the consumption patterns of a selected number of study participants of self-help media texts in South Africa today.

In the documentary earlier referred to, a close focus is taken on five main respondents of which three are professionally employed and one is a self-employed refrigerator repair man. The group of participants consists of a qualified graphic designer, a principal/owner of two nursing schools, a museum tour guide, as well as an unemployed stay-at-home shack dweller. What is striking about this study is the response given by all respondents to the question: ‘what class do you consider yourself?’ All of the study participants in question utter a confident, ‘I consider myself to be a middle-class’ (Phadi 2011).

It is intriguing how the consumption patterns of the five research participants in Phadi’s (2011) documentary differ vastly irrespective of their own self-perceptions of class identity. Mpho Hilda Makhene, the owner and principal of two nursing schools in Johannesburg, makes no secret of her expensive tastes (afforded to her by her proclaimed middle-class status) as she is noted to confess in the documentary that she only prefers purchasing expensive furniture which sometimes gets specially ordered for her by her favourite furniture suppliers. Makhene goes on to share with the researcher, at the time that the documentary was shot, that she will soon be buying her dream *Mercedes Benz*. This occurrence paints a picture of how self-perceptions of class are popularly married to affordability (Phadi & Ceruti 2013; Phadi 2011).

‘Affordability’, income, and occupation have remained key aspects of analysis when it comes to the conceptualisation of this ‘emerging black middle class’ in South Africa. Numerous studies attempting at locating a clearly defined black middle class in post-apartheid South Africa have often, so notes Mabandla (2013: 1), concentrated on “income/occupation as the main determinants of middle class location”. For instance, a Rivero, du Toit and Kotze (2003) study on middle class status in democratic South Africa manages to solely base their criterion for identifying ‘middle-classness’ on the pillar of occupation. As a result, the project analyses

the advances black South Africans (between 1994 and 2000) made in managerial and professional categories in its attempt to define the black middle class status (Rivero et al 2003).

Mabandla (2013) takes a different route of analysis in his attempt to interrogate the conceptualisation of the black middle class status in South Africa. The piece takes to explore the role of land ownership in the emergence of a black middle class in Mthatha; located in South Africa's Eastern Cape Province. The study provides an opportunity to look at the black middle class label through a uniquely shaded lens of a more durable asset such as land – an area of inquiry least often, if ever, considered in the conceptualisation of the emergence of a South African black middle class. Possession of 'disposable' income seems to be a prominent defining feature in literature on the new black middle class in South Africa. A highly publicised market-based research project in the form of the *Unilever* (2007) 'Black Diamonds Study' which takes a specific interest in the consumption patterns of black professionals, and emphasising these individuals' affluence purely based on income and black spending power (Mabandla 2013); stands as one such example. In addition, also consider the notion of the 'retail affluent middle class'; made prominent by major local investment companies and life insurance houses such as *Old Mutual* and *Momentum*. The middle class label here, is highly consumption-based more than anything.

This approach to conceptualising the notion of the South African black middle class has been continuously 'promoted' through studies launched during the dispensation of democracy in South Africa. Crankshaw (1997) for instance, takes a particular focus on occupational class; further going on to provide a definition of the black middle class as those individuals who belong to managerial, semi-professional and professional, as well as routine white collar occupations. The study by Crankshaw (1997) places the growth of the black middle class in the occupational advancement of this racial group; where the main growth enhancing factors are outlined as located "within a context of changing apartheid policies and capitalist production processes" (Mabandla 2013: 29).

Without turning a blind eye to Mabandla's (2013) refreshing approach to conceptualising the black middle class in South Africa, this thesis aligns with the over-emphasised approach at viewing the black middle class in South Africa in which consumption patterns and possession of disposable income take precedence. These indicators of class positioning, it is assumed, inform the deployment of the label by laypersons with no particular conceptual framework with respect to the label. And in evaluating the works of, for instance, Phadi (2011) and Iqani (2015)

one picks up interesting ways which, perhaps even indirectly, illustrate that the deployment of the concept bears influence on the socio-cultural mindset of the individual adopting it. It is the contents of these mind-sets (influenced by self-perceptions of class positioning) that this dissertation wishes to highlight if at all to emerge within conversations with the study participants. That is to say, how is the notion reflected on by participants – if at all – and how could these discursive referrals help us understand the deployment of this notion and its influence on the socio-cultural positioning of the participants in light of all facets of self-help consumption.

This chapter offers an engagement with literature that forms part of the paper's conceptual and theoretical framework. It explores the theorisation of confession, caring for the self by human subjects, self-management and identity. In many respects, this chapter has sought to draw on South African cases in point for further enhancement of the overall aim of this thesis; which is to investigate the consumption of self-help media texts by a selected group of black South Africans.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY

This study made use of qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Semi-structured, in-depth conversational interview sessions with ten research participants were the main method of data collection which I utilised for evidential support within the write-up of the findings, analysis and concluding chapters of this research paper. As a point of departure, however, it was crucial that the most appropriate candidates be identified and ultimately recruited for participation in this study. This chapter gives an outline of the methodological approach, data collection methods and process, as well as some of the challenges met during the data collection phase.

Qualitative Research

Due to the nature of this study and the type of research question(s) this paper set out to explore, a qualitative approach was appropriate and was thus deployed for the purposes of this research. Qualitative methods, according to Stokes (2003: 18) are usually largely based on the interpretation of the world according to certain concepts which are typically not given any numerical values. Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011) further emphasise the role of qualitative research as a methodology deployed for research. It is explained as a broad approach that grants the researcher the ability to examine, in detail, people's experiences. This, important to note, is achieved through the adoption of a specific set of methods such as, among others, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observation studies, content analysis and other visual methods (Hennink et al 2011: 9). A distinctive feature of the qualitative research approach is that it allows for the identification of issues from the perspective of the selected research participants; understanding the meanings, interpretations and reasoning for their behaviour. This highlighted feature adds to the reason why this particular research methodology was a choice for this dissertation.

Recruitment of study participants

In line with the aim of this research project, I only considered members of the black population while tailoring the recruitment methods for this study. I was particularly interested in recruiting a sample consisting of a minimum of ten to a maximum of fifteen participants in total as I believed that this was a solid number of people to engage with for the purposes of investigating and carving deeper understanding around the phenomenon in question. As an approach, I made use of my personal social media accounts (on which the majority of my connections there are, like myself, also of the black race) to seek research participants. As an active user of three

widely used social media platforms, namely, *Facebook*, *Twitter*, as well as *LinkedIn*. I went ahead and put up a detailed post on my *Facebook* timeline. Herein, I openly explained my research project and what it is about on an overall basis. It was following this that I requested interested individuals to make direct contact with me via e-mail to an account which I opened specifically for the purposes of this study.

The following extract is of the recruitment message I used on the social media platforms in question:

*Hello, Good people! I am in the process of writing a Media Studies Master's thesis under the supervision of Dr. M Iqani at the University of the Witwatersrand. At the moment, I am busy recruiting suitable participants for this research project. My thesis aims to investigate the consumption of self-help media texts; as well as what motivates people to participate in this culture of consumption which we may be able to see as a form of 'therapy'. I am particularly interested in exploring the participation of black South Africans in this culture of therapy, particularly through the consumption of self-help media texts. These media texts can range from print (self-help books, magazine advice columns) to broadcast (self-help inspired radio and TV shows, eg Relate, Forgive & Forget, Nyan'Nyan, Dr Phil, Dr Helgo Schomer on Redi Tlhabi's show, Dr Eve on Redi Tlhabi's show etc), as well as online media (self-help Youtube videos, online agony aunts etc). For the study, I would like to recruit 15 participants of the black race who are active consumers of self-help media. They'll be playing a key role in the study as the main 'evidential' contributors to inform the findings of this research project. If interested, or if you know someone that may be interested, kindly send a brief expression of interest to selfhelpmedia2014@gmail.com. You are also welcomed to use this e-mail address to request further details from me regarding the project and your potential role in it. Please note: prospective participants must be based around the Johannesburg/ Pretoria area (this is purely for logistical reasons and my ability to access people for face to face interviews). Thank you in advance. *Please Share this status with your Facebook friends* :) :)*

I, additionally, went on to post the same request on *LinkedIn* with the aim of attracting more potential research participants for my study. Again, asking all interested individuals to e-mail me details through which I could get into direct contact with them. Due to the limited amount of texting space one gets from *Twitter*, I found it would be beneficial for me to link my *Facebook* account to that of my *Twitter* account, and this made it possible for me to post a

hyperlink on *Twitter* which, when opened, automatically redirected the individual to the more thoroughly detailed *Facebook* post above.

Furthermore, having worked for an online and satellite radio station since February 2012, I had been gaining access to a considerable number of South African citizens who are regular listeners of the station. As part of its audience interaction approaches, the station has a *Facebook* and *Twitter* account with a high following. As a radio announcer on the station, I had been given administrative rights to these platforms and could communicate on these social media with the listeners. After firstly seeking formal approval from the station's management, I posted the same request for participants on the station's *Facebook* page with the goal of further accessing potential research participants to form part of the interview process adopted for data collection purposes.

Along with all the above outlined participant recruitment initiatives, I also used e-mail communication to seek potential participants. By adopting a snowball technique, I sent out an e-mail to my personal contacts of the black race. In this e-mail, I requested the recipients to also send the e-mail on to individuals on their personal contact lists, and thus initiate a snowball effect. This all happened alongside strong word of mouth recruitment techniques by myself as a researcher and full time Master's student within the University of the Witwatersrand; which in itself I had hoped would produce several potential participants for this study; ranging from students to staff members.

Recruitment Challenges

The above discussed recruitment efforts were met with certain drawbacks with regards to the response level of individuals interested and also competent (based on their engagement with self-help media texts) enough to be considered for participation in this research project. I received a limited amount of responses on both my social media as well as the e-mail account set up for recruitment purposes. Overall, a total of five individuals genuinely interested in participating expressed this to me on these platforms. What became a further hindrance for two of the five individuals was the fact that they were based outside of the greater Johannesburg/Tshwane areas; which would make it difficult for me to request them to travel long distances for the interview session. My own limited funds could not allow me to travel long distances to meet up with these interested individuals.

Faced with this challenge, I began to depend heavily on my word of mouth efforts and this, over the space of three weeks, assisted in me spreading the word to potential participants. A noteworthy reaction resulted from this. From the initial total of three definitely-qualifying research participants, I managed to have them further spread the word to their circles of friends whom they knew were, just as them, avid consumers of media texts of a self-help nature. This assisted greatly with me ending up with a reliable total of ten active consumers of self-help media texts – I introduce them below. At this stage, I could proceed with the second phase of the research process: organising interview sessions with selected participants.

The Study Participants

Name	Age	Gender	Bio
Ayanda	23	Female	Ayanda is a young professional working in the media and advertising industry as a media strategist for numerous global brands. She is passionate about her job and is driven by the outcome of her efforts in her role as a media strategist.
Breeze	27	Female	Breeze, at the time of interview, was in between jobs and seeking new employment. She is a young lady from the Eastern Cape Province who resides in Johannesburg. Breeze is a degree-holding candidate in the Bio-Chemical sciences but has not taken to professionally practice within this arena.
Butterfly	23	Female	Working as a strategic planner at a creative advertising agency in the North of Johannesburg, Butterfly – in her early twenties – is bubbly, sociable and loves to read. She holds a university degree and working towards a postgraduate qualification in the field of media and communications.
Dineo	21	Female	Dineo is a recent university graduate who, at the time of interviews, had just landed her very first internship within the media industry at one of Gauteng's well-known media agencies. She's "the kind of person whose goals and ambitions are forever changing with time as I am always bettering myself."

Faith	23	Female	This participant, at the time of interview for this project, was in the process of completing her degree in pharmacy while working part-time as a pharmacist's assistant in a local hospital. She considers herself a "foodie" with ambitions to change the South African health services system some day.
Mandy	21	Female	Completing her honours degree in journalism, Mandy is a young lady who possesses a great interest in media and communications. She shares that her "goals are to ultimately be working in the communications sector – a nice comfy job in parliament would be great!"
Mo	25	Male	Mo, a young professional, works as a middle school educator at an interracial school in a Johannesburg suburb. He says he loves going after what he wants in life – be it a prestigious position, academic achievement and the realisation of contributing to social change among gay and lesbian people in and around his immediate environment.
Muzi	25	Male	Muzi is an aspiring musician, film director and writer who finds joy in the performing arts sphere. He is an avid reader and strives to always be in a state of 'consciousness' about everything happening around him. He often looks to certain literary material to assist in his plight to be as ever-conscious as he wishes.
Nonny	22	Female	She, at the time of interviews, was completing her Bachelor of Science degree at the University of the Witwatersrand. Nonny is an avid music lover and regularly tours the continent as part of a choral music choir from Swaziland.
Sisana	24	Female	This postgraduate candidate enjoys being healthy and in charge of her fitness and body. Her key goals and ambitions are "to build a significant life, for now at this age I may not be too sure if I want a family but one thing I know is that I want to build a life of significance and pave the way for those that come after me."

Interviews

The interviews were set out in the form of deep dialogues guided by semi-structured questions that accompanied more questions as these emerged within the interview sessions. In these sessions, the aim was to extract information in line with the research questions this paper had interest in exploring answers to.

Interviews, as research techniques, are noted by Stokes (2003: 114) to be useful means by which we can use individuals as sources of evidence in our research. The interview method in media and cultural studies research enables us a great deal to discover people's ideas, opinions, and attitudes concerning certain phenomena (Stokes 2003: 114). It is noted to be such a strong method that it is possible to deploy as the primary research method of an entire study, or it may alternatively just be utilised as a means to gaining background information about whatever is being studied. Due to its beneficial significance within this study, the interview method posed as an intellectually beneficial technique to deploy. Below is a brief overview of the interview guide that was drawn from for this study. See full interview guide labelled and attached as appendix A.

All interviews were voice recorded and later transcribed by myself to create interview transcripts for analysis. All collected interview data was digitally stored on a password-protected laptop to which only I have the unlocking password. Two documents of informed consent were created for the purposes of this study. Prior to each individual interview session, participants were requested to read and sign these documents; of which one is an audio-recording consent form to ensure recording of in-depth interviews. The other is a general consent form illustrating participants' voluntary participation in the study after having read the complete participants information sheet. The interview sessions proceeded in the form of one-on-one, private sessions between researcher and participant. All participants were assured complete anonymity and informed that they will be referred to by the use of unique pseudonyms. I ensured that I again made it clear to all selected participants that they had the right to drop out of the study at any point without having to face any unwelcomed consequences.

These interview sessions resulted in a combined overall of more than seven recorded hours of interviews that were transcribed; resulting in a total of 70 pages of data that I used throughout the process of analysis in line with the aims of this thesis.

Interview Guide

I understood the pertinence for a qualitative research study of this nature that the interview questions needed to be open-ended and engaging to ensure extensive and insightful responses from interviewees (Pope and Mays 2006). The aim of these in-depth interview sessions with the selected research participants was to get a clearer sense of the participants' consumption patterns and the reasons behind this. The data collected from these interviews, played a significant role in informing the findings of this thesis. The interview sessions were guided by semi-structured questions. This was so that, as the researcher, I was able to remain within the subject of my questions aimed at elucidating useful information from the participants. Particular care was taken to remain as open-ended and general in my phrasing of the questions. This was mainly to avoid posing leading questions to the research participants and thus directing their responses in a direction desirable to me. The questions, as evident in the attached interview guide (appendix A), strove to be as open-ended as possible.

The interview session comprised of two parts. The first part aimed to gain more insights into the reasons why the research participants choose to consume self-help media material as well as how they go about doing this. The second part of the session was directed at exploring how the participants' perceived these media texts they so avidly consume and what this potentially says about their self-identities in relation to the people directly featured on these self-help media forms.

In line with this latter intention, I played a brief sound clip of a radio podcast on which audience members of *The Redi Tlhabi Show* on Talk Radio 702 were engaging in psychotherapeutic, psychosocial as well as psychosexual self-help by calling in and publicly confessing certain details around the issues they claim to be seeking assistance for. This was followed by a discussion into the research participant's thoughts and feelings around what they had heard on these radio podcasts. The chosen podcasts were a decision I instinctively took mainly due to the subject matter covered within the podcast. I found, after reviewing a fair amount of downloaded podcasts, that the podcasts eventually chosen for use in interview sessions for this study contained a variety of subject matter such as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and psychosexual issues around masturbation and its socio-cultural dimensions. I followed a presumption I held that this would allow for a broader discussion with the study participants about the podcast as the content therein pointed to a variety of issues ranging from sex, sexuality, personal, emotional and mental development. The chosen sound clip further served

in granting an evidentiary point of departure into one of the paper's conceptual frameworks of exploring and evaluating how confession and testimony are perceived and discursively approached by the interview participants as audiences of self-help media.

Ethical considerations

In line with research standards and regulations, it was vital that I applied for ethical clearance from the relevant department in the university. In this instance, the application was made to the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC Non-Medical) at the University of the Witwatersrand. Due to the fact that this research project involved a number of human participants, I was expected to submit an ethics clearance application to ensure that this research project does not jeopardise any of the potential participants. Once an ethics clearance certificate was granted, it was hereafter that I could start with the actual recruitment of participants, which ultimately lead to the data collection process.

Data Analysis

To analyse all collected data, a discourse analysis approach was deployed in order to compile and develop a comprehensive discussion of the findings made by this paper. This was done with the aim of providing the reader with a comprehensive response to the questions that this thesis set out to explore possible answers to. The analysis of data collected was guided by themes relating to the paper's two main questions. Therefore, an analysis of discourse pertaining to the reasons why participants consume self-help media texts was deployed.

'Thematic' Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis as a method of data analysis is the study of language in use. This dissertation embarked largely on what Gee (2014: 8-10) explains to be a 'descriptive' approach to discourse analysis. I was much more interested in exploring the 'content' of the language used within the interview sessions. I interrogated the data by seeking to particularly carve and depict issues and themes regarding the conversations shared between myself and the participants. This, I found, rendered my approach closely in line with a 'thematic' discourse analysis which Braun and Clarke (2006: 81) describe as "a method for identifying, analysis, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail". In some parts of the analysis, the reader shall witness an adoption of a more 'critical' discourse analysis where this paper located language usage within socio-political frameworks related to

how the study participants carved an understanding of the world. This, nonetheless, occurred in minimal but noteworthy instances.

My deployment of a thematic analysis was in line with realist or essentialist approaches (Braun & Clarke 2006) in that I engaged in the reporting of experiences, meaning and realities of the study participants in order to elucidate deeper meaning around the social phenomenon I claim self-help to be and the consumption thereof by the selected interviewees. My choice of method was further motivated by the scholarly observation that “thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (Braun & Clarke 2006: 78). Guided by the paper’s theoretical framework, I was particularly interested in how confession, consumption, identity, care for the self and self-help were talked about. This had a noteworthy bearing in the structure and content of the analytic chapters to follow.

These participants were all fairly interactive during the interview sessions – some more so than others. I found that some of the participants were more expressive and ‘creative’ in their responses which granted me more ‘meaty’ data to draw from for the purposes of this dissertation. As a result, the reader might come across instances in the analytic chapters where certain participants’ voices emerge more heavily than others. This is in no way reflective of a favouring of particular voices over others on the part of the researcher, which is why I find it crucial to state this upfront. The empirically and evidentiary helpfulness of respondents’ utterances qualified them being highlighted and theorised by the author.

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach deployed to assist in guiding the dissertation’s investigation into the observations particularly with respect to the insights shared by ten active consumers of self-help. The chapters to follow will be focusing on providing an analytic assessment of key findings which, I must emphasise, are not aimed at being generalised to the entire South African population. Such an ambition may not be fulfilled by the methodological approach I deploy in this study. It is, however, an objective of this thesis to grant a deeper understanding of some of the key issues around the exercise of sourcing and consuming self-help media.

CHAPTER FIVE: SELF-HELP MEDIA CONSUMPTION: EXPLORING THE ‘WHY?’ AND THE ‘HOW?’

This chapter embarks on an exploration of the key discursive themes to have emerged from the interviews with the study participants. Its main aim is to expose the reader to insights to have emerged from interviews with the individuals selected to participate in this research project. The themes identified and explored include the consumption of self-help as a ‘quick fix’ to problems, self-help as a means of ‘finding’ and ‘knowing’ the self, self-help as a guiding tool towards fitting into society, as well as an exploration of preferences with regards to engaging or not engaging in public self-help through mediated therapy. This chapter shall expose a lauding of the self-help media text which is expressed to have become a phenomenon that is a much needed aspect in a society said to be plagued with various social ills. So highly praised are these texts that, as one particular participant expresses, they are one of the best things that could have ever happened in the twenty first century. Even so, much more complex and intricate issues are at play and I take to highlight and put them into dialogue with related theoretical contributions as well as the important voices that are the ten interview participants of this study.

