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Sexy, Smart & Altogether Spectacular

Analysing the self-display of young black South African Women on Instagram

By

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of the Arts

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University of the Witwatersrand

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Plagiarism Declaration

I, **986569**, am a student registered for Masters in Media Studies in the year 2017. I hereby declare the following:

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Date: _____

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Background and aims of the study

In recent times, social media has become an area of constant interest and focus for scholars of media and culture. The explosion of technology and devices has enabled advanced communicative strategies. Social media as a whole has been at the forefront of enabling communication, and the influence and effect that it has on everyday life among people is seen in the interactions that take place continuously. Even though these media forms are not accessible to everyone, social media has found itself situated as an integral part of society, serving to fulfil a specific role and function in the way in that people express themselves, define and re-define who they are, and create who they would like to be within the online space (Schau & Gilly, 2000). Thus, it can be accepted as a normal phenomenon that social media ultimately plays a significant role in identity formation, or in the way in which people use this space to evolve into their assigned, idealized, or realized selves. The nature of these platforms allows the users the opportunity to "develop their self-concept and affiliated identities to create their image, and to produce their own spotlight through the experience" (Pugh, 2010: 1). This speaks to the liberal, enabling space of social media platforms, and the freedom it allows people to act, or function in their assigned positions, and eventually their realized or desired selves. This project explores the self-display of young black South African women on Instagram, and how they construct their identities within the online social media realm of Instagram.

Of the various social media platforms that are widely used, Instagram as an object of study is particularly interesting, due to the uniqueness of its application. It is primarily photo-based with an intended purpose of connecting people using the visual, which is done through easy uploading of photographs via a mobile application. According to Internet Live Stats (2017), there are 768 Instagram images uploaded every second. Instagram allows users to curate their own visual archive. Through photo editing and enhancement tools, it allows the everyday user a chance to become a photographer in their own right, and to showcase their photographic skills whether this is of

themselves or their work. For many users, the focus is driven towards the visually appealing elements of the images. For the purposes of this research, the photographic and visual components contribute to the interest of the study of this site.

Since its inception in October 2012, Instagram is now host to 60 million users, and these figures are growing on a daily basis (Jordan & Newton, 2014). The rise in Instagram popularity is primarily due to the nature of the platform. Instagram was designed to be a social online area, which facilitates the sharing of photography in an easy user-friendly manner (Instagram, 2017). While other sites may allow the uploading of pictures, Instagram focuses solely on photographs and images. Photographs are assuming more of an important communicative role within society (Meena & Rusimbi, 2009), which is amplified through the easy uploading feature. The creators of Instagram designed the platform in such a way that the users experience within this space is of primary importance, and emphasis is placed on building a strong sense of identity which revolves around sharing visuals within the Instagram community (Pugh, 2010). In comparison to Facebook, for example, that is comprised of statuses, comments, advertisements, groups and other factors, Instagram only allows a slower, more calculated flow of images, which focuses one's attention on one planned photograph of a user, as opposed to having to look through a mass of photos. This helps one to appreciate and acknowledge the process and effort taken to produce and publish a worked on, edited image. Instagram "exploits the storyteller in all of us, that shared passion for capturing our lives" (Jordan, 2014: 4), by translating the everyday experience of wanting to share one's life with others through verbal and physical communication, to an online experience.

Through the use of pictures, Instagram allows people to do many things in new ways. People can use Instagram as an easy-to-access photo album, and they can easily access the pages of others. It allows the visual element of marketing to stand out, without going through all of the hassle of developing a website, which has made promotion and production easier. As a result of its compact, well organised photo structure that is easily accessible, a user is able to structure and create for themselves their ideal overall image through personal branding, if they choose to use it in this way (Lindahl & Öhlund, 2013). Possessing loose limitations, and having very limited

restrictions on the content of pictures that can be posted, the everyday individual is offered the freedom to use it at their own disposal.

The freedom offered by Instagram, invites users to become who they would like to be within the online space. The aesthetics involved in this aspirational performance provides an opportunity "to create a desirable image of life where every experience is visualized" (Lindahl & Öhlund, 2013: 6). The participant's in my study suggest that a desired image can be achieved through a process of incorporating certain practices from people they aspire to be like, grooming themselves in a certain way, and by selecting the "best representations of themselves to strengthen the link between the actual and ideal identity" (Pugh, 2010: 6). Consumption is one of the modes through which these women are able to align themselves with their ideal self, and as such through their self-display, they gain the admiration of supportive followers on Instagram. Acting as a personal space for public expression, in the form of photo uploading for an online audience, Instagram is an appropriate ground of analysis in the area of people's representations of themselves, and their desire for contemporary success.

The notion that women can become Internet sensations through self-modification techniques, forms the foundation on which to discuss how the project developed. As a user of Instagram, I noticed that an increasingly high number of highly attractive, very well groomed young South African women are participating on this social media platform. Young black women utilize the space of Instagram to create their ideal selves through various means, in order to achieve some definition of 'success'. They have accumulated a mass following, which catapults them to a glorified 'Insta-Celeb' status, and the comments and likes that they receive is indicative of the support that they have.

This project discusses young black South African women who have a pronounced media presence on the Instagram platform. All of these women subscribe to one particular look, which is characterised by long well-groomed hair, known as a weave, as well as fashion forward images of immaculately dressed women in possession of high status items, who pride themselves in paying close attention to their outward appearances, and making themselves extremely appealing. Through their self-display

these women have all, in some form created a strong online presence for themselves that has attracted a large following of people. The focus is on the self-display of 10 such women, and how these women use Instagram to depict their aspirational selves on Instagram, and further, in doing this, how they achieve a certain type of success within this space. This is done by focussing on the culture surrounding the celebrity, the 'enabling freedom' offered by consumption, and lastly the way in which young black women define themselves in a modern online context, and how these elements work together to contribute to the participants overall self-depiction tactics in assuming socially desirable identities.

Discussions with these young women around beauty, aspiration, empowerment and status, serve as a tool for dialogue around issues of representation, prominence, hegemony, gender, self-display, pleasure, desire, personal fulfilment, consumptive satisfaction, and the relevance of social media as an enabling device for the creation of an ideal self. These ideas have previously been explored in terms of femininity, celebrity culture and consumption, and social media as a public sphere. However, there is minimal research on people's public displays of themselves on Instagram in relation to the effects of privilege and popularity that comes through certain forms of beauty, recognized lifestyle displays of consumption and the influence of celebrity culture on the construction of the self. This project discusses how these women choose to depict themselves within this online space, what creates and formulates their idea and understanding of success and the meanings behind success, and how this fits in within the larger global post-feminist, consumerist and celebrity culture.

This research focuses on the neo-liberal, consumerist, late capitalist era, which manifests in the personal representation of what the ideal, successful woman embodies. Neo-liberal describes a new form of selfhood that encourages people to be self-reliant by viewing themselves as autonomous subjects that are endowed with choices (Brown, 2006). In this way, given the financial freedom that women are offered, the neoliberal woman is summoned to "provide for her own needs and service her own ambitions" (Brown, 2006: 694), and therefore distance herself from the support of a man or the governmental institutions. The purchase and display of goods ties into the notion of consumption whereby, individuals are able to exercise their subjectivity and autonomy in those choices (Bauman, 2007). This fits into late-

capitalist ideas in which consumers economic "freedom has been equated with private choice" (Sørensen, 2013: 45). With specific reference to, and application of these manifestations, the way in which women exercise their liberty is best explained through the perspective of post-feminism, which is a "new form of empowerment and independence, individual choice, (sexual) pleasure, consumer culture, fashion, hybridism, humour, and the renewed focus on the female body can be considered fundamental for this contemporary feminism" (Adriaens, 2009: 4).

The participants draw their inspiration from these contemporary notions of feminism. This adaption is a global phenomenon that is seen in the over-representation, over-displayed visual self within the online realm. This shows the transnational power of certain displays of feminism that is evidently global, transcending borders and boundaries and settling well within the African context. The influence of this version of feminism on women goes beyond geographic boundaries and limitations of mediatized forms of beauty and success that are at play, which is facilitated by Instagram and the common threads of expected behaviour regarding specific beauty structures. The participants that make up the research sample model themselves in a way that attempts to encompass a desirable femininity. This plays into social injunctions of conformity, which stipulate the way in which a woman should look, behave and conduct herself, according to ideas of hegemonic femininity. Through the numerous components of identity formation, image, fashion, hair, opulent living and the posting of pictures as mentioned above, these women find their niche by behaving in an 'appropriate manner; or rather find themselves situated in cosmopolitan space among global black women. This gives them a platform to associate and position themselves with the global space of beauty and femininity.

This research will contribute to the study of social media as a public sphere [1], through the picture culture of Instagram. It is necessary in assisting in the understanding of how identity is formed within modern society that is heavily dependent on social media. Through the analysis of photographs posted by young black South Africans,

[1] Fuch, C. (2014). Social Media and the Public Sphere. *Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, 12(1).
Bruns, A., Highfield, T. (2016). Is Habermas on Twitter? Social media and the public sphere. In Bruns, A., Enli, G., Skogerbø, E., Larsson, A.O., & Christensen, C., (Eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Social Media and Politics.* New York: Routledge. 56-73.

and in conjunction with interviews conducted, this study aims to understand how they behave, function and see themselves, and what the ideological frameworks are, that underpin the things that they do.

This project and its content are current and relevant to the changing face of society and the media, and is useful to the study of social media, and the understanding of Instagram as a popular online space, as well as the facilitating abilities of a site such as Instagram in the lives of black South African women, and their participation in this social realm. Furthermore, it will expand on the understanding of the ways in which consumptive practices carry huge weight, and bring about social standing and prominence within contemporary society, for women seeking a specific profile. The role of celebrity culture and its effects on certain people will be explored, and the specific effect of certain African American celebrity influence on the way in which these young women define themselves, is worthy of close attention and investigation.

Research Questions

Through the analysis of images posted on Instagram, and through interviews conducted:

1). What are the social, hegemonic and ideological underpinnings of young black South African women's self-display on Instagram?

a). How do these young women's social media performances and personas relate to consumption and global celebrity culture?

b). How are these ideologies further depicted through the aesthetics of the images that are posted?

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This literature review assists in the discussions of the self-perceptions and self-depictions of black South African women of Instagram through the lens of post-feminism, and elements of the consumption and celebrity. It draws on literature situated both in South Africa, as well as the broader Western geography to explore the social complexities that exist when it comes to black women as a whole. It addresses areas of beauty and social media. It explores societal definitions of beauty and the meanings associated with hair. Social media is explored in terms of its relevance and prominence in society now, as well as the way in which people use these platform as an area for exposure and promotion, which then becomes a space used for personal branding. Together, these two areas highlight how the female Instagrammers of interest are at the forefront of this visual discourse. There is however not much literature that pertains to the scholarship of Instagram. This again reinforces the necessity of this research project, as it is relevant in uncovering the role of social media and its importance in society.

Beauty

Women and beauty are inextricably linked as "a women's body image is at the core of who she is" (Baron, 2005: 363). Beauty as an area of scholarly interest is marked by patterns of accepted ideals. Diverse cultural definitions of beauty in the South African context are "rather subjective and uninformed" (Singh & Singh, 2011: 4). The image of the white woman was always considered as the ideal within the Western world. The desired image was considered to encompass "delicate, fine, light features" (Tate, 2007: 301). Comparatively, the black woman was always associated with harsh images of unattractive, undesirable features. While the construct of 'beauty' is an area, which all women find themselves having to be aware of, black women are required to conform to these Western standards (Fujioka et al., 2009), by undergoing "more alterations in order to reach the assumed ideal beauty image" (Tate, 2007: 4). This can be considered to be true of some black women in South Africa who are seen striving to reach an 'acceptable' level of beauty (Gyekeke, 1996). Alterations and

deviations in beauty ideals impact the way that women chosen for this project present themselves on Instagram, especially when it comes to beauty procedures and adopting particular hair practices.

The impact that beauty ideals have on black women is due to a number of social factors, such as their social class, their shared history of political, social and economic oppression, the need to conform to fit in to within the dominant culture, as well as the necessity for economic and social progress (Rosado, 2006). As much as society has an awareness of these ideals, the women adopting these beauty ideals may not even be cognisant that they are doing it. As Bordieu (1990: 127-133) explains, "people may not even be conscious of their internalization of the dominant ideals, therefore symbolic capital-prestige, recognition and privilege is granted to those who embody these culturally shared values." What this implies is that these notions of beauty have become so normalized and ingrained in the lives of black women, that the way in which they choose to model themselves, and the beauty practices that they adopt, all relate to a higher societal structure that instructs their behaviour. Effectively, this ideal not only divides one woman from another, but it also divides women from themselves, by positioning their bodies as objects to be judged (MacInnis, 1993).

When it comes to this ideal, skin colour and hair are two categories that greatly affect the way in which women see themselves and others (Hill, 2000). People with fairer skin are usually rated higher than those with darker skin, which can explain why some women have gone through the process of lightening their skin, in order to receive the 'privilege' it is believed to bring. Scholars believe that certain beauty alterations, and practices such as hair adaptations and skin lightening were done for the purpose of internalising a sense of whiteness, however it is not as it appears (Gyekeke, 1996). More recent analyses have suggested that the adoption of apparently 'white' modes of beauty such as the adoption of long weaves are less about looking white, and more about aligning oneself with the hegemonic standard of beauty, which is still characterised by straight and long hair (Powe, 2009). The beauty process which one undergoes is a necessity for the presentation of the self. Being "well groomed serves as a visual marker, which is used by men and women to find an identity and social stance to be affiliated with" (Rosenborough & McMichael, 2009: 49). This is because

globally women believe that their appearance will shape their self-worth, their career, their satisfaction, and ultimately their success (Rice, 2010).

The preoccupation with human hair is common among women of colour, across the global sphere, who are not in possession of natural hair that is characterized as long, sleek, shiny, straight (Morrison, 2010). Black women's natural hair denotes "more than a mere covering or protective sheath from the cold; rather it holds 'emotive qualities' which are associated with the lived experiences of black women" (Thompson, 2009: 11). The hype surrounding hair and beauty has seen black women constructing themselves and their image around the dominant beauty aesthetic (Tate, 2007). This further emphasizes the fact that hair is loaded with meaning, arising within a space of symbolical attachments. The meaning that hair holds is deeper than the just the aesthetic. While the aesthetic appeal is one of the components, hair signifies so much more than just the ability to look attractive and be fashionable and stylish. Hair confers a certain amount of power to an individual. Some women believe that that they acquire strength and importance from their hair, as attention is given to longer, luscious hair. A certain level of beauty determines a woman's standing in society, as beauty often work more in a woman's favour than her qualifications or status (Patton, 2006). This renders hair as more than just an obtainable object of attraction (Byrd & Tharps, 2001).

The criteria for meeting the beauty standard is understood to become more demanding as time progresses, which means that women are required to spend more time and money on their image (Kilbourne, 2010). The way that a woman engages with these beauty pressures often times depends on her socio-economic status. This suggests that her ability to conform and adopt these means is dependent on her financial capacity as these beauty ideals are closely tied to consumption (Kilbourne, 2011). The process of grooming oneself through alterations and enhancements is extremely meaningful. It is not simply a matter of displaying the adoption of certain practices, so as to fall within the ideals set by society, but the acquisition of hair, beauty and fashion products and other consumables signifies the fact that one can afford these items, which is then a display of consumption (Newson, 2011). Within the realm of beauty, hair can imply a degree of privilege. Depending on the length, texture and quality of hair, it is a signifier of class, importance and one's consumptive capabilities. Hair now ascribes

value to a person due to its commercial value and commoditized assimilation. Fields Greene (2011: 23) explains the weight that hair carries, "while hair is a lucrative industry on the whole, the weave is an extension of a multi-billion-dollar industry." This is an industry that does not just offer the privilege of aesthetic beauty, but also signifies class mobility.

The post-modern, late capitalist female is exposed to a variety of existing modes of beauty that shows the mutation and morphing of female beauty. The image of the ideal woman is constantly being altered and manipulated, as well new images cast as the ideal. This is seen in a variety of different paradigms. While the beauty that is carried by hair remains, body types and the beauty found in thinness is contested, challenged and redefined (Brickell, 2005). Where thinness was previously encouraged and challenged as the beauty ideal (Hargreaves & Tiggeman, 2004), and represented by the "thigh gap"[2], "bones"[3] or "hip bones"[4], these notions of beauty now exist alongside "voluptuous", "big booty" and "curves" ideals, as they are described on Instagram. This current preoccupation with 'curvier' body types has become a trend among white women, however, what is important to identify is these body types and features are traditionally related to black women's bodies (Thompson, 2009). "Instagrammers" live on the forefront of this visual discourse by overtly displaying themselves and their bodies by emphasizing their "bootylicious" figures, and showing off their feminine assets, as users would describe it. Due to beauty constantly being disciplined, the behaviour of women on Instagram is influenced by external factors such as the opinion of others, as well as trends accompanied by messages that impact the individual and their perceptions towards themselves and the display of themselves.

[2] "Thigh Gap" is used to describe the space between a person's thighs when they put their legs together. It is most commonly used in the description of 'size 0' models, and is an ideal many woman strive for, as a signifier of reaching a societal 'goal weight'.

[3] "Bones" is an urban term used to celebrate extreme skinniness, referring to a skeletal description of a person. With specific reference to the protrusion of collarbones, wrist bones, cheek bones and rib cage.

[4] "Hip Bones" is also an urban term used to describe an aesthetic that literally speaks to the protrusion of a woman's hipbones. This is also a common aesthetic that some women strive to have as it is considered attractive and desirable in some societies.

Social Media

The terms Social media, social networking sites and Web 2.0 are regularly used interchangeably. However, Web 2.0 is important to first discuss as it considered the precursor to social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). The introduction of Web 2.0 describes a new way in which people are able to use the Internet, by being able to collaboratively contribute to online media content. It has also facilitated the communication process by making it much faster, and allowing people to interact in real time (Safko & Brake, 2012). This ties in with user-generated content, which forms the foundation of understanding social media content. Kaplan and Haenlein (2009) state that in order for content to be considered 'user-generated' it must be creatively produced, published for others to see, and it must be created outside of the professional domain. Campbell et al., (2011: 87) explains that, "it is much more to do with what people are doing with technology, than the technology itself. Rather than merely retrieving information, users are now creating and consuming, hence adding value to the websites that permit them to do so."

This shows that social media evolved from Web 2.0, in the way that there has been advancement from one simply retrieving information, to being able to interact and now collaborate (Campbell et al., 2011). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010: 61) developed an encompassing definition of social media describing it as "a group of Internet based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user generated content." It is also viewed as a combination of communication networks that enable users to interact with each other through the use of pictures, texts or sounds (Constantinides & Fountain, 2007). Mangold and Faulds (2009: 377) further describe social media as, "a variety of new sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumer's intent on educating each other about products, brands, services, personalities and issues." Users are therefore given the chance to be both consumers and creators of content within the online space of social media.

Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Youtube, Linkedin and Instagram are all social media sites that allow users to interact in a two-way conversation with their family and friends, through effortless communication. People are able to communicate through

their own personalized profiles, and they have the choice of who to allow access to their profiles. This idea of creating a profile was first noticed on online sites such as Myspace and Friendster, and this idea of individual profiles has since been integrated into multiple other social media platforms (Kapizdic & Herring, 2011). This framework of social media assists in understanding how individuals use these platforms in the construction of their identities.

Social media is a fundamental facilitator of discussion, that carries with it a large capacity to explore self-expression, and it allows us to understand the way in which people depict themselves, and portray their ideal selves. The advancement of communicative technologies and the participation of black South African women, on social media platforms see them "adventurously harnessing them as vehicles for identity and identification" (De Bruijn & Njamnjoh, 2009: 14). Instagram, as still one of the most popular platforms at this present time has been researched as being "used mostly for self-promoting and social networking" (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2013). People are able to do new things in this online space, which is regarded as a "social awareness stream" (Naaman, Boase & Lai, 2010: 2). Instagram has limited regulations on the content of photographs that can be posted (Hochman & Manovich, 2013). Most people use this to their advantage to put forward their glamourized self, using the freedom offered to them within a largely visual environment. Photographs are signifiers of meaning and are loaded with more than just visually appealing aesthetics (Meena & Rusimbi, 2009). Behind these images there is a process of assessment, configuration, reconstruction and identification, which all constitute the final product on display, and the final performance.

The demands of a social setting usually determine the behaviour that is then exhibited by individuals (Giddens, 1991). This is reinforced by Goffman's idea of "performance" detailing the manner in which people act out their ideal self, through behaviours which are determined by the norms of the settings they find themselves in (Goffman, 2002). This process can be likened to a production, in which a process of construction takes places through the adoption of various practices as one "adjusts the presentation of self in relation to whatever is demanded of a particular situation" (Giddens, 1991: 188). Instagram can act as an analogy of a blank canvas on which one can be shaped to reinvent ideas of themselves, and they can construct themselves

in a specific manner, which eventually becomes who and what they are known as. For some people, the cost at which this display, often referred to as a lifestyle is earned comes at the expense of having the space between their private and public life blurred (Rojek, 2001). While it can be argued that putting on a 'performance' is to some extent just a public act, it eventually also comes with having to share the more intimate parts of one's life and self. It is from this that an interesting paradox arises. Relaxing the boundaries in one's life sustains this particular performance.

Facebook has been the object of many studies exploring how people use this public online space to express and define themselves (Cohen, 2007). The way, in which popular online personalities are formed, affects and influences how society uses social media. One of the most fascinating areas about this development is the way in which a Facebook user can create a celebrity-like experience for themselves, brought about through a process of carefully selecting and sharing selected parts of their life. This is done in the way that their photos can be rated by being liked and can be commented on, and then shared on other pages. This draws a series of connected networks that resembles a built-up fan base, and a recognition that is achieved through the use of appealing photographs (Pugh, 2010). Through multiple posts, and well-received images, people often use this space as a means to construct their ideal self. By "authenticating acts or self-referential behaviours, users feel free to reveal to others their true desired self" (Schau & Gilly, 2003: 6). It is through the display of certain consumptive signs and symbols, as well as practices, that their socially ascribed self is communicated through reflective imagery. The photos that users post online are usually selected as the best representations of themselves, and are often then reinforced by the immediate responses they receive from an audience waiting to observe their activity (Cohen, 2007). The spotlight afforded to them by their network is similar to the spotlight a famous individual gets from the public (Healy, 2007). This however differs from person-to-person, as some simply uses the site as means to keep in contact with others, or share important moments of their lives, not necessarily seeking the same attention, but also not necessarily being capable of attracting the same attention.

The decision to share the intimate parts of one's life on a public forum can be regarded as the individual act of "giving up the normality of their private lives in

exchange for a celebrity-like experience" (Pugh, 2010: 12). This relates to the feeling of celebrity status, affording the average user visibility, conspicuousness, notability and a certain degree of power within the online space, just as a celebrity effortlessly acquires this (Pugh, 2010). While this research has only shed light on Facebook, this mode of construction can be used to understand the behaviour of other women, and the way in which they use Instagram to showcase their aspirations, while simultaneously creating for themselves a brand, and an ideal, through their spectacular display of self through their images. The Instagram profiles of these women highlight femininity, display and celebrity, which are then received by other young women that follow them.

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

This project utilises three broad theories. It will focus on post-feminism, consumption and celebrity culture. Post-feminism will be applied, to consider the manner in which the young black South African women address matters of selfhood by re-inventing their identities, displaying their created selves and 'empowering' themselves through extensive consumptive practice. Consumption is used to explain the notion behind buying certain things and the way in which people believe it elevates them to a specific position, through the symbolic value that it holds. Celebrity culture will then be discussed as a way of understanding how the celebrity is formed, how it functions in the lives of those that follow them, and how through social media this culture is prominently played out in another contemporary form.

Post-Feminism

I will be discussing post-feminism, but it is essential to first discuss feminism, and the way in which feminists discuss blackness. It is important to have an understanding of feminism before discussing post-feminism, so that we can get a sense of how they differ.

Feminism is used to describe a group of theories and ideas around political, cultural and economic factors focussed on establishing women as being as capable as men, and seeking equal rights and protection for them (Mullings, 1997). From the 19th century women began to express their dissatisfaction with the gender hierarchies that existed in society, and as a result of this decided to take it upon themselves to do something to change the situation, which led to feminism and feminist movements. Feminism can be seen as "an active desire to change a woman's position in society" (Banks, 1981: 3), to have equal rights and opportunities, and to be able to participate and share in societal and political affairs, in an equal capacity alongside men (Delmar, 1986). Three waves of feminism emerged during the period between the 1920's and the 1980's (Humm, 2003: Walker, 1995), and it was during this time "the vote, the attainment of legal control over property and person, and entry into male-dominated

professions and institutional hierarchies became the representative issues" (Offen, 1988: 123). This can be viewed as the basis of the Feminist Movement.

The experiences of white women were however regarded as the collective experience of all women. Collins (1989: 756) contends that although all women have experienced oppression in some way or another, their experiences are not all the same,

> "Feminist scholars assert that women share a history of patriarchal oppression through the political economy of the material conditions of sexuality and reproduction. These shared material conditions are thought to transcend divisions among women created by race, social class, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity and to form the basis of a women's standpoint with its corresponding feminist consciousness and epistemology."

Mainstream feminism has been heavily critiqued by black feminism, for its failure to account for black women's experiences and struggles, which they claim differs greatly from the experience of white women. As much as black women were involved in the feminist movement, they were marginalized and still treated as invisible in labour relations, political and educational spheres (Smith, 1980). The idea of black feminism grew out of, and in response to the Black Liberation movement and the Women's Movement in the USA (Smith, 1980). The Black Liberation movement was mainly focused on the liberation of black men, and as a result black women experienced sexually oppressed by them. According to hooks (1960: 69) "black men overemphasized white male exploitation of black womanhood as a way to explain their disapproval of inter-racial relationships. Men felt as though their freedom was to have indiscriminate access to and control over any woman's body." Whereas, in the Women's Movement the focus was on the liberation, solidarity and rights of white women, and as a result black women felt excluded and racially oppressed, as hooks explains (1960: 125) "there is little historical evidence that white women as a collective group or white women's advocates are part of an anti-racist tradition." In both instances, black women felt underrepresented and overlooked. Consequently, black feminism did not materialize in the same way that 'white' feminism did, as white women were fighting for the opportunity to work alongside men, but black women were already in that position (Mullings, 1997). Effectively, black women's

social position differed to that of white women, and therefore they were fighting for different causes (Collins, 1989).

Black women were fighting against both institutional and racial oppression as opposed to specific groups that they were excluded from (white women), and oppressed by (black men). Their personal struggle became an equally political one, which marked their struggle for both subjectivity and individuality in society (Mullings, 1997). However, fighting for individuality was viewed as "counter-intuitive to the fight for all black liberation" (Joseph & Lewis, 1981: 191). Cleage (1993: 55) explains black women's position on this, "we have to see clearly that we are a unique group, set undeniably apart because of race and sex, with a unique set of challenges." In this way, black women had to endure what is seen as a threefold oppression of race, class and gender (De La Rey, 1997). This should be seen in terms of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1992), which describes black women's experiences more accurately, and assists in understanding that many forms of oppression can happen simultaneously (Collins, 1989). The experiences of black women included "confinement to domestic work, sexual politics of black women, and motherhood" (Collins, 2000: 227). Even though they faced severe exclusion and oppression in multiple areas, "black women utilised these barriers as a site for resistance. Black women gained ideas, strength and network capabilities with other women through these channels" (James, 1999: 75). From this standpoint, one is able to understand the strides and progress that black women are continually making in the pursuit of gaining recognition, consideration, and ultimately establishing themselves in all spheres in society.

Black feminism is particularly relevant to this discussion as I am discussing black women who model themselves on an African American notion of female success. Instagram is a global platform, and my participants are framing themselves specifically as proud black women, but they do not emphasize 'Africanness' much, if at all. Instead, they locate themselves within a more global notion of blackness. At the same time, post-feminism has emerged, and in the work that I am doing there are many instances where things that apparently seem to be feminist, are actually post-feminist.