Through a discussion of a number of identified sub-themes within the broader themes of self-help, media and consumption, this chapter makes analytic arguments in its attempt to elucidate what self-help media consumption means for the black citizens (selected study participants) in post-apartheid South Africa. In the chapter, an observation that self-help media consumption makes for a complex practise is apparent. At play here, I begin to argue and extend this argument into chapter six, are intricate issues of private and public expressed differently by the individuals interviewed. Seemingly the case here is a desire by these individuals for an affordable (or even freely accessible) private yet public space that, at the same time, will provide a strong sense of camaraderie and collective striving towards a perfection evidently sought for.

The ‘Quick Fix’: Self-help at My Fingertips

Seeking, accessing and consuming media texts of a self-help nature takes on a noteworthy pattern for the participants interviewed for this study. There are two mediums through which access to self-help texts is prevalently gained. When queried about their preferred and accustomed media platforms through which to access self-help texts, the respondents point to the Internet as well as, to a large extent, books themed around the practice of self-help. It is the Internet that is more strongly lauded as it is said to allow ‘easy’ and quick access to the array of self-help media material that these participants may require at particular points in time.

Butterfly (Interview December, 2014) who has gone as far as to subscribe to an online community called *Goodreads*, shares that this has allowed her access to self-help topics of differing themes which she sources when the need arises. She describes *Goodreads* as “[...] an online platform. It’s like they take quotes from books and movies so there you’d literally go on a search tab and if you want to read about something on a certain topic like you’d search about, I don’t know, health; you’d get all these quotes about health. So, it’s all those books and *Goodreads*, and also conversations with my friends.” Similarly for Ayanda (Interview February, 2015), the Internet’s allowance for broad accessibility renders it a preferential media platform from which to source self-help themed material. She shares that this opportunity of easy and anytime access “gives me access to amazing people; Maya Angelou, Joyce Meyer, all these different people. Even normal everyday people who write for *Huffington Post* or *Tiny Buudha*; that’s a spiritual blog I used to read a lot, yeah. So, it makes everything accessible which is what I appreciate.”

Sisana (Interview November, 2014) expresses the same appreciation for the online media platform of Google which, she is of the opinion, is a platform that carries anything a person may find themselves in need of. She shares her viewpoint in the following words: “[...] there’s anything on Google, like how to keep yourself interested in whatnot. In *Cosmo* (*Cosmopolitan* magazine) we had a how to hook a guy, you know; getting close...so I’m thinking if you can Google that line, you can also find it, yeah. Like, there’s a lot of self-help.” Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) reaffirms this viewpoint: “you can almost find anything; I’m not joking, *anything* on Google. Anything about what to do when in certain situations” (emphasis my own).

For Breeze (Interview November, 2014), alongside books, the Internet also comes up as one of the preferred platforms of access to texts of a self-help nature. She shares:

Information is vast. So, being able to access the internet readily on your cell phone is one of the ways, and I read a lot. I read a lot of books so I'm more inclined, actually, to reading self-help and developmental books as opposed to novels [...]

Having information readily available for anytime consumption places the Internet in this favourable position with respondents interviewed. Being able to engage in anytime, unscheduled consumption of self-help media via the internet renders this a platform which, I argue, results in a situation where self-help can be considered to be at the user's fingertips. It is with the use of one's fingers that a person can type into an online "search tab", as Butterfly refers to it, the kinds of self-help media material required at a certain point in time. This capability is what attracts these participants to the Internet as a platform of access to media texts of a self-help kind. Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) goes as far as referring to the online search engine, Google, as a Doctor:

In moments when I don't know what to do, I refer to Dr Google; I Google everything. I know so many blogs for self-help. There are so many resources available. I hate being helpless, and you can almost find anything; I'm not joking, anything on Google.

This participant's comparison of the Google platform to a Doctor, connotes to a viewpoint that this online tool – much like a medical doctor – is able to bring about 'healing' to its consumer. This, then, not only places the self-help text at one's fingertips – as per my argument – but also constructs it as a tool to grant a 'quick fix' to the 'issues' that often lead individuals to seek self-help.

Faith's (Interview December, 2014) utterances, for instance, manages to capture this observation that due to the Internet's ability in providing platforms such as Google, anytime self-help consumption can supply a speedy resolution to one's difficulties or feelings of an undesirable nature. It is this elaborated response that encapsulates this paper's argument in this regard:

I don't know if this counts but every time I'm feeling off-ish, I literally go on Google and type motivational quotes. Yes, it counts hey. I don't know, like you can see here on my wall there's printed quotes that make up not to say the person that I am but the person that I'd like to be and sometimes I put them on my wall because I want to wake up... Sometimes a Bible verse even; from friends [...] I was lucky enough that I had a friend that walked in and out and so I'd have days when I'm feeling off and she'd just throw in a nice verse for me.

Faith's reference to feeling off-ish is what this paper regards as feelings of an undesirable nature that are most often difficult to overcome. It is during such, to borrow from Ayanda (Interview February, 2015), 'helpless' times, that self-help consumption via the Internet – at one's fingertips – can step in and provide the self-helper with instant assistance. This is something Nonny's (Interview November, 2014) utterances further illustrates: "[...]I was getting depressed sometimes because of school work so a friend of mine had said 'no, I've been watching this and it's helping me cope with the amount of school work that I have. How about you go and just type in online like how to be able to use your time efficiently'. So, for me it was one of those things whereby it was 'okay now I'm panicking, how can I deal with this?'" At the onset of 'panic', this participant was advised to source helpful media material online which evidently is utilised as guidance on how to cope.

The proliferations of new media forms have been gaining particular momentum in modern society. The internet, as is evident in the above discussion, holds a formidable place in society as a tool that fosters novel ways for the media to be successful in their role as a means of information, education and entertainment dissemination. This development has fostered the emergence of a myriad of ways for consumption to take place. Be that as it may, it is crucial that no blind eye be turned to the fact that access to the Internet and its praised benefits is not a reality for all citizens. Socio-economically in South Africa, many citizens – of which a significant number are of the black race – are excluded from enjoying the presumed benefits of media consumption through the Internet and are thus left at the margins of these consumption practices within which their black counterparts are actively participating. It is this observation that further widens the divide between citizens with access to new/digital media forms and those without. This occurrence has been theorised as the digital divide.

Pippa Norris explores the notion of the digital divide on three levels of analysis. In examining this phenomenon, Norris (2001) separates these levels of divide as the global, social as well as the democratic divide. The first form of digital divide – global divide – makes reference to the divergence of access to the Internet between developed and developing states. The social divide is explained to signify the gap between the information wealthy and poor in each nation; whereas the democratic divide is said to point to the "difference between those who do, and do not, use the panoply of digital resources to engage, mobilize and participate in public life" (Norris 2001: 4). South African society currently displays a combination of the social as well as the democratic divide; with traces of the former being arguably more prominent due to the socio-economic climate in the country. Bearing this in mind, it is apparent that these

participants, as presumably part of the societal ‘haves’ (I deploy this term to illustrate access to media platforms not accessible to many other citizens), are in a position to reap the benefits they so avidly attach to the self-help media text. Benefits that include further expressions of personal development as I explore in the sections to follow.

Consuming Self-Help Media: ‘Finding’ and ‘Knowing’ Myself

Probing, during interviews, into the respondents’ motivations behind consuming media material of a self-help nature provided insightful information useful in shedding light with respect to self-help consumption by the ten study participants. Queried about their reasons for actively consuming self-help media, participants reverted with a strikingly similar thread of reasoning. Among these similarities and in addition to getting a ‘quick fix’/solution as is outlined in the section above; are a bespoke objective to ‘learn’ and ‘know’ the self so as to – in relation to others – understand how best to behave to ensure harmonious social interactions. In addition to this, is an apparent desire to belong as they make their way through the course of life.

Breeze is of the opinion that life should be understood as an ever-evolving ‘journey’ that presents certain milestones and challenges which are required to be tackled as effectively as possible because “you don’t just go through life thinking you’ll be the same person that you were twenty years ago” (Interview, November 2014). Highlighting the reasons behind her consumption of self-help media, this respondent stipulates that media texts of a self-help nature are a key element of assistance in her plight to undergo life’s challenges and experiences while, at the same time, understanding and ‘accommodating’ other people’s journeys and experiences:

[...] Things happen, experiences; you come across different types of experiences. So, it’s all a journey. You’re trying to find yourself as you’re trying to find and accommodate those that are around you as well (Breeze Interview, November 2014).

A particularly striking aspect in this response lies with the notion of ‘finding’ and ‘understanding’ oneself and, to an extent, others. The act of understanding, at a basic level, involves the ability to perceive and make sense of the intended meaning of something (and this case, someone). This presents the impression that, as human beings, we do not naturally possess the capability of deciphering our sense of self and who we are as members of society. Breeze pointing out that through the consumption of self-help themed media she can begin to carve an understanding of herself and others, makes for a thought-provoking point of enquiry. What about the self-help text allows for this to be possible?

The idea of having to understand and find oneself gains further prevalence when it comes to why the participants interviewed seek, attain and consume media texts of a self-help nature. Sisana (Interview November, 2014) shares that for her, “the main driving force [...] was just like, to understand myself and to understand other people to get advantage in...be *that* girl; understand that people don’t think like me...” Similarly, for Butterfly, “the motivation comes from that need to know” (Butterfly Interview, December 2014). She, also, is driven by the urge to want to ‘know’ herself in the best way possible. Butterfly (Interview, December 2014) finds that the self-help text allows her to ‘tackle all avenues’ which includes finding and understanding herself as well as effectively tackling life experiences and challenges:

[...] also being like at my age I’m going through a phase where I’m just trying to get to know myself and I’m trying to tackle all avenues. Like, just to do that in the best way possible, I’m trying to get to know myself so that pushes me to buy more of these books and then read. And I’ve found that most of the time when I read something it’s...like with the book I’m currently reading, more especially, and I’m struggling to finish it because it’s just like every time I read a chapter, and suddenly it’s just like it is speaking to me right now. It’s speaking to what I’m going through at the current moment. So, it’s just those things sometimes I feel like I’m going through something; I’ve literally like gotten to a point where I believe that okay I’m going through something, let me open a book.

For these participants, the self-help text seems to be consumed as a form of a ‘teacher’ outside of a classroom in that it is deployed as a tool for empowering the self to become, not only an ‘expert’ of oneself, but also learning how to gain expert knowledge towards successfully comprehending others around you. It is a general belief that a teacher’s main role, among the many, is to provide her/his students with the understanding of certain concepts/issues, problems or ideas. The self-help text becomes, in the minds of these participants, a non-human teacher responsible for facilitating on-going lessons to its students (self-help consumer) to ultimately make out of these individuals experts in their own rights. Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) who goes as far as calling herself a ‘junky’ of self-help media captures this observation that the self-help text is imagined to embody a ‘teacher’ responsible for rendering its consumers in states of being well-informed about subject matter involving human beings. She expresses that she has:

[...] learnt of so many terms and...I’m naturally like an analytical person and I’ve learnt of so many disorders and terms for...because I read so much about things, you know. I mean I Google all the relationship dysfunctional stuff or whatever because you go through things or people around you go through things and you learn to decipher what everything is so I’m definitely a junky because I bookmark a lot of inspirational things,

a lot of I mean...the last what, three four books that I read are all not direct self-help but are all aligned with like bettering myself.

This teacher/guidance aspect attached to the self-help text renders it a choice of consumption for the self because “I know something will speak to what’s going on in my world right now. So it will give me some sort of light or some sort of guideline as to best go about tackling whatever it is. So, I think that’s like the biggest motivation,” as Butterfly emphasises.

A key aspect raised in chapter two of this thesis with respect to the self-help text is the fact that these materials are offered to consumers as possessing strong endorsement from individuals known to be experts in their respective fields and, often times, arenas related to human psychology. In South Africa, to take an example I have continuously drawn on, participants on a self-help, therapeutic-inspired television programme, *Relate* (SABC 1), are directly exposed to a professional counselling practitioner (known to South Africans as Sis Angie) from whom lessons and knowledge are received in person (Ndlovu 2013). Rose (1998) argues that people are prone to seek such insight of experts and ultimately cling to the promises of these experts in an attempt to gain some form of victory over their perceived problems. This observation grants some light as to why the respondents in question hold these texts in such high regard when it comes to understanding and finding themselves. It is, I argue, the involvement of an expert (who is deemed more knowledgeable than the ordinary person in many respects) that stands as a driving force behind these participants’ decision to engage with these texts. The self-help text enjoys this high level of respect to a point where it is trusted to can successfully facilitate this presumably vital plight of understanding yourself and others around you which a person seemingly gets to face in their ‘journey’ of life.

Drawing from the locally produced self-help related media text *Relate* that I closely analyse in chapter two as an empirical example of a self-help media text, research findings into this programme found that the producers involved also speak to an aspect of ‘guidance’ and ‘education’ that reportedly make up the core objective, parallel to other commercial benefits, of the show (Ndlovu 2013). The programme’s creators, as evidenced in the literature reviewed, claim to be utilising the medium of television as a means to teach members of the country important lessons on personal and familial improvement and healing (Ndlovu 2013). Based on similar underlying principles, other self-help texts (books, online videos, magazine features etc) can, then, also be assumed to carry this potential to disseminate content in the name of ‘education’ and ‘guidance’ to be exploited by those that consume them in order to ‘learn’ about themselves and others.

It is with this acquired knowledge of the self and others that the individual can spare themselves the risk of falling into perceived flawed behavioural patterns that may hinder any form of harmony in their lives. Certain ‘mistakes’ in life can be avoided and it is through the knowledge gained from consuming self-help media that interviewee Faith (Interview December, 2014) believes this is a possibility. She argues that the popular idiom pertaining to not reinventing the wheel holds a certain truth in life and she lives by this knowledge. This English saying, loosely phrased: ‘Do not reinvent the wheel’ stands as a form of advice to avoid wasting time indulging in what are deemed pointless behaviours or tasks of which the consequences are perhaps already known (*Dictionary.reference* 2016). So shares Faith:

[...] it’s like basically there’s a saying that says you cannot reinvent the wheel twice. You know, if somebody has travelled that path, sometimes it’s better to just see what they did and avoid those things because as much as you want to do things by yourself, there are people who have travelled that road and they know what’s there so you can avoid their mistakes and maybe you can get to your destination faster (Faith Interview, December 2014).

That aspect of ‘learning’ again emerges and further demonstrates how the self-help text has developed an identity of a ‘teacher’ even though outside of the traditional classroom setting. The widespread dissemination of these texts (on TV, radio, digital or print media), as literature enlightens, renders these programmes/publications etc – symbolically speaking – as forms of national lecture rooms packed with students (self-help audiences) seeking ways to steer clear of ‘mistakes’ that others have committed as is evidently the case with Faith. This participant explains that one of her main reasons for consuming self-help media is to be able to ‘learn’ from other people’s mistakes so as to avoid repeating them as she goes through life. It is evident here that the self-help media text is positioned in the minds of the study participants as possessing the capability to act as a scaffold between a person’s plight to self-understanding as well as self-guidance in terms of knowing what type of behaviours to engage in and what type to avoid in order not to make ‘mistakes’ that may impede on the smooth sailing of a person’s life journey.

Further to its argued role as an ‘educator’, the self-help text is interestingly positioned as a chief contender in a fight/war upon which the mind is the playing field. The opposition in this instance is the ‘voice’ and thoughts inside a person’s head that is often regarded as one that possesses certain negative influences on the self. It is argued by Beaumont (2015) that, as human beings, “we all carry a voice inside our head, an internalisation of the adults and carers who brought us up.” These voices hold the ability to do the self little to no good many a time.

The self-help text, in this battle with the voice and, in extension, the thoughts inside an individual's head is argued as having a crucial role to play as it is expected to be victorious over the negative thoughts and voices.

Mandy (Interview November, 2014), when queried about her reasons behind actively consuming self-help media, grants a response which, upon closer analysis, speaks to this internal 'battle' between the voices and ideas in the head, and the self-help media text:

In attempting to carve my own space in the world, you're often met with ideas of being imperfect and it's trying to deal with being imperfect that's forced...well not forced but has led me to consuming self-help. So, in my efforts to try and reach that perfection; again, like I said, that really doesn't exist but we all want it; I started consuming self-help to make me feel like 'I can do it!'

Paying particular attention to this respondent's description of what motivates her to consume media material of a self-help nature, it is apparent that these texts are considered 'powerful' as sources of positive reinforcement for the human being with respect to his/her mental well-being. Similar line of reasoning emerges from Faith's (Interview December, 2014) utterances. Reflecting on her experience with the perceived lessons drawn from her engagement with self-help, she expresses:

I remember this other book; they were talking about the negative thinking and things like replacing your negative thoughts with... So, I've tried it. I know I have this, like how basically they were talking about how your life is a garden and you don't want weeds to grow in your garden – you want to nurture your garden, you want it to grow. So, the same way you'll take care of your garden, you want to take care of your brain. Filter things that go inside.

The brain, which Faith draws a relation to a garden, needs to be 'filtered' with respect to input in order to ensure positive output which will potentially render desirable mental well-being.

With 'ideas' of imperfection flowing within society through various interactions between human beings – Goffman's (1963) body of work on the notion of stigma captures this observation as explored in chapter three – individuals find themselves in a culture where presumably objective distinctions between 'normal' and 'abnormal' (or imperfect) have become entrenched within their daily practices and this, more often than not, drives them to consider 'expert' assistance when faced with experiences deemed to be outside of this ideal of 'normalcy' (Cherry 2008). This 'expert' comes in the form of the self-help text and is in constant battle with the internal voices that say 'no, you can't!' because "the one thing self-help media does is make you believe that you can do anything and...so, sometimes we don't

think of it as a drug but it is a drug. It makes you believe you can do anything,” shares Mandy (Interview November, 2015) when discussing her consumption of these texts. Being able to do ‘anything’ may, I argue, also mean being able to silence those voices in the head, particularly those of a negative nature.

The ‘motivational’ element attached to the self-help text is highly sought after and it is part of the main reason why self-help media are constantly sourced in modern society (Rimke 2000; Rimke & Brock 2012); but with this popularity comes a significant share of opposition in that the self-help text or, more broadly, the act of self-help consumption is often described as an ineffective practice that is of little help to the individual (Rodger 2009). This opposing viewpoint appears to resonate with Faith (Interview, December 2014) as she is aware that some individuals might find it ‘stupid’ but she is staunch in her stance that these texts do indeed help as she takes to defend the self-help text in this response: “you know you think it’s stupid reading about someone motivating you. Sometimes there’s days where you actually have to, I don’t know, read it somewhere that you are a powerful person. You need that reassurance that... mental power”

The ‘mental power’ that this participant makes reference to emphasises this paper’s argumentative observation that the self-help media text is seen as a key role player in standing as a strong contender against the negative thoughts and voices a person may be faced with internally. This, furthermore, attributes particularly strong positive characteristics to media material of a self-help nature. Driving the point home with his response is Mo (Interview, January 2015) who explains that he consumes self-help media by “read[ing] these things, read on them...something that would kind of uplift my spirit, make me feel good [...]” Depending on how ‘strong’ the self-help text is in the battle ring against the negative voices in a person’s head, it is placed in high regard as a trusted element to make you ‘feel good’; whether about yourself or people around you and this stands as a key driving force behind why these texts are so popularly consumed by the participants in question.

As noted in chapter three of this dissertation, human beings in contemporary society, seek answers and solutions to a myriad of questions and concerns with respect to the self for reasons such as establishing who they are; or finding ways to ‘better’ themselves. This has become an increasingly fashionable quest as Rimke (2000: 61-62) notes. There exists an unsaid expectation that, as humans, it is vital that we find and remain in tune with ourselves in order to be able to effectively manage our experiences to the benefit of our socio-cultural and socio-

emotional well-being in an ever-challenging society. Being able to ‘fit in’ to society (I explore this more closely in the section to follow) requires a certain act of self-management that is believed to rely heavily on an intricately woven relationship between the self and an expert other deemed to have all the ‘tips’ and answers in this regard (Rimke 2000; Rimke & Brock 2012; Rose 1998). Literature explored in this thesis exposes the fact that the media hold a formidable role in ensuring the sustainability and flow of material required for the enhancement of this ongoing project between the “self” as a connection to an expert other. As a result, media texts of a self-help nature have and still are, especially over the past 25 years, highly consumed across many cultures (Rimke 2000).

Self-help and ‘Fitting In’

One of Foucault’s (1984; cited in Rimke 2000: 61) observations make a striking argument that, human beings, “[...] in the name of psychological science we seek fulfilment.” This quest towards fulfilment takes on various routes for people as the nature of ‘fulfilment’ in itself varies for these individuals. The self-help text, as has been established through my extensive review of literature in chapters two and three of this thesis, is successful in its incorporation of the psychological sciences as these texts are often packaged, produced and greatly endorsed by experts within the sphere of psychology. Within these texts lies a promise of a fulfilling life for the self-help seeker who should, voluntarily, take it upon her/himself to reach out and acquire access to the knowledge and expertise of assistance tied to these texts. As a result, as media consumers of these texts, users find themselves continuously at the mercy of an array of mental health experts, self-help gurus, among others, who dispense psychological advice for their consumption (Lilienfeld, Lynn, Ruscio and Beyerstein 2010: xii).

The psychological advice within the self-help media text is commended by the participants interviewed for this paper as I have begun to highlight in this chapter by drawing on participants’ perceptions of the self-help text. Nonny (Interview November, 2014), in particular, goes as far as referring to these texts as the best thing that could have happened in the 21st century (I highlight this more closely in a later section). This positions the self-help text in a favourable place in this consumer’s mind. At the heart of the consumption of media texts of a self-help nature – evidenced in chapter three – lies the act of confession (whether priestly, peer or self-confession [Rimke 2000]) which is considered a vital practice as this act of self-examination clears the way for the self-help seeker to realise their ideal/best self.

Foucault (1976; 1988) outlines that within this tradition of self-improvement; self-examination provides the individual with self-knowledge deemed vital for self-fulfilment.

A self-fulfilling life is a presumably ‘perfect’ life which delivers the self-helper in a mental state of considering her/himself as ‘normal’ and happy as a person. Through the lessons and knowledge imparted by the self-help text, users (as audiences or confessing participants) thereof are assured the potential to learn helpful tips to warrant that they fit into society (or any smaller desired social category) by, arguably, ensuring that they do not allow their imperfections to hinder their social relations with fellow human beings within that space. Dineo’s (Interview February, 2015) explanation of her thoughts about self-help media captures the idea of fitting in and self-improvement being key benefits: “[...] to me, self-help media is something that’s going to help you; something that is giving you knowledge, that can help you fit into society. Something that helps you better what you already have.” The idea of fitting into society is potentially one that is conceptually and practically challenging to decipher. One of the key reasons behind why fitting in is a challenging notion is because of the cultural diversity modern society possesses.

Society being as diversified as it is, what then, does it mean to fit in? I draw on participant, Faith (Interview December, 2014), in a later section who is dealing with having to negotiate an existing tension of being expected to fit in socio-culturally when at home (in the presence of parents and other elderly family members) by behaving in a particular manner and, at the same time, when at her institution of higher learning (where she expresses her ‘intellectual side’), a similar expectation is placed on her to behave accordingly so as to ensure she does not attract an ‘outcast’ status. This, when arguing in alignment with the body of work by interactionist theorist Erving Goffman (1959), puts the individual in a situation where a plight of fitting in primarily revolves around putting on a show of multiple behavioural characteristics and techniques of interaction across various cultural spaces within society. This, in and of itself, I argue, presents a challenge to master if the individual seeking to fit in is not convincing enough in his ‘act’.

Something Muzi (Interview January, 2015) utters in our interview session manages to encapsulate this paper’s argument around the potential problematic nature of a belief held by participants such as Dineo that self-help media texts can help you fit into society. As he attempts to explain what he believes his identity comprises, Muzi (Interview, January 2015) summarises it using the following words which explain that, to an extent, identity formation

comes from “basically, what you have throughout life and mine has been very diverse. I’m talking I’ve been a bit of everything. You know, from rural areas to the location life [...]” Prompted to elaborate on this idea of the rural and the non-rural, this participant begins to illustrate just how ‘fitting into society’ is not as smooth a task as may be imagined. He explains that the rural aspect of his life has played a role in grounding him in nature as “it taught me culture. It taught me how to climb mountains, how to go hunting; how to be free around nature – how to use nature as a form of healing and as a form of meditation. You know nature is basically part of it. Nature’s everything.”

Having moved out of the rural areas to becoming a city resident in Johannesburg, this participant finds that fitting in becomes a whole new ball game where, if you do not possess the ability to perform what is culturally expected of you, you will struggle to fit in:

City life, it’s been pretty great but you have to be a character; you have to be a form of a certain society. You have to have an image; you have to be a certain kind of way and yeah, I’d say my role would be acting because you meet different sort of people and if you’re a great actor you can adjust your personality to relate to the people around the city.

Notice how failing to master the art of ‘acting’ in a certain way is expressed to be a hindrance to one’s successful incorporation into society. That is to say, you can only expect to fit in once you have – and in keeping with the idea of the art of acting – learnt and memorised the ‘script’ for each and every cultural ‘showcase’ you find yourself ‘acting’ in. This expectation, as I argue, stands as a challenging task which overlooks the role of individual personality on a person’s ability to culturally ‘fit in’ to various social settings.

One of Goffman’s (1959) classic and sociologically relevant arguments makes for a helpful theoretical backdrop to the above discussed. Arguing that the world is a stage upon which human beings perform a part of the self in order to be perceived in a manner desired by the individual seems to be what is transpiring in the cases of the quoted participants. Being faced with the two immovable settings of ‘city life’ versus ‘rural life’ as is the case with Muzi, these participants are motivated to draw on the established script or ‘line’ – as Goffman refers to it – as a mode to enhance their performances of the expected self in either of the settings they find themselves. The self, then, is represented in a certain manner when met with the ‘urban’ setting and likewise is a culturally-appropriated self-identity embodied to fit into the ‘rural’ or, as is in Faith’s case, the traditional setting as established by her birthplace (home).

Participants stand by the opinion that because the self-help text is able to guide and teach you to become in tune with yourself; adapting to various cultural conditions should, then, not be a problem. What can thus be deduced from information collected in this regard is that the ideal human being is perceived as the one that ‘perfectly’ navigates his/her way within these various cultural spaces. Meeting your cultural expectations without standing out from the crowd seemingly encapsulates this sense of ‘perfection.’ This is a perfection Sisana (Interview November, 2014) explicitly admits to be seeking when consuming media texts of a self-help nature:

Yes, it’s always to perfect...I have to be a perfect human being; do you know what I mean? I’m fighting for that and I’m like ‘hey, I need this!’ Like, I can’t not be effective in communicating with anyone; I was lacking at that but right now I am more effective at that.

The ‘perfect’ human being fits into society because she is able to communicate effectively with ‘anyone’ and this permits her to fit in because, in Muzi’s (Interview January, 2015) words, if you’re a good actor (being able to effectively communicate and react to others’ communication towards you) you can adjust your presentation of the self to relate to the people around you. Relating to the people around you by means of attempting to fit into society is a quest strongly sought after. Breeze (Interview November, 2014) is on a similar pursuit of fitting in because she believes that no man is or should be an island:

[...] seeing as that we are social beings; right now what I’m struggling with, actually, is maintaining...I’m not exactly a socialite. I tend to be very withdrawn and with all of that I can be antisocial and that affects the people and the relationships that I keep. So, I’m trying to figure out how to break that barrier. I’m trying to figure out what the source of this withdrawal of mine is. I have an idea because of some experiences that I’ve gone through but I’m trying to figure out how to make the necessary changes in order to continue or in order to be the social person I want to be able to be because no man is an island or should be an island on their own.

This response came after this participant was queried about how and why she came into contact with self-help media texts. Her utterances, again, paint a picture that places the self-help text in a position of esteem and admiration as a tool to assist one to fit into society by helping the consumer thereof acquire the necessary skills and, in this instance, the skill to becoming more sociable so as to not be a social outcast. This preoccupation with belonging is, I argue, driven by a plight to avoid a situation in which this participant finds herself being attributed a ‘stigmatised’ social identity by individuals within the social settings she wishes to blend into. A stigmatised social identity puts the individual in an undesirable position as ‘stigma’ is seen

as a shortcoming, handicap or failure of a kind (Goffman 1963). Struggling at being a 'socialite', as she expresses, Breeze is potentially risking being stigmatised as, for example, stuck-up and difficult to approach which carries the potential, as is the case with stigmatisation, of being shamed and distanced by members of the social category she desires to 'belong' to.

Confirming this observation, are the following words Breeze (Interview November, 2014) shared in the interview session when asked whether fitting into society can be considered an element of motivation to consume self-help media texts: "Yes, because right now I don't feel like I belong. I don't belong in any social group – so to speak. Yes, I have friends in my life and people that I talk to but it is not...there seems to be a type of barrier that's stopping the natural progression of things and I think I am that barrier or within the source that is me there is another source, yeah, so..." The 'barrier' referred to by Breeze, I do not wish to directly claim to be a stigma-driven obstacle in the sense that Goffman (1963) argues but it is, I take to argue, somewhat related to how a sense of 'outcast' is formed due to either perceived or real shortcomings in personality and forms of being/interaction. For this participant, exposing herself to media texts of a self-help nature, she believes will assist her with her plight to fit in and ultimately dissolving what she calls 'barriers' against fitting in.

With this viewpoint fully acknowledged, I will argue that this stance somewhat overestimates the self-help media text and, in extension, the media as cultural vehicles in modern society. It suggests that the media will have the same effect on all the masses with access to them; an argument scholars such as Stuart Hall (1982) have advised to tread carefully around. Furthermore, it provides a restricted view that overlooks what I argue is a social reality in many societies. That social reality is the fact that although made widely available by the media on an array of platforms, the self-help media text cannot be assumed to have reached the economically-constrained, very little educated South African who may not even know where to begin to seek self-help texts (whether in printed, audio-visual or digital form) from; let alone make sense of them as most of these texts may be intellectually and linguistically inaccessible to them due to their socio-economic situation. A significant portion of South African society live below the poverty line with no access to a TV set, radio or book stores as they are most concerned with where their next meal of the day will come from (*City Press* 2015; Grant 2015). In addition to these citizens are the citizens who, irrespective of the fact that they are able to access these forms of media texts, choose not to do so for reasons known to them. Are we, then, to label all these individuals – which are significant in numbers – as social misfits who,

because of their refusal or inability to engage with self-help media texts, will not fit into any social category within society?

Mo (Interview January, 2015) just as noted with Breeze and Dineo, places a similarly high value on the self-help media text's ability to potentially provide a person with a sense of belonging as he explains that his consumption of these texts would often be motivated when he needed something to "uplift my spirit, make me feel good; something that would make me feel like I belong to something but like I said, I feel it is all constructed. I think there's an aim to it, you know; for you to move from that negative space to a bit of a positive space." The self-help media text is explained to be able to render its user with a sense of belonging – that is to say, one is able fit into, perhaps a certain group or various clusters of society. Note, however, the shift in the fundamental argument in this viewpoint highlighted by the participant in question. There's a shift in the overall mood of this explanation from one positively painting the self-help media text's value and benefits, to one much more cynical in mood.

This participant, in the same breath, shares an element of pessimism in the idea that these texts alone can assist with regards to all the benefits he highlights (including the opinion that a sense of belonging is guaranteed through self-help consumption). He highlights a view that these texts are 'constructing' a certain social reality that motivates the user to believe that these media texts are the be all and end all in the quest to dealing with personal problems. Mo (Interview January, 2015) says although he believes self-help media texts are a much needed facet of modern society, he also feels "like it is a constructed aspect of life. It has made people to believe that such can help when such can't always." This, then, begs the question on whether or not there is enough justification to be lauding the self-help media text as greatly as the participants in this study who are active consumers of these texts do. Are we to be conscious of the media's continuously-interrogated ability to shape societal opinion by constructing certain social realities that are reproduced across various cultural settings to a point where these ideologies are successfully entrenched within society as a truthful ideal for humans to work towards attaining? (Hall 1982; Adoni & Mane 1984; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes & Sasson 1992; Bryant & Oliver 2009)

This question is informed by research done by scholars such as Stuart Hall who spent some time exploring theories of media effects on audiences. Hall (1982), in what he refers to as a 'dramatic break' in early mass communication research, writes of a phase (between the 1940s and 60s) within the mass communication field where a notable paradigm shift was witnessed.

The application of sociological approaches of ‘mainstream’ American behavioural science to studying media effects shifted from this behavioural perspective to a ‘critical’ or ideological one which, as Hall (1982:124) writes, accounts for this dramatic break he makes reference to. It is this ‘critical’ school of thought that brings forth an interesting point of departure into how media effects have been historically investigated. I, for the purposes of this section of the chapter, would like to briefly interact with the behavioural perspective’s underpinning viewpoint that, in very general terms, media messages/texts possess certain political effects among others. These political effects came to be understood as the media’s argued capability to exploit the ‘vulnerability’ of the masses; leaving them susceptible to the “false appeals, propaganda and influence of the media” (Hall 1982: 126).

The above outlined argument – as part of early behaviourist schools of thought – renders the media consumer as somewhat passive in his engagement with the media text. When analysing the second part of Mo’s (Interview January, 2015) response: ‘it [the self-help media text] is a constructed aspect of life. It has made people to believe that such can help when such can’t always’; a similar line of argumentation emerges. This response strips the consumer of these texts of their agency with respect to consciously deciding to either alter or not alter her/his behaviour upon engagement with these texts of a self-help nature. This definitive viewpoint of what effect the media potentially have on consumers thereof is one that Gauntlett (2008) warns us against when thinking about media audiences. He exposes the reader to an argument that although the media presents audiences with various images and ideas that may or may not have an impact on one’s identity, it is also crucial to acknowledge the unlikelihood – which Gauntlett argues is high – of the media having a straightforward and direct effect on its audiences. This is because just as the times change, the media and people’s attitudes experience changes as well.

It is using this argumentative foundation that I argue that audiences of self-help media texts should not be assumed to be ‘victims’ of a directly-influential media-driven frenzy based on the culture of therapy through self-help media consumption. These consumers are conscious seekers of these texts which they believe to have a developing effect on their quest to self-development and self-improvement. The efforts made to access, consume and extract certain aspects from these texts illustrates, arguably, the behaviour of an individual who has given thought to something before engaging in it; thus ruling out ideas of being coerced into doing so. Even so, this agency is undermined the moment these participants overestimate the self-

help media text as a social must-have which will definitely influence the people exposed to them in a uniformed and socially-desirable manner.

‘Private’ versus ‘Public’ Self-Help: Mediated Therapy and the Flow of ‘Psy’ Discourses

An expression of certain claims about their personalities and social behaviour around ideas based within particularly pathologized frameworks emerged during interview sessions with the participants. These expressions and utterances provide helpful insight into how psychological discourses are deployed and expressed by the study participants. Breeze (Interview November, 2014), for instance, who explains how her social behaviour and personality have constantly been the subject of ridicule to a point where she found herself ‘buying’ into these viewpoints as she personally felt herself behaving in ‘surprising’ ways:

See, I have quite an intricate personality and I’ve been described as a lot of things, funny enough. Jokingly, some people would say: ‘yoh, you’ve got a split personality’, ‘Ahh, you’re so bipolar’ and whatever. I mean, but those were jokes and I would buy into them and joke along with all of that but as I spent time with myself I realised that I may just be a flip-floppy type of person (laughing). Do you know what I mean? The one moment, I would say this is who I am and these are my principles and this is what I’m about, and the next moment I’d flip over and it surprises me. It surprises me because I don’t know how it happens.

Described by many as ‘bipolar’ with a ‘split personality’ and ending up believing this about herself to a point where she refers to herself as a ‘flip-floppy’ person who is unsteady in her social behaviour and belief systems, illustrates how Breeze engages in the deployment of ‘psy’ discourses to explain her personality and behavioural patterns. It is her adoption of psychological concepts such as ‘bipolar’, ‘split personality’ that grants a sense that she characterises her personality and social behaviour as by some means psychologically abnormal. This reveals how a pathologized approach to refer to the self is often deployed in contemporary society. Querying Nonny (Interview November, 2014) about how she initially came into contact with self-help media, her response also illustrates a deployment of a pathologized way of speaking about herself: “Wits! Straight up, Wits! I was getting depressed sometimes because of school work so a friend of mine had said ‘no, I’ve been watching this and it’s helping me cope with the amount of school work that I have. How about you go and just type in online like how to be able to use your time efficiently’” Depression is a concept associated with the discipline of psychology. Experts and practitioners incorporate the concept in their engagement with clients who seek assistance.

Breeze's expression of being 'surprised' at some of her personality characteristics renders the resulting behaviours as unexpected and out of the ordinary which all speak to an idea of a deviation from the 'norm'. 'Bipolar' and 'split personality' are also concepts deployed by trained professionals in the psychology fraternity who determine the application of these concepts to individuals following a set process of informed diagnosis. The media's dissemination of texts of a therapeutic nature (including media texts that incorporate self-help) has played a key role in rendering the flow of these discourses into spaces such as, for instance, the living room (where audiences gather to consume media) or even the aesthetically pleasing stand in a book shop prepared specifically for 'self-help' publications where these notions and concepts are integrated into everyday conversation rendering these dialogues as no longer exclusive to psychology students and professionals but to any person with access to a mass medium.

Faith (Interview, December 2014), while delving into her usage of self-help media texts; speaks of herself as "[...] a very short-tempered person in a sense that...yeah, I'm a very short-tempered person. I let things sometimes get to me real fast; especially at work when you're with different personalities." She alludes to a 'psy'-inspired viewpoint that our temperaments play a role in how we cope in social settings of varying kinds and because she pathologizes herself as short-tempered, she is of the view that this often makes her prone to emotional struggle because things 'get to her' quickly. The phrase 'letting things get to you' is often socio-psychologically deployed to refer to how individuals allow themselves to feel unhappy due to the behaviour of other people towards them. Faith adopts this phrase to express a view that she does not regard this as 'normal' as it affects her interactions with colleagues because she needs to deal with their varying personalities. This again paints a picture of how 'psy' discourses have become entrenched in society and are referred to in everyday conversation about the self and others. This sees participants such as Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) talking about herself as 'complicated'. She thinks she is "[...] very complicated. Like, I'm complicated in that I'm an extroverted introvert. So, I'm loud and fun and bubbly but I'm very private and shy inside" These are personality related concepts prominent in what Rimke and Brock (2012) refer to as self-help technologies such as surveys and questionnaires often housed in popular print and digital media mass disseminated in modern society.

Evidence exists that the media, as platforms of transportation and promotion of various types of material packaged for consumption have allowed advice columns on print media platforms (Switzer 1997; Mutongi 2000; Thomas & Cole 2009; Reuster-Jahn 2014), self-help therapists

as hosts or guests on popular television and radio programs (Ndlovu 2013), as well as ‘agony aunts/uncles’ on internet communities to enjoy prominence in modern society. So prominently accessed and consumed are these texts that they have become a sprawling network of everyday sources about human behaviour (Rimke and Brock 2012).

The plight of ‘understanding’ and ‘knowing’ oneself as explored in the segment above, now transpires on vastly public media platforms of mass consumption such as radio, print and digital media as well as television (Ndlovu 2013; Matlala 2013; Gill 2009; Illouz 2003; Shattuc 1997). In attempting to accommodate and facilitate this process – deemed vital in an individual’s life – practitioners and ‘experts’ in related areas of human behaviour produce various ‘self-help’ material for interested individuals to engage with. This engagement, due to media involvement which ensures ‘professional mediation’ (Dayan 2001), occurs outside the perceived ‘privacy’ of the therapist’s office (Cherry 2008). Herewith are we witnessing the emergence of tumultuous varieties of self-help media texts, such as, for instance, the proliferation of self-help discourses on television and radio talk shows, the internet (through websites and webcasts), in autobiographical books, in celebrity interviews (disseminated to large audiences), in magazines and newspapers, psychology-related books and similar written texts, movies, and documentaries (Rimke and Brock 2012).

Everyday life practices are met with the highly pervasive presence of what Rimke and Brock (2012: 83) refer to as ‘psy’ discourses which play a role in promoting the acceptance of a widespread psychotherapeutic ethos responsible for informing and shaping social practices in modern society. As a result, people find themselves immersed in a culture of therapy which sees them adopting an immensely medicalised vocabulary when speaking about their inner selves. Thoughts, emotions and beliefs are expressed through discourses of a psychological nature as is evident in the expressions quoted above from the participants of this study. Looking specifically at South Africa, academic contributions around the presence of an argued culture of therapy and a remedying of psychosocial issues is attributed to a phase in the country’s socio-political history: an era coined the ‘transition phase.’ This period is marked as the time immediately following the demolishing of the apartheid regime and the movement into a national government based on the socio-political system of democracy. Born from this period, as a plight to begin a national process of reconciliation and a ‘fixing’ of the misfortunes of the past, was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa (Balila 2004; Mda 2002; van Zyl 1999; Reddy 1997).