Post-feminism is a term applied to discourse that claims that feminism is no longer necessary, as women are now given opportunities in society that allow them to become empowered through modes of shopping, bodily enhancement and modification, and assuming a prominent position within a male-dominated society (McRobbie, 2007). The connotations and expectations that surround modern women are defined around "capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation" (Giddens, 2005: 46). Young women strive for a sense of empowerment through the freedom and choice offered to them in choosing what to do with their lives, and their bodies simultaneously (Crusmac, 2013). It is also through this new 'liberation' that women are able to actively go about writing their own life biographies, and making the choices needed in the formulation of it (McRobbie, 2009). Through young women's active participation in various sectors in society, certain institutional structures such as female subjugation are being discarded. Post-feminism is then "an emphasis on empowerment and individualism" (Gill, 2007: 446).

To be an empowered individual is thus a personal choice that a woman makes. It is essentially a choice of self-determination to be all that she desires to be. Post-feminism is however exclusive, as it focuses heavily on those that can afford to participate in a financial capacity. It is through consumption and consumptive means, and the weight and meaning that society places on these goods, that women are believed to achieve a sense of empowerment through their freedom to choose what they want (McRobbie, 2007). According to McRobbie (2009: 27), the domain of "leisure and consumer culture is dominated by the vocabulary of personal choice, and is a primary site for hedonism, fantasy, personal gratification and entertainment." Women are welcomed to become a particular kind of self through their agency, on condition that they work on constructing their desired self (Gill, 2007). They are believed to be able to create their own sense of fulfilment through their independent pleasures and habits, and the enjoyment that comes from their participation in consumer culture. The media depicts all women as possessing the values of neo-liberal political culture.

The neoliberal woman, or neoliberalism in itself, is the construction of an individual that is autonomous, well thought out and self-analysing (Gill, 2007). Neoliberalism

operates on three levels. This idea begins with individualism (Gill, 2007), in which it is suggested that trends towards individualism have overtaken social and political structures. Secondly, it frames women as being autonomous and having the freedom of choice and agency to self-modify (Gill, 2007). Thirdly, women are called to self-manage and self-discipline when it comes to the various contributing factors of their identity (Gill, 2007).

It is through this neoliberal stance that "the new focus is placed on self-monitoring and the performance of successful femininity in terms of grooming, attire and posture" (McRobbie, 2009: 56). By having to develop an 'obsession' with consumer culture, women are led to believe that they can experience modern freedoms by seeking identification with consumable items, which "mobilises and unleashes the containment of female desire" (Fuss & Rabine, 1994: 195). This further suggests the political importance of post-feminism. Guilt-free consumerism is achieved through "new freedoms offered to women and the beauty culture" (Tasker & Negra, 2007: 424). Women who find pleasure through the use of beauty practices are able to exercise their individualism, choice and empowerment through consumption. In this way, post-feminism is seen to replace feminism and all other political involvement.

Viewing the "self as a project" is a very important property of post-feminism (Tasker & Negra, 2007: 21). The female body "possesses power, and is in constant need of monitoring, surveillance and re-modelling. It is a widely-accepted statement, that there is a cultural obsession with the female celebrity body" (Gill, 2007: 441). This is understood through the ways in which individual women experience their bodies, their lives and their selves, and the way in which society views the body as an object. Thus, women have to be conscious of their bodies, as it is a device through which they become empowered, and though which they are disciplined. This masquerade also serves to explain that not everything these women portray is as straightforward as it seems, which again highlights the underlying political power which still instructs their overall behaviour (McRobbie, 2007). Through the constant exposure to images of beauty, which emphasize the ideal aesthetic look of the time as set out by the media, these models of beauty are ultimately adopted by women, and finally accepted as a mode of who they are (Gill, 2007). It is through this masquerade that women, who did not previously fit the aesthetic ideal of beauty, are given the option to finally

achieve a sense of acceptance through "mimicry, accommodation, adjustment and modification" (McRobbie, 2009: 71). The opportunity to invent oneself allows the everyday woman to create her 'ideal self'. A woman using this mode of recreation is recognised as a "gleaming, commodified beauty, of self-confidence" (Gill, 2007: 441). Possessing the confidence that consumption is thought to bring with it allows some women to feel a sense of empowerment and inspiration in their quest to becoming who they would ideally like to be. However, what remains an area of interest are the structures that underlie this ideological system, and how this locates itself.

This formulation of the post-feminist self is essential in understanding how, as an expanded zone of self-display, Instagram allows these women the freedom to express who they would like to be. Literature on post-feminism reveals that these modes of self-display are not about what a woman naturally is, or about her freedom from social constraint, but rather how women replicate specific ideas about femininity. Their ideas of femininity can be understood through their adoption of certain consumption practices, which acts as an instrument, said to confer significant meaning and recognition to individuals.

Through these appropriations, the young black women on Instagram are catapulted to a position of importance in the realm of Instagram, and once they acquire an audience and a particular status, they draw their inspiration, which assists them in constructing their ideal self.

Consumption

Consumption can be explained with direct reference to capitalism and commodification. Giddens (1991: 7) suggests that commodification and the need to have certain things "directly affects the consumption process." Consumption is pervasive within society. It is directly involved in the continuous reshaping of living conditions on a day-to-day basis of social life, and makes up a fundamental part of everyday practice (Gould & Regan, 2009). Consumption "addresses living standard goals, or lifestyle goals which are directly involved with satisfying basic needs and

obtaining pleasure through the use of goods and services" (Goodwin et al., 2008: 2). Consumerism as a global practice is characteristic of the dominant culture that makes up a crucial part of the everyday life. While consumerism is a characteristic of society, consumption is an attribute and an enterprise of the individual (Bauman, 2007). Consumers are thus given the experience of "unprecedented freedom of choice that is autonomously exercised through consumption" (Slater, 1997: 27). Through various sources of media, the consumer becomes acquainted, educated, and exposed to the global sphere of consumer culture, and from this they are able to actively choose what they want for themselves by engaging in these consumption practices.
The media plays a significant role in consumer culture, through the strong visual elements present in print media such as magazines, newspapers and advertisements (Byrnes, 2007). Everyday life is loaded with visuals, due to the dominance of media industries. Consequently, consumer culture is profoundly mediated through this control. This can be explained through the way in which it is, "shaped, defined and constructed by a variety of media technologies and tools of communication, which take shape in various media texts and images" (Frow, 2006: 4). Consumable products are complete with images and signs, which are seen in its various visibly packaged forms (Slater, 1997). A brand, for example is immaterial, and is executed through a material component, yet specific value is attached to it, and as such it functions as an important factor in the way that it is used to make people stand out in society (Byrnes, 2007). People who engage in consumptive brand practices often use them in the construction of their identity (Leeds, 2002).

Consumption creates an area where people are able to practice, exercise agency and exert a certain amount of power within their own space (Slater, 2007). For some individuals, the need for personal autonomy, self-definition, authentic life or personal perfection is all translated into the need to possess, and consume, market-offered goods (Sørensen, 2013). This highlights the weight placed on the value the items confer, and not the item itself. Commodification as a whole, "influences the project of the self and the establishing of lifestyles" (Giddens, 1991: 7). For some people, the consumptive process is necessary for "self-realization, fairness, freedom, participation and social relations" (Goodwin et al., 2008: 2). Individualism is a component in the area of consumption, as the individual is able to make personal choices consumption choices (Sørensen, 2013). An active choice is made for the advancement of their own

desires and the progression of their image. One's identity is thus formed with the aid of objects, which act as a sign maker, or semiotic signifier (Goodwin, 2008). Through the available resources, one is then able to construct their desired self-image (Lazar, 2011). From this vantage point one can understand the acquisition of goods to be a source that assists in defining the needs and wants of a person.

For some individuals, this is a way for them to "seek ego satisfaction in consumption" (Byrnes, 2007: 8). It is a popular accepted phenomenon that "people who have an incomplete self-definition in some context will compensate by acquiring symbols associated with a desired social identity" (Goodwin, 2004: 5). Through these consumptive acts, some people believe a certain level of prominence is automatically gained (Lord, 2009). Through the consumption process, people choose products that possess characteristics that coincide with aspects of their selfhood, thus establishing an overall consistency with the products they choose to consume and the role it serves in their lives. Certain people consume because they find meaning in material goods and this meaning is transposable between being a necessity in some contexts, and being a form of expressiveness in another. Within this consumer society, meaning is created (Goodwin, et al., 2008).

The formation of one's identity involves a process where "people choose to identify with certain classes of people" (Byrnes, 2007: 4). For certain people, their interaction with certain people evokes the need to design or construct themselves accordingly. This sense of achieving a desirable position is often related to the appeal of aspirational groups. An aspirational group is a group that an individual has a desire to belong to, but is seldom admitted to. According to Byrne (2007), it is through purchasing, dressing or behaving like the groups with whom individuals would like to belong or be associated with, that the individuals re-create themselves. Lazar (2011: 49) suggests, "consumer goods designate certain characteristics that differentiate individuals, and in doing so become signifiers of a social position. Consumption provides the tools to negotiate the tensions between individuality and generality; the goods or services can be used as fences and bridges to show the distinction and membership."

This is true of the participants who, by emulating celebrities such as Beyonce are seen indulging in extreme consumptive practices, for the purpose of using this technique in their construction of their ideal selves. Consumption forms a part of the identities of the young women in this study through their display of self-representational acts on Instagram. They are defining their success within this online space through the 'embellished' self-display marked by consumptive properties.

Celebrity Culture

Celebrities form an integral part of society, and play specific roles that inform, assist and instruct the way in which people socially situate and define themselves. The fascination and obsession with celebrities, and celebrity culture has long been something that scholars have aspired to understand. A celebrity is someone who is famous and has come to be considered as a well-known individual, "known for their well-knowness" (Boorstin, 1971: 58). The audience creates the celebrity, through their ideas of the dominant cultural representations of how things should be structured according to certain norms. The accepted ideals of fashion, skill and aesthetic, as well as social appeal are the founding expectations on which society brings a celebrity into being a (Milner, 2010). The status that celebrities confer, "functions as a general token of success" (Bell, 2010: 49). They are considered to be "a voice above others, a voice that is channelled into the media as being legitimately significant" (Marshall, 1997: 12), and the appeal that they have separates them from the normal everyday person as most times they become famous within the entertainment industry. Studies suggest that the best explanation of their status can be explained by their ability to "move on the stage while the rest of us watch; express themselves quite individually and idiosyncratically while the rest of the population are constructed as demographic aggregates; represent success and achievement within the social world" (Marshall, 1997: 13). The way that their celebrity status entitles them to live out their lives, has been an area of much interest.

The celebrity is characterised by a number of distinct traits, but the most notable is the fascination that people have with them. The rise in Internet sites has been at the forefront of allowing for new reach and expression of the 'cult of celebrity' (Altman,

2005). The constant flow of celebrity imagery through the media (Warhol, 1979), and their depicted lifestyles has encouraged more global users that engage in media to seek out for themselves means to achieve the same feeling that celebrities give to them (Berger & Choi, 2010). As Stemheimer (2011: 4) explains, the celebrity culture that is present and normalized in society "surrounds us and even invades us. It shapes our thought and conduct" Celebrities are so heavily idolized that they have assumed a superior place in society, and have even taken the place of heroes in some cases (Corner & Pels, 2003).

Extensive studies have revealed that Americans are so engrossed with celebrities that they "suffer from some form of celebrity worship syndrome" (Houran et al., 2002: 5). It is from this 'worshipping', that celebrity-followers find themselves living vicariously through celebrities (Kennedy, 2006). They are seen as objects to be admired, as they are easily accessible through mediated channels and their personal lives seem open to the broader population (Alberoni, 2008). However, the allure of their public lives is a major factor that assists in sustaining their celebrity status, as their lives depict enticing elements, far-removed from the banal, everyday life of the average person (Dyer, 1986). The value that they hold is often social and cultural and the blurring between the private and the public components of their lives adds to their intrigue (Turner, 2006). These findings are essential in exploring the role celebrity's play in society, and how this affects the functioning of average people within their own space.

A celebrity's entire image becomes a commodified object to be disseminated and consumed by the economic value ascribed to them (Allen, 2013). The celebrity I becomes a brand, seeing their "name, image, hair (style), clothing, style turned into commodities to be 'sold' and eventually 'consumed'" (Cashmore & Parker, 2003: 215), through extensive publicity, advantageous advertising and deliberate promotion. They appear to the ordinary individual as possessing the ability to be superhuman, extraordinary and great in the respective fields in which they succeed. They are revered, celebrated and hailed for their success and the image that they have established. They assist in an ideological capacity by acting as a "symbol within the modern western capitalist system" (Dyer, 2007: 89) in the way that they promote ideas of individuality and consumption, and they are a representation of the 'success'

that can be achieved. To better understand this, "the celebrity as a concept of the individual moves effortlessly in a celebration of a democratic capitalism" (Marshall, 1997: 2). This facilitates the belief of the 'neoliberal' celebrity (Couldry, 2010).

Celebrity culture is thus a "strategy that promotes new orders of meaning and solidarity", and has become an institution in "normative achievement and social integration" (Rojek, 2001: 99). The celebrity is found in a culture that places great emphasis on consumption (Couldry, 2010). Consumption and celebrity work hand-in-hand, as the celebrity lifestyle is marked by the attendance of prestigious events, wearing designer labels, having immaculate make up, driving fancy cars and living in mansions, all of which come as perks of achieving that status. The average person does not have automatic admission to these things, but consuming goods that resemble them, or are replicas of the celebrity lifestyle, can create in these individuals a sense of alignment with the celebrity (Couldry, 2010). There is a sense of pleasure and freedom that comes from acquiring goods that have specific signs attached to them, which becomes a part of people's representations (Baudrillard, 2001). The project of the self then becomes translated into one that is marked by the possession of desired goods, and the pursuit of the self becomes translated into one of artificially framed styles of life (Bauman, 2007).

The inception and perpetuation of the celebrity through the media can be explained through the "phenomenon of mass-circulation newspapers, TV, radio and film" (Rojek, 2001: 16). The constant flow of imagery through "cable and 24/7 coverage" has revolutionized the celebrity culture (Fitzgerald, 2008: 11). Given the visual basis of these platforms, people become famous through the "the dissemination of the face, which has displaced the dissemination of ideas" (Gamson, 1994: 21). Extensive emphasis is placed on the aesthetic and visually appealing elements of a person, which are emphasized and exaggerated via the social media interface. Through the media, identity construction is made easier by enabling people to adopt certain practices and consequently market themselves. Celebrity culture has thus become a very "large part of the mediated culture within society" (Bonner, 2011: 75). The internet has further allowed people to exercise their agency, and to participate in various domains involving picture sharing, picture uploading, commenting and sharing, and it is in these domains that the normal, everyday person is able to emulate

the celebrity (Pugh, 2010). The formation of popular figures is a “mimicry of larger systems, and can often mutate into a mainstream celebrity” (Turner, 2006: 23). In essence, the observer is given the chance to become the observed. These discussions of the celebrity, and the value that they hold in society and to certain people, assists in understanding the way in which the women involved in my study look to certain celebrity figures to assist them in the construction of their own identities.

Chapter 4

Methodology

This project adopts a qualitative approach. Qualitative research is described as "detailed examinations of cases that arise in the natural flow of social life" (Neuman, 2006: 14). It is concerned with "developing explanations of social phenomena, and aims to help us understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are" (Hancock et al., 2007: 7). This approach allows room for interpretations of the world and a more flexible acquisition of knowledge (Stokes, 2003). Instagram was chosen as the online medium of analysis as it offers readily observable images, which enables an easy exploration of the relevant measures of data for interpretation. The data is within the public domain of the social media realm, and access is not hampered by restrictions, except for an active Instagram account. This qualitative approach adopted two specific methods of analysis, namely visual semiotic analysis and qualitative interviews.

As an active Instagrammer, I noticed the prevalent photo-uploading activity of young black women. By observing their profiles, I noticed a trend in the content of the photos that they uploaded. Most of their posts were elaborate images of themselves, and included inspirational quotes that accompanied these photos, or self-standing quotes. Most of the people that commented or liked the photos were young women, whose profiles bore significant resemblance, revealing elements of a common affiliation. What was most common among the women of interest was their extremely high number of followers (<10K followers).

After observing their participation for a period of time, I approached each of these young women individually through the direct messaging option available on the Instagram platform, and arranged an interview with them. I adopted a snowballing method to find all of my participants. Snowballing seeks to "take advantage of the social networks of identified respondents to provide a researcher with an ever-expanding set of potential contacts" (Atkinson & Flint, 2001: 1). All of these young women are aesthetically appealing, and fitted the criteria of unrestricted photo uploading, which mostly contained images of themselves with their hair done and

displaying numerous fashion-focused, consumptive images. They all appeared to be partaking in common practices to display their aspirations through their portrayal of beauty, and a demonstration of their idea of femininity and success. The sample size consisted of 10 young black South African females between the ages of 18-25, who are active Instagram users, and who were observed displaying themselves in the manner that related to the research question. The sample size chosen for this particular project was a fair representation (Lenth, 2001), using the combined methods of both a visual semiotic analysis, as well as semi-structured interviews

Interviews with each of these participants were scheduled. The interviews were approximately one and a half hours in length, and took the form of either a Skype or Facetime call. This method was chosen as these women live in different regions of South Africa, and have very busy schedules, so arranging times to meet with them became extremely difficult. An information sheet (Appendix A) was sent to each of the willing participants. The documents were printed, scanned and sent back by each of them, consenting to their participation. Consent is needed as it informs the subject about his/her rights, the purpose of the study, as well as the possible risks and benefits of the study and their participation (Rose, 2012). Further permission was granted by each of the participants to make use of their Instagram images for the duration of the project (Appendix B), and to record the interviews (Appendix C). The project was approved by the University's Ethics Committee.

Visual analysis is valuable in recognising and understanding the visual choices that are made by the 'artist' displaying a particular piece (Sayre, 2005). It is also useful as it has a very strong narrative advantage, with a capacity for interpretation (Krippendorff, 2004). This combined approach was chosen to examine what the underlying meanings are, that assist these young women in defining and establishing their online identities. It assists in revealing the link between the images posted and the power relations of hegemonic beauty and patriarchy, as well as the idealized selves that exist within these images, and the motives behind these displays, which coincide with what emerged in the interviews. For the analysis of the visual components, the profiles of the participants, and the images that they posted were observed once a week for three months.

The visual elements of exploration included:

- The content of the photos
- Observing what the common trend was in their posted images
- The clothing worn
- The make-up applied
- The choice of filter applied in order to enhance the overall image
- The visibility and presence of various consumer objects
- The frequency of the number of photos they chose to post of themselves
- The popularity of the photos that they posted and the way in which they responded to comments made
- The popularity of their profiles on Instagram
- The growing number of followers on their profiles

The semi-structured qualitative interviews were used to gain an understanding as to why they represent themselves in this manner. Semi-structured interviews recognise common themes, which contribute towards the development of the research as a whole (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The choice of qualitative interviews aids in elaborating on that which is observable and uncovering what the motivation, or underlying ideologies are, behind this public display. Additionally, an exploration was conducted in terms of how the dominant expectations and trends shape and instruct the young women's ultimate display. Qualitative interviews are valuable as they allow the researcher a level of flexibility and power in the carrying out of a particular study (Edwards & Holland, 2013). It assists in the examination of certain topics as a result of the communication that moves past the verbal, and enables the researcher to draw links between various parts of people's lives, both seen and unseen (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

These interviews were conducted in English, using an interview guide (Patton, 2003). This tool allowed for various themes to arise (Patton, 2003). The interview guide separated the interview into three broad themes, namely: Beauty, Instagram and Celebrity Culture. This allowed the participants to gradually get into the topic, to focus their attention on one aspect at a time, and to reflect on their self-display and

Instagram use. The interview guide used general questions to begin with, which allowed room for conversation to flow, and thus bring about new ideas around their self-display, and the easy revelation of their motivations. So, while it gives structure to the interview, it also provides room for flexibility. The answers that were given were therefore open-ended, creating more room for the participants to elaborate on certain areas, or points that were raised, which were of particular interest (Greenstein et al., 2003).

These interviews focused on establishing:

- the influences behind the behaviour
- the dominant ideologies held by these women
- the thought process behind their actions
- the choice to engage on Instagram in the manner that they do
- the choice of posting some images and not others
- the choice in clothing worn, hair chosen and filters used
- the influence or expectation placed on them by their following
- the specific image they are striving for
- their understanding and definition of a celebrity
- specific norms and ideals expected within the Instagram realm

After taking part in the semi-structured interviews, each young woman was asked to choose some of their favourite images, which they felt depicted them in the most favourable light. They were then asked to give commentary on those images, and to make mention of the features that stood out to them, and which they intended to make a specific statement. The recorded interviews were then transcribed. The interviews were then categorized using thematic coding. The themes were established based on common statements and sentiments that all 10 of the participants shared, whether they were explicitly or implicitly stated.

Thematic coding is frequently used in qualitative research as it examines classifications and existing patterns that relate to the data. In other words, it seeks to provide meaning, precision and intricacy to various aspects of the study at hand

(Alhojailan, 2012). It is also considered to be a valuable research tool, as it provides a rich and comprehensive, yet multifaceted interpretation of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are six phases involved in the process of conducting a thematic analysis: "familiarizing yourself with the data: generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing themes; defining and naming themes; producing the report" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 87-93). The main themes that emerged from the data include: Authenticity; Consumption; Celebrity and Image.

The interpretation of the findings then followed, measuring the uncovered visual elements in the pictures and the inferences gathered in the interviews. The visual analysis sought to establish a clear link to a common trend that was visible on the Instagram platform. Images that were selected were related to the themes of Authenticity, Consumption, Celebrity and Image. An interpretation of the interview findings, in relation to the images then followed, by searching for latent meanings that became apparent.

These introductory chapters formed the foundation of this study which sought to analyse and understand the self-display of the young black South African women on Instagram, within the framework of post-feminism, consumption, celebrity culture, ideas around beauty and an understanding of social media, through the use of interviews and a visual analysis.

Discussion of the Findings

The Chapters that follow will discuss the findings that emerged during the interviews as well as the visual analysis of the participants' Instagram profiles. Using a thematic analysis, the Chapters will be discussed as follows, Chapter 5 – *Authenticity*; Chapter 6 – *Consumption*; Chapter 7 – *Celebrity;* and Chapter 8– *Image*. But before I discuss the findings, I will give a description of the participants that took part in my study.

The Participants

The participants involved in this study are young, black South African women who are very well groomed, attractive individuals, who conduct themselves through their dress, speech, and behaviour to fit within a specific high class of individuals, and who pride themselves on paying careful attention to their overall image on Instagram. From head-to-toe, they resemble an image of a woman who suggests a certain understanding of success. From the interviews conducted, what became apparent is that all of these women are ambitious, they believe they are capable of achieving much, and they claim that they want to make something of themselves, constantly asserting their entitlement to their independence, which is aligned with theoretical ideas about post-feminist practice (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Some of them are studying Law, one is interested in becoming a journalist, one has a particular interest in environmental relations, whilst others are striving to establish themselves in the media and entertainment industry, as well as entrepreneurs who say they have identified a gap in the market and have found what they enjoy doing.

In addition to all of them wanting to establish themselves as 'career women', they are all striving towards a specific aesthetic look, as well as some mode of negotiated success on Instagram. They all bear remarkable similarities to one another in terms of the way in which they conduct themselves, their overall display, how they choose to portray certain aspects of themselves and their lives, as well as the fact that they all have a very large following. They are all fashionable, sporting trendy outfits and immaculate make-up. They take very good care of their hair and claim to eat well, and

are conscious of their health and image. With a following of over 10,000 each on Instagram (which is growing daily), these women can be categorized among the socially elite Insta-celebs of the South African online world. These aspirant women are described by their followers as being inspirational to them and other young women, and as having achieved what they consider to be a degree of success because of their reach and the following that they have acquired.

The fact that these are black women, who act in their own capacity on Instagram, can be applied to the notion that "black women co-inhabit the space of attention with their white counterparts, but it is always understood that they are exceptional and act as role models for their less successful peers" (McRobbie, 2009: 132). This speaks to the societal shift that is played out on Instagram, where specific women see their function as no longer just a matter of being beautiful, but it is now also about evaluating every area of one's life and managing how meaningful and impactful you are to other women in other spheres, such as in your online and offline life, your public and private life, in your chosen career, or in your relationships and interactions with those you know and those that follow you. The way that the participants behave suggests that they want to portray a certain mode of success in the contemporary space of Instagram, and to achieve this they do certain things and employ certain practices in the construction of their ideal self.

Chapter 5

Authenticity

In this chapter I discuss the issue of 'Authenticity', by which I mean the way that the participants construct their online identities around their version of what it means to be 'real' within the Instagram space. I argue that their definition of 'real' is not realness in itself; instead it is a performance of realness and authenticity that is carefully constructed within the constraints of societal norms and expectations, which is then displayed as a commodity.

Much of contemporary society values people according to their status, meaning that those of us who want to be accepted in this way must change ourselves accordingly, and sustain that change over time. This suggests that being authentic and maintaining a position of realness comes with challenges in this obsessively mediatized age, and begs the question firstly, of what it actually means to be real, and secondly, whether it is even possible to achieve the specific degree of success while maintaining a sense of realness given the expectations set out by society. This particular version of 'realness' is however socially constructed, according to certain norms, practices and expectations, which shows that 'realness' is not 'real' as such, as it is often a performance of realness, and also a social commodity.

The concept of authenticity is connected to the idea of expressing one's individuality through your personalised traits, and acting in accordance with your own beliefs and desires. This view of authenticity can be extended to "the idea that some things are in some sense really you, or express what you are, and others aren't" (Williams, 2002: 277). This allows room to consider the human factor, or the humanness of an individual, a primary component that emerges when one is believed to be acting authentically. What humanness alludes to in this context is human nature which is seen as an "innate, essence-like (deep-seated and fundamental), cross-culturally universal, and typical of the human population" (Haslam et al., 2005: 207). This refers to everyday, real-life events and happenings that humans go through, and at the same time emotionally respond to. Additionally, to be authentic "is to be clear about one's own most basic feelings, desires and convictions, and to openly express one's stance

in the public arena" (Guignon, 2008: 288). Again, this may not necessarily be 'real' realness, as it is often a performance of realness. Thus, establishing your style and sustaining it on social media is one of the ways in which people display their 'authentic', 'real' version in the public arena (Varga, 2011). Appearing authentic in public involves being confident or open enough to speak in a personal way, by using an informal understandable tone, by sharing personal content and details about your life, or things that could be considered to be personal about who you are and about what is happening in your life in real time. This approach gives those observing you, the sense that you are truthful about what you stand for, because of your consistency in sharing the 'real' aspects of who you are in a visible way, as people are given some degree of access to the 'real' you (Gaden & Dumitrica, 2015).

Sharing and connecting on social media is rooted in the idea that sharing intimate information about one's life leads to the development of stronger social connections, as well as a personal and important awareness of others (John, 2013). However, at the same time, another approach to making the 'real self' available to others, can be looked at in relation to what Dean (2002) terms the 'ideology of publicity', in which individuals have identified and hold in high regard what people want to see, and act accordingly to that which attracts the attention of the public. This element of publicity and the representation of the 'real self' cannot be viewed as a rigid construct that develops in isolation, but is instead the result of the interactions of a variety of "social and cultural categories, and identifications" (Harris, Carlson & Poata-Smith, 2013: 3). Thus the process that people go through to be acknowledged by others, involves the identification and endorsement of the 'authentic' individual by the audience in the public-private arena that is facilitated by social media (Papacharissi, 2010). This also ties into the class aspect of authenticity, which involves not just being 'yourself', but it is also about being seen to inhabit your social position, rather than taking up a 'fake' one.

This aspect of authenticity is something that I encountered during my research and my interactions with these participants. While all of these women have achieved some recognition and praise for who they are on Instagram, among all of the things that they are saying and doing that are turning them into something similar to reality stars, they also constantly emphasize their own realness, and the necessity to remain

authentic. Who they imagine themselves to be and the people they aspire to ultimately embody, is essential in their creation of their ideal selves, as each of them maintain, "I am an everyday person" (Participant I). The way that the imagined and aspirational self is constructed suggests that online identity such as gender is performative. A person's gender identity is an imperative way in which they choose to define themselves. It must be understood that "gender attitudes emerge prior to gender stereotypes and the awareness of one's own gender identity" (Martin, Ruble & Szkrybalo, 2002: 903). This statement reinforces the notion that gender arises from a specific place of "subjection", before it is adopted as one's own (Butler, 2004: 21). Thus the way in which gender materializes is through habitual appropriation, which comes from socio-cultural cues, and which is then adapted and combined with one's own individuality, making up the performance on display (Butler, 2003). In this way, constructing the self can work like constructing gender.

What this suggests for these women is that "the imaginary self must not only be discovered, but experienced, paradoxically as more authentic than the previous one, which comes to be regarded as inauthentic. It is thus through technological shifts that it is believed that one can discover their more authentic true self" (Tasker & Negra, 2007: 237). What the 'technological shifts' allude to in this instance is the introduction of new forms such as social media, which enables a facilitation of the creation of the imaginary self. It is possible that the more 'authentic' these women are, or strive to be in their representation of themselves, the more their Instagram feeds sustain their reputations. In effect, the culture behind Instagram facilitates the participant's growth. The more consistent and constant they are in their 'authentic' display, the more they utilise the platform's features and identify the gateways to online success, and the more this serves to benefit them. What is meant by the authentic display refers to the way in which these women perform their identity through their posted pictures, quotes used and overall image portrayed which comes to be "understood as evidence of backstage behaviour and a 'true' personality [in the] seemingly authentic and socially connected context of online social media" (Ellcessor, 2012: 60). This is because popular people who seem more real and authentic are deemed to be more worthwhile to follow by the wider public, which is made up of average people (Wood et al., 2008). This leads to some sort of identification where people view them as being as ordinary as they are, and therefore

more relatable because of the fact that despite their prominence, the lives they lead and what they choose to display they are going through, is more closely related to the average person (Fleeson & Wilt, 2010). This idea can be applied to the participants, who are young average individuals who claim to show their most authentic selves on Instagram. From the following that they have acquired and the comments that people leave them on their images, one can deduce that their 'authentic' display is one of the aspects that their audience is attracted to. The relevant themes that appear in the comments are often the followers expressing their approval or positive attitude towards certain displays of what appears to be candid moments, family moments, live activities or a live fashion feed.

When it comes to individuals having large followings, one can assume that this comes with its own pressures. In order to sustain this presence one has to be super-human or extraordinary. This contradicts what was discussed above, in the sense that the audience appreciates when women exhibit elements of authenticity, but they also have their own expectations of them. This shows that as much as their online displays appear to be real, it is not entirely real because it is a socially constructed notion of 'realness'. Therefore, it is a commodity that is offered to the followers. Thus, the manner in which these pressures present themselves comes through in a way that suggests that even though one is able to offer glamourized displays of life, their life should also show signs of being 'real' in comparison to the average, normal persons' everyday life. Participant F explains, "I'm human, I am allowed to post specific real things." While these women do not consider themselves to be celebrities, the way that the display of being real works in the celebrity realm of social media, seems to function in the same way for them. Participant H admits, "the more real I am, the easier it makes it for people to want to know who I am", which is repeated by Participant I who remarks, "if I post relevant things, I attract more women that want to feel normal." Although the participants have large followings, they make a point of emphasizing their 'normality', suggesting that the glamorous life that they lead is common and accepted as 'normal'.

Being authentic may be recognised and utilized as a tool to attract people, as people choose to follow celebrities to get closer to the real people, their lives, and who they really are behind their staged or performed selves. This happens through social media

sites, which gives a sense that the "distance between popstar and interested enthusiast is eroded" (Beer, 2008: 233). As research has revealed, this could be assessed along the same lines that considers that "contemporary society appreciates real-life drama over fictionalized drama created by writers, directors, and actors, which is why society flocks more towards the real-life drama of celebrities" (Gregory, 2008: 22). This is because often times, the life of a celebrity "is the combination of wealth, glamour and drama of some kind, which becomes interesting to the general public" (Clark, 2005: 5). So, when it comes to their private lives, "the illusion of access and intimacy remains the dominant structuring force in celebrity texts" (Holmes, 2006: 54). This suggests that fans feel some connection to the celebrities because they feel they are experiencing what the celebrities are going through because they know so much about the situation. By focusing on what the fans want, the celebrity's apparent authenticity is reinforced as a fundamental element of their enjoyment. What this suggests is that celebrities must appear to be as authentic and as real as possible, in order to maintain their popularity and appeal. Gamson (1994: 171) argues that because of the fan's needs, "the question of who and what celebrities really are must be answerable." As such, the following that celebrities have on Instagram could serve as an example of the way in which fans attempt to get closer to the real person and their appeal, searching for answers or insight into their authentically raw and unedited versions of themselves, or their real lives.

Participant B highlights "people caught onto me being real and being myself, so I decided I'm just going to try and be more of that." The use of the word 'try' suggests that there is a conscious effort involved in the way they authenticate the display of themselves. Authenticity therefore comes forward as one of the many facets of an Instagram star's persona. The access that the public has to the 'authentic' celebrity through social media platforms is part of what draws people into wanting to follow these celebrities. This aspect of normality, to a large extent normalizes the celebrities' lives, and makes them relatable to the average user (Wood, 2003). As much as the women involved in this research are almost treated as stars, they insist on their normality by claiming their authenticity. Participant A states:

> "It's just showing people I am ordinary. I get a lot of girls inboxing me, and we talk about these sorts of normal things. It's not only about

> empowering women, it's also about showing people I'm ordinary, I'm living my life to the best of my ability, and basically this is a process of my life. I go to school, I have heartbreaks, and I have bad days and good days. I'm not perfect, I'm Christian, I'm a believer."

As the above statement suggests, participants feel there is an expectation for them to be real with the people that follow them. They believe that showing instances of things that happen in their daily lives such as the banal events, as well as good and bad events, not only proves their humanness, but they also show that displaying humanness is an important part of inspiring others. This can be evaluated through the theory of gender performativity, combined with the previously introduced notion of gender construction (Butler, 1994). Butler suggests that gender roles are not natural, but rather that they are a learnt performance of gendered behaviour known as masculinity and femininity, which is "maintained through a sustained set of acts, positioned through the gendered stylization of the body" (Butler, 1990: 15). As she states, gender is constructed through social conditioning, and should not be mistaken as being a part of biological sex, rather it is the state to which behaviour is assigned (Butler, 1990). This speaks to the idea that gender is what one does and not what one is born as. Furthermore, it has been proposed that "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (de Beauvoir, 1993: 66). Through the adoption of specific gender practices and performances, women construct themselves to correlate and align with these dominant definitions that are already in existence, through language within the frame of society (Butler, 1990).

Through their consumptive practices which are characterised by longer hair, dresses, high heeled shoes and handbags, as well as cosmetic purchases, they are ultimately defining and re-defining what it means to be a woman in society. It is thus necessary to acknowledge that "because gender is a pervasive filter through which individuals experience their social world, consumption activities are fundamentally gendered" (Bristor & Fischer, 1993: 519). It is also important to consider the various practices as well as the performances that these women adopt in order to understand their position when it comes to the type of image, which is then displayed, on Instagram. The authenticity that the participants speak about could also be seen as being a performance, in the way that they obtain their cues of how to act from the social

setting of Instagram, which promotes their display, and the way in which other people that they aspire to be like, display themselves.

Joan Rivieire (1929) explored "womanliness as a masquerade" from a psychoanalytic point of view, which was a pre-Butler understanding, suggesting the way in which women used their gender as a mask to hide themselves behind in a male-dominated environment, arising from anxieties of not knowing what to expect should their capabilities be exposed. Butler's notion of 'gender performativity' is strengthened through the discussion of gender as a 'masquerade' which "claims that femininity is not natural, but an adopted surface, a defence mechanism" (Rivieire, 1929: 306). This is the same way in which authenticity functions as the feminine mask for the participants, for the purpose of achieving 'success' in the realm of Instagram. Although there is constant emphasis on being real and being authentic, there is very little about this display that is entirely authentic as it is all very carefully strategised and carefully designed to achieve certain ambitions and aims. Although these ideas would not necessarily be recognised as being genuinely real or authentic, these ideas of realness and authenticity are almost part of the masquerade, as these women are actually performing their own realness.

The notion of authentic participation gives rise to the understanding of the neoliberal woman. This can be described as a form of selfhood that encourages people to be self-reliant by viewing themselves as autonomous subjects that are endowed with choices (Brown, 2006), and to "see themselves as individualized and active subjects, responsible for enhancing their own well-being" (Larner, 2000: 3). This type of woman is sensible, well thought out and self-analyzing (Gill, 2007). Aspects of the neoliberal woman can be seen in the way in which the participants choose to construct a woman that is appealing to others, through their decision to display a calculated, genuine, holistic version of themselves on Instagram, by focusing on monitoring the various facets that they feel are important. Participant F describes "how you reflect yourself from your soul, your personality, the way you present and carry yourself, your morals and your integrity makes you a beautiful woman." This account shows that as much as 'neoliberal' suggests a type of freedom, there is a construction that takes place, so the neoliberal woman is actually an idea or an archetype, as opposed to 'just' a way of being.

Black women who emerge as dominant and independent individuals in contemporary times are identified by other black women as contributing to society in some positive way, and are ultimately respected for being responsible for their own actions and achievements (Higginbotham, 2001). Under the scope of post-feminist sensibility, women are encouraged to actively choose to observe the standards of femininity in order to be considered as empowered and desirable individuals (McRobbie, 2009). The way in which these elements come across in this project suggests by being 'authentic', and 'being themselves', these women believe that they are not just using their display to tell their story, but they are also using this as an opportunity to become the 'best version' of themselves. This idea of the 'best version' of the self, ties into neoliberal notions in which women are expected to engage in "self-government, self-discipline and self-management" to better themselves (Gill, 2007: 163-164). The demand to self-manage is communicated in popular post-feminist texts such as makeover television shows and magazines, which emphasize that women and their image are in constant need of modification (Gill, 2007). According to Participant G "I realized people follow me, and are waiting for my next move." This reveals that the participants are aware of the fact that they have an audience and this is why they choose to monitor their activity and their actions, and positively filter what they post and how they portray themselves. Participant B explains, "Now I know I need to watch what I post. So now I am more cautious about how I conduct my Instagram page." The use of the word 'conduct' alludes to the conscious construction of authenticity. At the same time this space has been identified as being an area that can be used to establish and exhibit one's humanness.

Realness, Humanness and Authenticity

Realness, humanness and authenticity are important factors to consider in this discussion. This is primarily because what was interesting during the analysis was that all of the women acknowledged their large growing following, but felt the necessity to not let that overpower or deter them from their purpose, especially from the fact that they are real people going through real experiences, evolving and living out their lives as real people. Traits that they defined as being authentic emerged at numerous points in our interaction, and this can also be seen very clearly where their claims

correspond with the actions exhibited in their images. Who they say they are and who they would like to be can be seen in their planned displays on Instagram. At various junctures in the interviews, the awareness of themselves was made known. Even though they admitted to continually modeling and making themselves into who they would ideally like to be, which is in essence a performance, they admitted that they are still prone to human error comprised of making mistakes, having regrets, and dealing with the consequences of their choices, yet they say their followers still refer to them as being 'inspirational'. These "humanly" instances (if they could be termed that) ranged from openly admitting that they are not the weight they would like to be because they are still carrying post-baby weight, to the fact that having a baby was never a part of the plan, to the reality that they still use public transport, or that they, just like every other woman have days when they do not feel beautiful, regardless of what the outside, observing world, may see or say.

Admitting their frailty as being human and susceptible to human error and making mistakes is something that they all indicated, which Participant D mentions, "as young as I am and as much as I have made mistakes, I am human, and I inspire a lot of people because I am wise, and because of my integrity." Participant F supports this, "having a baby was hard because it was not planned, and I think I surprised a lot of people, as many questioned how a smart girl like me could have fallen pregnant. When I found out it was a mistake the first thing I said was 'what are people going to say?" The fact that she mentions "smart" as what she is supposed to be, suggests that according to her understanding of society and the expectations placed on women, 'smart' women do not get pregnant by accident (Barnett, 2004). As much as this particular experience is exclusive to this participant, this statement could be applied to wider trends, which gives an indication of the pressures felt by these women when it comes to the way they as women are expected to behave (Barnett, 2004). These accounts imply that they admit to their 'human failings' as part of their unconsciously designed desire to appear authentic online, which suggests that these 'failures' are actually a 'success' in some way, because they are a part of their appealing identity.

Participant F says:

> "I could have terminated the baby, and continued being the 'it' girl, and probably suffered in the future from the consequences of terminating, just because I was afraid of society. But in the end, it was my decision, I decided to keep it, and I decided that I am going to turn this mistake into a blessing."

By making this decision the participant claims that she wanted to prove to people that she, just like them, makes mistakes and she is not exempt from making life-altering mistakes, even if "I have people looking up to me" (Participant G). This act of admitting a setback and being open about one's mistakes can be seen as holding positive truths for women. Participant F explains, "I believe I gave people the liberty to feel that even if you have made a mistake, and you are a mom, you can still live, be beautiful and take charge of your body and become a better person through your own choices." The image below (Figure 5.1) can be viewed in light of this. One of the participants is seen displaying what can be considered a private, yet proud part of her life, as she is seen with her children. The way she is conducting her public persona suggests that although she is a career-driven woman, she accepts her responsibility and duty as a mother, by sending a message to other women that not only can they be successful, but also that contentment and satisfaction can be found in motherhood, as it is authentic and real for women.



Figure 5.1: Motherhood is authentic

The way in which the image of the multi-faceted career woman and motherhood intersects, suggests that the modern woman is offered freedoms that can be seen through her "freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; and physical and particularly sexual empowerment" (Tasker & Negra, 2007: 7). This describes women as having autonomy, in terms of understanding and exercising their rights and freedom to decide what they want to do with their bodies and their lives, and at the same time, this challenges the empowerment women believe they have, in realising that they do have a choice, and that this cannot and should not be determined or dictated by anyone. However, it is crucial to emphasize that the image that is spoken about is of the post-feminist woman, or the neoliberal 'myth', which shows that although the participants have autonomy and choices, this is a constructed identity rather than the actual reality of their lives, as their identity takes form within structural norms and expectations set out for them. At the same time, what the participants suggest through their understanding of this is that parenting and motherhood should be classified as being a process that should be recognised as being as natural as making mistakes. So, while all of these negotiations of gender roles are taking place, the participants present themselves as being women who claim to embrace all of their feminine roles as set out by society, while still maintaining their 'normality'. Participant D explains, "I try my best to be the best woman I can be all-round, but I make sure not to lose myself in all of that."

Displaying Your Individuality and Uniqueness

The enabling space of Instagram can be utilised for personal display and overall personal goals. Women of all ethnicities use this space to construct and reconstruct notions of beauty and femininity the way they see them, as "the made-over woman embodies values of the new, aspirational middle class, in which she has more of an autonomous feminine identity" (McRobbie, 2009: 10). Women such as the participants are coming to the fore in this regard, as other women admire them as role models and examples of who and what they can become. Words like "inspirational" or "role model" appear frequently in the Instagram comments to describe their significance, or instead their role in the shaping of their identity and ideological

building as Participant H explains, "I always have girls sending me DMs[5] telling me how much they look up to me, and how much I inspire them."

Understanding this, and recognising that people are looking up to them, the women of this study appear to go about constructing themselves in a specific manner as they have identified a "site where power is made at various intervals within everyday life" (Butler, Ladan & Zizek, 2000: 14). On one hand, they use their ideas of authenticity to qualify for themselves what they define as being real, by implementing the same repeated practices of identity in all areas of their lives, and at the same time they use this understanding and approach as a means to convince their audience to believe in them as individuals through their displayed notion of authenticity. This reveals that at this time, this definition of 'performed' authenticity has come to be accepted as normal for the participants.

McRobbie (2009: 19) suggests that women are "called to invent their own structures", however the way that the participants are seen constructing their identities in the area of authenticity, reveals that they are as constrained by structural conditions, as are all women. This comes through even in their participation on Instagram. Their view of the platform is conveyed in the way that they see it as a space where they can use the autonomous freedom they believe they possess, to conduct, display and depict anyone or anything they choose to. This may suggest that their autonomy is conditional as they are expected to monitor themselves and their behaviour, and consequently construct themselves and their identities in such a way, that is parallel to what has come to be accepted as a commonly understood notion of authenticity. This can be understood as a mode of 'governmentality', managing the manner of behaviour (Foucault, 1991; Lemke, 2002; Brown, 2005), which brings the neoliberal subject into focus again in a way that suggests that one is able to act on their own accord, in their own way, without imposed instruction. The process by which this happens could be through the "self-reformation, therapy and techniques and the calculated reshaping of speech and emotion that adjust the self by means of the techniques propounded by the experts of the soul" (Rose, 1990: 10-11). This statement suggests that women can be liberated to do, be and live out who they want to be, as instructed by their own

[5] "DMs" is the abbreviation for Direct Messages, which is a feature of the Instagram platform that allows its users to send direct messages to one another privately.

desires. However, being ‘successful on your own terms’ actually means being successful in a variety of different ways that are prescribed by consumer or capitalist society. So, what this shows is that they are not actually encouraged to invent their own success, but they are encouraged to view themselves this way.

The process of construction has to take place “internally and individualistically so that self-monitoring practices replace the reliance on set ways and structured pathways” (McRobbie, 2009: 19). However, this is contradictory in a way that proposes that women can construct their own identity to be ‘who they want to be’, although ‘who they want to be’ is always predefined (successful, fashionable), and it does not communicate that they are first expected to undergo a series of self-alterations and modifications. This comes into conflict with the notion of freedom in a way that suggests one must first do certain things before being considered as a worthwhile figure, which brings into question what this freedom actually is.

This assists in understanding what emerged in the data, where emphasis was placed on being consistent and ‘true to your trade’, your craft, or the thing that sets you apart, or the thing that assisted you in achieving your status or position, emphasizing the necessity of individuality among people. When it comes to an active strategy of managing one’s individuality, Participant C states, “Continuity is key! Pick something and stick to it!” Participant G elaborates, “Don’t be all over the place. Find something, stay true to it, run with it.” Participant H reinforces this, “so if I love dogs, I will showcase that, and you can get an informed perception about me.” It is also considered to be a simpler way of life as Participant I affirms, “It makes life so much easier, and I’m so focused on what I am doing.” The images below (Figure 5.2) are a visible example of the participants’ profiles that serves to strengthen this argument, showing the displays in some of their accounts. Each of their profiles show behaviour that they believe to be unique to them, which gives some insight into who they are as individuals and the way they choose to portray themselves. The thumbnails show images that are distinctly about fashion, beauty and status as the participants are posing in different outfits, showing their hair, make-up and various fashion items.

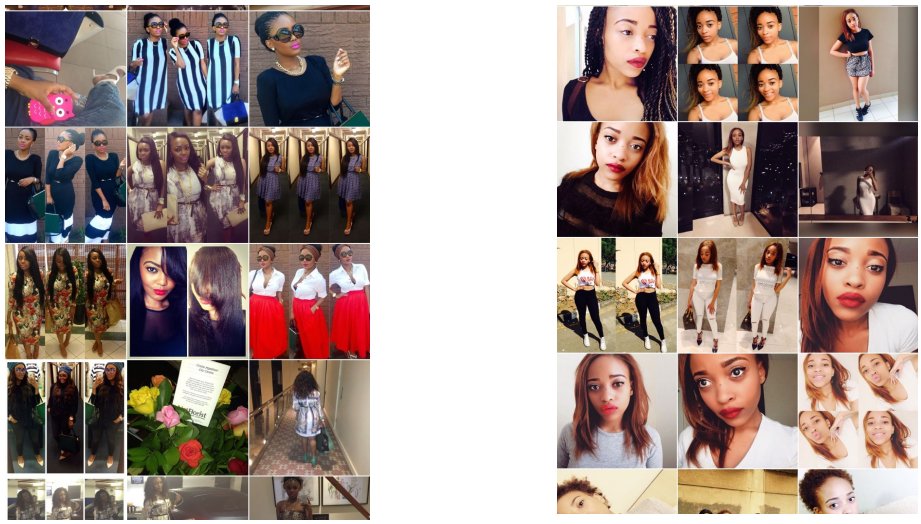

Figure 5.2: The participants' 'unique' displays of individuality

The participants emphasize the importance of their individuality by mentioning that one must "find their own trade, and stick to it", yet this is contradictory as their profiles all bear resemblances to each other. This shows that there is actually very little that is individual, different or unique about each of their displays or who they are trying to be. They all to some extent look like the other women. These images show that all of their claims about individuality are flawed, as the 'neoliberal' woman is actually constrained by pre-existing notions of femininity and success.

The participants also placed emphasis on the fact that Instagram is not really a true depiction, it is only a fragment of reality, and you only see what people choose to post. However, as much as this is the case, they also expressed that "Instagram is Instagram, and people take Instagram too literally" (Participant B). It became apparent that the participants felt that there is a definite need to be real and to enlighten people as to the extent to which things are and can be made up, but at the same time they did not want people to label them as trying to be or live something they are not. What this suggests is that they are aware of the fact that people are 'acting' on social media, and that Instagram is a representation of reality, and not reality itself. This also suggests that their idea of authentic display could very much be a performance of the same nature, but they try to represent themselves as being different, and their authenticity as being different to everything else people are

exposed to. What emerges again is that being real means something very specific to these women. They imply that they live out what is actually happening as, "You don't want to walk down the road and for people to say she's such a dream-seller [6], and in the meantime, you know you are just an ordinary person. So, I try by all means to take photos of what is really happening" (Participant B). What this suggests is that it is not just about being 'real' for your own sake, but it is also about consciously making authenticity part of your personal brand. What comes through in these accounts is that as much as being true to yourself is necessary, which is in essence being consistent with your portrayed image or the 'self' that people have come to know, these women feel the necessity to be 'true' to their followers too. This sheds light on the expectation placed on them by their audience, of how to behave and conduct themselves within a certain context, which includes regulating both their online and offline personalities in a specific manner because it is understood that, "self-definition comes through the intersections of media with everyday life through an audience" (McRobbie, 2009: 13).

The participants have all expressed their own uniqueness, and have revealed that they have aspirations to be women that others can relate to and can look up to. So, while these women are striving towards becoming their own ideal woman by inventing and reinventing themselves using various consumptive techniques, what this reinvention suggests is that all of this is not done to become someone else, but to rather become a truer account of who they really are, which is consistent with who they would really like to be. This is the idea that you can work to be the 'best version' of yourself through self-invention and personal responsibility (McRobbie, 2009), which comes from the discourses of neoliberalism and post-feminism. This process involves the incorporation of a number of styling and grooming techniques that are often taken from existing systems that are adopted and adapted. However, the way these women shop and groom themselves to become the more 'real' version of themselves, can be problematic, as these things are used to enhance one's image, and are in practice more feminine, but being more feminine does not necessarily mean becoming more authentic. Furthermore, shopping also provides a false sense of empowerment, as

[6] This is a colloquial term used to describe someone that has managed to convince others of their exaggerated life and what they have, or who they know, in an attempt to achieve a feeling of relevance.

even the items that are purchased are indicated by a larger social structure, suggesting a sense of status that is attached to them.

As previously discussed, femininity is a performance and all of these modifications assist in the performance of authenticity. In modern society, "people are increasingly individualized. They are required to invent themselves, and they are repeatedly called upon to shape themselves so as to be flexible to fit within new circumstances which makes them aspirational" (McRobbie, 2009: 130). Participant A states, "They are not me and I am not them, whatever I post is authentically me." This suggests that the participants identify themselves as individuals, comfortable in who they are, and secure in their own individuality. They continuously reinforce, they have no intention of being someone else, but rather just being themselves as "the best way I can" (Participant B). Although they speak openly about their own individuality, again this is contradictory as much of what they do is conforming to the trends they see on Instagram, and what they see other women doing on the platform. This questions the notion of individuality and authenticity, as this implies that much of what they do is not very original or unique to them at all. The participants accentuated their aim for realness in many ways where Participant B says, "I try to look good every day, not doing it all the time, but trying", and Participant C elaborates, "I am a normal person just like everyone else I'm still as humble as possible, so I think that's what makes me different." The women repeatedly made claims such as these about being real, by reinforcing their stance of always remaining open and transparent about all that concerns them. As the statement suggests, 'real' to them involves a conscious effort of 'trying' to be a better version of themselves. Furthermore, this effort suggests that they want their 'performance' of realness to not only qualify them as being considered as a 'normal' individual, but they also want their performance to serve them in a way that advances their image and identity.

This notion of realness is echoed by Participant D who mentions what all of the other women of the study feel they want everyone else to say about them, "Wow, she's actually a really nice person, she's just as normal as we are." The participants define this notion of 'normal' as living or being a certain way through what they display, which also leads to the discussion that 'normal' means different things to different people, depending on where they are positioned, or the context in which they find

themselves. Even though these women all convey that they want to make a statement of being spectacular in their own way, at the same time they also want to be accepted as being as normal as the next person. Participant D encompasses the attitude of the participants, "my posts are not superficial, and whenever I post it is what is happening. I can never be questioned about the lifestyle I lead, because it is really the lifestyle I lead, not some façade." The images below (Figure 5.3 and Figure 5.4) are examples of their claim of realness, where you can see the participants behaving 'naturally' and 'normally'.



Figure 5.3: Doing 'normal' things



Figure 5.4: Posing 'naturally'

The first image (Figure 5.3) features the participant going on a church outing. In this image, you can see her standing with other women, surrounded by their luggage and their bedding. What is particularly obvious in this image is that there is no extravagant background, as the other pictures on her profile depict. Furthermore, the fact that she mentions this is a church outing, suggests that this is part of her performance, and that she is seeking to prove that she is a good, moral person driven by good intentions. What she may also be trying to show is that she still does 'normal' things, besides just dressing up and looking glamorous. Additionally, what also comes across is that she is attempting to prove her normality by showing that she spends time with 'normal' people that are not necessarily in her usual social circle, and who do not fit the same profile or description as she does when it comes to aesthetics, style and hair. This is also seen in the second image (Figure 5.4), where you can see the 'natural' way that they are posed, which is meant to look like a casual conversation between two people

who are enjoying nature. While there are few of these types of images on their profiles, this may be a way of strategically positioning themselves as being authentic, amongst all of their individual images and 'selfies [7]'. This may act as a reminder to their audience that they are still real, even though most of their profile is comprised of them looking immaculate and doing elaborate things.

The Pressures of Social Media

The participants conduct themselves in a way that suggests that they believe they are empowered and liberated from societal pressures, which suggests a stronger post-feminist position. Participant G states, "I don't feel the need to do things just because society says so." Social media can appear superficial and dramatized, and it is here that unspoken norms arise, which places expectations on its users. The participants all confessed to conforming to the norms of Instagram when they started using it, which Participant I alludes to, "social media really does make you lose your focus", as "you feel the pressure to conform to what others are doing" (Participant A). These norms included going to certain places just to post that they were there and wearing certain things just so they could post a picture for their followers to like, essentially for the approval of other people. Participant C explains, "you do things, without actually realizing you're doing it for your followers, you're not doing it for yourself. You will literally buy an outfit and you just want to post wearing it, and then you realise your life is Instagram now. You're no longer living a normal life." Participant A reiterates, "You begin doing things you do not really want to do, just to impress, be loved and recognized." This action has been termed "doing things for the Gram[8]" (Participant F). This term itself, speaks to the collectively accepted actions that circulate in these social circles. As much as this post-feminist discourse suggests that women have choices available for what they want to do with themselves, and to some extent they really do, these choices are rooted in the meanings of existing structures, and they are expected to make choices that correspond with those constructs.