A key characteristic of this commission was the heavy involvement of the media and their widespread broadcasting of the actual experiences of traumatic and emotional testimonies by participants involved (Mda 2002). Theorised as being a form of a mass therapy session in that it was reflective of the practise of psychotherapy (Reddy 1997), the TRC as argued by scholars such as Matlala (2013) and Ndlovu (2013) paved the way for contemporary media producers to adopt the nature and principles of the commission and skilfully adapt these from a national to a more personal and familial structure. In their dissemination of texts deemed conceptually parallel to the TRC, South African media producers of texts such as, for instance, the TV show *Relate* among others; allow for the permeation of psychological discourses into society; exposing audiences thereof to the means through which experts on these shows discursively initiate and emphasize a pathologized approach to speaking about human behaviour. This, I argue, provides further reasoning behind a tendency by participants to deploy a pathologized way of reflecting on the self.

Not only have the media provided channels for the flow of ‘psy’ discourses throughout societal spaces, they continuously expose consumers to media texts that incorporate the engagement between the ordinary citizen and ‘experts’ with these ‘psy’ discourses. Popular to a large extent, as outlined in chapter three, are media texts such as radio and television shows that incorporate self-help therapeutic elements, mass consumed and disseminated print and online platforms with experts acting as ‘agony aunts/uncles’ and advisers. This paves the way for the mediation of the practice of therapy; open to anyone with access to mediums of mass dissemination and promoting the movement of the therapy session - traditionally imagined and conceptualised as a ‘private’ process between therapist and client - to becoming a form of a ‘public’ affair.

As discussed in chapter three, the idea of the ‘public’ as deployed by this dissertation is linked to how the notion has been theorised historically in that it was approached as a politically-inspired concept linked to the manner in which Jürgen Habermas (1969; 1989) theorised it which speaks to an idea that the ‘public sphere’ should be considered a site which ensures the free and open potential for civic participation around matters of the day (Baker 1992). In this space, critical debate and deliberation are centralised as crucial with little else involved thereafter as these ‘sites’ would be neglected in pursuit of returning to one’s ‘private’ life activities. Equally relied upon by this paper is the way the public is theorised by Dayan (2001) and Iqani (2012). This view points to an observation of the public through a media-centric approach rendering the public as spaces of appearance accessible to mass society through the aestheticized organisation of an array of media texts ‘illuminated’ through ‘professional

mediation' (Dayan 2001) in order to perpetuate the consumption thereof. Thereby the public, in this sense, can be imagined as sites of visibility. It is in both these approaches to the notion of the public that, I argue, 'psy' discourses flow seamlessly across social spaces. These participants – all audiences of media texts of a self-help nature – are interpellated into directing their collective attention by gathering and listening to/spectating (McQuail 2005) the staging of the practice of therapy; defined in this paper as the treating of mental health problems through a process of talking to a professional known either as a psychiatrist, psychologist or mental health practitioner (*Mayo Clinic Staff* 2016).

Upon engagement with the interviewees, who are all active consumers of self-help media texts; I probed into these participants' preferences when coming to engagement of a 'private' versus that of a mediated form. I must mention that this question was posed in the interview sessions in line with this paper's at times usage of the notions of private and public as specifically related to the practice of engaging with self-help as an act of psychological therapy through a private, behind-closed-doors session with a professional or, alternatively, through mediated forms of therapy mass disseminated and aesthetically highlighted for reasons of, for instance, economic benefits for their producers.

Respondents present differing views when it comes to their preferences with respect to what appeals to them more between mediated therapy (as either an audience member or participant) and what we shall refer to as the more traditional therapy setting. Overall, as a choice of consumption, mediated self-help engagement is more widely claimed as a preference but noteworthy value is attached to private, unmediated forms of therapy. An underlying indication with these responses is that personality is directly able to dictate the kind of self-help a person would choose to engage with and, to an extent, engage in.

Sisana (Interview, November 2014) makes direct reference to her personality traits; sharing that due to the kind of person she is, she is more strongly drawn to the private form of self-help engagement. She is notably more comfortable having the peace of mind that she can immediately contact someone directly to seek self-help advice and 'answers' to tackle the 'issues' she may be facing at any point in time instead of having to undergo the process of making certain efforts to be considered to engage in the more public forms of self-help on, for instance, a print media platform which only publishes certain queries from 'readers' directed to the resident agony aunt/uncle. Because she knows she is "[...] the type of person who, if I

need an answer, I want it now. So, with *Sis Dolly* [a popular agony aunt featured in a vastly circulating local magazine called *Drum!*] when will I wait until my issue comes?”

By preference, Sisana would rather call on a therapist she can instantly get an answer from and believes that the time she can afford with a privately practising therapist is beneficial for her because, at times, she would merely just want an ear to listen to her: “[...] I don’t even need an answer for it (referring to an issue she might be facing), I just need you to listen to my cry and then afterwards I know, actually, if you think I’m thinking rationally then you will jump in.” This participant’s response which outlines her preference for private self-help engagement over the mediated form thereof, is expressed by another respondent – Breeze (Interview, November 2014) – who, similarly, places emphasis on the role of individual personality when considering what type of self-help consumption to engage in when faced with matters deemed worthy of expert intervention. She expresses:

What appeals to me more would be a private session because of the personality that I have adopted or the person who I think I am, and on top of all of that you must understand that no one wants to be classified as having something wrong with them or, you get what I mean? No one wants to stand up and say, ‘Hey, I have this problem’ or admit even to having that problem. So I don’t know, for me, yeah...

Participating in mediated self-help consumption exposes the self-help seeking individual to a large number of eyes and ears as these quests are very often disseminated to mass audiences in ways assured to be aesthetically alluring (Iqani 2012; Dayan 2001) in order to instigate consumerism which is pertinent in ensuring the economic sustainability of such media texts. Breeze’s response communicates a sense of fear and pessimism with regards to having her ‘problems’ exposed in such a manner. Her generalised viewpoint in, particularly, these utterances: “...you must understand that no one wants to be classified as having something wrong with them [...] No one wants to stand up and say, ‘Hey, I have this problem’ or admit to even having that problem,” illustrates the existence of this cynicism towards public or mediated self-help engagement. Her particular reference to the act of ‘standing up’ to admit to imperfection is arguably related to the public nature of mediated self-help as argued in this dissertation where the seeker of self-help is expected to publicly, as if in a venue packed to capacity with other people – which sometimes is the case when considering the notion of audiences as people assembled and as people addressed (McQuail 2005) – speak out and share with everyone their problems, struggles or imperfections (Lunt & Stenner 2005; Peck 1978; Rimke 2000; Gamson 1988; Shattuc 1997; Ndlovu 2013). This is something an individual would not have to face when opting for a private session of self-help engagement where

admitting to imperfection also happens but is guaranteed to remain between the four walls of the therapist's office. Even with consideration of this element, this view is not shared among all the participants interviewed to have been interviewed.

Opting for the private form of self-help to avoid having to confess inner problems in the 'presence' of many strangers is expressed as a means of protection against humiliation on a mass scale. This is evident in how Sisana (Interview November, 2014) reflects on her preference for private over mediated self-help therapy:

I would never be brave enough to stand up and tell them [audiences]: "Oooohh my man is cheating on me"; or go to Jerry Springer and... Actually, that's like more of a private matter. If I want to handle someone, I'd sit down, think of a way to handle them and I will handle them. So I don't feel like I need to put it on TV and embarrass myself, yeah.

Be that as it may, the discipline of confession is one which is just as rife within these presumably private settings/sessions of self-help. Remaining constant is the fact that, whether confessing to one or one thousand people, the intricate power relations entrenched in the discipline of confession (Foucault 1976; Peck 1978; Rimke 2000; Illouz 2008) still prevail. The self-help seeker remains intricately bound to the judgement of the receiver of the confession and will be held responsible for the process of self-improvement and betterment by making her/himself available to expert or at times even 'peer' intervention deemed key in this quest. Ayanda (Interview February, 2015), who is seemingly aware of this, expresses that she would instead use the Internet-based platform of Google to seek numerous options of helpful material instead of approaching a therapist because:

you'd go to a therapist and sometimes...they're not perfect so they'd say the wrong thing and you...it's human impact and sometimes you don't feel as comfortable talking to them because it's a human being and they maybe don't understand you because their job is to make things better so sometimes they won't let you be sad or...and many people have had that experience, you know. So, for me it's about the many options that are available that I can use and be like okay, if that doesn't appeal to me, I'd find the next and the next until I find something that actually appeals to me. So, it's different options and with no one judging me on the other end.

More respondents opted, in some way, for the public/mediated form of self-help engagement. They express this approach as a preference due to reasons pertaining to how mediated therapy grants the opportunity for vital knowledge and lessons to be disseminated to voluminous members of society who may not possess the resources (mostly financial capability) to privately seek and pay for tailored self-help advice. The issue of affordability of private forms

of self-help also emerges strongly in Ndlovu's (2013: 15) study of the therapeutic-inspired media text, *Relate*, in which he highlights that the underlying motivation for four of the six people interviewed with regards to their participation in this vastly public programme; was in line with a concern that "the services they needed would require sums of money they could not afford."

Along with its said potential to deliver to 'free' exposure to therapy for its audiences, interviewees expressed a shared view that the public form of self-help engagement renders a feeling of camaraderie among seekers (public participants) and audiences (private viewers) of self-help; whereas a private therapy session (often occurring between just two people) may not succeed in this regard. This camaraderie I link to an expression drawn from Iqani (2012: 19) who informs of a 'commonality' driven by "a 'shared world' defined by the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear." This alludes to a 'publicness' hard to miss. It speaks to the idea of a shared experience of audiences granted by a collective witnessing of an illuminated object – in this case – the testimony and confessional contents of self-helpers – which this thesis proposes to be an aspect that makes self-help texts public. Audiences collectively focus attention on these staged contents and deploy these in ways helpful for their own pursuits of self-development.

Mandy (Interview, November 2014) feels that private forms of therapy are not only costly – due to hourly payments – but also take away from the human element on the part of the therapist who merely sits and hardly engages you:

[...] when you are in a therapeutic sort of private session with a therapist [that] you are paying by the hour, a therapist does not express any type of human; they're not human. They are just this object that's trying to give you answers but not really saying much so, for me, it makes me feel judged; therefore, private therapy not so much. I prefer public self-help because you are given that thing of yes, we are all in this things, we are all discussing this thing and we are all imperfect but we are going to take note and make changes.

This lack of engagement, on the part of the therapist Mandy makes reference to, stems from discourses within and outside psychological circles where psychology professionals and experts often promote the fact that, as therapists, their job is not to dictate to people what to do to solve their issues but to create an environment where individuals can come to solutions by themselves (Fischer 2013). It is this aspect of the private form of therapy that Faith (Interview, December 2014) thinks is a downside and demotivates her from going this route after attempting a few times. She does not "feel bad in going to a therapist but I just felt myself

answering myself because you're not really given any solutions. They are running around; they want you to find your own solutions. They can't direct that, you know. So, I found it better talking to a friend who would give you a straight answer and whatnot; or reading self-help books and sometimes I try to figure it by myself first." This participant presents a view that she would rather consume self-help made available in written form than bear the experience of private forms of therapy where she'll be met by a semi to none-responsive therapist.

This view is shared by Breeze (Interview November, 2014) who, ironically claims private self-help as a preference, has "tried to see a psychologist once or twice – epic fails both times – because I felt there was no engagement." She believes making the effort to see a therapist should be met with a highly engaging atmosphere because:

I mean if I'm going to see you for something I'm struggling with, I expect you to engage me. You don't just sit there and let me talk, talk, talk while you write notes and you don't ask questions. You don't involve me – you sort of treat me like an experiment, you know what I'm saying? That made me very uncomfortable. I didn't like it at all, and both times it happened like that and that's why I never bothered to go back.

Also referring to the financial aspect of private forms of therapy and the idea of mediated self-help being able to reach many at one point, is Butterfly (Interview, December 2014), who states that "going to a therapist [...] costs money and not everyone that needs that kind of help can afford it." Therefore, if a person has access to a mass medium such as television, they may still benefit in indirect ways to what is disseminated by the experts on these public media texts of a self-help nature. So, "...if one thing Dr Phil says can help one person who wouldn't otherwise have been able to go to a therapist, then great." Butterfly's view alludes to a stance that the media provide platforms of mass dissemination which should not be undermined because "you don't know who it reaches. He [Dr Phil] is talking to one person but there are millions of people watching and you don't know how many people it's reaching and how many people it's actually having an impact on at that moment in time." A respondent who goes as far as providing a figure that she perceives to encapsulate the level of reach these texts could have, is Ayanda (Interview February, 2015):

I think they're amazing. Obviously there's a demand for it, you know. There's a supply that has come in, you know, so I think it's absolutely amazing. And also it helps on a bigger scale, you know, and not just helping a person who's in that seat [individual(s) participating on a public scale], you're helping the millions of people who're watching it and I think that's why people like Dr Phil and Oprah got such a huge success is because it's actually an innate human need to be referred and be helped and be guided so, yeah, love it!

In Faith's (Interview December, 2014) view, the reach that public forms of self-help render is to be appreciated and she is one such individual who appreciates this. She is of the opinion that "if it helps the next person, why not? You know, I actually think it's a faster way to reach more than one person. There can be one person going to a therapist, yes they can get the help but if a therapist can be on air and have a TV show and say, okay today we're tackling bad boyfriends and what-not; thousands of people would be watching and thousands of people would hear discussions and stuff. So, I am totally for it." She goes on to add: "[...] I am really for the public self-help things because you know it's all out there for you to use. Take it, use it. Like, if it better your life, why not? So, if they can do it at a larger scale via radio, via TV it is even more great."

Mediated self-help engagement, especially on platforms such as the television, radio and online communities carry an element of third-party involvement which I argue in this paper as one axis of an intersectional publicness embodied by self-help texts through visibility/appearance (Iqani 2012; Dayan 2001) and publicness through allowing for civic participation (Habermas 1968; 1989). Audiences of self-help media texts are able to interact with content disseminated through these texts and, often times, on an instant basis. Listening to a radio show or watching a television show has become more than a linear intake of information due to the media's ability to converge numerous tools of communication to render an interactive media consumption experience (Jenkins 2006) resulting in audiences as 'hearing' or 'audition' which sees them embedded in a media presentation to a point of participating by remote means and even providing responses to viewed occurrences (McQuail 2005). Telephone lines, Short Message Service (SMS) lines, and social media communities exist to incorporate audiences' voices regarding the content disseminated to them (Omwoha 2014). Similarly, content of a self-help therapeutic nature tied to these mass disseminated media texts is open to this potential of audience engagement. When an expert engages with a self-help seeker during these mediated therapy sessions, third party involvement emerges when listeners/viewers call in to share their thoughts and viewpoints about the self-helper's issues and, at times, make supportive or contradictory commentary on the expert's guidance of the individual in question.

Although, open to intricate forms of judgement from spectators tuned in on these media platforms, audience commentary often involves the sharing of similar experiences and insight on how these were dealt with. This provides a bigger scope of 'solutions' for the self-help seeker; something which is seen as a positive attribution by participants interviewed for this thesis. This experience is closely related to the idea of the 'emotional public sphere' as argued

for by Lunt and Stenner (2005: 59) pointing to the ushering of personal emotions into the public arena on public media platforms such as the television. Or in line with Iqani's (2012) work, this is a key example of the complex interconnectedness of the private and the public in that the personal emotions I refer to here are in constant movement from, metaphorically speaking, a state of darkness or shade (privacy) to a state in which they are artistically illuminated or professionally mediated (Dayan 2012) (for however long or short a period); that is to say, emotions (which involve pain, trauma, failure, disappointment etc) are put on a stage in appearance for collective consumption.

Muzi (Interview, January 2015) alludes to the usefulness of public self-help engagement/consumption (the widespread mediated therapy) in allowing for the spreading of helpful 'messages' that may, in turn, result in the tackling of larger societal issues deemed problematic to the quest for social harmony so often desired by people. He expresses his preferences in the following response: "Well, I prefer public. But before getting public, obviously I'd want the message to reach the masses and I'd want them to be attentive and basically use the knowledge and information so it could work for them as well." This offers the idea that for him to publicly participate in seeking self-help from an expert; he will be more at ease knowing that the process would be mass disseminated in order for the unpacking of his issues to reach many people who will learn from what he is going through. As established thus far, self-help texts indeed are public due to their deployment of mediated therapeutic practices aimed at 'staging' private issues for mass dissemination. Therefore, if Muzi, as a potential self-help seeking citizen, communicates his struggles on a mass consumed medium and is exposed, in turn, to supportive commentary from audience members within this 'emotional public sphere'; a reinforcement of a camaraderie is indeed fostered.

So confident is Muzi (Interview January, 2015) in the value of mediated therapy through public self-help engagement that he goes as far as saying he would advise "...what a therapist should do is actually be more ambitious and working hard to reach even broader people because if that was the case we wouldn't have xenophobia, for instance." This statement emphasises this paper's observation around an existing viewpoint (among the participants) that public self-help engagement should be regarded as a key catalyst in promoting social harmony, camaraderie and, as is evident in Muzi's response, responsible citizenship by 'teaching' people the behaviours that are socially acceptable. I specifically wish to use an observation made by Chouliaraki (2008: 329) regarding the observation of media as pedagogical agents of morality to have become embedded into society:

However, under certain conditions, technological as well as symbolic, satellite news stories [as transnational media texts] might be able to produce a sense of moral agency that transcends geographical and cultural boundaries, thereby constituting cosmopolitan communities of emotion and action.

South Africa experienced two waves of what was termed ‘xenophobic attacks’ in the space of seven years (in 2008 and again in 2015). Both instances received strong media coverage which involved the dissemination of images of violence amongst South African citizens and a number of targeted individuals deemed to not be South African citizens (Winsor 2015; Haffejee 2015; du Plessis 2015; HRW 2008). During both these instances, the country’s president and government officials spoke strongly against these acts of violence; pleading to citizens to refrain from such actions and to be more responsible in how they treat foreign nationals. According to Muzi (Interview January, 2015), such events could be avoided through the use of mediated therapy as it possesses the ability to stifle the occurrence of such acts through promoting, as earlier argued, the dissemination of knowledge and information based on socially-appropriate behaviour. Rimke (2000: 61) captures this idea in an article that:

[...] explores contemporary self-help literature as a strategy for enlisting subjects in the pursuit of self-improvement and autonomy. Appropriating democratic liberalism's and neo-liberalism's ways of seeing the individual and the social world, self-help promotes the idea that a good citizen cares for herself or himself best by evading or denying social relations. Yet a hyper-responsible self, the result of self-help practice, is intrinsically linked to the governmental management of populations, and so to less individual autonomy rather than more.

The overall argument made in the article referred to above speaks to the use of self-help material as contemporary forms of governing citizens. This, as argued, is achieved through the lessons constructed and packaged within these texts to intricately promote discourses around self-management and responsible citizenship. The self-helping individual opens him/herself up to ‘lessons’ on becoming a better person, parent, colleague, student, employee etc who can be trusted with responsible behaviour. This self-governance, in turn, makes for easier governance of populations at large (Rimke 2000). It is this supposed potential carried by the self-help text, more so in the form of mediated therapy, Muzi (Interview January, 2015) finds as motivation to engage with these texts. This paints a noteworthy picture of just how, in the face of evidently disabling realities (such as brutal xenophobic attacks, for instance) citizens such as Muzi look to self-help media in order to create meaningful spaces of existence based on ‘moral’ discipline and self-control in the context of so much out of control in South Africa.

Collectively tackling problems is also seen as a better option than relying on a single individual to assist. Faith (Interview, December 2014), thus, places more value in mediated therapy because when engaging in this form of self-help, “people want to feel like they are not alone [...] like write to Sis Dolly (*Drum!* magazine’s agony aunt feature) because you get comments and people comment with things like: ‘Ohhh, your story! My husband does it, too’, so it gives you that sense of not feeling alone, you know. Whereas with your therapist, it’s just you; you can’t even tell the next person about your session. So, sometimes I think all they want is to feel like I’m not the only one – it happens.” This puts emphasis on how much the element of audience interaction provided on self-help texts incorporating mediated therapy is valued. Camaraderie in tackling imperfections that are publicly confessed by self-help seekers, the prospect of spreading helpful knowledge to many through testifying certain personal challenges, not having to pay a lot for private consultations, as well as tackling larger societal issues stand as some of the key elements that render mediated self-help engagement a preference for most of the participants interviewed.