[7] These are photographs that individuals take of themselves.

[8] 'Gram' is a colloquial or shortened name for Insta'gram'.

In as much as they are using their autonomy, and honing in on the feeling of being 'liberated' from the constraints to have money and look good, at the same time they are still being controlled to some extent by their choices. This suggests a condition within the post-feminist discourse, which emphasizes that choice is available to women, but as long as that choice is made in accordance with specific standards. According to Gill (2007: 157), "women are presented as entirely free agents, but this avoids all the important questions about the relationship between representations and subjectivity, the difficult but crucial questions about how socially constructed, mass mediated ideals of beauty are internalised and made our own." Participant J describes her behaviour as coming from a place of enlightenment regarding the choice she feels she has, "It's just another social media platform. Everything I do is for myself, but it is important to be the person I am and show people that. If they don't see it that way, that's their own thing." The way that the participant speaks about social media suggests that there is a belief that one's actions are entirely their own, which does not reflect the necessity to self-discipline that takes place beforehand.

In developing and becoming the women they esteem, Tasker and Negra (2007: 237) emphasize that "the new self must be liberated, rather than being imposed from the outside. The more authentic self bears the hallmark of post-feminism." Many of the participants stated that as they grew and matured, they began to see what they call the 'superficiality' of Instagram, and instead opted to show what is to them, a real image of themselves, as opposed to living out something they really are not. Participant G states, "I am who I put out there, I'm not living a lie." This shows that as much as there is freedom to occupy a desired position, this is still ideologically inflected and must be approached in a specific way, as the success they are interested in has to first fit within a specific frame that defines how they should look and behave. Within Instagram there is a notion of what authenticity is, and by participating on the medium, they subscribe to that way.

However, all of the participants made it clear that they feel you can only achieve this 'mental liberation' from societal expectation when you are confident and have a solid understanding and acceptance of 'who you are' as an individual. Participant D explains, "Your likes don't determine who you are. I got to understand that, and people need to understand that." Again, what this suggests is that a woman is

responsible for monitoring and surveilling her own behaviour in order to see herself as emancipated, but even after she has done this, she is still constrained in this 'freedom' and not completely 'free' under these conditions. Participant I states, "I'm the type of person that can leave social media." The way in which the participant states that she can leave, yet however she does not, suggests that her behaviour is intentional. In this way, she is also trying to prove her ability to deviate or move away from the norm, in the sense that even though Instagram is common and many have it, she is willing, or could be willing to be different and not have it.

Tasker and Negra (2007) propose that only a confident woman can acquire independence and freedom, which comes with a demand for continual self-monitoring and investment in grooming and nurturing one's complete image. In one way the participants are acting in their own capacity, but it is debatable whether they ever reach a point of complete liberation and freedom in the wake of their performance. Although their engagements seem purely independent, as they are able to 'personalise' their image, the extent of their freedom is challenged by the fact that they are expected to 'improve' themselves by continually investing in self-maintenance practices. This suggests that there is actually limited freedom in the construction of their image or their performance, as they are expected to first look a certain way or groom themselves in a specific way, which can be liberating in its own way, but they are ultimately subscribing to a specific aesthetic standard. This also brings into question their ideal or definition of authentic or real, if there is a constant improvement or modification of the self, taking place. This suggests that what is to be considered as authentic is in need of constant monitoring, which disqualifies the common understanding of authentic and again points to authenticity as being a performance.

Online and Offline Personality

In addition to this discussion of authenticity, an interesting trend emerged in the participants' behaviour both online and offline. These women believe so much in their idea of being real and authentic that they claim their offline persona matches their online display; as Participant E says, "I'm pretty much always the same, online and

offline." This statement suggests that their offline persona is also not 'real' as it is also monitored, and that there is a degree of intentional self-construction at every level, which plays into the ideas about performativity, and the social nature of the modern self. What makes this discussion interesting is the way in which they use their own definitions of authenticity and realness to reinforce their performance. This could suggest a way in which the modern self comes together. By assuming a certain position through certain gendered acts, the online personality or performance becomes the primary factor that instructs the way in which one defines or constructs the rest of who they are. People therefore use social media as a relevant way to define and represent themselves. In this way, the lives of the participants could be seen as a performance of authentic living, and effectively the performance of a narrative of some kind, as "performance engulfs a radically constructionist notion, suggesting that personal narrative performance is a site in which social meaning - including that of a narrator's identity – is fervently negotiated and constructed" (Way, 2004: 117). Therefore, in order for them to be of relevance to the audience they are intending to reach, and the final objective they are hoping to achieve, they may deploy this version of 'performed' authenticity, as it is necessary within the social setting (Swindler, 1986) (of Instagram). This again comes back to the issue of self-monitoring per McRobbie (2009). The fact that they monitor who they are outside of social media, suggests that there is a modification of their original self, and in this way their online persona has come to be accepted as the more authentic identity.

Participant B explains the importance of the online image by mentioning that she does not want people seeing someone different when she is in public, "Aren't you the girl from Insta? Every time I'm going out to a place where there are a lot of people, I make sure I look good so they can't say- Oh she's a catfish[9] !" What arises at this point is another contradiction in which the participants explicitly state that in order to match their online identities, they make a conscious effort to always dress well and look good, so that they will seem 'real' to their followers. They claim that what they are doing is showing realness by ensuring their identities always correspond with one another, which is indicative of the way that they position themselves discursively as

[9] A catfish is usually someone online who pretends to be someone else. They conceal their true identity very well, until their façade is exposed, and people come to know of the real person when they meet them in person.

real and authentic. But the way they talk about their behaviour suggests something very different as they continuously highlight the way they regulate their image. This suggests that self-modification and self-alteration is now such a natural part of who they are, and what they do, that this behaviour has come to be considered as authentic. So even though they talk about 'realness', this is met with the need to 'perform' realness, which is seen in the intentional process involved in creating their image.

The participants also expressed that they feel there is a duty placed on them to share their personal details as Participant I suggests, "I try my best to display the actual person I am, my thoughts and the things I go through because that is what people want. Sometimes I even talk about my mom on my posts. How I act, or talk to people is really the same." The image below (Figure 5.5) reinforces this discussion as it shows a tribute that the participant made to her deceased mother. The image shows photographs of her and her mother, as well as how long her mother has been gone for. At the same time she is seen posting this on Mother's Day, which may have been done in an attempt to align herself as being a normal individual that feels the absence of her mother on a day dedicated to mothers, or that she, just like everyone else has emotions and was at that point feeling emotional. By revealing some of her emotions and also giving her followers some insight into her life story, suggests that she is reinforcing her humanness.



Figure 5.5: Sharing personal details

Participant E explains, “I just try to keep it real, and welcoming, by actually displaying the person I am, even outside Instagram.” This suggests that the ‘vulnerability’ these women choose to show, and the personal details they provide are also a tool that they use to create their ‘perfect’ online selves. Participant H addresses this, “I just want my page clean, showing that’s me in my normal life. I don’t pretend to be someone and something I am not, so that I can be accepted.” Participant J elaborates, “I’m just a normal person 90% of the time. If a person sees me, they will say this is the same person.” What is essential in these accounts is that these women place so much value on being authentic not just for themselves and their own conscience, but they are highly concerned about their followers, and about the opinion of their followers in shaping their ‘authentic’ identities. This raises the question that if their aim is about being real and genuine, why is it so important for them to be seen that way by their followers?

The position that they adopt emphasizes that in order to be successful in who you are on social media, or to make a success out of Instagram, you are required to construct yourself in a specific way, as that has become acceptable, or accepted as the norm, regardless of what you may feel. What may also be a factor worth considering is that specific women such as Beyonce and Rihanna, with whom the participants identify, have adopted these display techniques, and have gone on to achieved global recognition and a specific mode of recognition or Instagram popularity. In the same way the participants emphasize that they have made it their ‘duty’ to attempt to adapt to their idea of authenticity, or the authenticity they have come to understand. Their approach also suggests that in being as authentic as they understand, they will not only attract followers, but keep them too, which could be useful for them. So this factor questions their motive for being on Instagram, as their display is revealed as being clearly well thought out and intentional. They are seen both striving to be authentic and also doing specific things to create that authenticity, which is acting in accordance with the standard of authenticity as adopted on Instagram.

I have shown through discussing a number of elements that ideas of authenticity and the realness of the self are important to these women, and influence their self-display. What was noteworthy was the way in which the participants define and understand, or live out their authenticity or realness as very different to the commonly held

understanding of what it means to be real and authentic. Certain habits such as the adoption of constant self-modification techniques have come to be a part of their authentic display, which emerges as actually being a performance of authenticity, and not authenticity in itself. Through their discussions, they explained the importance of Instagram in assisting them to prove their authenticity by explaining how they strive to display their individuality, their mistakes, their personal struggles and their life events to represent themselves as 'normal' individuals, in an effort to establish some relevance with their followers. This highlighted the way that they go about constructing every aspect of their identity, to become who they aspire to be and who they feel they are expected to be, and as a result of this, emerge as being inspiring to others. As much as they feel they are being 'real' by utilising their freedom and honing in on their individuality, what is not discussed is that they are self-disciplining first, and their performed authenticity is a product of this.

Chapter 6

Consumption

In this chapter I will be discussing my respondents' engagements in the consumption and display of high-end luxury goods such as elaborate fashion accessories, exclusive brands, luxury cars and the documentation of holiday destinations that are all considered to be glamorous in nature. It is also necessary to recognise the identifiable components of visible consumption that can be observed on the participants' profiles, and the way in which these women speak about their engagements. By observing these practices and analysing the way they speak about consumption, it is important to understand the motives behind their actions and why they choose this particular display, why it is that they show their consumption practices as such a central part of their image and who they are, as well as to what extent their consumptive practices assist them in the construction of the woman they ideally want to become.

In the era in which we are now living, one of the standards set by society places emphasis on how well you present yourself, what you are in possession of, how fashionable you are, and what you materialistically display, which is seen to inform the behaviour of some people. According to McRobbie (2009: 132), this is because "glamour is celebrated as a mark of aspiration", and what it suggests is that 'success' is only attained when you can afford to engage in particular acts of consumption. Glamour acts as evidence of the level of commitment and dedication to doing some sort of labour, in whatever form that takes, and reaping the reward of that effort. This is then translated into an exhibition that is put on display for others to witness. Spending money or consuming goods is regarded as a common practice that most people make an effort of engaging in because of the feeling, emotion or experience that is attached to owning those specific things (Slater, 1994).

Consumption involves an individual process of acquiring and possessing certain goods (Goodman & Cohen, 2004). The way in which this process is spoken about focuses on the way in which people engage in certain consumptive transactions, for the purpose of attaining some end. This speaks to the freedom women are suggested to have, which relates to post-feminism in the way that it "encourages and valorises

women's ability to consume as a signifier of feminism's success, enabling women to take control of their lives through consumption practices and the "freedom" of choice this implies" (Projansky, 2007: 94). However, at the same time this points to how a woman is expected to use these choices, to monitor how she models and grooms herself. In addition to this, the way in which this relates to neoliberalism focuses on the way in which women are now offered more opportunities to conduct their own lives, make their own money, and find their own way to independence without having to depend on anyone to fulfil those needs (Brown, 2005). The relevance of this suggests that women have more of a choice in deciding what to do with what they have acquired, and they are effectively entitled to construct their image.

As Sørensen (2013: 42) suggests, consumption choices are used as "displays for external messaging due to the sign value that they possess." This notion argues that consumption is involved in identity construction in the way that one does not necessarily purchase identity, but identity can be revealed through interactions with the purchased consumptive items (Campbell, 2004). Depending on the social setting in which one finds oneself, certain items hold symbolic value, and being in possession of these items elevates them to a specific position, or creates a particular image of status that is then perceived by others. As Slater (1999: 153) proposes, "goods are described as building blocks for climbing social status", which is of importance for those individuals that see their consumption practices as being a tool that is able to fulfil more than just a functional role for them. The reason this is of interest is because the women in my study continually position themselves as independent, 'free' women, repeatedly engaging in these consumptive practices on their Instagram profiles, and it is evident that they hold in high regard this presentation. What all of these engagements suggest is that these women are highly concerned with their image, and the image they portray, and that it is of great importance for them to have certain goods involved in the process of defining and constructing their image, for the value that they signify in creating status and positioning them accordingly.

As a regular Instagram user myself, much of what I have seen on the platform is the repetition of certain feminine practices such as the presence of constantly groomed hair and nails, the presence of make-up applied daily, and clothing choices that include dresses, skirts and high-heeled shoes. In addition, specific material items are

displayed in particular ways, which clearly connote certain loaded meanings within this online space, and which may hold significant symbolic value for the individual. These practices within the space of Instagram have become norms that are expected of women and men alike who participate in this space. Not only have these practices become the norm in the sense that those who subscribes to this specific lifestyle has an idea of how they should behave, but they are also given the space to show how they adopt these norms and consequently behave. In a way, posting a picture shows one's commitment to these practices that are deemed acceptable. Due to the value that consumption practices hold in society and now on social media, particular women are found using these modalities to convey their various lifestyles, and their desired lifestyle choices.

A Desirable Lifestyle

During the interviews, the participants spoke about themselves and the lives that they lead as being extremely desirable. The way they spoke about themselves in relation to celebrities and their followers, suggests that they feel as though they act as a beacon of encouragement for other women who have similar aspirations, empowering them to believe that the lifestyle they lead is not exclusive to celebrities or those people they aspire to be like. Participant F states, "When girls are like, you have it all going for you, you live such an awesome life, I'm like, babe, what's stopping you, you can too!" However, they suggest that as an independent woman, these freedoms are also accessible if one has worked to acquire the means to involve themselves in consumptive activities. Participant I states, "It's all about the effort you're prepared to put in, you can live the good life too!" The emphasis that they place on Instagram suggests that through its visible component it is responsible for facilitating empowerment and aspiration, which contributors can use at their discretion, and which can be explained by considering that, "social media makes the stars seem more relatable and attainable than ever before, especially young women, whose age and demographics are similar to the characters" (Donatelle, 2014: 36). What this also implies is that this lifestyle is not exclusive to only certain successful people, and anyone can have entry to this life of consumption and the enjoyment of owning certain things through consistency and hard work.

Participant D explains her position on this, “the fact that people like my lifestyle when it’s not event that hectic, like I’m not even Beyonce, but people are following me, is really cool because it makes me believe that they believe they can do it too.” What this suggests is that through this act of purchasing, possessing and associating oneself with specific things, women exercise their prerogative in choosing what to do with their money, and how they want to express themselves through their consumed goods. While this is to a large extent true, as much as the participants make this glamorous display and engagement seem easy and attainable by the way they promote it, the power that it is said to hold is in actual fact very classed, contingent and difficult to both achieve and maintain. This is because living this life that they propose as being both wonderful and fulfilling, is not as liberating for the individual as it might appear to be, as it requires the individual to constantly monitor and police themselves and their image by always living up to a certain standard.

The participants went on to emphasize the importance of the way they are perceived on Instagram, in terms of their overall image of remaining appealing and desirable at all times. According to the Oxford Dictionary (2016), lifestyle is described as “the way in which a person lives.” Thus, lifestyle indicates the manner in which a person goes about their day-to-day life. Consumption and lifestyle function together in the current society as consumption choices are used to establish identity and indicate a specific social class and standard of living (Bauman, 1998). Lifestyle is considered to be a variety of activities and practices that people involve themselves in on a daily basis. The monetary aspect involved in these practices is often dependent on one’s profession, qualifications and income (Keller & Røbert, 2011). At the core of this discussion, “lifestyle differentiation consists of a reduced level of consumption in the lower strata of the society, while the upper strata of the society have much more choice in their lifestyle” (Keller & Røbert, 2011: 55). Lifestyle in this context refers to the special events that the participants attend, the destinations they go to, the exclusive restaurants they dine at, the select people they spend their time with, and also the luxury designer labels they wear and consume. The women display their interaction with these things as a regular part of their lives, and as though these things make up a normal part of who they are, which they are living out and utilising naturally. They present this life on Instagram through repeated means and tactics that detail a representation of a consistent high standard of living, intended to develop a

stable image of what they do, and the lives that they lead, which assists them in framing who they want to become.

The first set of images shows some examples of the glamorous lifestyle that these women display. The first image (Figure 6.1) is the display of flight tickets, bringing attention to the fact that this participant was not just flying economy class, but instead she was flying business class. To further support the prestige of flying business class, she also tagged the Premier Lounge location to demonstrate that she was among fellow people of a higher class that also use that lounge, and she was enjoying the luxury of being able to afford the same things.



Figure 6.1: The benefits of high-class living

People often adopt this kind of visible consumption to express or prove their economic status or social standing to others (Charles, Hurst & Roussanov, 2007). More so, displays like this could suggest that women are trying to prove that they are capable of making enough money to afford these luxuries. Consumption within the neoliberal context is thus used as a method to obtain power and to achieve a sense of pleasure (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2014). This is because there is appeal associated with being in specific places which well-established people frequent, as this creates a perceived image of high status and accomplishment in the minds of followers. To expand on that, the image below of the champagne, Armand de Brignac, is an opulent brand that is owned by rapper Jay-Z, and which is often consumed and flaunted by

celebrities at their elite events, as Instagram illustrates. It is exclusive champagne that retails for approximately $300.00 or the equivalent of R3, 499.00.



Figure 6.2: Celebrity-owned brand

This is an alcohol that is also consumed by celebrities which are of a higher status group, so owning a bottle of the same drink could be done "in the hopes of raising the woman's own status" (Braudy, 1997: 479). The symbolic value that this holds suggests that when it comes to taste, having 'expensive taste', raises one's status, as one becomes eligible to be associated with a specific social circle as they "pass as a citizen in the republic of taste" (Tasker & Negra, 2007: 235). This is because "taste has become an immediate way of framing who we are" (Campbell, 2004: 30-31). Therefore, in this context, owning a luxury brand of alcohol is an indicator of one's association to a specific class. What this suggests for normal people is that these luxury brands are not exclusive to only the celebrities, but the average person can be a part of these trends too and can effectively associate with that class. However, at the same time that taste includes certain people that can afford to purchase these luxury brands and share in the 'taste', it also excludes those people that cannot purchase these items. So, in as much as the participant's claim that they give other people hope that the lifestyle they lead is not exclusive, and that others can have access to it, they also display class and taste that excludes other people.

In the same way that structures such as race are used to explicitly classify individuals, classification is now also arranged systematically according to how good you look, the clothes you wear, the car you drive, the places you go to and the people you

associate with. Within this particular context regarding the participants, what comes across is that "taste and lifestyle preference are important elements of identity" (Gilroy, 2006: 112). Although is not a new concept that one's lifestyle contributes to their identity, this notion is manifesting itself differently through social media and the effects of globalisation. This is because individual identities are framed by the lifestyle they display on social media. As a result, social media serves as an important space for people, where they can be assessed by their followers through comments, and given an indication of how people see them, and effectively how they can better themselves. This again suggests that self-reflexivity is necessary for the participants in their construction of becoming who they want to be.

What this proposes is that by engaging in these consumptive practices and spending time on their image, women are exercising their freedom, and through this, experiencing a sense of empowerment. From this perspective, "the more individualized styles of glamour are requiring of more conspicuous consumption on the self, such as manicures, fashion, pampering and other observable practices" (McRobbie, 2009: 132). This argument can be seen in light of the image below, which showcases the participant's manicured nails, highlighting the process of grooming oneself, or drawing attention to the aesthetics of the nails in particular.

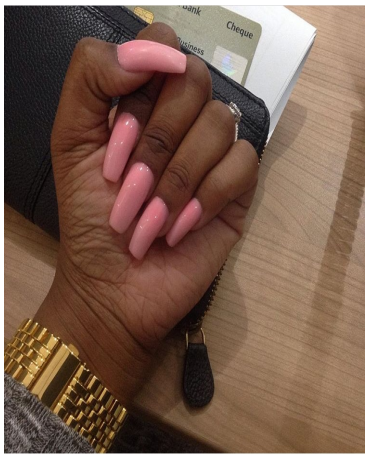

Figure 6.3: Conspicuous grooming

In addition to this, what is also visible in the background is the presence of a Business Cheque card. This image suggests that the participant intended to show that she is enjoying getting pampered by getting her nails done, and at the same time that she can afford it. The presence of the card may suggest that she paid for it on her own, or it may be used to imply that she is a hardworking neoliberal citizen, and her business is doing well. Therefore, the enjoyment aspect comes from the fact that in earning her own money she has the freedom to use it in the way that she chooses, which in this case involves pampering herself. However, this image shows that there are different markers of success being juxtaposed. This suggests that consumption practices are gendered because gender cannot be viewed as a physical thing alone, and must therefore be reconstructed by repeating cultural norms (Butler, 1990). So women are expected to express their femininity through means of conspicuous consumption such as getting their nails done, and are subsequently expected to use their own money to achieve this femininity. In effect, this acts as a marker of a woman's success, by positioning her to be viewed as independent and successful, based on what practices she can show or prove. From this perspective, femininity can be seen as conditional and based on what one first does to themselves, or that femininity is only achieved when one engages in specific altering practices that they are required to fund on their own.

Figure 6.4 below is another example of conspicuous consumption.

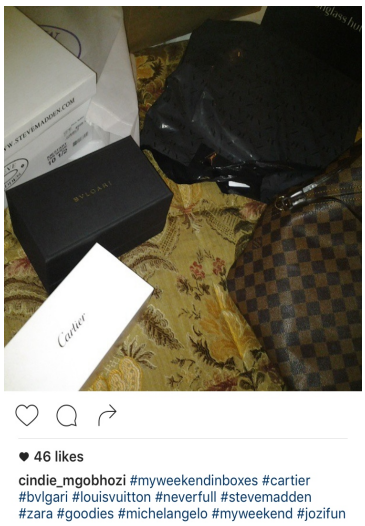

Figure 6.4: Conspicuous consumption of exclusive brands

This deliberate exhibition of the participant's shopping spree for luxury brands such as Cartier, Bvlgari, Steve Madden and Louis Vuitton, could serve to describe the sense of empowerment experienced through shopping for these brands. This kind of ownership connotes a woman's 'success' in a way that proves that she can afford these brands, as people "assure themselves of who they are and how much they have achieved through what they consume. Others judge them and their identities by the same criteria" (Dholakia & Firat, 1998: 114). It also suggests that these women want to be seen as being stylish and capable, as they earn enough to shop in those elite places and wear exclusive brands that only a certain higher class of people can afford. This point applies to all of the images that are used. Importantly, celebrities who have great appeal also wear these luxury brands, so what this implies is that for a normal person that owns the same items, they are able to relish some of the celebrity status. This suggests that the audience gives people consideration only when they are in possession of certain consumer items.

Although this specific display and the shopping process is framed as a 'freedom' to engage in the consumer culture, there is little about this display that is actually liberating, as the participant's behaviour and consumption choices are still governed by a certain standard and set of expectations placed upon them by both society and themselves. The type of 'freedom' involved is one that offers a sense of empowerment through consumption. Accordingly, "consumer culture has become a medium for the construction and negotiation of identity in a society where social position is no longer handed to the individual automatically" (Sørensen, 2013: 45). While this practice suggests that women may feel empowered through their consumer activities, the status they hope to achieve is only earned by proving what they have consumed through posting photos. Therefore, this type of 'high status' consumption is only successful in what it aims to do if people are able to see it.

Through my interactions with these participants, it became clear that one of the ways in which they measure their success is by the number of followers and likes that they receive, which to them indicates an approval of the lifestyle that they lead, their style and the way they model themselves. Participant A explains, "if a photo gets less than 100 likes I will most likely delete it because I would think, oh my word people do not like this part of what I am displaying, it must go." Participant B elaborates, "If I post

pictures now, I am posting pictures of my life, or things to get likes, I won't lie." This attitude towards the content of their posts suggests that the participants take cues from their followings, of how they should behave. By doing this, they are given insight into what their followers want to see more of, and what is appealing about their display, which repeatedly includes showing images that are laden with visible presentations of consumption. This is also a direct indication of the way in which they 'perform' their identity, which is emphasized by the previous point above that their consumption needs to be visible in order to 'function' beneficially. This shows that they measure their behaviour against what their audience wants or expects of them, and they then adjust themselves accordingly. This reinforces that what one sees on their profile is a performance of authenticity, and not authenticity in itself, which was discussed in the previous chapter. Participant D elaborates on this:

> "It feels good that people like what I show them, but now knowing this, I don't think I've reached where I want to be. There are people with 70-something million followers, so I don't think I can rest and say I've really done well, because there is room for growth."

This account could serve as a possible explanation for the continual flow of images, frequenting the Instagram platform, which perpetually displays consumption practices of some sort, as this is what some people want to see. The way this links to ideas of post-feminism suggests that for women, "appearance is everything" (Palmer, 2002: 295). This shows that the kind of social environment that these women exist in is one that focuses heavily on one's appearance and what one possesses and is able to visibly display, as this acts as an indication of who they are. It is this display that the participants see as being instrumental in their success. Furthermore, the participant mentions, "there is room for growth" as she compares her following on Instagram to the followers others have accumulated, which suggests that she believes she needs to improve her 'performance' and increase her consumption activities to advance her image, and achieve her desired success. As Sassatelli (2007: 4) describes, "adjusting or modifying one's needs or wants to match the needs or wants of society is also a way of self-modification." This implies that these women measure success by the number of followers that they have, and that they see the content of their photos as being an important factor that attracts followers. It is because of this that they invest

so much time and money inventing and reinventing their image using consumptive means, which is seen in their posts on Instagram.

The Relationship between Fashion & Inspiration

In addition to acquiring likes and followers for their own end, what also became clear is that these women recognise that they play an important role in the lives of others, and as a result they can use their lifestyle or fashion sense to influence and inspire other women. What is meant by the term 'inspiration' is directly linked to influence, and assuming the role of being influential in the behaviour and lives of other people. The women that post the pictures and their followers both often use this term. Through these repeated acts in which consumption is used, this version of glamorous femininity is situated as being the ultimate image, and the level by which 'success' for certain women is defined. The fact that the participants are an inspiration when they show off expensive things, suggests that consumption has extreme effects on some women. What this response implies is that the followers automatically view the participants in a certain light and see them as having achieved much, because these are 'normal' girls in possession of greatly desired, exclusive high status items. As such, the luxury items define the women to a large extent, as they become known by what they possess, as this acts as an indicator of what they have achieved. This may further add to the success, which they feel they attain, as Participant C details:

> "I loved posting things that inspire women and empower women. I especially love posting outfits. I love fashion, so I naturally post something I love. So, people can look at my profile and say hmmm let me see what she is wearing. I wanted to be an inspiration to young girls. And I often get a lot of messages from them telling me how much I inspire them, and how much they love what I wear, and I'm always so happy to tell them where to go. So that's why I have this account, I really enjoy that."

This idea of inspiration suggests something that is different to older, more traditional understandings of the term that were about different forms of achievement.

Essentially, the way that inspiration works in this context suggests that the followers are being inspired to dress in a certain way, and to model themselves using specific items, which differs to older forms in which people were inspired to do things such as 'follow your dreams', or to do good deeds.

As a part of the glamorous 'lifestyle' that the participants speak about and display, they also have a particular interest in fashion, whether it is simply wearing fashionable items for their own pleasure, or being considered a fashion icon and inspiration by someone else. It is of particular interest that these women feel they are able to be an inspiration to someone else through consumption, simply by what they choose to wear, or how they present themselves. This is because "the fashion image tells women they are subjects of change within this repertoire, emboldened, unthwarted and endowed with capacity" (McRobbie, 2009: 104). This suggests that clothing in itself is vital, so the process of shopping and purchasing one's own pieces and then wearing them carries significant weight in mobilizing women to see themselves as figures clothed with influence. This is further explained by König (2004: 140) "dressing up equals fun, fun equals empowerment", which again claims that a woman is promised a sense of individuality and freedom through fashion and shopping. The participants' profiles have multiple pictures of fashion images, which show the influence of fashion on their lives.

Figure 6.5 below is a post by Dreamfashion_SA boutique that shows a garment of theirs, which was worn by the participant to the Vodacom Durban July event.



Figure 6.5: Exclusive boutique ensemble

The image uses the words “slayed” and “slayering” in the caption, which are urban colloquial terms, used on Instagram, to express the extent of how well one is dressed, and to express that the outfit made a statement and the person in the outfit outshone or ‘slayed’ everyone else. The way that the word is used suggests that a confidence materialized when the exclusive ensemble from this boutique was worn. This again suggests that power can be found in owning select items that hold a level of prestige, which in this instance is an outfit from an exclusive boutique.

Figure 6.6 below uses the same term in describing whom the participant calls the “Queen of S L A Y”.



Figure 6.6: Educated in fashion

What is also interesting about this image is the choice of words used in the caption – ‘Class is in session’. This caption suggests that the participant takes fashion and her personal style very seriously, and because of that she seeks input from others to assist in improving herself. This is because she states that she wants to be ‘educated’ and is therefore being ‘schooled’ by a person she considers to be a fashion expert. Furthermore, what this also suggests is that the participant sees her association to *@stylealertsa*, who has a large Instagram following, as a way in which she can raise her appeal through the status that *@stylealertsa* has already achieved. Social associations are said to work, “only if there is public awareness of one’s relationship with the high status individual” (Miller, 2010: 382), which in this case is validated through this post. In a way, this practice is contradictory as it implies that the participants display is not exactly individual, as they enlist help or seek knowledge

from others. So as much as they believe they are exercising their individuality, the way in which they consume clothing and fashion happens through a process of communicating by conforming to existing norms to fit within the society (Todd, 2012). What this process involves is an on-going cycle where one seeks to inspire others from a place of being inspired by others. It is here that the power held by clothing or fashion is disclosed, which is greatly significant in this discussion of the realm of consumptive practices.

Fashion is considered to be an individualized and liberating practice, which Cook and Kaiser (2004: 206) explain, "Girls may have little control over media representations, but they do exercise agency in the representations they create in the daily process of contemplating and dressing their bodies." Fashion is therefore a necessary part of female subjectivity as gender is no longer exclusively dependent on the physical features, so it therefore rests on the cultural component (Bruzzi & Gibson, 2004). This may explain the importance that is placed on fashion, and the prevalence of fashion images on these women's profiles, as Participant H describes, "It is your page, and your decision what you do with it, so it's also your fashion sense and how you want to put things together." Correspondingly she identifies herself, and is simultaneously acknowledged by others in terms of the political economy of individuality (Miller and Rose, 1997). What emerges is a mode of power, exchange and communication, rather than empowerment. This suggests that instead of being empowered through fashion choices, a woman is instead able to define their style, and as such use clothing as self-expression, which at the same time communicates status and social standing. This can be taken back to McRobbie's (2009) argument, which discusses how 'feminist' words have been chosen by the mainstream and made void of meaning. Words such as empowerment are an example of this. Accordingly, what is seen in the images on Instagram, in terms of how one should dress themselves, sets the tone for what is to be expected of these women should they choose to participate on Instagram.

Therefore, when it comes to consumption, "shopping is the privileged site of self-production, as it is in buying clothes that the participant shapes herself as a neoliberal feminine subject" (Sherman, 2008: 56).

The participants spoke about clothing in the following way:

> "I love clothes because they're very expressive, if you're happy with yourself, your fashion sense and how you dress, this will show in the way you dress. If you're confident, you tell yourself you're worth it and you're a positive person, this will be revealed in the way you make sure you always look good. So, it's mostly clothes that reveal parts of me, and then being a person that's positive and self-confident, which is how people get to know me" (Participant H).

This can be further examined through anthropologist Daniel Miller's (2009) efforts to describe fashion and the act of beautifying oneself as a person's extension of themselves. He explains how women use clothing as a real, material part of who they are, as well as how they use their own flair to personalize their identities, which is therefore not only used as a mode of self-expression, but which is also used in the construction of self. To elaborate on Miller's argument, fashion can be considered to be more than just an act of dressing one's body, but rather in this act, one is creating their identity, which may still to some extent rely on existing social acceptance of "what is feminine, beautiful, and in style" (Miller, 2009: 25). This identity formation is exercised through fashion selections, alongside an understanding of how women feel a sense of achievement through their own style that "parallels young women's identity construction through consumerist practices within the post-feminist, neo-liberal society" (Donatelle, 2014: 13).

As much as these women may feel the need to consume and dress in specific ways, and even though their identities are constrained by hegemonic ideas of performativity and femininity, they still use fashion creatively within this frame to express a certain mode of selfhood. Participant H outlines her particular style as follows, "my style is a bit grunge, and not too girly. I like girls who are not that girly, but they can show their beauty, it shows their strength, their confidence." In the broader discussion about style, this could serve as an interpretation of the fact that through clothing, a woman can depict that she is gentle and feminine, but at the same time she is also able to be a tough woman, that is not easily shaken. This is a particular post -feminist archetype of femininity that can be expressed through certain types of style and dress. This form of

display discursively refers to ideas about women who are tough and independent, but still beautiful and well presented. This depiction focuses on performance and the display of strength. It is the post-feminist masquerade (McRobbie, 2007), where dressing as a certain type of character, which in this case is a strong woman, signals associations of a particular version of contemporary femininity.

The Role of Brands in their Lifestyle

As much as these women focus on fashion and how they dress themselves, they are also seen possessing certain items and promoting their loyalty to certain brands that carry significant weight. Therefore, "the context within which consumer participation is not simply (or even most importantly) indicated by purchases, but by brand loyalty and affiliation, linking brands to lifestyles, politics, and social activism" (Banet-Weiser, 2011: 13). It is important to understand what exactly this brand affiliation means, and how it works to feature affluence and a degree of achievement. It is not just about having a handbag to complete your outfit, but it is about having a Louis Vuitton handbag to complete your outfit. Or, it is not simply about having a car that you have purchased, but it is about having a Porsche that you have purchased. This is because brands signify a level of success, and act as a symbol of status and distinction (Heath & Potter, 2004). Within the global context, high-end brands are used to categorize individuals according to the status they achieve by being in possession of these items. This is because "prestige and status benefits have been shown to constitute one of the primary motivations of consumers to choose global brands" (Bauer, Exler & Bronk, 2006: 1). This notion is particularly common in Non-Western countries because global brands are often more pricey than local brands, and because of this they acquire exclusive appeal (Steenkamp, Batra & Alden, 2000). Additionally, consuming international brands is a way of becoming aligned and integrated into a multinational and contemporary lifestyle, which is highly attractive for some consumers (Alden, Steenkamp & Batra, 1999).

This new "space of attention" achieved through having brands, offers women a specific form of freedom, and a particular idea of independence" (McRobbie, 2009: 125). These women feel they are entitled to engage with, and be considered among a particular class of people because of what they own, which is a misguided notion of

how class affiliation works, because the process is more complicated as certain requirements have to first be met. Furthermore, they engage in this way, as they believe they will achieve a higher status through their brand affiliation, which will assist them in constructing their desired image.

It is not just with these women that this is prevalent, this is a trend across the broader scope of Instagram, and it is also among celebrities that these practices are seen being played out as normal. The series of images to follow reveal some of these trending brands. The first image (Figure 6.7) is a brand of Nikes that is owned and designed by Kanye West.



Figure 6.7: Globally trending Nike sneakers

This particular Nike sneaker became an Internet sensation that was highly sought after. Buying and owning a pair of these exclusive sneakers not only allowed the participant to be a part of a global trend, but also serves to prove that she could afford these shoes. This is because "public citizenship is constructed through the notion of a woman as a shopping citizen" (Adriaens & Van Bauwel, 2011: 8). What this does not consider is that this citizenship is not found simply in shopping, but in purchasing specific items. This means that it is actually not enough to just shop, as not all items carry the same distinctive value. Furthermore, this acquisition has a sense of freedom and prestige attached to it, as she possesses something that is not only limited, but something that others also desire. This relates to neoliberalism, which suggests that

women are able to buy their way to freedom and independence. Moreover, the striking purple colour of the shoe is significant, as this speaks to ideas of individuality, whereby the participant may have chosen this colour to make a statement about her personal style. The way that the shot is framed is also important as the image only focuses on the shoes, which shows that the participant is only interested in the consumer object.

The next image is of Gucci high-heeled shoes. Gucci is an exclusive brand, and the retail value of a shoe like this is approximately $900 or the equivalent of R14, 217.64, therefore owning a pair of these shows people that you have the means to afford to shop extravagantly.



Figure 6.8: Consumption of global high-end brands

The image itself focuses exclusively on the high-heeled shoe, which is an item considered to be particularly feminine, suggesting that she is trying to prove her sophistication and her adherence to hegemonic femininity. Emphasis is also placed on the Gucci brand itself, as the brand name is seen twice. Furthermore, the image shows two Gucci boxes, suggesting that the participant wants to make the point that she owns more than one pair of the branded shoe, emphasizing her economic independence.

In Figure 6.9 below, the participant is posing in front of a Porsche Panamera, with the hashtag #TheRoyalPalmHotel. This is significant because even though a car has a functional purpose, it is images with this content that indicate that it may also function to classify one among other successful people that have worked hard to own one, or to prove to the world some degree of affluence.

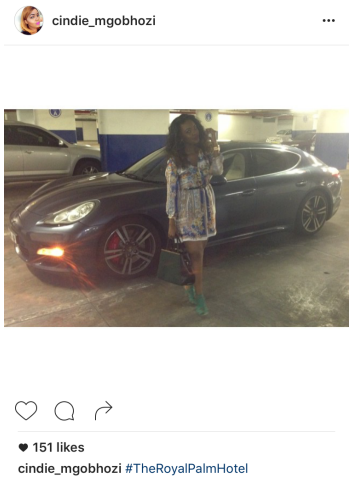

Figure 6.9: Femininity and Consumption

The dark colour of the car may work discursively to reinforce her 'strength' or a sense of 'masculinity' in being able to purchase these exclusive items, however she is standing in front of the car wearing a dress and high-heeled shoes, and carrying a handbag, which is traditionally feminine. This shows that traditional femininity no longer comes into conflict with female power, as she is able to dress well (in a feminine way) and possess exclusive items. However, even though the exclusive car carries extensive weight in the participant's identity, having an attractive image is represented as a woman's primary source of her identity (Gill, 2007). This suggests that attractiveness and consumption choices work together in identity construction.

These accounts emphasize that these trends originate from global flows of meaning, status and consumption. This implies that status is derived from consumable items, and people are accordingly measured and given preference based on the material things that they own (Todd, 2012). This suggests that products fulfill more than the

function for which they were created, and it is from this that people use these items to create and produce a certain sense of being.

Inspiration as an Object

As discussed, the way that the participants live out their believed freedom, results in them being viewed as inspirational by their followers on Instagram. Instagram is understood to act as a space in which individuals are able to express themselves through their decision of what to post in their images, and many women use these online spaces as "a forum of self-disclosure, especially as a place to engage in self-expression" (Stern, 2002: 224). Instagram also acts as an interface affording one the opportunity to selectively construct themself. These young women are able to share their aspirations and express who they would ideally like to become, and are striving to embody, and at the same time they are able to give some insight into who they are as individuals, and their particular preferences. As Participant A explains, "sometimes if I do put a picture of shoes or a handbag, it's going to be what I like or aspire to have, not necessarily what I already have." This suggests that aspiration is tied to the ownership of certain high-end consumer objects. Furthermore, what this suggests is that the participants construct their online displays in such a way that it appears to be reality, when it is actually just showcasing their aspirations, which again reinforces that their notion of 'real' is not actually real.

The fact that their aspirations are tied to consumption or displays of consumption suggests that these women want to distinguish themselves through their consumption practices, and to create their own identities. However, as pointed out above, what they may actually be doing is performing 'authentic' displays of consumption, and in doing this, establishing themselves individually through their own aspirations. Additionally, they want to be known as popular figures because of what they 'have', as what they have is a key to helping them establish who they want to become. This is because consumption practices provide us with meaning by allowing us to express ourselves, and it assists in constructing and securing identities that are appropriate and fit within the global context (O'Cass & McEwan, 2004). Therefore, aspirational levels increase the more one consumes (Meeker, 2008). As Smyth, MacLachlan and Clare

(2003: 59) contend, “the overwhelming message being broadcast is that you are only as good as what you buy as our traditional cultural icons are being eroded and replaced by certain things.” Aspiring to have things such as these, gives an indication of the value that the participants hope to achieve, as they believe that is a catalyst to their success. Analysing the images below can reinforce this relationship between aspiration and consumption. Both of these images display fashion items.

In the first image one can see a walk-in shoe-dresser with shelves of high-heels and sneakers, with the caption “Goals”.



Figure 6.10: Shoes as a lifestyle goal

This reveals something the participant aspires to have, and is indicative of a goal she has set for herself which she implies she will work to achieve. The fact that there is the presence of both high-heels and sneakers ties into the post-feminist idea that women can “have it all”; in the sense that they can be feminine (wear heels) and also wear clothing that is typically associated to masculinity (sneakers). This suggests that women can “choose a lifestyle from an endless range of options now available” (Negra & Tasker, 2007: 74). In this case, this account suggests that she wants to be able to conduct her image in an ‘all-round’ manner.

Figure 6.11 below of the pink fur coat, with the caption “Inspo”, a colloquial term that is circulated on Instagram, is the abbreviation of ‘Inspiration’. The pink colour choice may have been used to communicate more ‘soft’ and gentle aspects of the

participant's persona. This may be related to aspects such as motherhood, which are associated to more subtle tones of femininity. This also supports the notion that this item is something that this participant wants to own, and this coat alone is inspiration as fur coats sell for a high price, so this signifies the reality that hard work is required to own it. Participant G reinforces this, "I will work hard for what I want."

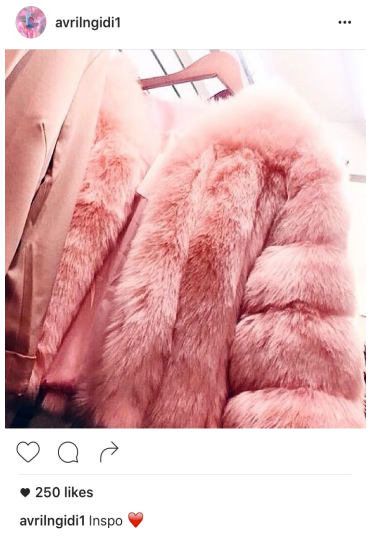

Figure 6.11: Fur coat as Inspiration

The notion of buying and spending therefore gives them a sense of who they are in the capitalist market economy. It is an ideology that is created on the notion that the commodities that we consume have symbolic meaning, and as a result our identities are constructed and reconstructed by what we buy and the manner in which we consume. The fur coat is referred to as inspiration, and this speaks to the way in which power is created through language, and conferred to objects. What it means that the object (the fur coat), which can be consumed, is regarded as inspiration, suggests that the participants are positioned as objects or commodities that can also be consumed, as they also speak about themselves as being inspirational. This implies that the coat becomes a part of the self. In this way, the individual becomes inspirational when the coat is worn, which shows that in this context, inspiration is directly tied to consumable objects. At the same time, this shows the relationship between objects, inspiration and individuals, and that individual's work to make objects inspirational, and at the same time those same objects work to make them an inspiration.

The inspirational discourse suggests that using consumption to inspire oneself means that in this age you can only be inspirational when you have what you know others want, and when you avail yourself to be 'consumed' by others. This suggests a relationship where the consumer consumes, but they themself become a consumable (Slater, 1999). As such, the participants may view themselves as a commodity or something that can be consumed, which implies that in order to be inspirational you need to avail yourself to be consumed by others. This describes how their image is presented on Instagram, and how their followers are able to access their lives and 'consume' them and their display.

Creatively Conforming through Consumption

The data that has been discussed so far, reveals the participants dynamic relationship with consumption and the various ways in which they engage with it, but in addition to this, they also consider their engagements to be unique. Participant I explains, "Trends change, so you try to adjust everyday into a modern woman by taking note of them, but I don't follow the trends of beauty or fashion, I still aim to set them." As much of what she is doing feels liberating, this notion is replaced by the new forms or settings that are tacitly laid out, which places many regulations and constraints, or terms and conditions, on women striving for a particular idea of success. This is contrary to what is said in the participant's account, as she believes she is acting in an entirely autonomous capacity, without the awareness that even her 'autonomous' behaviour is controlled. So in as much as the women are focused on getting ahead of norms, at the same time their behaviour is regulated by existing norms. This notion "stems from a range of sentiments, from nostalgic yearnings for "real" social protest movements to respectful acknowledgements of political practices that open up economic and social opportunities to a sheer base desire to "belong" to something (Tasker & Negra, 2005: 210).

However, in saying this, the participants maintain their position that they refuse to follow trends, and instead prefer to be trendsetters themselves, or icons in their own right. Participant A asserts, "I like being more of a trendsetter than being a trend follower." Conversely, this is contradictory, as they are not entirely acting on their own, as they are visibly conforming to the global consumption trends that circulate on Instagram. So along with the fact that these women exercise the liberty that they

understand, “freedom, equality, innovation, entrepreneurship — are the same discourses that provide the logic for girls’ post-feminist self-branding, a practice that situates girls and young women ever more securely into the norms and values of hegemonic gendered consumer culture” (Banet-Weiser, 2011: 8). This idea emphasizes that in order to be spectacularly individualized, you are required to behave or perform in the specific manner that is expected of you within the consumptive Instagram space. Thus, suggesting that one of the ways women can secure their place in society, is in being independent by making their own money and participating in society’s arena of consumer culture. Through particular consumption choices, “it has become a feature of women’s lives, almost an entitlement to move from the shadows to the spotlight of visibility, into a luminosity which has the effect of a dramatization of the individual, a kind of spectacularisation of feminine subjectivity which has become the norm” (McRobbie, 2009: 125).

This suggests that one behaves in these various ways for different purposes, but the participants may be presenting themselves in this way for both the promotion of their image and for a sense of belonging at the same time. They do this by sharing the more personal details of their lives such as their #OOTD (outfit of the day). This is a personal display as the participants consider their style to be individual and a personal representation and reflection of whom they are or how they are feeling. Additionally, they share where they are dining, what car they are driving, or what handbag they are carrying. What this has facilitated is a relationship between the women of the study and their audience, who are themselves ‘normal’ people, but can to some degree find their own role by living vicariously through the participants. It is in doing this that the participants have almost earned their entry by their fellow Instagram users to be a part of the more elite Instagram community. The way the participants behave, and the way they talk about their presentation, suggests that they feel empowered and in control as they believe they are acting autonomously through their consumption choices. However, this ignores the fact that these practices are not executed entirely independently, but they are a result of the pre-existing hegemonic consumer culture informing femininity, which renders this action a false sense of empowerment (Gill, 2008) that has replaced political action. The series of images that will follow depict examples of this.

The image below (Figure 6.12) of the participant's breakfast plate, also happens to have BMW car keys strategically positioned as a part of the picture, indicating the car she may be driving, but at the same time proving that, just like anyone else, she enjoys a good breakfast. Having breakfast is itself a normal practice, but showing one's possessions has also become a normal practice on Instagram, so therefore she is behaving according to the unspoken norms of Instagram. She also says "Breakie alone!!" in her caption, which may also work to prove her independence.

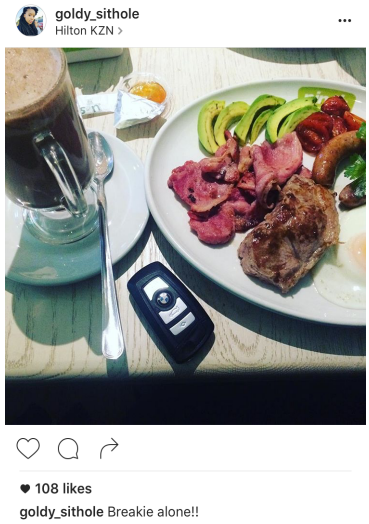

Figure 6.12: Displays of 'natural' consumption

Additionally, the kind of food that she is eating is significant. This meal, which is not necessarily the healthiest breakfast, speaks to the notion of eating 'normally', yet at the same time still managing to have an enviable body. By doing this, her consumption is designed to look natural.

Figure 6.13 below shows the participant having high tea at the Hilton Hotel. High Tea is associated with certain class markers, and is thus an activity that is closely related to royalty, class and prestige. The participant is also captured as the focal point of the image, wearing a figure-hugging yellow dress, displaying her well-proportioned body, while at the same time holding a plate of cakes. As much as this post is about what she is consuming (high tea), she is positioned as something desirable to be 'consumed'. This also relates to the previous picture, driving the idea that she is able to indulge in whatever it is she wants to, reinforcing the notion that she is real and authentic as she still eats what everyone else does, and she does not behave any

differently. This also relates directly to neoliberal thought, in which she is acting freely and experiencing pleasure from her engagement, as she is not concerned with the ‘male gaze’.



Figure 6.13: ‘Classy’ Activities

Figure 6.14 shows the participant having something to drink at the 4-star Southern Sun Maharani Hotel, which is known to house business individuals on their trips to Durban. While she mentions her glasses in her caption, they are not made to be the focal point, and instead her drink and the Tsogo Sun logo are the focus of the picture. This shows that in this instance, while her purchased glasses are made to be the topic of her post, the ‘elite’ places that she goes to holds more value, and is used to convey a certain message to her audience about the social circles with which she associates herself.



Figure 6.14: Exclusive places

The fourth image below shows the participant in her #OOTD. Her posture shows that she is strategically posing. 1183 people liked that picture, which again suggests that approval is linked to appropriate consumption, which in this case involves dressing well and putting together a fashionable ensemble. The ensemble that she has put together is a casual, yet sexy look. The use of the denim shirt and jeans, as well as the sneakers and white midriff, suggest that on this particular day she was interested in displaying her personal style through her expression of a casual look, combined with some sex appeal, as she has incorporated a midriff into her look. This shows how consumption and clothing are used to "re-fashion the self" (Arthurs, 2003: 93).



Figure 6.15: Personal style through fashion

This particular picture format is also a common widespread practice on the Instagram face, where women post a collage using multiple pictures of the same outfit, posing in different ways. Displays of consumption therefore act as a space where the participant and the follower can develop some sort of common ground, as these shared fetishes "act as a nexus for bonding" (Tasker & Negra, 2005: 95). This happens in a way where the female audience identifies and connects with fellow women. They converse on global topics and participate in practices around a shared interest, based on topics such as fashion and taste, which is a part of the global feminine structure.

The participants boldly state that they do not follow trends, yet their profiles show a distinct conforming or adoption taking place, and bear a resemblance of following

what is trending. This can be seen through Participant I's argument, "I don't keep up with anything. I feel I'm more than that. I don't do things in a certain way, I just go with the flow." On one hand, there seems to be a refusal to acknowledge the influence of the hegemonic order that is placed on them, and on the other hand they describe their emancipation from these practices. Participant A describes this, "I was doing it for the page definitely. You buy something or you get a gift and immediately it's bae got me this, or mother-in-law got me this bag, or simply I bought this for myself and it was all about show-off." The participants almost normalize their behaviour in a way that suggests that their behaviour begins to be accepted as normal. Instagram has waves of trends that proliferate the platform, and there are other practices that have developed into perpetual trends, such as women posting pictures of themselves, posting selfies of themselves, adopting various filters or effects to enhance their pictures in a specific way, and adopting similar poses which try to create a model image using professional-amateur photography skills. Participant B discusses these trends:

> "I only follow a trend if I feel it's necessary, or if it appeals to me, but that rarely happens to be honest. I wouldn't do it just because it's a trend, so I don't really seek out to follow the trends, or to be an ideal woman, I'd rather do my own thing. If I see something that's trending I may consider doing it because I want to do it, not because I have a certain pressure to do it."

However, this statement does not apply to selfies or collages of photographs, she is only talking about certain kinds of fashion, which is contradictory given the fact that part of her appeal and her popularity on Instagram is because of her selfies and collages. This discussion shows that these women believe that having your own profile means that you are entirely acting on your own accord, and it is here that they depict that they are unaware of the influence societal norms have over them, and instead attribute who they are online to the freedom they believe they have. This is what the theorists (McRobbie, 2009; Tasker & Negra, 2005; Banet-Weiser, 2011) are suggesting, that feeling empowered through consumption and capitalism does not mean actually being empowered. Additionally, the urge to consume and 'set trends'

may very well be part of the deception, or allure of the hegemonic society that encourages people to maintain those principles.

Consistency in Consumption

Consumptive practices can further act as a currency between the followers and the women. Visually appealing images of the participants can be used in exchange for a following of people, their likes and their critical comments, for their self-improvement (Tasker & Negra, 2009). Tending to the demands of social media by giving people what they want to see does this. Participant E explains, "I got so many followers because I was posting pictures of me, and people just wanted to see pictures of me. Because I would just post nice outfit pictures and selfies, and my Instagram would just flood up." What this implies is that not only does an attractive online presence mean that one will get followers, but that followers can also act as a precursor for further opportunities that may arise out of this online presence. Participant C explains:

> "If I wanted to start something, like a business of some sort, a boutique maybe, people will most likely follow me because they would have remembered me from Instagram saying oh she's the girl with lots of followers from Instagram, she dressed really well, maybe what she is going to do and sell will be really good, I'm going to try it."

A paradoxical relationship emerges in the sense that even though one has to pay for goods, the goods will one day reciprocally pay back in the long term, which can be practically simplified to a scenario of 'investing in one's future'. This is a feature of capitalism in that capitalism is built from investment with the purpose of ultimately making a profit. One of the main thoughts behind capitalism is the option to freely choose, with regards to making decisions about consumption, production, and long-term investments (Meltzer, 2012). In this way people are not bound by their decisions, and those that are displeased can choose to purchase alternative goods, and investors are free to follow more worthwhile endeavors (Meltzer, 2012). In much the same

way, if the participants fail to produce an attractive or enticing image, their followers may choose to 'unfollow' them, in the pursuit of finding other inspirational figures, which points to the reason why the participants' engagement in consumption is so necessary to them and their image. This idea emerged in the interviews where the women mentioned how important it is for them to build a strong, attractive Instagram image that people will relate to, and remember. In a political sense individuals are positioned as having agency through shopping, and are responsible for building their identities as independent, powerful individuals exercising their capabilities of sustaining themselves. A following therefore assists in mobilising that development.

It can also be argued that much of what the participants do is calculated, but it cannot be completely calculated because it is also responsive to the followers' opinions of their images, which they take into account. This suggests that calculation is fundamental in the participant's construction, as they believe that in order to create one's desired image there needs to be careful planning involved in the process to secure its success. Calculation can be tied to self-reflexivity, which as previously discussed, involves the constant monitoring and modelling of oneself (McRobbie, 2009). Participant I describes part of the participant's calculated display, "I really take time with the pictures I post. I really think about it." This again reiterates that they are performing, and as such conducting themselves to create a certain image in response to what their followers want and expect of them in an effort to strengthen the status of the image they are building. Participant F says, "There was a point where I couldn't stop travelling. Like you don't really want to be in Cape Town, but you go because you just want to post it, and be relevant in society." The use of the word "relevant" suggests that there is behaviour that is considered appropriate in society. Furthermore, by behaving in this appropriate societal manner, the need to be "relevant" suggests that the participants believe that gaining significance in society comes through consumption, and 'appropriately' consuming by traveling for example, as it shows your status.

Participant G expands on this, "you do things, but you may be broke. But you have this image of being the 'It Girl', traveling, having brands, getting things, so you have to keep it up on Instagram." In this account, the participant mentions "you do things, but you may be broke", which shows that there is a degree of sacrifice involved in

their display. This shows that there is a process that takes place, which the polished images on Instagram do not reveal, revealing the lengths that they go to consume and uphold their image as an investment. Again, this gives rise to the way in which these women go about calculating their construction in relation to what others expect of them, and to live up to the glamorous display they offer to be reality on their Instagram page. Participant G details:

> "I could post that I'm having champagne at 9am every morning and then you see me buying fish and chips, and you're trying to link the two. So there is the expectation to live up to what you have put out there, now you have to do that in the public eye as well. If I tell you I drive a Rolls Royce and a Bentley, and you see me in a Toyota, you're going to then say my life is fake."