This potential for the act of confession to carve particular forms of camaraderie through rendering a sense of community is highlighted and argued by scholars such as Garman (2006). According to Garman (2006: 340), the individualising aspect of confession as proposed by Foucault, neglects to take into account “confession’s power to unify and create community – while perhaps not free of these same mechanisms of regulation – is a very attractive possibility given the worldwide problem of creating peaceful and functional nations from disparate groups of people” In effect, what is yearned for by these participants, I argue, is the formation of a public sphere or a ‘community’ ran on the basis of the coming together of ‘imperfect’ citizens in their plight to render their imperfections open for collective discussion and evaluation in order to produce, within this public sphere, solutions beneficial to all involved.

This chapter has embarked on an analytic exploration of four sub-themes within the broader theme of self-help consumption by, specifically, the participants of this research. Engaging with the responses from these individuals, this chapter makes noteworthy findings with regards to the motivation and behaviours behind the active consumption of self-help media texts as is explained by the participants in question. In terms of the consumption patterns of media texts of a self-help nature, for these participants, a considerably high affinity to online media platforms such as the search engine, Google, which is described as a preferential medium trusted with providing the self-helper with what I argue to be a ‘quick fix’ to their problems; is often sourced as it renders self-help, I further argue, at the consumer’s finger tips. The Internet,

alongside self-help books, enjoys this apparent favour on the part of the self-help consumers interviewed for this research project.

Considering that numerous black South Africans – unlike all the participants in this research project – are excluded from society's group of 'haves', leaving them in an unfavourable social position where they may not be economically empowered enough to gain access to self-help media texts on either television, radio, print media and least of all the Internet. This, then, results in them being unable to reap the benefits that participants of this research paper confidently attribute to the self-help media text. What does this ultimately mean for the citizens in question? In consideration of a viewpoint brought forward by Muzi (Interview January, 2015) regarding his support for the mass dissemination of self-help media texts as a means to successfully instilling notions of responsible citizenship by, as he argues, helping to avoid events such as the xenophobic attacks that took place in South Africa; I argue that the economically-constrained citizen is indirectly cast as the irresponsible, ungovernable individual. Due to the economic disparities in South Africa, the economically deprived citizen is, arguably, also the information poor citizen with very little or no access to the self-help media text believed by the study participants to carry key lessons of responsibility and self-management. Is it this citizen that is prone to behaving in undesirable ways deemed problematic in society? Even though this paper does not deeply probe into this, I argue this is an enquiry worthy of being probed by future research on self-help consumption and its role in promoting hyper-responsibility and self-managing citizenship.

This chapter goes on to expose a widely shared viewpoint among the participants that the self-help text is an ideal tool in a person's 'journey' towards knowing and finding themselves. Additionally, these texts are lauded as powerful mental contenders against the negative voices and thoughts said to exist in a person's head. It is views such as these, I argue, that uphold the self-help media text as a form of an objective, supportive guide/teacher there to inform and direct the self-help seeker and even the self-help consumer (audience member witnessing the self-help seeker on public platforms) in his quest towards self-knowledge and a better understanding of the self. A line of reasoning and argumentation that a blind eye shall not be turned to is that of the sense of 'community' and camaraderie that participants confidently speak to. It is believed that the self-help media text in its state of being a public form that perpetuates public confession, allows for a collective tackling of issues that are said to not be unique to individuals. It is this aspect that provides better coping and a sense of not being alone in one's struggles.

The chapter to follow expands more explicitly on the element of ‘public’ versus private self-help engagement. This is approached with an interest to establish each participant’s own engagement and potential participation (as a publicly confessing individual) in the self-help project. This is in line with an interest of this thesis to elucidate evidence of a potential influence of self-help media consumption on the patterns of self-identity as expressed by the participants.

CHAPTER SIX

Consumption and Perceptions of Identity

The chapter will extend the discussion of self-help media consumption with an extended detailed look into what the study participants make of, specifically, the personal implications tied to the ‘publicness’ of self-help which expects of the self-help seeking individual to expose themselves to intricate forms of opinions and judgements from experts and audiences of these texts. Judgements that may or may not bear influence of these individuals’ perceptions of identity. By exploring sub-themes within the broader subject of identity formation and self-identity, this chapter will provide some key insights into the self-perceptions of identity held by the individuals selected to participate in this research project and how these, if at all, influences the consumption patterns of self-help media texts with regards to the individuals in question.

Public Self-Help Engagement: For the ‘Brave Hearts’

As highly valued as it is (discussed in chapter five above), self-help consumption carries with it a requisite considered integral to the quest for self-development and self-improvement. This requirement exists in the form of confession and testimony as acts of discipline and a primary step to take during the process of learning to help oneself in achieving a happy, ‘normal’ life or overcoming what is perceived to be a psychological hindrance to a person’s well-being. To be able to find and understand who you are, it is pertinent to engage in acts of self-examination to reveal the ‘truth’ about the self, for it is this self-knowledge that allows for successful self-regulation towards an ideal self (Foucault 1988). Appreciating literature points to the above stated claims are conceptualised and presented as benefits of confession, I took to investigate the willingness and interest of the study participants to take the route of confession by participating in public self-help as they are evidently appreciative of the media’s role in availing texts that incorporate self-help.

The media’s provision of these texts is seen as a ‘wonderful’ development. So wonderful, according to Nonny (Interview, November 2014) that it should be acknowledged as “one of the best things that could’ve happened in the 21st century.” Private one-on-one therapy sessions and the “physical contact situations are not working anymore because you know that time is money.” This participant appreciates the widespread availability of these texts because it means she can now be more efficient in her usage of her time:

So, being efficient in using your time means that if I'm going to be at work or whatever I'm doing...my school work and I'm still able to access self-help media at the same time; fits in perfect.

This participant's lauding of the self-help media text stems from its potential to not act as a disturbance to a person's daily commitments and activities. Because these media texts are accessible outside of the therapist's/expert's office – on television, radio, magazines and online communities – self-help can seemingly be consumed without losing time on other important activities such as working to make a living. Although expressing a preference in both the private forms of therapeutic engagement as well as engagement through media texts, Butterfly's (Interview, December 2014) response also attaches value to the self-help media text by pointing out how it allows for saving time in a busy society:

[...] That's why I say I prefer both things, like even if you look at the world we're living in; it is rush hour all the time and there isn't much time to go sit with a therapist. So, like when it comes to those things, then I mean your public self-help media is like a bit of an advantage. But I still feel like nothing beats the good old human connection.

Mo (Interview, January 2015) reinforces the viewpoint that self-help media texts have a firm place in modern society and will continue to hold this reputable position as long as society is faced with various issues of a negative nature. He “think(s) it's what society needs. Particularly our society, be that the society we live in that it is faced with so many societal issues you know; children being raised up by single parents, children being abused physically, also adults going through challenges.” Accessing and engaging with media texts of a self-help nature is, as elaborated in chapter five, seen to can promote a tackling of these broader societal issues. This is a view also held by participant Muzi (Interview, January 2015) who used xenophobia within South Africa by means of exemplifying the kinds of issues he believes self-help media and mediated therapy can successfully tackle.

I argue that these optimistically expressed aspects attributed to the self-help text renders it a trustworthy source of 'guidance.' As Sisana (Interview November, 2014) shares, she feels “self-help [consumption] is basically people wanting assurance and guidelines like, let's say for example, if I call into a radio show even though I know, let's say, this boy is playing with my heart. Even though I know that, I'd like assurance from someone telling me 'no, you're doing well.’” It is this constant need for a second voice of reason and assurance that Sisana believes would drive a person to take the plunge and engage in mediated therapy (as public forms of self-help) by calling in to a radio station to seek advice on certain issues because “[...] we're moulded into always seeking additional help; not being strong enough to actually

proceed alone on our own accord or whatnot. So, we always want that second voice.” These ‘second voices’ are successful in getting people to listen to them because, as Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) stipulates in accordance with Sisana’s view, that voices such as those of Dr Phil and Oprah hold importance “because it’s actually an innate human need to be referred and be helped and guided [...]”

Accessing and gaining tailored benefits from these ‘second voices’ – often times the voice of an expert – carries with it a key element which, as earlier noted, occurs in the form of confession of the truth about the self. Mediated self-help engagement allows for these personal details being shared on mass media platforms – television, radio, print media and internet communities alike – where the self-helper is motivated to engage in what Illouz (2003: 90) refers to as “therapeutic storytelling.” This phenomenon speaks to the idea of public confession, often on media platforms, where seekers of self-help are encouraged to share details of a personal nature to expose aspects of the self that are considered ‘diseased’ and in need of transformation. In these instances, one can witness the sharing of intimate details on television and radio talk shows by individuals on a quest towards ‘healing.’ It is believed that “if failure is the result of a disease of the will, then it is self-made, it can be unmade, which legitimates and perpetuates the very existence of the show and the therapeutic institution that feeds it” (Illouz 2003: 90).

A widely shared viewpoint from almost every participant interviewed and queried about their willingness to confess during mediated self-help consumption, was that this practise requires a certain bravery which these participants say they do not possess. These individuals present a particularly peculiar situation in that, on the one hand, they confidently support and appreciate the prevalence and ‘publicness’ of self-help media texts in modern society but almost in the same breath emerges an expression of no interest in directly engaging in mediated self-help. These participants expressed a confident ‘no’ when queried about whether or not they would consider the practise of confessing to experts on these mass media platforms as a means to reap the promised socio-emotional benefits which they seem to be aware of. This observation makes for a thought-provoking discovery because it presents a double standard worthy of being investigated. If mediated self-help is as ‘wonderful’ as, for instance, Nonny (Interview, November 2014) and Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) believe; why, then, would they and the other participants not actively engage to a point where they directly confess to experts on these media platforms to receive tailored advice and guidance? The answer, as expressed by them, is that they are not as brave-hearted as the individuals that indeed engage in therapeutic storytelling during self-help engagement. Also, it is a view of some of the participants that

these media texts rely on the commodification of emotions which they would rather spectate than become a 'victim' of.

Sisana's (Interview November, 2014) view is that public self-help engagement is for people who are brave enough to stand up and expose their issues. Even though she says she appreciates this bravery, she would personally not be willing to publicly confess such details as "[...] that's more like a private matter." For her, dealing with emotional issues by no means involves practices which will humiliate her in public as she believes mediated self-help does: "If I want to handle someone, I'd sit down, think of a way to handle them and I will handle them. So I don't feel like I need to put it on TV and embarrass myself, yeah." At the same time, this participant continues to support the media's provision of platforms for public self-help because she believes they are 'helpful' as people who are as 'private' as her may benefit from passively consuming other people's confessions:

I feel they are very helpful and they're very open in a sense that people like me who don't want to...I might be going through such things and then I might get help. I think they're very helpful.

In Dineo's (Interview, February 2015) view, public confession as an aspect of self-help is fine "as long as the person is willing to put themselves out there [...] It's not like there's any kind of coercion that is happening. So, I think that's totally perfect." Even with this positive view about mediated self-help engagement, Dineo does not mince her disapproval when queried about her potential to subject herself to the act of confession in order to receive direct assistance from experts: "Nope, I'm not a brave heart! (Laughing) That's why I appreciate so much when people come out and say; because as much as I want to, it is very hard for me to do that. So, I prefer and I appreciate when other people do that and I can say wow I appreciate that because I am going through the same thing."

These 'brave hearts' are applauded and commended for their bravery and willingness to confess. Dineo (Interview, February 2015), similar to Sisana (Interview, November 2014), would rather 'passively' consume (as unmediated audiences) these confessional aspects attached to self-help media texts. This indirect self-help acquiring is helpful enough to guide her as far as to a point of engaging in the most private form of confession – self-confession – as theorised by Rimke (2000). For this, Dineo appreciates these 'brave hearts':

[...] sometimes you listen to the radio and you get these people calling in and they are asking a question that sometimes you're too scared to ask to yourself. So, I like that it's been publicised. Those brave hearts that are coming out and saying what a thousand

other people want to say. So, it's also that generating conversation with yourself to say: 'Hey I'm not the only one going through this. How did she handle it? How can I handle it?' Maybe you can find similarities and differences that maybe can help you to cope with yourself because you were too scared to talk to anybody outside.

Bravery and confidence in their plight to seek assistance are some of the characteristics Breeze (Interview, November 2014) attributes to individuals engaging in public forms of confession as a form of self-help. She, however, does not "think I'd be able to call in and be about that. I would probably call in and ask for someone's number so I can go meet them at their office, you know what I mean?" This participant uses her audience status with respect to self-help media texts as a means to receive information about experts she can make contact with in order to organise private forms of engagement away from the mass media platforms she consumes these texts on. She goes on to express traces of what seems like judgement towards this 'brave bunch' of people when it comes to the act of confession: "I mean, if you call into a radio show and you're my friend, I'll recognise your voice, you know what I mean? I'd be like 'Heeeeeeyyyyy!!' Sit there and listen in and be like, 'Oh Lord!' (laughing)." And in the same breath, she admires these individuals because they are not fearful of this judgement. The fact that they can come out and say "listen I've got things about me that are off tune and I need help with it", is admirable in Breeze's eyes.

It is the element of personal revelation that is considered to be challenging to achieve because it demands a particular compromising of deep-rooted secrets which self-help experts characterise as the driving forces behind behaviours considered problematic in a person's plight to socio-emotional and spiritual harmony. Rimke (2000) situates the discipline of confession within three broad categories: priestly, peer, as well as self-confession. The first category – priestly confessions – sees the 'confessor' open up to an expert or learned authority considered to be well informed. Exposure to helpful techniques, knowledge, guidance and instructions – a promise made by this well-informed authority – is what the self-helper is made to cling to as motivation to start sharing the secrets housed within; said to be hindering the individual's happiness and betterment. Engaging in peer confessions involves having to reveal one's deepest secrets to a group of individuals who are on a related quest towards self-improvement. This form of confession exposes the self-helper to an environment of fellow confessors who possess a mutual understanding and similarity in experiences. These two avenues of confession can most popularly be witnessed to prevail during mediated therapy as a procedure of self-help engagement. Self-confession refers to a form of self-examination that takes place in the presence of no one else but the self. It is, arguably, the two former types of confession that the

participants try to avoid as they may potentially expose the individual to attention from others outside of the self.

Faith (Interview, December 2014) shares that she would consider the practise of confession through mediated self-help engagement depending on the nature of the issue. If the ‘problem’ at hand is more personal, this participant says she “would rather speak to those close to me; those who know me and my situation.” If the issue requiring expert influence is related to an area such as her academic career, “like I’m struggling maybe with a certain section or I’m not concentrating, I wouldn’t mind participating on a larger scale like a more public [platform]; like I’m trying but I’m failing to concentrate.” For this participant, public self-help and the incorporation of the act of confession is not a problem until it requires her to expose details considered too personal “like my boyfriend or my family has issues – my mom and dad – I’d rather go consult to those close to me.”

A turn to the people considered ‘close’ is also something Butterfly (Interview December, 2014) prefers and seemingly enjoys doing. She admits to indirectly consume self-help through her friends who are equally as interested and informed about this subject matter. This indirect consumption manifests through conversations with these friends. Conversations, I find plausible to assume, are sparked by the sharing of personal experiences within these friendship circles which lead to the sharing of self-help knowledge and material. This is how Butterfly (Interview December, 2014) expresses this observation:

I feel like it is quite an integral part of my life because...like, you know, as you were asking that question I realised that another avenue through which I consume self-help material is through my friends. Fortunately, I’ve got friends that have got some wisdom that like even when I have a conversation with them, it’s like they’ll reference something and I’m just like ‘Oh my goodness!’ and then I’d find myself talking to them and then I’d reference something that I read; something that just stood out for me. So, I think it is an integral part of my life. I reference those things a whole lot and it’s like I use them...I try to remember the things I’m reading just to use them as guidelines as to how to best tackle these things [...]

Even though she lacks the level of courageousness required to publicly confess during mediated self-help, Faith (Interview December, 2014) much like Dineo, Sisana and Breeze also thinks the ones that actually do are brave:

I really think they’re brave and I admire them to some degree because for you to take your weaknesses and showcase them to everyone, hoping that there’s other people who

feel like you and would get help from your experience, is really nice and it means you're not being selfish with your hardships.

If the act of public confession is applauded as such a heroic thing, why, then, are these respondents so sceptical about their own potential to engage in this practise? Are they not willing to receive the added benefits of directly engaging with experts who avail themselves through these media texts of a self-help nature? Faith (Interview, December 2014) expresses that her 'intellectual' side has no problem in taking the plunge and publicly engaging in self-help consumption. However, a major stumbling block for her is her 'black side.' As a black person, this participant believes it is not culturally acceptable for you to share your personal issues with just any stranger. Such behaviour, she admits, is seen as 'taboo' in the black community because your family is considered qualified enough to assist you in your plight towards dealing with certain hardships. She captures this view in the following manner: "As a person, like an intellect, I'd say yes but then you get the black side of me that thinks but why are you taking your problems out there, you know? It's a taboo thing; why aren't you talking to your family?"

Mo's (Interview, January 2015) utterance: "Uuuuhm, for me it would be my last resort [engaging in self-help through making public confessions to experts]. Like I said, I've got people who I can rely on so in a sense those people become my self-help media. Like my family; my mother. So, I don't see the need to go and publicise my information." Short of making reference to his race, Mo expresses a similar reference to the family or other people presumably close to him. It is out of a fear of judgement from other individuals that these participants would not engage in mediated confession practices.

However, I wish to argue that an avoidance of judgement is a task considerably difficult to conquer. The family as an 'audience-oriented' public sphere is conceptualised in its allowance for the staging and elevation of subjectivities nurtured by the family to be played out in what Habermas (cited in Calhoun 1992: 10-11) refers to as "dramas staged for the other members of the family." Faith, Butterfly, Mo and other participants' preference of expressing/illuminating their personal issues to family and or close friends is indeed also a form of public engagement. The very publicness these participants claim to steer clear of for reasons involving a fear and avoidance of judgement. Their seemingly private confession of personal issues is 'audience-oriented' and open to family subjectivities. I argue thus for a plausibility in claiming that judgement may in such situations still prevail – however low-scale or contained as compared to mediated judgements on, for instance, social media platforms on which more large-scale

confession-oriented programmes are engaged with by audiences. Foucault (1988) argument regarding the institution of confession is helpful to further emphasise my argument. He notes that the act of confession has power relations ingrained in often unobvious manners. Deciding to subject oneself to the discipline of confession by revealing details of a personal nature (whether to family or strangers), immediately binds the individual to the judgement (moral, ethical, social or otherwise) of the receiver of the confession. Following confession, the confessor is expected, then, to assume full responsibility for her/his actions and personality imperfections by remaining steadfast in their plight to realise ‘healing’ from an expert other who promises to make this happen.

The power relation in this relationship, when looking through a Goffman-inspired (1963) lens of stigmatisation, also exists in the practice of labelling that occurs as aspects of popular forms of psychotherapy. This happens when the expert, after presumably extensive analyses of the client, will take to diagnose their behaviour under one or more of the psychotherapeutic labels established within the practice of psychotherapy. Examples include, ‘depression’, ‘bipolar’, ‘schizophrenia’ to name a few. In this act of psychotherapeutically labelling people – which I wish to argue informs an atmosphere of stigmatisation – the expert immediately accomplishes control over the labelled individual who will henceforth attempt anything to rid himself off this label which carries negative connotations and a risk of stigmatisation as an outcast within the current social categories this individual identifies as a member of. Power is, then, handed into the hands of the expert who will be facilitating this plight.

There is a twofold viewpoint held particularly by Faith regarding mediated self-help and the incorporation of confession which is caused by a tension between her cultural background and her intellectual emancipation through the formal education she has been acquiring. She separates her ‘blackness’ from her intellectual self to justify her almost undecided stance on the matter. It seems being educated and black places certain limits over one’s consumption patterns of certain media texts; in this instance, the consumption of self-help media texts with the incorporated aspect of confession on these mass media platforms. A reconciling of the two – cultural background and level of education – does not seem easy to achieve with regards to how to behave and how not behave as a consumer of various media texts in modern society.

Although she attaches desperation as motivation to confess, Butterfly (Interview, December 2014) also alludes to levels of education as being a key role player in who confesses and who does not. For this participant, and in contrast to Faith, individuals that are less educated and of

a lower economic class are the ones that are likely to be pushed to the 'extreme' of engaging in the act of public confession as a means to seek self-help on various media texts involving experts:

You know, having heard some of these people call in and stuff, you can tell that they are desperate. They probably...they tried but they don't know any better. You know, such aspects like your education levels, like how far you've reached, they impact all these things and you find that they feel like they've tried all they could and they don't know what else to do.

A particular take on race and class with respect to mediated self-help surfaces as she continues to explain why she, personally, would not consider engaging in the practise of confession during mediated self-help engagement:

It's just like when people from...people that live in like your Diepsloot go to your Daily Sun to go report bad service or whatever. I mean, those of us that are like middle class-ish we think, 'Oh My gosh!' But for them that's it! Like, that's all there is, that's all they know. Like having heard quite a number of them, you can hear that if someone is desperate, they can do almost anything to try and fix whatever that's going on. Like, I don't know how I feel about it but it's sad that some people are pushed to those extremes.