This statement reveals that the participants feel an expectation to behave in a certain way that is consistent in order to prove their 'authenticity'. This is a contradictory argument because knowingly behaving in accordance with expectations shows that the action is not authentic, but is instead constructed. This is part of my discussion that questions whether the aspirant individual can only receive approval or acceptance in society by being 'relevant' through consumption, and why it is that as much as consumption can act as a liberating process, it can have an equally imprisoning effect. This relates very strongly to the previous chapter of authenticity which also suggests that although these women seek to use their consumption practices to become more of who they want to be, and to assist them in constructing that image, this process involves a performance that questions the realness of who they become when they are in possession of all of these items. The discussion is strengthened through the fact that in order to make their identity more believable, they are expected to ensure that their lives on and off social media correspond with one another. However, while they believe this to be an act of authenticity, it is actually a performance of authenticity as they are constantly monitoring and policing their image to ensure its consistency.

This discussion has revealed that much of the image and identity that the participants are building revolves around their consumption practices, and is seen to assist them to a large extent in shaping who they want to become. Through their fashion choices and

lifestyle options, they have achieved a sense of status and appeal within the Instagram space, and are subsequently viewed as inspirational figures by their followers. They make this display seem effortless and attainable by the way they participate on Instagram, but this does not cover the principles of discipline around femininity and 'appropriate' behaviour that actually underpins the performance that is involved. As much as they frame consumption as a way of becoming more individual, the image that they are building does not evolve in isolation, but is formed alongside existing structures that inform their decisions and guide their behaviour to fit within the hegemonic order. Even though participation in consumption does enable a sense of creativity and the freedom of personal expression in some ways, it does not bring with it the empowerment that it promises, and these women are still expected to construct their image based on the societal norms.

Chapter 7

Celebrity

This chapter will be discussing the significance of certain black female celebrities, as well as the celebrity culture as a whole, which emerged in the analysis of images, as well as the interviews as serving an important function in the lives of the participants. The participants spoke extensively about these women, and described how they use them symbolically in the construction of their identities.

The culture surrounding the celebrity is valuable, and the celebrity figure as a whole emerges as a significant component, as it works to instruct or serve certain people in various ways that engage in some form of celebrity-following practice. In light of the previous chapter, the notion of celebrity certainly means something to the women of the study, as the brands that are desired and regularly adopted are often related to celebrity culture, and the points that came up in the interviews indicate that there are specific celebrities that are seen as being particularly important.

The construction of the celebrity "involves ongoing maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity and access, and construction of a consumable persona" (Marwick & Boyd, 2011: 140). It is through these platforms that people are understood to get 'closer' to celebrities and their lives. From the formation of fan bases to discussion forums, celebrities are given attention for one purpose or another, and this spectacle surrounding the celebrity is also known as a process of 'celebrification' (Rojek, 2001). A celebrity is a person who is "well known for his well-knowness" (Boorstein, 1971: 57). This suggests that celebrities are not people necessarily known for something particularly good, but are instead individuals that have achieved extensive recognition, and are known for whatever factor it was that distinguished them and made them popular in the first place (Gamson, 1994).

The proliferation of celebrities in society, and throughout the scope of the media has made it difficult to ignore or undervalue the position of authority, or weight that they carry in the lives of certain media consumers (Turner, Bonner & Marshall, 2000; Corner & Pels, 2003; Marshall, 1997). As bystanders one is given much mediated

insight into the world of celebrities and who they are as individuals, through reality shows that are dedicated to exploring and critiquing, as well as divulging their lives in a paparazzi-like manner, to reality shows documenting their lives, as well as the magazine covers that are decorated with them. From this, society is shown the type of people they should become. What this suggests is that celebrities operate as a type of design for how we should perform our gender identities (Milner, 2010). This is because celebrities hold value to people and are seen as examples of what they aspire to follow or imitate. Although, not all people, or even globalised media consumers react to celebrity in the same way, or even at all.

The way that celebrities perform their gender identities in the way they dress and behave is accepted as the dominant view, or the suitable standard to follow. This naturally means this mediated delivery affects the way in which the celebrities are perceived. However, the introduction of social media has meant that celebrities can and have been shaping their own images by filtering what they want to show in a manner perceived to be closer to reality. This contrasts with relying on opinion pieces, critiques or shows dedicated to shaping their image, or framing them in a specific light (Berger & Choi, 2010). This relates to the previous chapter which suggests that the feeling of authenticity that social media can provide also applies to celebrities and their audiences in a way that what they present on their profile is accepted as truth and reality, when in actual fact what it really is, is a performance of reality. This is because they too selectively choose how they want to behave and which features of their lives they want to put on display.

Social media is a way for individuals to feel like they are getting to know celebrities 'off-stage', which is also seen as a way in which the merge between the public display and the private is seen taking shape or coming together (West, Lewis & Currie, 2009). This view endorses the "celebrity as a fashioned, maintainable practice, and a cultural symbol" (Wood, 2013: 2). As the data reveals, there is synergy between the ways in which the various participants talk about the same celebrities. All of them repeat the names of the same people as being inspirational, and the idea of being inspirational is useful, as discussed in the previous chapter where the participants themselves are viewed as inspirational because of their online displays. Inspirational for them has very specific connotations for aspirational. This is the intersection between the

inspirational and the aspirational. This notion suggests that, "celebrity culture offers important sites of fantasy and investment for young people, representing the possibility of visibility, symbolic capital and self-betterment" (Allen, 2013: 16). Thus, celebrity acts as both a model of aspiration and a reason to self-discipline. For some individuals it suggests that while this is what you can be, at the same time, this is what you must be. Both of these suggestions are made simultaneously at all times, so one is given a sense of choice, but only within specific parameters.

Although these women spoke about themselves throughout the interviews, and their profiles also largely display just them, they mentioned the names of specific celebrities with whom they identify. Celebrities are believed to influence societies' thoughts on race, ethnicity, work, sexuality and gender, at historically detailed moments in time (Dyer, 2003). It is particularly significant that these participants express that their fashion, lifestyle and outlook is inspired by particular black women, who have a global following and are successful in their own right. In this sense, celebrities serve as ideological metaphors that assist in negotiating existing matters and therefore developing depictions of an ideal self, by operating as a foundation from which one can identify (Gabler, 2001). Women such as South Africa's Bonang Matheba emerged, although quite minimally, but more extensively internationally-renowned Beyoncé and Rihanna came up in every interview. It is noteworthy that the most influential women are African American women. As much as the participants express their pride in their identities as South African women, the most important celebrities with whom they identify always come from the USA. This shows something of the globalised nature of neoliberal post-feminism, which may change in detail in different locations, but at the same time, also has significant similarities.

In a way, this suggests that the participants find figures that are appealing to them because they find some parallel with them, or something they feel they can relate to. Participant F explains, "I look up to girls like her who are like me, who have endured some hardship and that tell their stories. It does motivate you." Interestingly enough, what all of these celebrities have in common is the fact that they are all regarded as having achieved what they have, by overcoming obstacles in their lives, much like the participants themselves. This comes back to the way in which the aspiring participants see these women as inspirational, as the celebrities represent what they can also

achieve. Modern-day celebrity culture is thus overflowing with neoliberal-related accounts of victory over hardship "making it against the odds" (Littler, 2004: 16).

Rihanna

In the same way that the participants seek direction from other women who are popular on Instagram, they also stressed the extent to which certain female celebrities, including Rihanna, influences and inspires them. Rihanna is a black Barbados-born woman who is one of the most successful female artists of her time. She has recorded seven multi-platinum albums, with a record of thirty million albums sold, and one hundred and twenty million singles sold. She has also accumulated a number of awards including Grammy, Billboard and American music awards (Eells, 2011). In addition to her career as a singer, she has also taken to acting, featuring in Hollywood films and producing a reality fashion show (Patterson, 2007). She is an influential figure in the black community as she sings about matters of race and gender that are relevant to black people and black women in particular. She is also considered to encourage women to exercise their freedom in gaining confidence to take control of their sexuality and their lives through her bold and elaborate performances (Bryant, 2008; Stephens, 2012).

During the interviews the participants spoke extensively about Rihanna's relevance to them as both an artist and a fashion icon, and their Instagram posts depict something of the same nature. One of the prominent factors that emerged in the interviews was the way the participants aligned the celebration of self-expression with Rihanna. The participants view her as a symbol of female empowerment that encourages them to feel comfortable in their individuality and to freely express themselves. Participant A says, "My favourite is Rihanna, because she is so free with herself. She does whatever she wants with her style. Everything looks good, and she makes everything look good." Rihanna is spoken about as being "free with herself", which suggests that she is confident in her sexuality and her femininity, and she allows herself to be an individual in all she does, suggesting she is liberated from any societal or self-imposed limitations. This may be an inspiring feature for them to follow as they construct their ideal selves. However, what is significant is the fact that they associate

the ideas of freedom and fashion. Rihanna is seen as being free and wild, and as having an individual style, which shows that even the 'liberated' and 'free' celebrity is an object that is judged on her appearance.

Additionally, all of the participants consider Rihanna to be a true fashion icon or fashion inspiration, as she has been described as always being herself, being unafraid to express herself through her clothing choices, thus empowering other women to follow suit and to use clothing or outward adornment to express their attitude or overall self. Her bold stylistic choices are part of the way in which she defines her individuality, which suggests that individuality can only be achieved through modifying and reinventing one's image. One can see how this notion of bold self-branding by Rihanna reinforces the neoliberal practice of constant "self-improvement" (Couldry, 2010: 81). This is seen in the way the participants speak about Rihanna as using inward confidence to continually improve herself, or seeking to use this confidence to make progress in other areas of her life.

This notion of confidence also regulates a certain type of individuality that does not essentially need the opinion of others to legitimize its existence (Couldry, 2010). The opinion of others only becomes irrelevant when a certain degree of success is achieved as a result of their hard work, in the form of a mass following, a number of accolades and an accumulation of wealth. While this belief of individuality holds some truth in this context, it is contradictory as Rihanna is a complicated role model. She inspires the participants because she seems to not care about anyone's opinion, yet the participants clearly care very much about the opinions of others, especially when it comes to how they construct their image, as discussed earlier. At the same time, Rihanna's brand of individuality is very strongly related to high fashion, and a highly-sexualized performance. What this shows is that it occurs within distinct limits of female appropriateness.

Figure 7.1 shows how the participant models herself in Rihanna's poses, seen in Figure 7.2. The pose, hairstyle, as well as the lip colour are all very similar, and this shows how other people adopt the practices and techniques that Rihanna adopts.



Figure 7.1: Mimicking Rihanna



Figure 7.2: Rihanna

Participant H elaborates on this stating:

> "Besides being a badass[10], she does not care. Whatever she wears, she's going to wear in her own way. You know at the end that the dress didn't wear her she wore the dress. She's always standing up for people being themselves, she's a person vouching for others being an individual and being who you are, and just being you. She can wear anything and look gorgeous, and she's so confident in it."

This raises the point that it may not be so much about just Rihanna's style or the clothes she wears, but more about who she is that appeals to them. 'Who she is' in relation to the above quote suggests that she represents a freedom of choice and particular mode of independence and individuality that is consistent, whether or not she is wearing fancy clothing, which encourages women to be authentic and real about who they are. This notion of authenticity is problematic as previously discussed, as the realness the participants believe in, is not actually 'real', it is a performance of realness, as their behaviour is guided by societal expectations. Furthermore, what this suggests is that Rihanna gives the clothing that she wears 'power' in a sense that "the dress didn't wear her, she wore the dress", which implies that while for others certain consumption items confer status to them, the status that Rihanna already has given the clothing that she wears value.

[10] This is a colloquial term used to describe someone that is seen as having special appeal because they dress and behave without a care.

This could also function in a way that inspirational figures like Rihanna awaken in these women the ability to do the same through the choices that they have. However, these choices are not as freely available as they are framed to be, and not all women have the same choices. They are dictated and constrained by dominant structures. Participant I explains, "I'm obsessed with Rihanna. I love her music, her fashion, her tattoos and just what she says. I look up to certain things about her. She's an entrepreneur." The way that the women speak about her highlights multiple facets of who she is, which means that she stands for more than just fashion alone. As a central component of who she is, she connotes freedom that women can create who they want to be, and an independence that locates women as being capable of achieving whatever they set their mind to, although this is a particular kind of very contingent freedom. Participant E enhances this feeling towards Rihanna:

> "Rihanna is so free-spirited and living her life, and she's doing so many things while she is young and having so much fun while she is doing that. She does so much. She has a fashion line, perfume, and she does so many things besides music, and she does so well at everything too. But most importantly she dresses so well."

There is a contradiction inherent in the idea that she is free-spirited, but also very productive as she has multiple businesses. This suggests that her 'freedom' is a performance that is designed to sell her products, and the participants may know this but they still react to it, and they still show an appreciation of this. Alternatively, this could also mean that 'freedom' means something different in a neoliberal context.

Although Rihanna is multi-faceted, her fashion sense still emerges as an important feature of who she is. This could be explained by referring to the notion that, "media images of strong independent female characters may consider consumer culture as a place of empowerment" (Tasker & Negra, 2007: 207). It appears that clothing may act as a tool of power, or as a tangible result of hard work, which can then be presented through the way in which one may clothe themselves. In the same way, "celebrities who had gained their status through making the most of the opportunities available within the celebrity industry and the labour involved in achieving this are more valued" (Allen, 2013: 17-18). What is noteworthy is that the participants obtain cues of how to act or express themselves from renowned people such as Rihanna who have

worked to earn their status. This could be seen as a strategy for them to achieve success, by adopting a formula from people that are by definition, already successful. As Participant J explains, "Rihanna encourages me to work for the things I love. She has things I can learn from." This suggests that Rihanna embodies a standard of success that these women hope to achieve, and she has worked to get herself to where she now is.

Beyoncé

Rihanna surfaced as a prominent figure in terms of self-expression, freedom and independence, but without a doubt the most significant name that emerged was Beyoncé. She is an Afro-American singer, songwriter, performer, actress and entrepreneur who is known for being politically engaged (Durham, 2012). She uses her body to drive home a sense of female empowerment through her hyper-sexualised performances. This is done through the costumes she chooses to wear and the lyrics she uses. At the same time, she unashamedly flies a feminist flag and unreservedly makes known her stance on gender, racial and political matters (Demi Ray, 2013). According to Allred (2010), "Beyoncé is the prodigious pitchwoman for commodities - "aesthetics, taste and style cannot be divorced from "political" questions about power, inequality and oppression. She is a fearless feminist that ignores issues that should define ones identity." Beyoncé is described as both a branding exercise and a feminist, which means that she positions feminism as being a commodity that can be purchased. In doing and being all of the above, Beyoncé is also married to, and has a family with successful mogul husband Jay-Z who himself has established his name and work in the industry.

Beyoncé's name came up in every interview. She stands out as an inspirational figure to the participants as they relate to her as a global icon of blackness. The praise she is given is related to globalised ideas about blackness. Participant F describes her, "She's put together, she's whole, and that's why she's on everyone's lips because she's managed to maintain herself in an industry that is always ready to break you. Through her music and performances, she empowers us to do as she has." Beyoncé is viewed as being someone that continually challenges limitations to create more of an area for marginalized ideas of the female body, black women's desires, and societal

philosophies of women (Allred, 2010). The Beyoncé brand stands out as strong and robust to black women, acting as a voice which echoes the desires of black women by "articulating the questions and concerns of black women" (Brooks, 2008: 180). Participant I states, "Beyoncé is our voice. She has done so much for women. Some people even say she has "traits of a man." This account suggests that in this context, the traits Beyoncé is said to have includes having strength, confidence, assertiveness, competitiveness, aggression and the ability to think rationally, to lead and to hold authority. These are all stereotypical characteristics that are assigned to men, which Beyoncé is considered to embody. As much as the participants love and respect Beyoncé, their thoughts towards her suggest that they see her as being something more than just the average female. From this perspective, she can be viewed as a modern female ideal in the area of the neoliberal, post-feminist culture (McRobbie, 2006), by joining her male counterparts in hegemonic masculine pursuits, such as being the breadwinner in her family and being economically independent while still performing her feminine roles. The image below (Figure 7.3), taken off one of the participant's profiles is extremely powerful and pertinent to this chapter and to the way in which these women view Beyoncé.

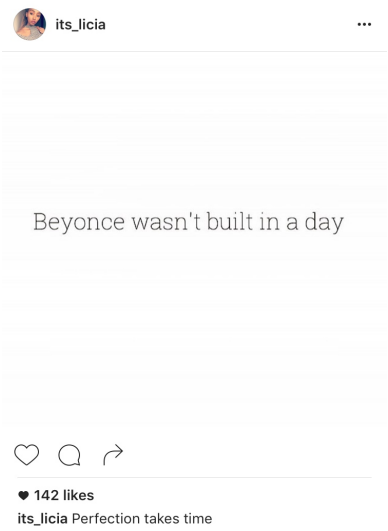

Figure 7.3: The encompassing view of Beyoncé

"Beyoncé wasn't built in a day" mimics the common expression "Rome wasn't built in a day" (Heywood, 1953). This hugely motivational saying likens Beyoncé to Rome, meaning that just like Rome, which is a magnificent city rich in historical

value and importance, which can be seen by the structures that still remain as a former Roman Empire, so Beyoncé is viewed in the same way. This sheds light on the fact that by viewing Beyoncé in this way, the participants position her as not 'just happening' as some claim to fame success stories have, but more in the sense that Beyoncé is the prototype of perfection that they consider to be a timeous process of careful 'building' and construction. Participant C states, "Beyoncé didn't just become Beyonce." Participant C elaborates, "She is so disciplined. That girl worked hard for a long time."

The second part of the "Beyoncé wasn't born in a Day" image that is necessary to explore is the caption "Perfection takes time." Participant B states some of the words used to describe her, "She's fierce, mysterious, beautiful, talented, a good dancer, fit." Participant H elaborates on these emotions towards her, "She's a good singer, she's beautiful, independent. She's just great! She's perfect! Everything is just great about her." Other participants echoed the association of Beyoncé with perfection. Being labelled as being "Perfect" almost elevates Beyoncé to an exclusive position of superiority. Further excerpts from the interviews support this, with the Participants calling Beyoncé a "legend" (Participant C) or claiming, "she is everything" (Participant F), and according to Participant B who encompasses this view, "If you watch her performing it's like "Is she even human?" Their discussion of Beyonce suggests that she may act as the pinnacle of female success. The next few sections will discuss the common themes that emerged around Beyoncé. These sections will detail how the participants view the various facets of who she is, and will show how they use her as an example in their own constructions.

Hard worker

The celebrity image may appear to be effortless, as a complete and polished image is sold to the audience. However, in reality there is a process of hard work that has taken place, but which is not accounted for in the 'finished product'. The participants see the 'real' Beyonce as a 'finished product' of hard work. The participants spoke of Beyoncé as being a hard worker, and they view this as one of her strongest traits and one of the elements that makes her stand out.

Participant G says:

> "Beyoncé is a woman who says you have to be confident in who you are, and she's quite a feminist. She has consistency and longevity. If you have that, and you're a hard-worker, you can be a legend. She's done that. She's consistent in her work and every other aspect."

Beyoncé (2013) herself attributes her success to the fact that she herself had to work hard to be who she is, as she explains, "Power means hard work and sacrifice." Beyoncé's celebrity branding strengthens the discourse around hard work. She is part of a broader representation, which the participants use to construct their ideal selves, which suggests that women can achieve anything through hard work.

Negra and Holmes (2008) discuss how female celebrities have been drawn into conversations about the present 'crisis' of celebrity to illustrate an alleged removal of "talent and hard work from contemporary fame" (Allen, 2013: 5). In the context of the project involving a group of young women who are famous to some extent, for doing nothing really outstanding, but gaining social media popularity, reinforces this argument by suggesting that talent is no longer needed to become a 'celebrity'. Participant H's account explains this, "It's quite flattering when people know you. 'I'm like oh my word, I'm a mini-celebrity, people actually know I'm breathing. So just being known when people put you in their conversation is quite remarkable." This shows that contemporary celebrity is a position that does not involve hard work, in contrast to older notions of celebrity (although, it is important to remember that there has always been other types of 'celebrity' such as socialites). Participant B explains, "They call it 'Insta-celeb' on Instagram when you are an Instagram celebrity. But in the real world you're just another girl – nobody is like Can I take a picture with you?" This account indicates that new terms are adopted for new forms of contemporary celebrity that emerge.

However, the fact that the participants attribute Beyoncé's success to her talent and hard work, suggests that hard work is rewarded. One of the reasons Beyoncé is viewed as such an iconic figure is because she has achieved her fame or success as a result of her own doing, using the talent she has and not simply having her status

handed to her. This is strongly related to neoliberal ideology, which states that your success is dependent on your hard work, as opposed to getting things handed to you. Furthermore, it suggests that everyone can succeed if they try. This is greatly aspirational but it does not necessarily take issues of inequality and access to resources into account. As an inspirational figure, Beyoncé makes it seem as though anyone can obtain what she has, which is a largely neoliberal thought. Participant A explains:

> "Watching her documentaries and how hard she has worked, you know it's just so amazing how much work she puts in. She goes the extra mile more than the ordinary person would, and that kind of inspiration can be applied in your everyday life. In whatever you do, you go the extra mile, so she has a lot of influence on me."

However, this quote suggests that Beyoncé does more and has something different that sets her apart. So as much as she works hard, she also has qualities that make her different, which means that not everyone can attain this. The fact that the participants choose her as an inspiration suggests that they view her success as being attainable, and they view individuality and uniqueness as being instrumental in achieving success. This implies that they see themselves as having the 'correct' qualities and potential to achieve success, which means that now all they have to do is put in the hard work. However, this feminism ignores systems such as sexism and racism that constrain the choices and freedom of women.

Participant E went on to describe Beyoncé's influence, "She has that thing which tells you, you can be whoever you want to be, and as a little girl you have that thing that's in the back of your head, but you grow up internalising it." This is one way of explaining how her work has consequences for those that look up to her, in the way that "people are encouraged to see themselves as individualized and active subjects responsible for enhancing their own well-being" (Larner, 2000: 13). This is seen actively taking shape in the images below, taken from the participant's profiles, which speaks directly to the act of working hard. The first image (Figure 7.4) uses the word 'grind' which is taken from the colloquial saying 'on the grind' which means to work hard. This comes across as a reminder to themselves. The second image (Figure 7.5)

is a formula for hard work that all of the participants speak about, which suggests that when it comes to hard work, they believe they need to carefully plan and then put that plan into action, by combining that with effort in the hope that it will lead to success.



Figure 7.4: Self-Reminder



Figure 7.5: Strategy for success

This neoliberal ideology suggests that you can have whatever you want, or be anything you want to be, as long as you put the time and the effort in (Gill, 2008). It also highlights the extent to which women have to work much harder than men do, to self-discipline and monitor every aspect of their behaviour (Rottenberg, 2013). Celebrities are made out to be something special, but this ideology suggests that they are actually not that special or unique at all, as it is possible for those that put in the effort to succeed.

Most of this discussion reveals a complicated situation when it comes to the celebrity figure. Beyoncé (2013) herself poses as a contradictory figure because of the fact that she is multi-faceted, encompassing multiple identities, calling herself a “Modern feminist”, stating that "I guess I am a modern-day feminist. I do believe in equality. Why do you have to choose what type of woman you are? Why do you have to label yourself anything?" Being a modern-day feminist is contradictory because multiple identities did not formerly function together and they are now occurring simultaneously. This involves being a career woman, being a mother and having a successful marriage. The participants consider Beyoncé to be extensively feminist in nature as Participant C expresses, “Beyoncé is such a feminist and believes in female

empowerment, and that's apparent in her recent songs where she sings about female empowerment. So many people want that freedom, to be able to do things for themselves, and Beyoncé is able to empower women through her songs." This shows a progression from being marginalized, to being able to participate in the same capacity as their male counterparts without being questioned. The participants believe in the 'feminism' that Beyoncé promotes, which is in essence the pursuit of being able to balance the masculine with the feminine, by being both strong and assertive, nurturing and maternal and not being limited to a specific role of what a woman should be and do, but allowing women to occupy both positions (Renold, 2006). As Demi Ray stated (2013: 21), "Beyoncé has released her call to action and it is the decision of women everywhere to either heed her call or turn away from it." This author also supports the idea that Beyoncé is a significant contemporary figure for women.

The topic of independence ties in very closely with this notion of hard work. The way these participants incorporate Beyoncé into the discussion begins with hard work acting as a key to their independence, and the fact that they want to be able to support themselves without assistance. Additionally, being financially independent means there is no longer the need to depend on a man, effectively resulting in the post-feminist "can-do girl" (Harris, 2004) and McRobbie's (2007) idea of "Girl Power". Participant A explains, "She makes all girls see you don't need a man, you can do it on your own." Using Beyoncé as their source of encouragement, Participant H expresses, "What Beyoncé does, I completely love it. She's reminding females that they do have strength", which Participant I supports, "You can be that big if there's something you stand for. She stands for women empowering themselves and being independent." These conversations are supported by the images on the Participants' profiles, as well as the stance they are taking.

The image below (Figure 7.6) "Thou Shalt Get Her Own Money", suggests that as an ambitious woman, she will achieve financial freedom on her own, without having to depend on a man. What this image does not cover is that just because a woman can make her own money, it does not mean that men become unnecessary. This raises a contradiction, or instead a merging of co-existent feminist-post-feminist thought that allows a woman to be financially independent and equal, and at the same time making

provision for a male presence.



Figure 7.6: The idea of female independence

Participant D supports this idea, “I don’t aspire to be a housewife and with this, she really inspires me that you can be a woman, you can have a rich husband, but you can contribute to make your life better. You can be a powerhouse and you can build an empire.” Participant F again makes the feminist-post-feminist point that it is possible to co-labour with male counterparts, as opposed to being entirely against them, or claiming that life can be lived without them, “She makes you realise that it is possible for all girls to see you can stand on your own two feet, she doesn’t need her husband, she’s with him because she loves him and she’s chosen to build an empire with him.”

This notion of ‘empire’ building is particularly important. The way that the participants speak about it suggests that this notion of ‘alpha-feminism’ is ruthless, and will strive for power and success at any cost, but that it is desirable. This deduction is made because the idea of an empire is a disputed topic, as it is loaded with negative connotations because it is related to particularly oppressive periods in history such as slavery and colonialism (Wilson, 2004). Those periods were driven by dictatorship, disregard for people and a greed for power (Wilson, 2004). This implies that the brand of feminism that the participants are advocating for is one that involves oppressing or dominating others to get ahead, and therefore advancing at the expense of others, whether it is other females or males. Therefore, this brand of feminism

implies that it is only concerned with individual interests and not the interests of other women involved in the struggle. In addition to this, 'empire-building' in the contemporary sense that it is used, is no longer exclusive to male domination, as more women are emerging and co-labouring with men to achieve this 'success', just as Beyoncé is doing with Jay-Z.

The participants have adopted this mentality as a widely-accepted outlook that educates and empowers them. This is coherent with Beyoncé's approach, which is believed to "present women as autonomous agents no longer constrained by any inequalities or power imbalances" (Jones, 2012: 153). This emphasizes that hard work is necessary for women to align themselves with men who are taken more seriously in society. It also means that as well as having to be beautiful enough to 'earn' a successful man, a woman has to be successful enough to do the same. Participant D expressed this, "Nowadays, looking good is not enough. You need to be more than that. The thing is, there's too many gold diggers out there, and successful men don't want to be with a woman that looks good, but is just using him." This appears to be a neoliberal thought that suggests work and beauty is needed in order to succeed, even though it is expressed in the language of empowerment.

The analysis of the participant's texts highlighted that celebrity culture strongly communicates added standards of neoliberal femininity, which is concerned with self-monitoring, consistent self-remodeling, as well as obligatory educational and work achievements (Allen, 2009; Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). The image below (Figure 7.7) is an example of a contradiction as the participant that posted this image is herself 'beautiful' and accumulates many likes on her images.

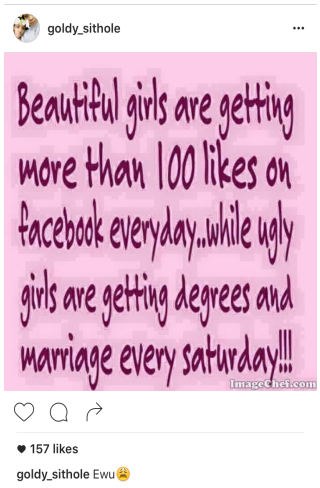

Figure7.7: The beauty contradiction

This gives rise to the discussion of the beautiful-ugly divide. As much as the participants suggest that 'ugly' women are the smarter ones by educating themselves, these women are extremely concerned with being beautiful and also getting degrees and establishing a good family structure. The way this dichotomy plays out suggests that the participants view themselves as being an exception as they are able to fulfill all of these roles of being beautiful, educated and domestic. Taking into consideration that a large part of Beyoncé's appeal is in her physical beauty, this relates to celebrity in a way that makes them, or specifically Beyoncé stand out as being an exception, and being capable of fulfilling all of these roles. As young women, they find themselves navigating the demands of both excelling in education and the projections of highly attractive femininity (McRobbie, 2004; Ringrose, 2007).

Privacy

Privacy is a term that is seldom used when celebrities are spoken about. However, all of the participants consider Beyoncé to be an extremely private person. Participant B explains:

> "I don't know who she is behind closed doors, and I feel like she doesn't really get into who she is, and she doesn't let people in, so I feel it's hard for me to really know her. So she's just there as a figure of a really incredible woman - She's still a bit of a mystery."

The participant speaks about Beyoncé in a personal way, as she mentions "it's hard for me to really know her", which suggests that she believes that knowing more about her will give her a sense of having a personal relationship with her. Participant C elaborates on this:

> "She's just one of those household names, and she doesn't talk about her private life. It's only her art and music that you can try and access. Thinking about it, she's not really humanised. You can look at her and she's there, but you don't know what she's doing, so you don't have anything to say. You can only say she makes good music."

In this account, Beyoncé is described as "not really humanised", which suggests that being open about one's life is human nature, and privacy is tied to something beyond human nature. This again frames Beyoncé and her actions in such a way that gaining access to her life is made to seem like an accomplishment. It seems quite unusual that there would be such a massive correlation between being private and being a celebrity, as the two are not mutually exclusive. Furthermore, Beyoncé also has social media accounts, and she is quite a regular user, often revealing parts of her life as seen in Figure 7.8 below, which introduces the public-private discussion.

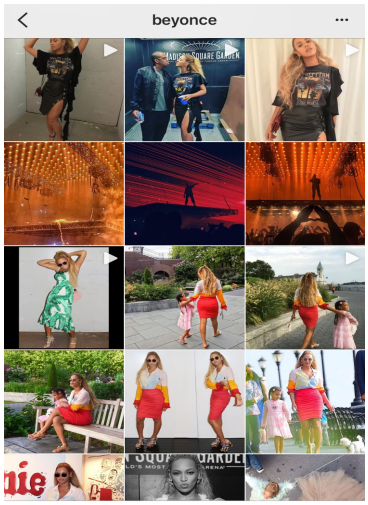

Figure 7.8: Screenshot of Beyonce's Instagram Page

This image shows thumbnails of Beyoncé and her husband, as well as images of herself and her daughter, which one would think is no different to any other celebrity who acts in much the same way. According to some researchers, the shifts from the public to the private lives of prominent figures are key factors involved in becoming a celebrity (Turner, 2004). Although, "the dominant public-private binary has recently been revised and expanded with the 'popular self', which denotes the representation of an ordinary, easy-going and pleasing persona without necessarily disclosing private details" (Driessens et al., 2010: 319). This may be the case with Beyoncé because she posts about her family and her life, which may be considered to be ordinary images that are shared. Although the images that she shares of her child are actually intimate and personal. However, this can be viewed in comparison to the dramatic over-sharing of other celebrities such as Kim Kardashian for example. What this is

suggesting is that Beyoncé seems private in comparison to the reality television aesthetic. Participant A explains:

> "She's so private about her marriage, it's so hard to have an opinion about her marriage. It seems like he makes her happy, one thing about her from the documentaries you can see she's a strong-headed woman, and if she wasn't happy and okay in the marriage, I'm sure she would have left him a long time ago. But I love that she keeps it private, its such a wonderful thing that she's able to keep her marriage life out of the media and so private. But they're a power house and together they make a mean team."

This description suggests that Beyoncé's form of privacy is different and the way she constructs her 'private' life is part of her success. Privacy can also be related to the discussion of authenticity. The participants emphasize that they love Beyoncé because they believe she is still normal or human, as even they as individuals in their own lives value privacy. This comes across as a reaction against other types of celebrities, because in reality Beyoncé is not much more private than any other household celebrity figure, yet she still holds that reputation and she somehow makes her version of privacy seem acceptable. Participant B states, "I think it's just so good that she's so private. I mean, some things shouldn't be known by everyone especially in this world. People will judge you, because they don't really know a situation. So I really think it's good that she chooses to be so private." Participant F celebrates Beyoncé saying, "When people talk about her private life, she doesn't entertain it. So I admire that she tries to stay relevant through her art and not what's happening in her everyday life." Participant C adds, "We don't know what she goes home to or what she does when she's home, she doesn't tell us. Honestly as far as we know she's just making money." This statement suggests that her privacy is a good factor as it serves the purpose of only monitoring and displaying how much money she makes. This implies that wealth is evidence of female success.

Figure 7.9 and Figure 7.10 show a shared attitude towards privacy, which resonates with the way the participants describe Beyoncé and how she lives her life 'privately'.



Figure 7.9: Participant in favour of leading a private life



Figure 7.10: Participant promoting privacy on social media

This suggests that Beyoncé's version of privacy is the ideal way. This is seen in the first image (Figure 7.9) where the participant suggests that there is a satisfaction that comes from living privately. The second image (Figure 7.10) reinforces what Participant C says "We don't know what she goes home to or what she does when she's home." This speaks directly to the character the participants ascribed to Beyoncé, or another factor that they identify as being essential to a woman's success. Beyoncé is distinguished from other celebrities as being known for all the 'right' reasons, namely as having a particularly good reputation and not behaving like other celebrities. Participant D describes Beyoncé:

> "She's not on TMZ articles always causing drama with other celebrities, or making a bad name for herself. You know, she hangs out with the president, and it kind of shows the person she's portrayed herself to be, and how different she is. Because I feel like celebrities feel any sort of publicity is good publicity, but it doesn't last long like that because people get over you. But with Beyoncé she's kind of authentic and true to herself, if I can say that."

This account links authenticity to "being true" to yourself, which relates to ideas of what is 'moral'. This notion of 'moral' behaviour also relates to the notion of respectability politics, a term coined by Evelyn Higginbotham (1993), which speaks to the way in which African American women "defended themselves by absorbing

and enacting middle class standards of femininity through their bodily self-presentation which refuted racist caricatures and claimed the status of lady" (Lowe, 2003: 13). This notion suggests that 'good behaviour' is fundamental in creating success and availing opportunities. This idea of moral, respectable behaviour can be applied with reference to Beyoncé. She conducts herself in such a way that her motherhood is situated as fundamental to her public persona. She is seen as a good mother and a faithful wife, in comparison to accounts of other celebrities and their infidelity. So in as much as she dresses hyper-sexually, is extremely wealthy and exercises her power, she is viewed as still performing all of these traditional feminine roles, which makes her behaviour admissible. This also applies to the participants in the sense that they portray themselves as being 'decent', even though they are 'successful' and admired by others.

Figure 7.11 below is a narrative of a woman that is not interested in getting a bad reputation, but is instead working towards building a 'good name', in much the same way that Beyoncé 'protects' her name.



Figure 7.11: Maintaining a good reputation

However, being a 'bad bitch' can be related to excessive self-display. This image is therefore contradictory because the participants speak about how tacky this online display is, but they are striving to become prominent figures by displaying their lives

online. What this demonstrates is that 'some' forms of self-display are acceptable, while others are seen to be shameful.

From this point of view, Beyoncé is seen as an advocate for feminism, independence, empowerment, being successful, being humble and being a 'lady', which involves being 'appropriately feminine'. Participant E explains the reason for her success, "By Beyoncé not being out there, and being low-key really has had an impact on her success, as she has no bad publicity." Participant D reinforces this, "she stands out because of her sex appeal and how she has conducted herself, and not like other celebrities, by ensuring she has no scandals or dirt." This could be seen as a traditional view of femininity, which suggests that a woman can be empowered, be a 'powerhouse' and build an 'empire', but she is still expected to be a 'lady', behave in a 'classy' manner and keep her life 'private'. This mode of femininity implies that there is a particular kind of self-policing that has to happen when you want to be both successful and 'appropriate' at the same time. This involves the negotiation between modelling oneself against what is 'appropriately' feminine, alongside modelling oneself according to notions of masculinity. This relates to the freedom that Rihanna suggests, by reinforcing that 'freedom' is actually conditional and dependent on whether one meets the requirements of their own context by behaving 'appropriately'. This reinforces that what appears to be freedom is actually a false notion of freedom, as it can only be achieved when certain conditions are met.

This is also contradictory as the participants talk about how they try to display their authenticity, but what this suggests is a desire to be both public and private in order to build their brand or a solid name. This is seen in the images where they display personal parts of their lives publicly on Instagram, while at the same emphasizing the importance and necessity of privacy in their lives. These arguments are very closely linked to arguments about capitalism and post-feminism. Therefore, the female ideal that is being offered here "is emphatically not the one-dimensional or one-track professional woman who sacrifices family for career, but rather a high-powered woman who manages to balance a spectacularly successful career with a satisfying home life" (Rottenberg, 2013: 11). What this means is that women are required to perform dual roles at the same time. They are expected to be public and be non-domestic, and at the same time there is the requirement for them to be private and to

be domestic, which again ties in with the 'appropriate' behaviour that is expected of them. This requirement entails fulfilling all of the feminine roles associated to domesticity, by ensuring that all areas of her domestic and family life are properly taken care of, and at the same time ensuring that she is able to function, excel and establish herself in a male-dominated society. Beyoncé seems to do this by occupying both of these positions, and she seems to have mastered these multiple roles or expectations placed on women.

All- Rounder

The final factor that will be discussed examines the way in which the participants classify Beyoncé as an 'All-Rounder'.

Participant E says:

> "Let's start by saying she's got it all! She's a hard-worker, She's successful, she's a multi-tasker, she has a child, she's married. She does it all - everyone wants to be like that. She's the voice of women, and of what they're capable of. They can take over the world!"

This participant mentions that women have the capability to "take over the world", which again relates to the emerging theme of power and empire building. Beyoncé is characterized as aggressive, which is an important factor to mention. They frame her as being dictatorial and dominant in her pursuit of power. This is a typical example of the negotiation between the "post-feminist masquerade" (McRobbie, 2004: 6) and the "phallic girl" (2007: 732). This relationship is the negotiation between performing hyper-femininity and in this case, relates to the way Beyoncé is performing hegemonic masculinity, in the process of assuming power and control through "marks of boldness, confidence, aggression and even transgression" (McRobbie, 2007: 732).

Participant H says, "What Beyoncé does, I completely love. She's reminding females that they do have strength and to use it to enhance who they are. As women, we are multitalented in ways that we don't even know, and that's what she is putting out there." This relates to 'power femininity' which is a widely accepted post-feminist dialogue that includes feminist features of liberation and authority which says that

women can now "have it all"' (Lazar, 2006: 505). This relates to the discussion of Beyoncé as powerful in a way that suggests that she challenges racial or gender limitations, and positions herself as equal to men by creating her own wealth, ensuring she looks beautiful, and making sure she does not neglect her family duties. The participants speak about Beyoncé as being the ultimate woman or "The ideal woman" (Participant D). They describe her as someone that skillfully fulfills all of the roles laid out by society at the same time. Participant A states:

> "She's able to balance everything out, and she's able to keep a private life in all of that chaos. She works hard for what she has. She provides for her family, and she carries herself well. I love her demeanor, and how she carries herself, and how much of a lady she is, and how much humility she has regardless of her success."

This idea of being a 'lady' fits within the domain of normative femininity, which revolves around ideas of being classy, presentable, being compliant, being passive, and conservative, and having self-respect. Self-respect is a quality assigned to white hegemonic femininity, which excluded black women, as they were labeled as lacking dignity in the way that they behaved (Lowe, 2003). This association is meaningful as Beyoncé is a contradictory figure of what it means to be a lady, as she challenges these ideas in the way that she is active and 'agentic' as opposed to being passive, she challenges gender inequalities and her self-respect and class is often questioned in light of her hyper-sexualized performances.

Participant B reinforces the belief of Beyoncé as the ideal woman:

> "What she does with her baby, her work, her life behind the scenes, her past, how she's got to where she is now. Her working relationship with her husband, and how she manages her career, as well as her fashion line that's just come out is wow! It's so inspirational for me."

This account offers insight into the prototype against which the participants define the ideal woman. They portray Beyoncé as someone that does more than the average woman, and they consider her to be the 'ultimate woman', as they believe she has managed to do it 'all'. The 'all' that is spoken about fits within the current neoliberal model, where women are expected to be the perfect wife, mother and career woman

(Tasker & Negra, 2007). This suggests that the ideal woman is comprised of a series of complex characteristics. According to the participants, this is somebody that is able to balance being maternal, an entrepreneur, private, emotionally and physically strong despite circumstance, heterosexual, ambitious, as well as stylish. Therefore this is someone who is able to balance being extremely feminine (heterosexual, maternal, stylish, private), as well as having characteristics that are considered masculine (entrepreneur, ambitious, physically and emotionally strong). McRobbie (2009: 255-256) describes this as "the 'double entanglement', which is the co-existence of neo-conservative values and liberal values, where women can be traditional, radical and pretty at the same time." Participant E says:

> "I love Beyoncé. I love her music, she really does perform well. She seems like she's a humble person the way she is, this fame thing hasn't taken over her, she's humbled from where she is. She still cares about her family and her child. I think I just like her as a person, she just seems like she is a nice person."

Participant G reinforces this, "It's amazing how she's decided to portray herself humbly. She portrays a full woman that says this is I in all my glory; I choose to portray me positively." Celebrities often emerge as role models when they are relevant, relateable or are attainable (Marshall, 2010). Beyoncé has emerged as an aspirational icon, as she possesses a combination of characteristics that these women find desirable. Furthermore they repeatedly use the terms "lady" and "humble" in describing why Beyoncé is someone they choose to emulate. However Beyoncé dresses scantily-clad and posts excessively on Instagram just as the participants do, which is contradictory to the traditional understanding of these terms.

It is interesting that these points are raised because many of Beyoncé's performances may be seen as objectifying the female body due to her raunchy outfits and elaborate shows. Again however, because of the status that Beyoncé has earned, whatever she does it is deemed to be acceptable. This signifies the "obsessional preoccupation with the body and the shift from objectification to sexual subjectification that this is framed within a discourse of freedom, and, above all, choice" (Gill, 2008: 11). In the same way Beyoncé's hyper-sexualised body suggests that she is powerful, independent and sexually agentic (Gill, 2007). This way of dressing and presentation is viewed as a

source of empowerment that resists male control (McRobbie, 1997), and brings forward neo-liberal femininities in which women are free to conduct themselves in the way that they choose (Gill, 2006). However, this is contradictory as women are expected to be "respectable and be 'sexually appropriate' to fit within the normative contemporary view of femininity, but women are also expected to always be 'up for it' and sexually agentic" (McRobbie, 2007: 85), which challenges how empowering Beyoncé's display actually is.

This demonstrates that even though she is a mother, she can still be sexy. This is noteworthy primarily because, "the identity development of black women typically uses the lenses of race and gender to illuminate the multifaceted nature of identity formation within the context of the black woman's experience" (Henry et al., 2010: 239). This relates to the participants as they are navigating and constructing for themselves the ideal woman, within a contradictory space of multiple conflicting ideas around femininity.

The participants speak about Beyoncé as an influential leader because of the way in which she exhibits and reinforces an identity of black pride. Participant G explains:

> "Beyoncé is the first person everybody thinks of. I think Beyoncé is beautiful. She's natural, she's just always been the one that everybody just loves, I think it's also because career-wise, she's made it, and that makes her even hotter. Even the songs she sings, when she sings about being bootylicious, she's always been proud of who she is."

The term 'bootylicious' is relevant to black women in particular as they are known to have a curvier body shape, for which Beyoncé is an advocate. Accordingly, Beyoncé plays a key role in the "redefinition of black identity which can be seen in the shift in popular perspectives when referring to the black female body, or more specifically the 'booty' (Henry et al., 2011: 244). Beyoncé is esteemed because she "continuously breaks the silence around black female sexuality" (Theys, 2014: 85). What the participants highlight is that not only does Beyoncé's confidence in her sexuality exude a pride that they as black women are aware of, and are encouraged by, but also Participant B says:

> "What she does, is she carries herself like a lady, but at the same time, you will see her performing and she's in a skimpy, small outfit, and she's working. So, she balances these two elements that you would not associate to the same person. But we have to admit she balances the two so well, bringing a powerful woman together so well."

Participant I reinforces this with reference to Beyoncé's performances:

> "She could have gone the skank route, but she's chosen to do it tastefully and that's what got her to this place. As much as we like the rough girl, we also want someone who is going to make us feel comfortable in all of our femininity, and do it in such a way that you don't need to cuss it out. So she's portrayed a full woman."

Participant E adds to this, "She's also not parading her boobs. She's fighting for female equality, but she is not extreme." The participants are inspired by Beyoncé because she is proud of her body, by flaunting it. However this also suggests that there are 'tasteful' and 'correct' ways of displaying the body. This assumes an unusual position of bodily pride combined with conservative morals.

Therefore the way Beyoncé acts and reacts around topics of the female body again shows a sight of post-feminism as it "calls for women to be their own person and to embrace their individuality, physical and sexual difference from men" (Walser, 2015: 19). By approaching Beyoncé this way, one can deduce that the participants believe, "She embodies the ultimate capability of a black woman. Simply put, just be the best you can be, and leave a legacy inspiring people while doing that" (Participant E). Figure 7.12 below is a summary of the discourses around black femininity.



Figure 7.12: Encouraging black pride

The participant posted this picture as an attempt to do what Beyoncé does, by encouraging a black pride amongst her followers. This is because the participants see Beyoncé as the 'face' of black pride in the way that she embraces her blackness. So what is being emphasized in the image is a particular type of motivation in support of blackness.

The image below (Figure 7.13) ties all of these ideas of celebrity together and simplifies Beyoncé.



Figure 7.13: Beyoncé as a mind-set

This suggests that Beyoncé holds so much power and influence, that she is viewed as an entity that can be cloned into an action which can be reproduced and internalised, and which can then manifest itself in some way that replicates her, allowing one to achieve what she has achieved. This is an analogy of not just Beyoncé's significance, but also the celebrity figure as whole. In this way, celebrity can be approached as a mind-set that can be internalized as people look to the figures from which they draw inspiration.

This chapter has shown that celebrity plays a significant role in the lives of the participants, in assisting them to define as well as shape who and what they would like to be, alongside black established icons that are inspirational to them such as Rihanna and Beyoncé. Rihanna and Beyoncé are seen as holding the dominant views on sexuality, family, freedom, independence and empowerment. From the participants' Instagram profiles and the factors they shared in the interviews, there is a

direct correlation between what the celebrities do and say, and the way that the participants construct themselves. What repeatedly emerged is the constant negotiation between different versions of femininity and the quest to embody a 'free' and empowered position. However, as much as these celebrities make each of their versions seem easy to attain, this process of construction ignores challenges of inequality around gender, race and socioeconomic status, which suggests that in reality not all women actually have access to the freedom which Rihanna symbolises. In the same way, Beyoncé is framed as the modern standard of ideal femininity, which the participants are striving to replicate. An interesting factor that emerged repeatedly is the interplay between her being powerful and being a lady, suggesting that the type of identity these young women are constructing for themselves is an all-encompassing picture of a woman that is able to rule in a male-dominated world, and also master her hetero-normative femininity.

Chapter 8

Image

This chapter will discuss the issue of 'Image' by exploring the way that the participants construct their ideal image by navigating existing beauty ideals and modifying their image, and at the same time the way that they 'embrace' their own features. This is done specifically through the discussion of hair, whereby they beautify themselves through the incorporation of weaves, as a way to assimilate themselves with the dominant beauty ideal. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the way in which the 'booty', a naturally black feature is coming to be accepted as desirable among women.

In this contemporary era, much attention is to given to women's beauty and their overall image. Women exist in a space where there is a pressure exerted on them to look or be a certain way, according to society's standards and expectations. They are expected to construct themselves in a specific way regarding their aesthetic appearance, pertaining to what their hair should look like, what shape their bodies should be, what clothing to wear, and the way in which they should model themselves. This refers specifically to the way in which beauty ideals have existed and developed alongside or in relation to the Eurocentric model of ideal feminine beauty. According to this ideal aesthetic, femininity has been characterized by the female profile of being fair-skinned, having long hair, being tall and being petite or slim figured (Banks, 2000). When this European beauty ideal is contrasted against African characteristics, dual opposites are formed, such as 'kinky and straight, long and short, dark and light, good and bad' (Chapman, 2007). These attitudes have rooted themselves deeply in the awareness of many societies that would be considered to fall outside of the 'white/Caucasian' scope.

Speaking specifically of black women within the African society:

> "for them to have "good hair," or a "good nose" means that one's hair is closer in texture to that of people of European descent or that their nose is straight and resembles something close to that of the Western ideal. As far as one can deduce, beauty has, over the years been

> socially and politically constructed to emulate those in power, white people" (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014: 90).

For black women in societies marked by racial oppression, this has come with great difficulty. Not only have they been oppressed for being black, but they have been measured against dominant beauty ideals, and have been viewed as being the complete opposite of what beauty, by society's formulated definition, has meant. This for them has in the past come with harsh forms of treatment and deliberate exclusion based on their appearance, and in this contemporary time still sees them striving to be acknowledged.

Black Women and the Media

This discussion revolves around matters of race relations and gender performance. The area of image and beauty in particular is located in a racial space that stems from a history of oppression as experienced by black women. Even though this treatment may have been more prominent in certain locations, "black women have a "shared historical reality" of structural oppression, degradation, disenfranchisement, and misrecognition through which they are axiomatically linked" (Few, Stephens & Marlo, 2003: 206). Beauty plays a crucial part in the construction of the participant's identity, which has been revealed in the interviews as well as their images on Instagram. The participants continually model themselves to fit a specific beauty ideal, which is seen in the way that they do their hair and fashion themselves. However, the fact that beauty is seen as being crucial to them does not necessarily mean that the forms of beauty that they engage in are automatically used as a way of internalising racism or colonialism.

Tounsel (2015: 8) begins this conversation of their performance by mentioning that "black women have developed nuanced interpretive strategies and redemptive practices of using the cultural resources such as blogs, online social network profiles, images, and traditional platforms like broadcast and print media to define the black female self on their own terms." By adopting these approaches black women are permitted to interact with the existing online content, but at the same time they are also able to intentionally rearrange the content to accommodate their individual interpretations and adaptions (Hooks, 1992; Bobo, 1995). This shows that the

adoption of contemporary norms does not exclude agency.

These markers of identity construction can be seen most notably through their displays and conversations of femininity, the fashioning of their hair, as well as the way they choose to model themselves through their clothing and their expertise in their chosen beauty regimes. Their visible displays of beauty are well received by their mass followings. Moreover, by accounting for their online presence, McRobbie (2009: 125) identifies that it has become a component of most women's lives, or almost their prerogative, "to move from the shadows, into the spotlight of visibility, into a luminosity which has the effect of a dramatization of the individual, a kind of spectacularisation of feminine subjectivity, which becomes the norm." Drawing from these discussions of beauty and image, what also becomes a point to mention and later elaborate on, is the way in which beauty can be understood as "A process… An on-going process" (Participant A), that is fluid. What is noteworthy in this regard is how the current beauty and body trends are taking on forms of the once 'deviant' black body and becoming the norm, as will be discussed.

Beauty

All of the black women involved in the study shared the same sentiment as participant B expresses, "being black, it's sometimes hard to find beauty in yourself." However, despite feeling this way, they all stressed the importance of taking pride in their appearance, and they raised three particular areas around image, which they focus on in creating the best version of themselves. Participant I summarizes, "Firstly, I take good care of my hair. So, it's my hair, make-up, mascara, lipstick, obviously dressing nice is essential, and making sure my closet is in order. And yes, basically looking good in terms of everything." They described beauty as a number of elements, but what came up the most was the stylization of hair, which was followed by completing their look by focusing on the careful selection of their clothing and their make-up. This indicates the pressure experienced by women to perform a certain way, and this is the practical culmination of what Johnson and Bankhead (2014) explained above. Participant G explains:

> "In my life, I've struggled so much with my features, that I've actually had to learn to just accept them. We live in a society where I thought a

> beautiful girl was one who was really light-skinned, even though I'm not really dark, I think I'm just in between. I'm beginning to accept that not everyone with a pointy nose is nice, not everyone who is light in complexion does look nice with that complexion. You could say it's a trend, it comes and it goes. I hope we will go back to black being beautiful at some point. We as black women are so focussed on society and making other people happy. We want to be what society wants us to be."

This account raises the issue of 'lightness', which surfaced numerous times in the interviews. This speaks to the hegemonic beauty ideal that has been held by society, which characterized white women's beauty and skin colour as being the standard of beauty, suggesting that beauty is dependent on lightness. This notion of being what society wants us to be links to neoliberal 'freedoms' in a contradictory way. On one hand women are encouraged to self-modify and reinvent themselves, but on the other hand, this must be done within an 'acceptable' space, and in line with the dominant standard. So as much as women are offered freedoms, they are expected to make their choices in accordance with the dominant ideal, which strengthens the fact that this 'freedom' is not actually as free as it seems. Participant J builds on this argument:

> "There is a lot of pressure on us, especially from social media. That part is especially hard, especially for younger woman. The Western side has great influence, and it's so bad because when you see all of that, that's when you start bleaching, because especially with black people, yellow bone is considered to be better. Young girls and young women are following that trend, and you don't see it now because of the pressure that has become so normal. I don't feel they're doing it for themselves, they're actually just going with the flow."

'Bleaching' refers to the act of using chemicals that contain the substance hydroquinone to lighten one's skin (Karamagi & Katabira, 2001), in order to achieve a fairer complexion, or to be classified as a 'yellow bone'. 'Yellow bone' is a term that emerged in the USA, but has become popular through the media in contemporary South African culture. This is one of the criticisms of Beyoncé's current music

videos, which is said to raise issues of 'colorism', and the promotion of the 'yellow bone' (Drayton, 2016). This is a term given to black women that are fairer in complexion, which elevates them to a place of superiority within the black African community, as they are more closely associated to being white (Poran, 2006). This is a preview of the current mind-set of the young black women. Although their feelings and emotions are changing towards the concept of beauty, they still show a desire for apparently white features, as there is still a perception that anything more closely connected to being 'white' is privileged over anything that is not (Keenan 1996; Rooks 1996; Patton 2006).

These young women also voiced their feelings towards beauty in totality, and the effect of Western ideals on their self-image. They all share each other's strong sentiments on beauty, and Participant B begins this discussion, "Beauty is everything honestly. It is everything. Appearance is really important in this day and age." Participant D adds on to this view of beauty, "Physical beauty is very important. I personally like looking good, because it makes me feel good." Participant F reinforces, "It is important because when you feel beautiful, you feel brave. It all goes with self-esteem." This response towards beauty and image reiterates the idea that self-esteem and self-confidence are impressed in a woman's body (Tsaousi, 2015). This coincides with Gill's (2007) belief, which suggests that one of the basic ways in which women's identities are shaped is through the depiction of women's bodies in the media. Approaching the conversation from this viewpoint leads to an understanding of the way beauty functions for the participants. This assists in understanding the confidence their Instagram display gives them, and why it is that they dedicate so much time and effort to their image. To expand on another dimension of beauty that came up, Participant D says:

> "Beauty is very important. It has to be something you radiate from within. If you feel comfortable in yourself, and if you are happy with yourself, there's something that radiates, that makes you beautiful, so I think that it's very important. When you don't feel beautiful- it's a confidence thing."