Diepsloot is a township in the Northern part of Johannesburg where a predominantly black portion of South African citizens reside. The area still houses many poor citizens who reside in shack dwellings and houses built for them through the post-apartheid government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RPD). That Butterfly (Interview, December 2014) points to this portion of society to exemplify her claim relating to mediated self-help and public confession, demonstrates her relation of race, class and consumption with respect to media texts of a therapeutic self-help nature. Butterfly's response arguably expresses that when it comes to black South Africans, it is mostly the less economically and educationally empowered individual who will be 'desperate' enough to engage in such activities.

A strikingly similar observation surfaces in the work done by Ndlovu (2013) regarding what he argues as a lack of participation of middle-class South Africans in these programmes. It is these confessional elements that, commentators such as Ndlovu (2013) argue; may instigate a habit of voyeuristic viewing from audiences who may hold various negative opinions about the text and the people featured. Most of the negative viewpoints regarding the element of public confession that these shows thrive on are noted to potentially stem from South Africans deemed to be members of a socio-economic label known as the middle-class. Ndlovu (2013:

14) cites one of the producers of *Relate*, Lusanda Chauke, in response to an observation that, seemingly, black middle-class citizens are not visible on the show:

Chauke was of the opinion that they [middle-class blacks] would rather see a psychologist behind closed doors and gave herself as an example of someone who would never consider appearing on *Relate* and added, ‘Why go on TV when you can see a psychologist in private... with no camera?’

Formal education again surfaces in a response from Mandy (Interview, November 2014) who expresses how her level of education has often acted as a hindrance to her patterns of consumption of media texts across the board:

the one thing that having a formal education does; in the form a university degree does...is that it allows you the opportunity to sometimes stand outside of your own experiences and look inside in an attempt to be an outsider looking in. In that outsider looking in, it became a struggle to freely consume the media so I’ve always found myself pulling myself away from the media so I can’t identify with them frankly because I have all these ideas about how these people are just making money by selling all these messages but I find myself in phases that I just end up doing it.

Notice how this participant believes that because of her education levels, she is in a position to establish the media’s dissemination of certain texts as a means to making profit from the content carried by these texts. This sentence, specifically, emphasises this observation: “[...] I have all these ideas about how these people are just making money by selling all these messages”

In theorising talk shows as media texts, Gamson (1988) argues that profit making is, indeed, the fundamental prospect. Producers of talk shows; which include talk shows incorporating discourses of a self-help therapeutic nature where confession is rife, are driven by economic benefits to package these texts in particular ways. As Gamson (1988 7) notes: “Talk shows are show business, and it is their mission to exploit. They commodify and use talkers to build an entertainment product which is then used to attract audiences who are then sold to advertisers, which results in a profit for producers. Exploitation thus ought to be the starting point of analysis and not, as it so often is, its conclusion.”

Asked about her views pertaining to these public self-help themed TV and radio talk shows, magazine features, online communities etc, Butterfly (Interview, December 2014) shares a view similar to the argument made by Gamson (1988). She explains:

You know, it's sad when you, what's the word? It starts with a 'C'; when you make something...when you commodify or commercialise someone else's wellbeing and that's essentially what these highly publicised self-help media platforms...that's essentially what they're doing. These therapists on TV, like they're making millions and it's sad that that's what it's gotten to

However, a blind eye cannot be turned when it comes to the potential benefit that the media's role in ushering self-help media texts into our living rooms and other public spaces has brought because "I still feel like it's reaching people; people that probably wouldn't have been able to get access to it any other way. So, it's doing the job; it's a win-win situation for both the people [the self-helping confessor] and those people that are making money out of selling other people." (Butterfly Interview, December, 2014). The 'people' (public confessors) referred to by this and other participants are perceived to have reached a stage in their lives where they are confident in their identities and are thus not afraid to publicly engage in self-help to potentially improve on who they believe they already are as citizens in contemporary South Africa. Just like Breeze (Interview November, 2014) suggests regarding publicly confessing citizens on self-help media texts, "they are brave! I think they're brave and I think they know who they are. They're not afraid." Knowledge of the self (an established identity) seems key in this case. An exploration of, specifically, the perceptions of identity held by the participants will make up the remainder of this chapter with an aim to gleam evidence on whether or not these participants' consumption of self-help media bears any influence on their perceptions of identity.

Identity: Who and What am I?

Identity construction in South Africa, as literature in chapter two highlights, have taken captivating discursive routes regarding, most significantly, the formation of a collective identity for the country following an extended period of inter-racial segregation and discrimination. Tensions surrounding the idea that memory plays a defining role in how human beings construct their identities have taken centre stage across a myriad of academic commentary with commentators such as Zakes Mda (2002) arguing that memory is, in essence, the driving force behind the formation of identities in post-apartheid South; thereby claiming that we cannot and should not turn a blind eye to the collective memory South Africans share with regards to their socio-political past. What this argument alludes to is a stance that current identities are intricate products of the past that develop and transform within the peripheries of history even in present-day society. In exploring identity in its discursive manifestations, I queried participants about their current perceptions of their identities and from these responses

emerged noteworthy themes that incorporate interesting ways to carve an understanding of how the ten participants continuously construct and reconstruct their self-perceptions of identity.

Breeze (Interview November, 2014) who, as was apparent with the other respondents, found it difficult to respond to the question regarding what she believes makes up her identity. She resorts to respond by mentioning that she (at the time of the interview) is in between ideas of what her identity comprises. Relating this to the fact that she is undergoing certain undesirable personal experiences, she shares:

Wow! (Laughing). I didn't think this was going to be about me. I thought it was going to be generally speaking. Generally about people. Self-identity? Uhhh, how would I self-identify? You know, it's difficult for me to say right now because when I met up with you I did tell you that I was going through some stuff. Some emotional, psychological changes. So, right now at this stage I'm in between ideas of who I am and who I could be and what I identify with.

That Breeze is, as she points out, in between ideas of who she is and who she *could* be; potentially means she has a point of reference that houses these 'ideas' of who she could be; which she consults to assist her in her quest to self-identify. What is apparent is how Breeze refers to certain internal aspects (emotional and psychological changes) as hindrances towards her plight to carving a sense of who she is and could be. How, then, I seek to investigate, are these internal elements (from which we should not exclude memory) put into dialogue with external influences?

Asked to share the things she believes influences her identity, Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) grants the following explanation:

I think hardships in life; things that I've been through. I think pure coincidence; me posting a picture [on social media platforms] of me doing something and someone commenting and referring me to something. Reading and exposing myself to new things, I think. Sometimes you grow overnight and I wake up and I'm like, I don't like this anymore and I don't want to put up with this anymore – I would change and that's where the spiritual aspect comes in.

Of particular interest is how this respondent speaks to a deployment of other people's 'referrals' to things that she is motivated to explore and, in turn, carve a clearer sense of who she ultimately identifies as from these points of reference; which, as it becomes apparent, are external. Through the reading she does, Ayanda exposes herself to external elements that are argued to have an effect on identity formation.

Be that as it may, with both external and internal (e.g, hardships and other emotional adversities) references at their disposal, careful assumptions can be made that these individuals would generally be confident in their sense of self-identity. What became apparent with the individuals interviewed was that self-identity development is not a process to be taken as straight-forward and easy to accomplish. Participants were notably taken aback by this query and thus struggled, to some extent, to grant a confident response in this regard.

Take, for instance, this response from Dineo (Interview February, 2015) who, before attempting to answer, acknowledges a sense of discomfort in that she finds my query into who she identifies as, as an awkward question:

Awkward question (giggles). Okay, how do I identify myself? I think I'm a bit more of a progressive individual; so nothing is ever standing still for me. There's always something that's challenging me, that's making me grow; something I discover about myself every day, you know, that I want to enhance. So, yeah, those are the key attributes to myself.

In the interview session, this participant expressed this sense of discomfort in that she took a considerable pause right after this sentence: 'Awkward question (giggles). Okay, how do I identify myself?' which points to this sense of difficulty in the process of identity formation.

Also making apparent an observation that the process of self-identifying is a seemingly difficult task to navigate is Faith (Interview December, 2014) who expresses the following in response to a question I posed regarding her identity. She says, "I'm Faith. Zulu-speaking, outspoken, social, very friendly, but yeah I'm...this is so weird. I've never really had to think about it, but yeah, I'm a strong-willed person and I'm quite dominating sometimes. My nature's a bit dominating; I try not to be but yeah, I'm just there – an out there person." Although confidently listing certain attributes as what she regards makes up her identity, Faith evidently had discomfort in having to respond to this query as she, mid-sentence, utters the following words: "[...] this is so weird. I've never really had to think about it, but yeah" Reference to feeling 'weird' due to the fact that self-identity is seemingly not something top of mind for her; captures this observation. The adjective 'weird' as defined in the Macmillan online dictionary refers to anything "strange and unusual, sometimes in a way that upsets you" (Macmillan dictionary 2016). Considering this definition of the term and its deployment in Faith's sentence, it is plausible to claim this participant found it strange and unusual to be asked who she identifies as.

Preceding her attempt at an explanation of her identity, Butterfly (Interview December, 2014) had a particular expression of surprise at the fact that I asked about identity. She starts off her response in this manner: ‘Oh my goodness, Simphiwe! How do *I* self-identify?’ Identity is evidently not something that is consciously kept top of mind to be expressed whenever the question arises. However, an observation worth noting is that external elements bear influence and – in line with insight from Gauntlett (2008) and Giddens (1991) – I argue for the inclusion of the media as part of those elements of influence.

Moving between internal and external references of identity, these individuals are evidently ‘open’ to indicators outside of themselves which are often driven by the media, I argue. The media in South Africa, through a propagated culture of remembrance; play a defining role in the enhancement and perpetuation of the country’s historical memory which exposes the younger generation citizens – as descendants of various of the racial groups who were not directly present in the state of affairs under the apartheid regime – to these memories. It is through these moments of remembrance in the form of, for instance, television media’s mass dissemination of documentaries and films about the ‘struggle’ faced, to a significant extent, by black South Africans (and those of other races who stood in solidarity with them) that the identities of the current generation is partly influenced.

Also evident is how identities are not, as argued by scholars such as Alexander (2006) ‘given’ and stable but instead are a process of construction which is an approach commentators within the social sciences nowadays take. The fact that these individuals do not have a long-standing, given identity, they find themselves faced with the challenge of continuously having to self-construct their identities. Thus, I argue, when the question ‘who do you identify as?’ arises, these individuals cannot easily revert to a known/internalised reference making this a challenging request to respond to.

Through the dissemination of an array of cultural products, the media have become front-runners in the dispersal of ideas and knowledge of what it means, as a person of a certain gender, to behave in socially expected ways. These ideas and suggestions are spread through media platforms such as television (consider texts such as films portraying relationships, advertisements showcasing ideas around what to consume, how to do so and what effects this would have on one’s social circles). This is a medium which, as Gauntlett (2008) notes, people in modern societies consume endless hours of. They are further circulated through print media, outdoor media touch points, as well as on the Internet and social spaces such as cinema.

Through these media platforms, images and ideas pertaining to what the world ‘looks’ like and how human beings should imagine the world works, are entrenched within society. This exposes audiences to details of these ideas of the world in relation to, not only oneself, but also millions of distant others we are shown on a global scale. It is here, where Gauntlett (2008: 3) argues, the beginnings of a form of influence can be anticipated. This influence occurs, however great or minor, in the form of steering receivers of these media content in a direction that may encourage them to conduct themselves in a certain way; as well as to develop in them certain expectations of how other people are supposed to behave. It is these concepts – disseminated to people through the mediation of experiences – that individuals cling onto and use as signposts towards the development of an identity and an understanding of the organisation of their social relations (Giddens 1991). Participants such as Ayanda and Breeze in their utterances make it apparent that external influences play key roles in their self-identities

Investigating Consumption and Class Identity

With the emergence of a black middle class in South Africa being continuously explored and rich literature resulting from this, this dissertation enters its study with a view that class identity is an important aspect to be considered when evaluating an area such as the consumption of media texts; and in this instance, self-help media texts. In evaluating the works of, for instance, Phadi (2011) and Iqani (2015) therein emerges interesting ways which, perhaps even indirectly, illustrate that the deployment of the concept bears influence on the socio-cultural mind-set of the individual adopting it. It is the contents of these mind-sets (influenced by self-perceptions of class positioning) that this section wishes to highlight if at all to emerge within conversations with the study participants. That is to say, how is the notion reflected on by participants – if at all – and how could these discursive referrals help us understand the deployment of this notion and its influence on the socio-cultural positioning of the participants in light of all facets of self-help consumption.

Careful not to directly ask participants about their self –identification processes in relation to class, this paper anticipated the emergence of this notion within the conversations that were held with the selected individuals. Interestingly, class-related ideas were not widely referred to but traces hereof emerged in noteworthy fashions as shall become evident in this section.

A myriad of other factors emerged quite frequently. These include race; which Nonny (Interview November, 2014) believes is the first and most important element of her identity. Asked to share how she identifies herself, she utters:

[...] black, first of all. That's the first thing that you identify yourself with. Colour, because colour is very much important. It links you with your background; it links you with your ethnicity as well. So, yeah, a black person who grew up in... who is a Swazi; yes, where I come from is very much important and whose parents are very much conservative in how they raised me, you know.

Race and ethnicity prevail in this participant's self-identity. What also stands out is how she links her socio-historic memory to who she believes she is now. This brings to surface the argument made by Mda (2002) and, to an extent, Nebe (2012) that memory (which is where the past resides) is a key element drawn on in the process of identity construction. As part of this response to how she identifies herself, Nonny went on to share how these ideas about her self-identity are linked to her consumption of self-help media texts.

She explains that due to her being raised by 'conservative' parents, she is not necessarily expected to engage in practices such as self-help because "self-help media was sort of kind of out of that boundary on who...how Nonny should grow up; what she should do and all of that. So, yeah, I'm a black Swazi girl who is semi-modernised because there's still some things that I still believe in that are very much traditional that I will never lose and I'm very much a...how would I phrase it? It's not...very much a person who likes analysing stuff before participating in anything." The idea of the modern versus the traditional makes for thought-provoking insight in that it renders this individual with a sense of a dual identity which she finds herself negotiating when faced with self-identifying. Her 'modern' identity is shaped by behavioural characteristics such as her active engagement with media texts of a self-help nature which, she states, somehow goes against another facet that informs her identity: her traditional belief systems, customs and ways of expression as a 'black Swazi girl'

Mandy (Interview November, 2014) similarly stresses the element of race and the role it plays in how she self-identifies:

I would think race; race is going to be the first thing. I'm going to identify as a black, I'm going to identify as a female; I'm going to be from a previously disadvantaged background – whatever that means. I'm going to be...I don't know, I think those are the first three things I think of every time someone asks, tell me about you.

A part of this participant's response is influenced by post-apartheid discourses pertaining to black South Africans. The political notion of being identified as from a 'previously disadvantaged' background has gained widespread popularity across South African society. It refers, partly, to the government's treatment of non-white citizens during a more than thirty year long period of a socio-political system known as Apartheid; which thrived on racial

segregation that saw many citizens – not of the white race – being excluded from several opportunities for economic emancipation.

Mandy's somewhat unsure deployment of the notion of being previously disadvantaged: "[...] I'm going to be from a previously disadvantaged background – whatever that means", makes for a key empirical reference in support of an argument that the media in South Africa, through a noted culture of remembrance – often in action on nationally-celebrated occasions in memory of the various so-called 'struggle heroes' – perpetuates a re-living of a murky socio-political memory that drives many of the descendants of the black citizens directly involved in the apartheid atmosphere, to discursively adopt identities deemed parallel to a previous socio-economic disadvantage hard to avoid.

Besides race, this paper's interest in uncovering the possible emergence of class in people's identification of themselves was further overshadowed by much more individualistic, personality-centred discourses. It became increasingly apparent that the social construct of class; whether lower, middle or upper is not considered a defining factor in as far as the identity of these research participants is concerned.

For Butterfly (Interview December, 2014), identifying herself is an internally-driven process which she summarises as follows:

I mean now, obviously, I self-identify...I don't know, I think with my compassion and with my...well, I think my compassions makes up a good part of my life. I'm the type of person like it's very easy for me to show empathy towards the next person [...] I'm naturally inquisitive. [...] So, yeah, I think it's my inquisitive nature and my compassion.

A similar 'approach' is taken by one of the male participants in this study whose self-identification proved to be distanced from anything relating to class, and again, credit is given to internal and personal attributes. Mo (Interview January, 2015) expresses:

My struggles, the challenges I'm going through. I think they are part and parcel of who I am. My successes, my do's and my don'ts, my ways of doing things; the way I perceive life and my commitment to situations you know, be them school, be them relationships or whatever.

That no participant of this study made explicit mention of class in their self-identification makes for an eyebrow-raising discovery for this thesis and it instantly set off a range of

questions with regards to the attribution of this socio-economic category by scholars to the subjects of their research; and in this instance, the black South African citizen. One key question that becomes critical to me is whether or not this notion of the black middle class is perhaps not just socially imposed on these individuals who may possibly not be bothered by it, or more critically, may not even fully grasp this label?

This is something that is evident in the Alexander et al (2013) study as well as the Phadi and Ceruti (2011) documentary where it was discovered that a significant number of the Soweto residents interviewed for the research project indicated that they considered themselves as middle class irrespective of the visible differences in income, ownership of assets as well as, to a significant extent, levels of formal education. The overall percentage of participants who confidently took on this middle class label was recorded as 66% (Alexander et al 2013) - a significant amount considering the Soweto landscape and distribution of wealth in this area, specifically at the time the research project was embarked on. This, I wish to argue, illustrates a sense of ill-understanding on the part of numerous South African citizens of the characteristics scholars and researchers base this notion of the middle class on.

Imperative to note at this stage is the fact that discourse pertaining in some way to class identity managed to find its way into the conversation with a participant in interesting ways and this observation, I believe, provides a sense of affirmation that viewing class through the lens of consumption makes for a helpful point of departure in trying to solicit evidence to utilise in contributing to existing debates on race, class and consumption with respect to black South Africans.

One such manner in which class identity becomes visible on the part of the research participants was during conversation with Butterfly (Interview, December 2014). While exploring her participation in the consumption of self-help media texts with specific reference to this activity being engaged in on certain mass media platforms, Butterfly makes an interesting claim which, I argue, exposes her potential self-identification with regards to class. Queried about her opinions regarding individuals that she has witnessed to engage in self-help consumption by confessing certain issues of theirs on mass disseminated media platforms such as, for instance, nationally broadcast radio and television stations; she (Butterfly) made an extensive explanation of how she is of the opinion that class is one of the major driving forces behind who does and who does not engage in 'publicly-driven' self-help consumption and its closely-related aspect of confession.

It is in this explanation that her class identity becomes apparent. Butterfly (Interview December, 2014) shares:

You know, having heard some of these people call in and stuff, you can tell that they are desperate. They probably...they tried but they don't know any better. You know, such aspects like your education levels, like how far you've reached, they impact all these things and you find that they feel like they've tried all they could and they don't know what else to do. It's just like when people from...people that live in like your Diepsloot go to your Daily Sun to go report bad service or whatever. I mean, those of us that are like middle class-ish we think, 'Oh My gosh!' But for them that's it! Like, that's all there is, that's all they know. Like having heard quite a number of them, you can hear that if someone is desperate, they can do almost anything to try and fix whatever that's going on. Like, I don't know how I feel about it but it's sad that some people are pushed to those extremes.

Not only does Butterfly's discussion highlight how she identifies in term of class, it also exposes the existence of that tension that I argue to exist in relation to fully grasping this concept.

The following sentence in Butterfly's explanation is of particular interest in support of a sense of being unsure of this label and just adopting it as it seems to be so frequently imposed on her through socio-economic discourses within post-apartheid South Africa: "I mean, those of us that are like 'middle class-ish' we think, 'Oh My gosh!' But for them that's it! Like, that's all there is, that's all they know." The use of the middle class label is adopted by this participant in what seems to be an uncertain and not entirely confident approach as she reluctantly utters the contribution of the concept to her as "middle class-ish", and in the interview session this was done with the use of air-quotes by this participant. She further exposes, although indirectly, a sense of class identity in response to a brief radio podcast I played to her featuring a caller engaging in psychosexual self-help by confessing certain personal details regarding his sexual life on *The Redi Tlhabi Show* that airs on Talk Radio 702:

[...] But it's like, you see, I feel like the reason some people might have, like might have what can I say, that might like think of these shows as like they might just feel like 'Oh my gosh, this is really like low class' or whatever. I feel like it's maybe the way people respond to the questions or the topic because like with the first one about masturbation, I mean that's something people do and something people need to talk about because like people don't seem to understand that.

Butterfly highlights an interesting aspect of discourse she has evidently been exposed to: discourse pertaining to public confession being something that a person of a class that is above

the lower class may frown upon. She exposes a viewpoint, I argue, that stipulates that middle and upper class individuals (one adopts these notions very carefully here) are not prone to publicly confessing certain things. A viewpoint she attempts to distance herself from but her prior highlighted response renders her part of these ‘people’ who hold this viewpoint about the lower class and public confession through mediated ‘therapy.’

This is a similar line of argumentation that Ndlovu’s (2013: 14) study exposes us to. By exposing us to the words of the producer of a mass disseminated television show based on self-help and, of course, public testimony and confession that, “they [middle-class blacks] would rather see a psychologist behind closed doors and gave herself as an example of someone who would never consider appearing on *Relate* [self-help inspired media text] and added, ‘Why go on TV when you can see a psychologist in private... with no camera?’” ; that study helps to support the claim I make above that class identity in post-apartheid South Africa plays a notably determining role in how self-help media texts, specifically, are consumed by black South Africans such as interviewee, Butterfly and the television producer quoted herewith.

The scholarly attention given to the concept of the black middle class in South Africa makes for insightful contribution to literature useful for the purposes of understanding, in less obscure terms, the socio-economic categorization of citizens and how this may bear a potential influence on the consumption patterns of these individuals and, indeed the direct reverse, how consumption patterns of these individuals may potentially influence their self-categorisation (self-identities). Although still significantly contested in academic circles, this concept is widely deployed by numerous citizens as part of how they identify themselves in various contexts. For this reason, I will argue it imperative to have probed into this facet of identity.

Self-help Consumption and Self-identity

An inclination in the patterns of self-identity formation with regards to the individuals interviewed is that, to a significant extent, self-identity takes on characteristics based on certain socio-cultural aspects such as tradition, ethnicity, belief systems, feelings and experiences. Participants point to a number of such factors when sharing their perceptions of their identity. In less significant terms, often times do physical body features also make the list of characteristics deployed in the self-identification process. Take, for instance, Sisana’s (Interview November, 2014) attempt at accounting for her identity. She shares that “the main attributions that identify me, basically, is my strong jaw line (laughing); I would say for one. I have a very strong jaw line, and I’m a fun person. People associate me with, “whooop whoooooo,

let's have fun!" because of my personality, really, that's me – I'm a sanguine, my personality. And, yeah, that's basically me; I'm a person who's always saying "Yes, let's do it! We can."

Faith (Interview December, 2014) provides this response: "I'm Faith. Zulu-speaking, outspoken, social, very friendly [...] I'm a strong-willed person and I'm quite dominating sometimes. My nature's a bit dominating; I try not to be but yeah, I'm just there – an out there person." For Butterfly (Interview December, 2014), her compassionate nature is expressed to make up a core aspect of who she believes she is: "I think with my compassion and with my...well, I think my compassions makes up a good part of my life. I'm the type of person like it's very easy for me to show empathy towards the next person." Reference to 'other axes' (Gauntlett 2008) of identity surface when analysing these participants' responses. According to Gauntlett (2008: 15), the notion of identity is multidimensional as it incorporates 'other axes' that often go beyond the obvious markers of ethnicity and gender:

Identities, of course, are complex constructions, and gender is only one part of an individual's sense of self. Ethnicity is obviously an important aspect of identity, and like gender may be felt to be more or less central to self-identity by each individual, or might be made significant by external social circumstances (such as a racist regime or community). Other much discussed axes of identity include class, age, disability and sexuality. In addition, a range of other factors may contribute to a sense of identity, such as education, urban or rural residency, cultural background, access to transportation and communication, criminal record, persecution or refugee status

Mo (Interview January, 2015), as highlighted earlier in the section above, holds that he identifies by his "struggles, the challenges I'm going through. I think they are part and parcel of who I am. My successes, my do's and my don'ts, my ways of doing things; the way I perceive life and my commitment to situations [...]" These features, notably internal and psychological, make reference to the role of experience as an axis in self-identity. This is an approach Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) also deploys when she points out that she "think[s] hardships in life; things that I've been through" play a key role in how she self-identifies. What seems to be the case here is that participants deploy a tendency to refer to internal, psychological attributions linked to personality and express these as elements of their identities. As an indication of personhood on the individual level, identity can be understood to refer to the markers of individuality and uniqueness that differentiates the person from other people; as well as at the same time – when looking at the notion as a collective definition – referring to the sameness or continuity of the self across space and time (Zegeye & Harris 2003).

On the level of the person, the ‘markers’ deployed by quoted participants to express their uniqueness provide a situation evident of a conflation of personality traits and experience (psychology) with other socio-cultural aspects as in the case of Faith who includes her ethnic group in the same expression of her perceived personality traits of, for instance, ‘dominating’ and ‘strong-willed’. These observations begin to grant an intersectionality in the idea of identity where it seems to develop not only on social grounds but involving an attachment of more psychological axes through personality traits.

Whether or not these aspects of identity and how they are discursively interlinked (by participants) alongside elements of personality have any influence on what and how these individuals consume or, in reverse, does what and how these individuals consume have any influence on their perceptions of identity?; is a question this paper deems crucial to explore. Helping in providing some understanding towards a possible answer to this enquiry is an utterance from Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) in response to her thoughts about self-help media:

I absolutely love them, I depend on them. I think who I am is because of that. [...] For me, I’ve always felt like unguided for the kind of person I wanted to be. I don’t believe in role models so that’s why I feel unguided like you can like a certain characteristic in someone but nobody is who I want to be. So, for different things I always refer to self-help books.

Ayanda’s admittance to using self-help books as means of guidance in moments when she feels guidance is lacking in her pursuit to the kind of person she desires to be illustrates, I argue, that a relationship exists between her consumption of these texts and her patterns of carving an identity.

Although pointing to a non-believe in role models, this participant’s active consumption of the self-help media text intricately connects her to an element of self-help that possesses laden traces of an involvement of a role model. For insight into defining this notion see Gauntlett’s (2008: 223-254) discussion in his chapter entitled ‘Directions For Living.’ Texts of a self-help nature, at their core, present the consumer with information around how to behave by directing the individual towards a state of being ‘inspired’ and ‘motivated’ to want to alter behaviour and assume certain roles considered to be in line with what is taught by these texts to be socially desirable. ‘Inspiration’ and ‘motivation’ are concepts often referred to in discourses pertaining to what makes a person regard someone else as a role model. If the self-help text can achieve

this; it could, then, be considered as a role model. Even though not human, these texts embody a form of a role model in how they are constructed for consumption.

Providing further evidence for the existence of a relationship between self-identity and consumption is a response from Nonny (Interview November, 2014) which, for the purposes of emphasis, I bring up again. Nonny, in this response to how she self-identifies, makes a direct link to who she identifies as and how self-help consumption has been intertwined into this identity. She self-identifies as “[...] black, first of all. That’s the first thing that you identify yourself with. Colour because colour is very much important. It links you with your background; it links you with your ethnicity as well. So, yeah, a black person who grew up in... who is a Swazi; yes, where I come from is very much important and whose parents are very much conservative in how they raised me, you know.” Consumption of media texts, and in this case, media texts of a self-help nature is something Nonny actively does (thus her being selected to participate in this dissertation) and it is this fact that she believes accounts for a ‘semi-modern’ element of her identity.

For this respondent, “self-help media [is] sort of kind of out of that boundary on who...how Nonny should grow up; what she should do and all of that. So, yeah, I’m a black Swazi girl who is semi-modernised because there’s still some things that I still believe in that are very much traditional that I will never lose [...]” Although her active engagement with media texts of a self-help form admittedly oversteps the behavioural ‘boundary’ her ‘conservative’ parents set for her, she attempts at negotiating a co-existence of the modern and the traditional.

This, as I earlier claimed, accounts for a duality in identity and, in extension, the beginning of a picture of an intersectionality with regards to identity. An intersectionality evidently informed by a negotiation between what is taught and memorised culturally in the sphere of the home/birthplace and what is independently consumed and deployed as ‘modern’ forms of reference to aid in self-identity. What this further points to is the existence of a tension that, I argue, arises when having to negotiate an evidently multi-layered identity incorporating the personal (thoughts, perceptions), the psychological (emotions) as well as the socio-cultural (experiences, memory-driven signposts, domestic traditions and cultures) aspects of influence.

Incorporating the ‘modern’ into her ‘traditional’ customs which she claims she will never forsake, Nonny’s response to this tension sees her adopting ‘modernism’ as part of the identity she has carved thus far in her life which, as she stipulates, is based on a socio-cultural foundation of tradition (specifically, Swazi tradition). It is here where I will deploy an argument

put forward by Giddens (1991) about modernity and the ultimately influential role the media play in their transportation of this philosophical movement. In what Giddens (1991: 4) terms ‘high modernity’, occurrences distant to the self are notably influential on intimacies of the self and events proximate to the self. By endorsing the mediation of experiences, the media, through this genre, not only influence people’s attempts at organising social relations but they also influence self-identity as a personal process of self-knowledge in the world as we know it.

A response from Ayanda (Interview February, 2015) helpfully captures this observation. Ayanda expresses that her engagement with self-help media has been exposing her to ‘amazing’ people whose wisdom she ‘taps’ into to guide her in her own experiences:

[...]You’re reading something that someone wrote two years ago but they are leaders in their opinions or, I don’t know, fields. So, you know like listening to Oprah videos, you know; someone who’s been there, done that and has the wisdom and you can just tap into that. You don’t have to know the person personally. So, I feel like it gives me access to amazing people; Maya Angelou, Joyce Maya, all these different people. Even normal everyday people who write for Huffington Post or Tiny Buddha; that’s a spiritual blog I used to read a lot, yeah. So, it makes everything accessible which is what I appreciate.

The exposure of these study participants to media texts themed along the practice of self-help, places them in a position which leaves them exposed to being influenced by the experiences of distant others through these texts they so actively consume. Whether they are experts who have ‘been there, done that’ or ordinary people who use mass media platforms to disseminate details about their private experiences; the accessibility to these mediated experiences is valued.

What, then, about the influence from the individuals not so distant from these persons? Their immediate family members – perhaps more so the elderly – who have particularly influential positions over younger individuals such as Ayanda and Nonny? Their influential roles as, for instance, parents should surely also render them significant points of reference and, perhaps, guidance in the plight to foster self-identity. What Ayanda utters (Interview, February 2015) in our interview session illustrates a possibility that the country’s socio-political history may render these adults as not credible enough to draw forms of identity from: “[...we can’t look up to our parents because they make different decisions because of the regime they were under. We don’t have that, we’re free. We have all this freedom and all these opportunities open to us but nobody kind of prepared us for it so we don’t know what to do.”

The 'regime' pointed to here is the apartheid regime which Ayanda believes altered the decision-making potential of many of the individuals (in her case, parents) to have lived during that period. The influence of the Apartheid regime left a mental mark which manifests in an inferiority complex which is what further discourages Ayanda from taking self-identity guidance from her parents. The following extensive quote captures this observation:

So, we always have this sort of complex but we don't know where it comes from and we don't know how to deal with it. [...] We can't take directions from our parents who lived in a different regime because our parents get excited or even children in the hood or even old people get excited about having a white person in the room or in their area like a white person is superior or something, you know. Black people...I just have so many...I'm harder on black people because I feel like there's a complex and that's definitely from Apartheid but some of us, I'm 23 and I didn't leave in that era and I don't understand why I have to be punished for it.

Therefore, her being in a different regime – that of democracy and a 'freedom' she makes reference to – she cannot bring herself to confidently carve an identity by using her parents as reference points which are potentially fraught with inferiority-driven dialogues. This is a case in point which is in relative alignment with an observation Nebe (2012: 156) makes about South Africa's transition from apartheid into democracy and the resulting implications on identity construction on the part of descendants of this regime. He argues:

The democratic transition had failed to acknowledge the full extent of the historical trauma of racism and division within the country, and that this failure had begun to have a profoundly negative impact on the identities of a new, young generation.

This reality has fostered a lack of, perhaps, assurance for Ayanda in that her parent's guidance would be beneficial for her – a 'free' individual with vastly different 'opportunities' – as her parents may, arguably, not be mentally in state of appropriately guiding a liberated individual such as herself.

The self-help media text manifested in the form of television and radio talk shows that houses rife mediation of 'therapy' (the broadcasting of confessions) which, I argue, is a core illustration of how the often distant experiences of 'imperfection', unhappiness, disappointment, fear – among many others – inform how these participants carve their own social relations and use these as reference points to determine how they want to be perceived within these social relations which, ultimately, informs who they believe they are relative to or even in opposition to the people in their social spaces.

Witnessing, through these media texts, how ‘confessors’ are ‘guided’ by experts to deal with their issues makes it easier for the consumer of these media texts to decide how, personally, they will incorporate such guidance into their own behavioural patterns to be able to adopt a desired role in society. These ‘roles’ often vary but are ultimately acting as a behavioural foundation for the ‘type’ of person these consumers desire to be identified as. With this I argue that there evidently exists a relationship between self-identity and self-help consumption in that the consumers of self-help media texts participating in this study cling on to the pedagogical nature entrenched within these texts to ‘learn’ from distant experiences that are then used to, firstly, compare as well as determine how to behave ‘appropriately’ to be the best ‘you’ (identity) that you are capable of.

This chapter has engaged in a discussion of sub-themes deemed helpful in granting insight into self-help media consumption, the public nature thereof and how this is perceived by the study participants. The discussion emphasis in extension of chapter five, a seeking of self-knowledge which these participants believe are carried by the self-help text. The attainment of this sought after sense of self-knowledge presumed to being an accompanying benefit of engaging in psychological self-help, is argued to be intimately attached to the practise of confession which is deemed crucial if self-helpers really want to be successful in their quest to ‘finding’ and ‘knowing’ themselves. It is this inseparable aspect of the self-help process that has been packaged and produced on mass media platforms such as television, radio, print as well as online digital media that has seen the confession of often intimate details being vastly disseminated by the media. This socio-cultural manifestation has gained such popularity that an emergence of a culture of ‘remedy’ and therapy perpetuated through this genre by certain emerging and established media text producers is hard to miss in modern society. For the participants interviewed, when queried about their preferences between private and mediated forms of self-help oppositional discussions emerge which, as I closely analysed, ultimately point to a preference for the latter.

Reasons given include the viewpoint that mediated self-help results in an atmosphere of camaraderie amongst audiences of these texts who, through communicative interactivity allowed by these texts as I argue, can share in the experiences of others’ pain and emotions to teach to them while learning from them. It is this relation that is said to possess the ability to inspire vast responsible citizenship deemed crucial in times of troubling behaviours such as xenophobic violence. Fascinatingly, willingness to participate in mediated self-help engagement by confessing certain details to an expert other on, for instance, radio, television

or an online community; a firm 'no' is expressed. These participants link their disinterest in engaging in public confession to the fact that they are not as 'brave-hearted' as the individuals who actually *do* confess.

Who, then, is identified as this brave-hearted individual who is so adamant in gaining expert assistance that she goes as far as exposing her deeply personal experiences on public media platforms? And why are these participants – all avid consumers of self-help media texts – not willing to reap the full benefits of the self-help process by engaging in the practise of confession? In response to this, I argue for the existence of a tension when it comes to these citizens and their self-perceptions of race, culture and education with regards to self-help media consumption. As a deliberate move taken by this dissertation, all of the participants are of the black race. It is the socio-historic elements that these individuals carry with them that cause a tension and evident limitation in their consumption patterns of the self-help media text. Being black is explained by participants such as Faith to carry certain cultural values which are tied to ideas that confession of deeply-rooted problems/imperfections is not something to be publicly done. To avoid being publicly frowned upon by fellow black people, confession should rather be done in the presence of no more than very close family members who will assist accordingly.

Be that as it may, due to their levels of formal education and exposure to modernistic cultural values, some of the participants find themselves in a state of having to navigate and negotiate their way through a space where their traditional values as black people often clash with what they have been culturally exposed to through modern day media and the often-Westernised educational tools they've adopted over time. Who then confesses can be argued to be two types of black people: Firstly, the very little or uneducated black citizen desperate enough for 'help' and intellectually limited to realise that the media are publicly exploiting their suffering for, more often than not, economic gains. Secondly, it is the notably educated black citizen who chooses to go with modernist socio-cultural ideals that go against the conservative values this individual may or may not have been taught regarding privacy of intimate information.

All participants interviewed for this research project are what I would like to argue, a part of the societal 'haves'. It was, as a result, no surprise that most of their viewpoints were skewed to an evidently elitist perspective on consumption. Nonetheless, without turning a blind eye to this, it is vital to mention a striking response around self-help media consumption as a potential tool for promoting social harmony by, as Muzi argues, teaching citizens to behave in

responsible ways; so much so that social ills such as the xenophobic attacks could be avoided. It is these ideas that continue to support the proliferation of self-help media texts as tools for self-management and responsible citizenship. If so, then this view presents a problematic picture in that it naively overlooks the citizen who is, often times not by choice, unable to access these media texts due to the socio-economic nature of this country; as well as the individuals who, by choice prefer not to expose themselves to self-help media.

What, then, are the implications of this lack of access on these individuals? The citizen who finds himself at the margins of the consumption of self-help media due to socio-economic restrictions and the one who doesn't find any interest in this media genre even if able to access it, are disallowed access to this presumed tool of guidance throughout their 'journey' of life; resulting in them missing out on these highly lauded moral lessons around responsible living and mastery over the imperfections of the self (believed to come with self-help media consumption). Are we, then, casting them as the citizens responsible for behaviours deemed socially inappropriate? This, I argue, is where an overestimation of the role of the self-help media text could be problematic/complex in helping us understand what self-help media consumption ultimately means for the black South African citizens who have participated in this study.

In line with an attempt to draw a connection between perceptions of identity and consumption of, specifically, media texts of a self-help nature; this chapter explored sub-themes related to the emerging insights on consumption and identity. Drawing on interview data from the individuals participating in this research project, it is apparent that identity formation is a complex process which takes on various routes for these participants. This complexity in the construction of a self-identity renders the presence of an element of difficulty/discomfort when it comes to being faced with the task of verbally expressing their identity. When ultimately expressed, these identities present a notable intersectionality driven, I argue, by a tension in the form of a pressure to negotiate between personal, psychological and socio-cultural indicators of self-identity. What is resorted to instead, one observes, is an adoption of various aspects which result in dualistic, often multi-layered expressions of identity that intricately bring in personality-driven traits.

A relationship between self-help media consumption and self-identity, I argue in this chapter, exists based on the grounds that the educational and public nature of the self-help text renders it a key tool of 'guidance' to these self-help consumers. It is a guidance that is intricately linked

to the media's endorsement of mediated experiences from which consumers of these distant experiences 'learn' in order to ultimately attribute these lessons to their own social relations. This, in turn, allows for the carving of their own identities based on the 'ideas' they have at their disposal.

Historically-driven ideas of what constitutes socio-cultural discourses pertaining to being black are being re-imagined and reconstructed in ways that, more explicitly through Nonny's explanations of identity, incorporate the usage of 'modernist' ideals that are adopted to carve what I argue are dualistic, multifaceted identities that deploy both the modern and still attempt to 'stay true' to the traditional, cultural principles entrenched in the ideals (residing in memory) around being black. Class identity minimally manoeuvres its way into discussions pertaining to self-identity and, although not a common pattern with majority of the participants, the adoption of this label illustrates what I argue to be a sense of ill-understanding of this label yet it still exposes an insightful manifestation in the consumption ideals of the participants. Be that as it may, knowledge into self-identity provides a 'strong' foundation on which to draw insights as to how this process is influenced by the consumption of, specifically, media texts of a self-help nature.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Discussion of Concluding Remarks

By summarising key issues concerning the findings that this thesis makes, the following chapter comprises of an overview of the two analytic chapters, concluding remarks, an outlining of the limitations of this research project as well as brief recommendations for future research into this subject matter. Herewith, I aim to grant a discussion in closure with which to render an inclusive summary with respect to the two research questions this paper set out to explore answers to.

Overview of Analytic Chapters

Chapter five of this thesis has developed a contextual backdrop to the reasons gleaned from interview data with the study participants regarding their consumption of self-help media texts. The chapter shows that self-help media is consumed by these participants as sources of guidance and knowledge deemed crucial by the study participants when they are faced with the need to understand and know themselves as well as other people in their social spaces. Illustrated in the chapter is how participants place emphasis on the view that by knowing and understanding themselves and others, they are better positioned to fit into society. Fitting into society is reflective of a perceived socio-cultural perfection seemingly sought after by the participants who are firm in their view that the self-help text manages to assist in assuring this plight.

In addition, what the chapter shows is that the Internet as a media channel (more especially via the search engine Google) is valued by participants as a popular source through which self-help material is sourced and used by the participants as an instant solution to ruling out unfavourable and unwelcomed feelings/behaviours – expressed by these participants through a deployment of various ‘psy’ discourses of, for instance, short temper, being socially ‘introverted’, bipolar, split personality – believed to disallow better interaction with fellow human beings. Beyond these, broader socially-undesirable behaviours such as acts of xenophobic violence (used as an example by Muzi) in a country such as South Africa said to already be plagued with social ills crippling to social and interpersonal harmony; are stipulated by participants to can be avoided through the consumption of self-help texts if producers of these texts ensure mass distribution thereof.

The Internet's provision of almost anything (as participants such as Ayanda, Breeze and Sisana claim) renders it a platform deployed, as the chapter has noted, with the motivation that it is able to provide a 'quick fix' to problematic intrapersonal and interpersonal conflict. Other media platforms such as television, radio and print media in South Africa that have incorporated the genre of self-help through mediated therapy (e.g, *Relate* [TV] and the *Redi Thlabi show* [radio]) are favourably reflected upon by study participants who share that such moves by media producers provide for welcomed platforms of 'learning' and continuous development. Learning, in this instance, is linked to a core aspect of self-help: its expectation and motivation to those participating in it to engage in the practice of confession and testimony – often to expert others – of details of a personal, often intimate nature said to be hindrances to psychosocial and/or psychosexual prospering. These participants, in their capacity as audiences of such media texts, speak to a learning from the mistakes of others provided through the vast availability of these texts that ensures an avoidance of similar mistakes which, participants claim, not only provides a much-needed camaraderie between confessing bodies and audiences collectively experiencing these confessions; but it also positively alters the lives of millions with access to these texts.

In light of these findings, I argue in the chapter that the self-help media text as a cultural form is somewhat overestimated by participants who seemingly suggest, firstly, that these texts can or will definitely have the same effect on all individuals accessing them (audiences). This is a viewpoint scholars such as Hall (1982) have advised to tread carefully around as audiences (of diverse backgrounds) are in fact much more active in their reception of media presentations. Secondly, this approach is problematic in that it naively overlooks, like I suggest in the chapter, the economically-constrained individual (not socio-economically empowered enough to access such media texts) as well as the person who, is able to but actively chooses, for reasons known to them, *not* to engage with texts of a self-help therapeutic nature. It is the overlooking of such individuals that I argue subsequently blankets them in the minds of active consumers of self-help media (participating in this study) as the people responsible for the socially-crippling occurrences said to can be avoided by mere consumption of self-help media.

Further provided in chapter five is this dissertation's view on what makes self-help and its therapeutic undertones public. The chapter – borrowing from bodies of work such as the

classical literature from Habermas (1969; 1989) regarding the public sphere, as well as contemporary studies of the media by scholars such as Dayan (2001) and Iqani (2012) – argues for self-help as public in ways that incorporate Habermas’ proposition of the public sphere as sites of civic participation through critical reflection on the issues of the day; and ideas of the public as sites of visibility and appearance often through ‘professional mediation’ (Dayan 2001). The practice of self-help as a media genre poses as sites of visibility and appearance in that it allows, during these moments of mediation of the interactions between experts and ordinary citizens, for the illumination and professional management of emotions and private intimate details. These are ‘staged’ in visually, audio-visually and audibly alluring ways for consumption by audiences. These audiences are presented the opportunity to actively engage with the occurrences collectively experienced by them as they are hailed upon by producers of these texts to call in, SMS, e-mail and deploy the use of social media platforms to provide commentary, similar experiences, instigate debate or general advice to the parties ‘appearing’ within these texts. This, I argue, accounts for the self-help text as a form of a public sphere; which emphasises this paper claim of an interlinked publicness comprising of sites of visibility and appearance and sites symbolic of those permitting civic participation.

Chapter six of this dissertation goes on to explore and build on the issue of public and private self-help by highlighting responses from participants with regards to their consideration of and willingness to potentially compromise their ‘privacy’ (afforded to them by their audience status) by participating as self-help seekers on media platforms. The chapter shows that the study participants have an awareness of the public nature of these texts and this awareness results in them expressing a collective scepticism with regards to considering their own participation by staging their personal and intimate details to experts for others to consume. Participants – as shown in the chapter – argue, firstly, for a fear of judgement from people unknown to them and secondly, as is the case with participants such as Faith, it is believed that black people consider such public displays of personal issues to be taboo. What is considered by participants is the divulging of such personal details to only close family members and friends in spaces deemed private as they are free of professional mediation.

It is in this chapter that I argue for the potential of a non-escape from the judgement that these participants claim to actively avoid by choosing not to feature on self-help media platforms. I draw from the contributions as presented by Calhoun (1992: 10-11) citing Habermas and his reference to the family as an ‘audience-oriented’ public sphere in its allowance for the staging of issues protected by the family to ultimately be played out as “dramas staged for other

members of the family” during the sharing of these issues among family members which exposes the individual to the power relations embedded in confession and testimony that, as Foucault (1976; 1988) argues, ties the confessor to the judgement of the receiver(s) of the confession who expects of the confessing individual to take responsibility in ensuring that they do something to deal with the contents of the confession especially if they are deemed socially or psychologically disabling.

Chapter six further delves into a discussion of consumption of media texts in relation to identity. The chapter argues that identities are influenced by the consumption of the media texts these chosen participants claim to be active audiences of. This influence is facilitated through a process where these interview participants, through these texts, are exposed to the experiences and behaviours as confessed and testified by distant others through “therapeutic storytelling” [stories of a ‘diseased’ self] (Illouz 2003: 90) directed at experts who often times respond in ways indicative of a guidance towards ‘fixing’ these behaviours to ensure psychologically-beneficial and socially-desirable outcomes upon which healthy self-identities can be constructed. These participants who, as is evident in the chapter, often deploy markers of identity seemingly interlinked between social axis as well as personality-driven traits (psychological), use these media texts as a pool of ‘ideas’ from which to pick and choose markers of identity deemed closely associated with where they believe they are as human beings in this perceived community of ‘imperfect’ citizens collectively striving towards perfection.

Concluding Remarks

As is evident in chapter six of this dissertation, for the participants interviewed; identity formation proves to be a complex process which significantly relies on the availability of external ‘ideas’ often from sources distant to the self. The media’s provision of distant experiences through the mediation of these occurrences is a major driving force as a source of ideas. It is these ‘ideas’, the paper argues, participants deploy to assist in constructing their own identities. Individuals participating in this research project illustrate this reliance on the media, in this case, via active consumption of self-help media texts (ranging from radio and TV shows, books, as well as online media platforms) to aid in carving a socially-desirable identity as per suggestion by these texts. I borrow from Mda (2002) who argues that memory plays a crucial role in identity construction and should not be overlooked as a potential influence on people’s construction of identities. In this vein, I argue that the media’s engagement in a culture of

remembrance also partly informs the identity construction patterns of these black interview participants who are descendants of a social-cultural climate of human rights violation and torture mostly towards black bodies (Goodman 2006).

It is found in this thesis that the educational nature of the self-help media text renders it highly lauded by these participants as a key tool of socio-cultural and socio-emotional guidance in modern society. It is so highly valued that participants such as Nonny confidently claim the prevalence of these media texts to be “the best thing that could ever happen in the 21st century.” Muzi re-iterates this high value for the self-help text in his claim that these texts are major contributors to positive social transformation; especially in a country such as South Africa where socially undesirable behaviours lead to occurrences such as the xenophobic attacks that occurred in the country. If more access to self-help media texts is continued to be endorsed by the media, such occurrences, Muzi holds, could be avoided.

This viewpoint, I suggest, places further emphasis on the argument that the prevalence of the self-help text ultimately informs the emergence of a means to ‘govern’ citizens without directly enforcing more laws, policies and regulations. Consuming self-help media, I align my argument with Rimke’s (2000); means consuming responsibility. This is a responsibility taken by a human being who occupies various roles such as parent, son, daughter, student, teacher, employee etcetera. Ultimately, a hyper-responsible citizen renders easier governance and lesser probability of socio-political, socio-economic, socio-cultural chaos.

What is problematic, however, is that the glorifying of the self-help media text makes for what I argue to be an overstated value attribution as this view about the self-help text overlooks a key issue: the socio-economic climate in the country and the aspect of audience choice in what to consume and not to. As stipulated more broadly in chapter five, a major portion of South African society live under and in extreme poverty; rendering it potentially challenging for such individuals to gain access to self-help media texts as access to the platforms of dissemination of these texts is far from reach for them. I argue that the overstated value placed on the self-help media text as a vehicle of greater social responsibility education to be problematic in merely what this viewpoint potentially alludes to. Claiming that the self-help texts is ideal in ‘teaching’ responsibility and self-management as is apparent in how participants speak about these texts, connotes to a believe that individuals not accessing these texts are to be considered as the ones thought to engage in irresponsible behaviours such as, in keeping with one participant’s example, the xenophobic attacks.

This dissertation does not strip the self-help media text off its said value; which is greatly shared among participants (all avid consumers thereof) who hold that it is through these texts that they are able to ‘find’, ‘know’ and understand themselves better as individuals. These texts are also said to possess the benefit of granting their consumers with the tools to successfully silence the ‘negative voices’ said to be in a person’s head.

For a holistic benefit, self-help media consumption is intricately linked to the practice of ‘confession,’ which is claimed to be a crucial step to take if the self-helper seeks complete ‘healing’ and emotional emancipation (Foucault 1976; Foucault 1988; Peck 1978; Rimke 2000; Rimke & Brock 2012). Through strong media involvement, the confession process has been rendered what I’d like to call a public affair where the exposing of deeply-rooted secrets transpires outside of the ‘privacy’ of the expert’s office on mass mediums such as TV and radio (talk shows themed around self-help); print media (e.g, magazine features involving agony aunts) and online platforms (audio-visual material on, for instance, YouTube showcasing confession as part of self-help). Because the aspect of confession is closely tied to the practice of self-help, the mediation thereof renders self-help media texts public in a way that illustrates an interlinking of the idea of the public as a sphere of civic participation (Habermas 1969; 1989) as well as that of the public as sites of appearance and visibility (Iqani 2012; Dayan 2001). Through the ‘staging’ of people’s personal and intimate details, self-help media texts and their producers often motivate for audience interaction with the subject matter and provide commentary which, I argue, embodies an interlinked publicness as spaces for participation and sites of appearance and visibility.

Interestingly, all participants of this study claim that they are not ‘brave’ enough to go as far as confessing their ‘imperfections’ on these media platforms for several reasons. Some participants hold that public confession is something that, as black people, is considered a taboo because as per custom and tradition, you just cannot make a public spectacle of your intimate details. This undermines your traditional values and disrespects the value of your close family and familial elders who should be your first and main point of advice and guidance. So, to avoid being frowned upon by fellow black people as well as steering clear of any potential public humiliation, participants such as Faith, Dineo, Ayanda, Butterfly, and Breeze avoid confession of a ‘public’ nature and claim that either close family or friends should be approached if personal issues need to be testified and dealt with. I argue, in response to this observation, that the family and/or close friends are indeed also a form of a public because of their being ‘audience-oriented’ as soon as they collectively gather to listen to/witness to the

confessing family member's testimony. Thereby, still implicating the confessing member in a state of potential exposure to judgement and the power relations attached to confession.

Another reason as to why confession is not engaged in by the individuals participating in this study is that, due to the level of public 'drama' it possesses, it is said to undermine the 'confessors' intelligence which, Butterfly believes is key in helping one understand that the media are merely exploiting the confessing individual for monetary gains. An argument closely aligned with Gamson's (1998: 7) observation that "talk shows are show business, and it is their mission to exploit. They commodify and use talkers to build an entertainment product which is then used to attract audiences who are then sold to advertisers, which results in a profit for producers. Exploitation thus ought to be the starting point of analysis and not, as it so often is, its conclusion." Being adequately educated is seen as a guard against such 'exploitation'.

Who, then, are the 'brave-hearted' individuals in, specifically the black communities, that go as far as confessing their 'issues' on mass media platforms in the pursuit of psychotherapeutic, psychosocial, psychosexual 'healing'? Based on interview information, it can be concluded that these brave hearts are a combination of two kinds of people. The first is imagined to be the very little or uneducated individual 'desperate' enough for self-help to a point that s/he is blinded by the media's exploitation of his/her suffering by packaging it in aesthetically luring ways that results in dramatic storytelling made available for the voyeuristic consumption of audiences.

The second type of person considered 'brave-hearted' by his fellow black citizens, is the educated individual who, due to heavy subscription to 'modernism', is able to go against the cultural, traditional and customary values that are so often attached to ideas of what it means to be of the black race in, specifically, a country such as South Africa or a continent such as Africa. By 'moving with the times'; a modernistic philosophy driven by the media, these individuals, then, find themselves engaging actively in order to reap the perceived benefits of self-help media consumption.

The dissertation presented two research questions around which a deeper understanding of the practice of self-help media consumption was aimed to be carved. It asks, firstly, how and why do black South Africans consume self-help media texts? Secondly, to what extent does these individuals' self-help media consumption influence their self-identities? The self-help text is largely consumed as a guide towards 'knowing' and 'finding' the self as well as granting further moral education with respect to socially-acceptable behaviour deemed vital for social harmony.

It is often consumed in manners that locate it in the mind of its consumer as a ‘quick fix’ to feelings and experiences deemed undesirable. This element of an instant repair to imperfect conditions is more pronounced by the Internet’s praised capability of granting easy and anytime access to these texts; further placing the text, I argue, at the consumer’s fingertips. These texts are also consumed due to their said capability to create a sense of camaraderie and community in imperfection which can be collectively tackled. By publicising these experiences on large scales, these texts are argued to benefit the people who may need assistance with tackling their own issues but can perhaps not ‘afford’ to or are not ‘brave’ enough to seek help publicly. Thereby, these individuals can still indirectly reap the perceived psychological benefits and ‘guidance’ in the comfort of their own homes, offices etc. while knowing they are not alone in these struggles. This is a claim that I found to strongly resonate with the participants interviewed for this research project. They argue for a sense of camaraderie, ‘learning’ and ‘transformation’ through these media texts.

Self-identities are influenced to a great extent by the consumption of self-help media texts. By providing access to a broad range of distant social interactions through the mediation of experiences, the self-help media text exposes its consumer to a myriad of ‘ideas’ on how to behave in socially-acceptable ways. It is these ideas that are deployed by the active self-help consumer as a key reference point in the carving of their own identities within the social spaces they find themselves.

In a country plagued with a past so traumatic and evidently challenging to forget; the media – through a genre incorporating aspects of ‘remedy’ and therapy – are capitalising on a promotion of a culture of ‘fixing’ and a preoccupation with emotions which has been the order of the day since the country’s ‘transition phase’ from apartheid into democracy. Attempting and, I wish to argue, not entirely succeeding at this plight; the TRC appears to have been a spring-board of this evident and undeniably growing culture of therapy we are now almost presented with on a daily basis on mass media platforms such as television, print media and radio.

What is striking, however, is how these participants display a shared scepticism towards the act of directly participating on these public self-help inspired media texts by, for instance, appearing as a guest in need of help or even calling in to a radio show seeking help. Justifying this cynicism as a mere lack of bravery on their part, these individuals are showcasing an ironic selfishness in that they expect other people to carry the responsibility of publicly exposing their, often deeply personal issues, in the name of ‘healing’ so that others may ‘learn’ from

their experiences. As participant Faith so thought-provokingly puts it: “I really think they are brave and I admire them to some degree [...] it means you’re not selfish with your hardships.”

The ‘them’ in this instance that this participant refers to, I find, are subjected to a very complex relationship of admiration which is intricately overshadowed by a sense of shame and judgement for the fact that, perhaps due to lack education, a disrespect for tradition/customs or culture, or a mere lack of economic freedom; these individuals would stoop to allowing the media to exploit them and their emotions in the ways that are evident in contemporary society. A society where, whether or not overt admission of this is made; a core goal behind the production of these media texts is the capitalist-driven objective of ensuring profit for the producers of these texts.

With the continuous perpetuation of a culture driven by a goal to strive towards a ‘perfection’ hardly ever, if not impossible to attain; the media – I argue – are for a long time to benefit from the active participation of citizens in this plight of striving towards this perceived perfection. It is under this ‘reality’ whereby we witness the highly voluminous mushrooming of, for instance, television programmes linked in various ways to the practice of therapy deemed a key transporter towards the land of ‘perfection.’

Identities, as a result, are constantly pulled in numerous directions as is the case with the participants interviewed for this research paper whereby it is apparent that there is a tension between the identity attached to an individual’s primary source of a social collective – the home – and traditions/customs practised there; and the ‘city’/modernistic spaces of, for example, multicultural institutions of higher learning filled with different cultural identities. A pressure to ‘stay true’ to the identity constructed within the ‘home’ space and still strive to ‘fit in’ to the spaces away from this traditionalist one; leaves these participants to adopt what translate into intersectional, dualistic/multi-layered forms of identity.

Limitations of Research Project

This study, as anticipated, is not without limitations. It is, therefore, vital to highlight some of these restrictions. As is evident with the participating individuals in their utterances, consumption patterns and access to media forms; these individuals are all part of the people considered to be part of the ‘haves’ in society. That is to say, socio-economic access to various media platforms does not pose as a strong challenge to these individuals who, as a result, are able to expose themselves to cultural products such as the self-help text, for instance. This is largely also owed to how recruitment was done. A major part of the initial recruitment call

occurred on online platforms. Such a move carries the potential to exclude the individuals who have very little to no access to the Internet and any of the online communication media platforms used due, perhaps, to certain socio-economic constraints. These excluded voices, I believe, have a potentially influential effect on the findings made by a study of this nature. This study, as a result, is skewed to relatively 'elitist' and middle class voices, viewpoints and experiences of a group of largely Johannesburg-based black South Africans.

Recommendations for Future Research

In its main attempt at investigating the consumption of self-help media texts by a selected group of black South Africans, this thesis only looks into the viewpoints held by individuals who are avid consumers/audiences of self-help media and highlights where (platforms), why and how this is the case. It provides knowledge to contribute to debates within the academy with respect to race, class, identity and consumption. Future research, I propose, could explore both sides of this avenue of enquiry: investigate both the approval and disapproval of self-help media as popular cultural texts in modern society. That is to say, future research could explore the reasons why certain individuals potentially disagree with the said benefits that the consumption of self-help media possesses; which would make for interesting comparison of voices on either side of the phenomenon. For further enhancement of such a research approach, future researchers could incorporate the voices of the 'experts' attributed to these media texts and put these in direct dialogue with supporters and naysayers of self-help media.

Appendix A: Outline of Interview Guide

Outline of Topics addressed in the interviews:

Part A: How and why they (participants) consume self-help media texts?

Thank you, once again, for agreeing to participate in this study. The goal of this session is to gain more insight into some of the reasons why the research participants choose to consume self-help media material, as well as how they go about doing this.

- To start us off, please tell me what your thoughts are about self-help media material?
- How did you initially come into contact with this type of media material?
- What would you say influences your consumption of these self-help themed materials?
- Do you consider yourself a ‘self-help junky’? I just deploy the term very casually in this case. That is to say, has self-help media material consumption become an active practice in your life?
- Self-help media material consumption is considered a form of psychologically-inspired therapy outside the traditional private space of the therapist’s office
 - What are your thoughts on this observation of therapy moving from the privacy of the therapist’s office into public media spaces such as TV, Radio, Magazines and Online communities, among others? [I ensured that I granted interviewees with practical examples to help bring clarity to the question].
- Numerous TV and Radio programs have introduced self-help themed features where experts publicly engage with audiences who seek practical self-help techniques:
 - What do you think about these vastly public self-help themed TV and Radio programs?
 - Have you, or would you ever engage in ‘public’ self-help consumption by seeking self-help advice on TV/Radio programs with self-help experts?
 - What do you think of individuals who seek self-help techniques on these vastly publicized programs?

Part B: How do participants' perceive these media texts they so avidly consume and what does this say about their self-identities in relation to the people directly featured on these self-help media forms?

I played a brief sound clip of a radio podcast on which audience members of *The Redi Tlhabi Show* on *Talk Radio 702* are engaging in psychotherapeutic, psychosocial as well as psychosexual self-help by publicly confessing certain details around the issues they claim to be seeking assistance on. This is followed by a discussion into the participant's thoughts and feelings around what they had heard on these radio podcasts.

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