What is even more noteworthy is that Participant B articulates, “Beauty is being comfortable in your own skin, appreciating what you have and being happy with what you have.” Comments such as these are contradictory and seem to be a repetition of discourse that circulates in the media regarding the confidence women should have. The participants say these things, and continuously post inspirational quotes and images about self-esteem and pride, which, but their conversations and attitudes around hair suggests otherwise. They speak about beauty this way, as it seems like the ‘right’ and acceptable thing to do, however they are constantly altering their natural hair and using various forms of artificial hair adaptions to make themselves ‘feel beautiful’ and ‘confident’. In one way, they are saying that confidence creates beauty, and beauty comes from within, but on the other what they are saying is that beauty makes them feel confident. This suggests a perpetual negotiation that goes on between what they ‘should’ feel (confidence makes you beautiful), and what they ‘do’ feel (hard work is required to feel beautiful, and failing at that means you will not be a success).

Hair

Hair is another area that is considered to be a fundamental component of a woman’s beauty, as Johnson and Bankhead (2014: 90) explain, “hair is a part of every woman’s identity to some degree.” Hair is also considered to be a distinct “marker of womaness, gender and identity” (Chapman, 2007: 1). In the interview discussions of beauty, the topic of hair was raised among all of the participants. Hair emerged as the primary component of their image, as Participant D says, “Hair is the first thing people see on you. I feel you can look nice in an outfit, but if your hair is not nice it just takes away from the whole look. So basically it’s what ties the whole look together. For myself that’s what I notice.” Participant E reinforces this argument, “Hair is actually a really big factor in making yourself look pretty. Sometimes you can wear a bomb outfit, but your hair is not so good. Sometimes you think, ‘if I had a weave on, this picture would look amazing’. This is a true story.” The level of importance that the participants give to hair can be viewed through Mercer’s perspective (1987: 34), which considers “the way people shape and style hair may be seen as both individual expressions of the self, and as embodiments of society's norms, conventions and expectations.” Hairstyling can also be viewed as a

performance of one's gender, which is also associated to beauty (Butler, 1990), and this positively affects women's self-esteem as they believe they are exercising their individuality and the freedom to define for themselves their own identity.

In conjunction with the data that emerged from the interviews around hair, the images posted on the participants' profiles show numerous images of them displaying their different hairstyles such as red hair, blonde hair, short hair or long hair as a focal point. Within black South African communities' hair is an area that is treated with much sensitivity, along with heightened interest (Smith, 2011), as hair within certain black African cultures is greatly symbolic, and the value that it holds reaches into various spheres for them (Banks, 2000). The participant's spoke extensively about hair and what their hair means to them, and also the way in which it functions for them.

Again, this matter of hair amongst black people dates back to particular historical periods such as slavery where, "in an effort to dehumanize and break the African spirit, Europeans shaved the heads of enslaved Africans upon arrival to the Americas" (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014: 87). This explanation comes from the USA, but the USA has been a major contributor to globalized black culture over the years. As much as the participants are South African themselves, they locate themselves within a more global, notion of blackness. Through the subjugation and consequent enslavement of African people, the oppression of black hair arose (Bryd & Tharps, 2001; Chapman, 2007; Erasmus, 1997). The oppression of black hair originates from a long line of black people being ostracized and belittled, and being forced to cut, cover or transform their natural hair to replicate something closer to their white masters' aesthetic (Banks, 2000; Thompson, 2009). Kinky hair was considered dreadful when measured against the long slinky texture of white hair that was considered to be attractive (Chapman, 2007). As such, natural black hair is laden with negative connotations associated to slavery, oppression, exclusion, isolation, unattractiveness and unruliness. Those negative associations remained, even after the abolishment of slavery, but along with this, a definite awareness of beauty was shaped through the maintenance of black hair (Chapman, 2007), and became fixed in the pattern of black people's lives (Thompson, 2009).

These negative feelings around hair have been carried down through generations, although there are global differences between the South African and American generations. This relates to globalized cultures of race. Gilroy (1987) argues that black people are connected transnationally, not necessarily through an actual connection to imaginary 'Africa', but they are connected by the shared awareness of a mutual racial oppression. From the idea of unity among black people, Gilroy (1993) adopted the term "Black Atlantic" to describe a different society that confronted the basis of traditional racism, separatist accounts of belonging, and cultural dictatorship, and which have been building "a relational network" instead (Gilroy, 2000: 123), which transcends borders and structural agendas. This globalized notion of race is seen in black communities when it comes to this topic of hair, in the way that even black women, in contexts that did not experience slavery or Apartheid still straighten their hair and wear weaves.

However, this issue of hair in the South African context can be viewed through instances such as the "pencil test" during the Apartheid era (Powe, 2009: 1), which involved passing a comb through the hair, to distinguish black and coloured people's hair from that of white people. It was used as a political tool to classify people's races. Those people whose hair the comb passed through easily, earned a superior status of being 'whiter', as opposed to the hair in which the comb got stuck, in which they were considered inferior, among other factors (Powe, 2009). This suggests that hair came to hold political significance for black people. As a result, they were bombarded with advertisements and 'solutions' of how to better their hair, which would allow them to become more integrated into the dominant culture (Thompson, 2009).

Participant E expresses: "Hair is a very big thing. We actually really don't like our natural hair as black women." This could be explored by looking at how large populations of black women approach hair, and how they go to great lengths to mask their natural hair. Participant A addresses this point, "Because I grew up with a lot of white kids, I haven't reached a point where I am comfortable with my own hair as such. I have to relax it or do something to it." Participant B also details her lived experience of donning her natural hair and the treatment that came with it, "When I was young I was told to use the boys' bathroom because of my little Afro. So for a

long time, I did things to my hair to make it more girly." These accounts suggests that femininity and beauty is still tied to societal ideals of having long, straight hair (Weitz, 2001), and because of this black women still feel a sense of inferiority because of the texture of their own hair. In order for black women to be seen as being feminine, they are expected to modify their own hair so that they correspond with the hegemonic notion of femininity. For many black women, hair acts as an indicator of their identity (Banks, 2000), which they are made aware of through their experiences as children, as well as through the circulated media images that they are subjected to.

Fairly recent research has revealed that more forms of natural hair such as the Afro are becoming a trend among black women (Konneh, 2013; Thompson, 2009; Chapman, 2007). According to Chapman (2007: 24) "the Afro hairstyle was adopted by Afro-Americans as an outward affirmation of an empowering sense of black pride." Having an afro hairstyle was a way to celebrate and reignite a love and an acceptance for hair that was rejected (Thompson, 2009). What these scholars speculate as the reason for the resurgence of the afro is that as more black women are becoming empowered and 'successful' in society, the more they are feeling a sense of liberation, and as such are in pursuit of exhibiting a more authentic version of black pride, as white ideals are becoming less important to them (Konneh, 2013). However, it appears this is not the case with the participants, as they all express a deep dissatisfaction with their natural hair and a complete renouncing of its presence. The fact that this is not visible amongst the participants suggests that they still feel the pressure to conform to the hegemonic ideal of beauty in the construction of their identity. This is because hair acts as a status symbol, which is a prerequisite for them to achieve success. They all shared the same sentiment; "I will never leave the house with my natural hair" (Participant F). Participant E reveals her attitude towards her hair, "Personally, I like my hair, but not for more than 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, I don't want to see it, because I don't want to be combing it and relaxing it, and washing it over and over. I really don't want to see it after that. It gets too much." This reveals a deep dislike of their natural hair.

The participants display images of braids and speak of them as an 'interim' hairstyle, which is adopted as a short-term solution between their transition to weaves, as displayed in the images below (Figure 8.1 and Figure 8.2).

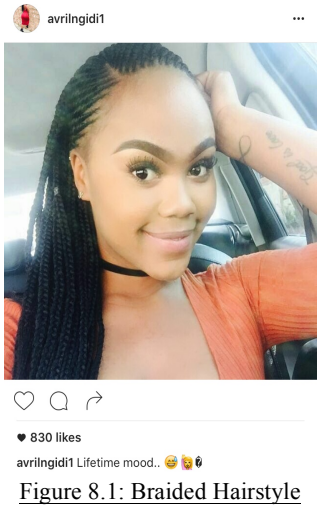

Figure 8.1: Braided Hairstyle

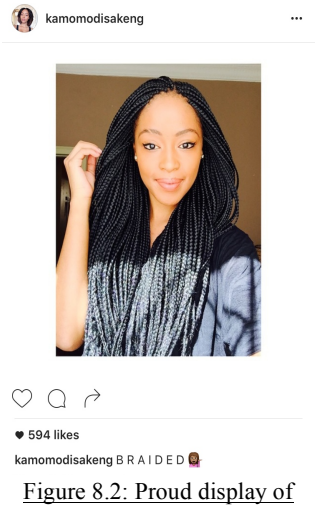

Figure 8.2: Proud display of braided hair

They also speak extensively of weaves as being inextricably tied to their identity. Participant F explains that weaves have an effect on her self-confidence, "There's just something about hair, as many people believe that hair makes you, you, or it makes you beautiful. I actually do believe so as well. Hair is the most important to me. In saying this, I am addicted to weaves. I am a weave girl." Participant G supports this feeling, "Weaves make me beautiful, and it changes me. It's like make up. It does enhance your beauty. With a certain hairstyle you feel gorgeous. And that is the time you actually begin to accept your features, because that is the time it actually outshines everything else." This account suggests that the participant only begins to accept her 'natural' features when she is wearing a weave, and as such when she has long hair. This implies that these black women believe beauty is tied to having 'perfect' long hair. These comments reveal the deep connection these black women have to weaves, or their relationship to hair as a whole.

The images below (Figure 8.3 and Figure 8.4) indicate that the participants love for various weaves (blonde, wavy, straight) styled in different ways, and as a trend they display the hair they have at the current time. What these images show is the way that they conform to the online Instagram trends.

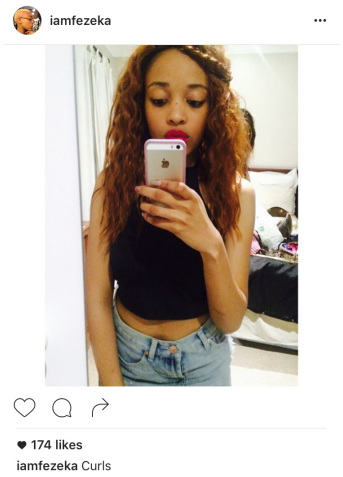

Figure 8.3: Blonde wavy weave



Figure 8.4: Blonde straight weave

They also feel it is a necessity for them to act as a promotional tool, by directing others to where they too can obtain their hair from, leading to a collective, shared knowledge. By doing this, the participants' position themselves as having expert knowledge in this area of hair, which works to strengthen their credibility as inspirational icons. The images below (Figure 8.5 and Figure 8.6) are an example of how contemporary corporate advertising practices manifest themselves in the way these young women display themselves on Instagram.



Figure 8.5: Collage display and Promotion of long wavy weave

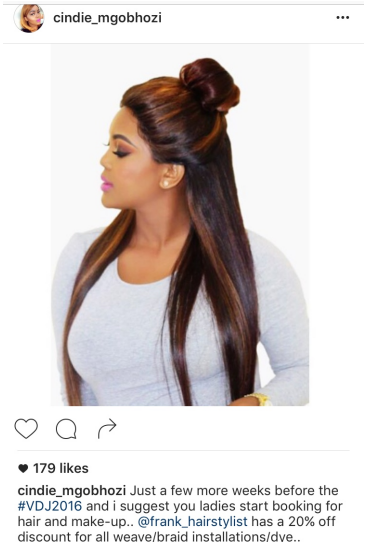

Figure 8.6: Profile view of 'installed' long weave

This shows an interaction between the promotional and the personal, and these particular images are an example of a personal social discursive consequence of viewing the self as a product. By using images that focuses on them and the hair, they are 'selling' a specific image of success and status, which is attached to the high-status of their weaves. This is because weaves are very costly depending on the length. This could also be viewed as the intersection between empowerment and self-commodification, which ties in with neoliberal ideas of consumption (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Furthermore, through their captions they suggest that other women can also experience this feeling, as they are also neoliberal subjects.

Weitz (2001: 667) argues that, "hairstyles are culture-bound, public, personal and highly malleable to suit cultural and personal relevance", which suggests that the participants' adoption of weaves could be seen as an attempt to replicate 'ideal' features, which is done to fit both the norm and to stand out by trying to create their brand through their 'individuality'. Weaves emerge out of social, ancestral and negotiated structures that function to uphold traditional habits and, in turn, the embedded ideals (Thompson, 2009). In other words, "the gendered cultural ideology that make weaves meaningful are utopian, or rather, symptomatic of, the black hair fantasy" (Konneh, 2013: 26). These factors surrounding the weave highlight the participants' agency, in the way that they actively choose to model themselves in a specific way, by 'beautifying' and restyling hair that has held a label of being unattractive. Hair maintenance is a cultural norm for black women, and therefore wearing weaves has come to be accepted as one of the maintenance norms.

Women are positioned as having a choice in selecting things that fulfill their own desires in the construction of their own image. In the same way, the choice that black women make to use weaves, suggests that they are emancipated from society's beauty norms and expectations. The belief that women's practices are chosen without constraint is at the core of post-feminist dialogue. Women are displayed as being independent individuals that are not inhibited by any discriminatory attitudes or power battles (Gill, 2007). However, as much as this 'freedom' of 'choice' is framed as a liberation from the hold of oppression, and the freedom to do what they want to with their bodies, this ignores the fact that black women feel the need to self-modify and wear weaves before they feel beautiful, in order to fit the hegemonic standard of

feminine beauty. This idea of 'freedom' ignores the fact that the dominant ideal of feminine beauty is characteristic of long, straight hair, which black women have adapted and internalized, and they have taken ownership of these certain looks and made it their own. However, some white women also wear weaves, which means that this 'fantasy' really is a fantasy, it is an unattainable ideal for all women. This reinforces the fact that race, or more specifically 'whiteness' is not 'real'.

Another way of approaching this could be alongside Patton's point (2006: 36) in which she suggests, the act of hair modification as a form of gender performativity confronts the dominant ideal of beauty, which creates, "a way for the marginalized to attempt to become centered in a world of beauty that tends not to value African forms of beauty." While black women in this case attempt to align themselves with the acceptable standard of beauty through their hair adoptions, their authenticity in this performance is often challenged. Distinctions have been made between what has been termed authentic and inauthentic hair, natural and unnatural, as well as good and bad hair (Konneh, 2013). Authentic hair refers to black women adopting hairstyles using their own natural hair, such as dreadlocks, or sporting an Afro, which is subsequently, termed bad hair. While inauthentic hair refers to hair straightening or using 'fake' hair to do braids, or a weave, which is considered to be good hair.

Although the weaves that these women use could be considered 'real' hair as it is human hair that is used to make these weaves, the fact that it is not their own renders it inauthentic, in the same way that although braids are commonly associated with black women, the fact that they use a combination of synthetic hair also renders it inauthentic, according to scholars (Konneh, 2013). As I suggested in the chapter on 'Authenticity', a number of contradictory stances are present in their online displays, and this is the reason these distinctions about hair are raised, and some time is spent discussing it. While all of the women stressed the need to be authentic by introducing terms such as 'being comfortable in your own skin' 'doing you', 'being true to yourself', 'finding your trade', or 'being natural', it is interesting that they do not consider weaves or extensions to be outside of that authenticity bracket.

Weaves have become so naturally entwined in their made-up look, that it is no longer considered to be fake or inauthentic. Participant E says, "Weaves are just a part of

who I am now. You won't see me without it." This suggests that modifying their hair using weaves has become such a natural part of their routine and their image, that it has become normalized and naturalized. Participant H gives some insight into this deliberation:

> "Hair is important, but I feel at times I should embrace my natural hair. However, I feel as a black woman, you have to have a weave to define that you're beautiful. And I feel I have to embrace my natural hair too, and be without weaves, but I can't, so I do wear weaves."

In this account, the participant is expressing the dual pressures on young women to be 'real' and to be 'beautiful', and she is suggesting that they are mutually exclusive, by implying that 'natural' blackness cannot really be beautiful. This could also be aligned with the notion that while they do have a choice of whether or not to use weaves, they choose to wear weaves to become 'beautiful'. By observing the images below (Figure 8.7 and Figure 8.8), there is a shared aesthetic among these women. The participants associate themselves with other black women, that all share the same approach to weaves as they are seen sporting them.



Figure 8.7: Both women wearing weaves of different styles



Figure 8.8: The participant and her friends all sporting long weaves

Taylor (2000: 668) elaborates on this by suggesting that hair alteration "has taken on such radicalized significance that participation in the practice can be a way of expressing Black pride rather than a way of precluding it." This may suggest a shared neoliberal position, which signifies an empowerment that is reinforced and celebrated through the adoption and collective acceptance of this aesthetic as seen in the images below.



Figure 8.9: Both women using the same hand gesture, sporting similar weaves



Figure 8.10: All of the women have long weaves

However, weaves are classified as inauthentic and "this situates them as fundamentally opposed to expressive black subjectivity" (Konneh, 2013: 26), which essentially proposes that these women are evolving into a model that disregards and modifies the original black image, but which at the same time situates them in a slightly favorable position. Participant F explains, "As a black woman I just can't wear my own hair. It won't get me anywhere!" However, even as they are presented with the decision of whether to wear their natural hair or to conform to the dominant image of having long straight hair, as Arthurs and Gill (2007) suggest, they are still exercising their choice, and using their agency.

Hair, Consumer Culture & The Benefits

The decision to spend money on one's image emerged as a central component of success, which Participant G explains, "It is important. It really does play a role. As much as we sugar-coat it, and say it's not about presentation, when it's really about

did you beautify yourself? Did you put yourself out there? Did you make a conscious effort?" Women believe they are exercising their choices by constantly spending money on doing their hair and working on their image. This relates to the chapter on 'Consumption', which considers a woman's access to the world of consumer culture by rendering them 'consumer citizens' due to the fact that they are able to use their own money as neoliberal women to fund their shopping (Gill, 2007; 2008; Jackson & Tinkler, 2007). This comes with certain benefits, as Gilchrist and Thompson (2011: 4) state, "hair is an identity marker and a symbol of status that can connote beauty, acceptance, and power." This is because hair becomes a political statement for black women, as it holds social relevance, because it is both expensive to purchase and maintain these fancy hair alterations (Patton, 2006).

The choice women make to purchase these weaves, no matter how much they may cost is noteworthy, because hair within the black community has always indicated a person's socioeconomic status to some extent (Byrd & Tharps, 2001). The practice of 'getting one's hair done' is significant in black communities (Chapman, 2007). According to research conducted in 2012, the African weave hair industry had cumulative revenue of $1.85bn (IBIS World Report, 2012). The value assigned to weaves can be seen on social media. A common observation is the hashtag jargon utilised on Instagram relating to a specific weave or hairdo present in that image. These hashtags may be applied as a way of indicating the value of the weave, which the audience already has an understanding of. These include the hashtags: #weave; #peruvian; #lacewig; #laceclosure; #hairgone; #virgin; #brazilian; #20". Figure 8.11 below is a typical example of the way in which hashtags are adopted to indicate the value of the weave that is worn. These hashtags could be seen as a way for the participants to frame themselves in a specific light, and to shape other's views of them, as possessing the best or most desired hair, which is very expensive. The status of these different hair types and hashtags signifies a structural hierarchy that is created based on the hair a woman wears, and what one consumes in general, and it works to put people in corresponding brackets making them of more or less value in society.

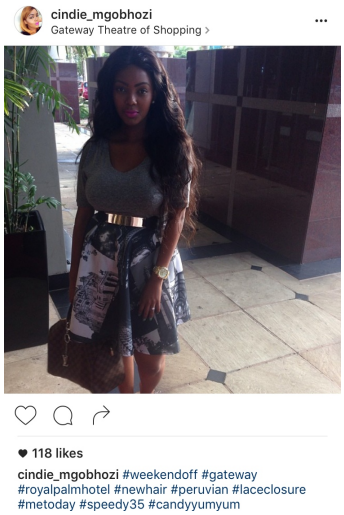

Figure 8.11: Hashtag use relating to weaves

This is a more obvious act of brand-building, as the participant is displaying how good she looks #metoday, but what is actually going on is a type of synergy between the personal and promotional, between the participant and 'things'. The 'building of the brand' is something that goes beyond Instagram and encompasses an entire lifestyle choice, and a collective fantasy that all of the women are involved in. It is a clear example of the way Instagram is used structurally. Through the use of hashtags, which develop into trends, people are able to research their interests in this area, which shows how simple it is to convey a message or promote a product on Instagram. Additionally, it shows how simple it is to read Instagram but also how Instagram-literate the audience is to understand the use of, and meaning behind these hashtags.

Additionally, this also speaks to authenticity, as the participant in Figure 5.11 is not just showing that she is a typical girl that has a #weekendoff and spends it at the shopping mall, but she is also showing herself as something desirable. According to post-feminist discourse, shopping is considered to be a necessary feature in the construction of ideal femininity as previously discussed. In a way, she is showing that she is a 'regular girl', while at the same time promoting these consumer objects (#laceclosure; #royalpalmhotel) as desirable objects. What she is suggesting is that she may be privileged to have access to these things, but also that she is just like every other woman, which again reinforces her neoliberal position. This may suggest what she imagines her personal brand to be, which is not just about authenticity but

also about accessibility, and a sense that everyone is the same and has the same opportunities. However, this overlooks the fact that in reality not everyone has the same access to the things she does. This reveals a tension between the verbal and visual discourse, where the participants are always making themselves look as 'perfect' as possible in the images, but they then use their captions as a way to 'humanize' and 'normalize' that display. This is because authenticity and accessibility are things that are demanded from inspiring women at the present time.

The participants also use the words "neat" and "tidy" when speaking about how their hair should be and what they need do to it. Although 'neat' is not explicitly categorized as being Eurocentric, it is created through that particular portrayal of beauty, which is repressive of black people (Johnson & Bankhead, 2014). Participant D says, "My hair must be neatly done." Participant F adds to this, "My hair needs to be neat and not scruffy. It depends on the hair really. I'm a fan of weaves, so if it's a curly weave, it must be neat and in proportion, and if it's straight, it must be brushed." Society still holds to older regulations when it comes to how hair must be fashioned, which could serve to explain why these women place so much emphasis on their hair being neat, and neat to them exists when they are wearing weaves, as weaves are more closely related to the ideal hair, which acts as the exemplary model of what the prototypical hair should resemble. This demonstrates how racist narratives travel and replicate themselves. Discursively, the fact that 'euro' hair is spoken of as being 'neat and tidy', suggests that natural hair or afro hair is the opposite of that, so is therefore 'unruly and untidy' (Chapman, 2007). This raises another old association between blackness and negative connotations of dirt, disorder or a lack of civilisation (Ferber, 1998). This shows a dichotomy that exists between 'neat' and 'clean', and 'messy' and 'dirty'. The first account is often associated with whiteness, or the position held by whiteness, whereas the second account is related to racist colonial understandings of blackness (Ferber, 1998). Thus, the desire to be 'neat' and to have 'neat' hair has significant connotations.

As young emerging working individuals, the participants' performance may suggest that they identify the adoption of weaves as a means of recognising who they want to become, by beginning to live out that aspiration now, which post-feminism identifies as "female achievement exists within traditional ideological rubrics" (McRobbie,

2009: 7). This could be explained by making the point that natural African hairstyles such as the Afro or dreadlocks are considered unruly, and untidy, and are consequently prohibited in the workplace, as it is not deemed to be within the 'code' of acceptable presentation, and it symbolises acting in opposition to white control (Brewington, 2013). This implicit job description could indicate that those norms still have an effect on today's women, as these young, ambitious women are studying and educating themselves to one day enter the working and corporate world. What they are showing is that they have already adopted this behavior, by self-regulating and self-policing their image through the adoption weaves and making themselves 'beautiful, and therefore 'acceptable'. Kaba (2001: 103) suggests that black women are willing to go through the physical pain and financial cost of doing their hair in order "to achieve access to economic and social resources." Participant I says, "For a working woman it's just better in every way, because people give you a chance, and personally, I just prefer it." This suggests that the participant acknowledges that 'natural' hair leads to specific prejudices, and therefore wearing weaves avails opportunity and is a way to relieve prejudices, or a way to avoid being viewed in a negative light.

Although the argument can be made that natural "black hair no longer carries the same sociocultural significance it did in decades and centuries past, the "natural" remains an unwanted politically-charged marker in the workplace" (Thompson, 2009: 836). This is because black people are encouraged to do their hair in order to immerse themselves fully in the corporate culture, and integrate themselves into the white-dominant workplace by assimilating themselves with that ideal (Robinson, 2006). Hence, their "choices also reflect the search for a survival mechanism" (Caldwell, 1991: 383). Participant H asserts, "People don't take you seriously without a weave", which implies that spending money on a weave could give them an equal opportunity in society. This coincides with Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity, which in this case frames hair as being performative, and necessary in establishing a sense of equality.

Furthermore, when it comes to the female body, aesthetic appeal, beauty and attractiveness still play a large part in one's selection. Aesthetic appeal is suggested to afford the participants opportunities. Participant F articulates this point, "The prettier

you are, the easier it makes everything. If you invest in having good looks, you have a bigger following, and greater opportunity." Participant G expands on this:

> "As much as we try to look over it, if two people had to go for an interview, if the one is more put together than the next, the person who will probably get first consideration would be the one that is more presentable. So how you present yourself, in essence for a woman, is how beautiful you make yourself out to look."

This account suggests that 'beautiful' is equated with being 'presentable', which relates to the neoliberal argument, which implies that in order to be acceptable as a woman, you have to be beautiful. Participant G reinforces this, "In an interview, you could have the same marks as someone else, but because you're extra beautiful and you have taken extra pride in yourself, they're going to take the better-looking person." This suggests that a woman's beauty is seen as a promotional tool, which is reinforced by Rooks (1996: 27), "attractiveness will contribute much to your success—both socially and economically." The participants are fully aware of the role that beauty plays in society and consequently, they believe that fitting the normative ideal is beautiful. Participant D explains, "When you see your hair is a little off, you better change that. You better change that because it doesn't look good, you don't look good, you need to get nice hair." Participant E reinforces this, "So what I do to be pretty is my hair of course." What this suggests is that to the participants' hair is the prelude to the quintessence of beauty or attractiveness. Women therefore also exercise their agency by representing themselves as desirable, marketable subjects through their beautifying practices (Gill, 2007).

In the image below (Figure 8.12), the participant is advertising hair 'installations' and making herself look really beautiful, but discursively she is also doing a particular form of very individualistic, post-feminist, neoliberal performance, in which she is saying that a woman must be beautiful and empowering, while also giving credit to the person that did her hair.

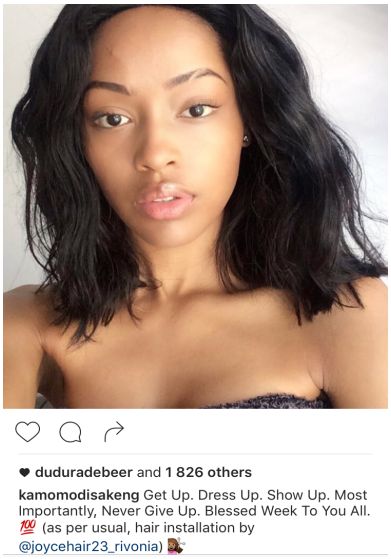

Figure 8.12: 'Individualistic' and 'empowered' display

This is another example of the intersection between empowerment and self-commodification, using hair as the primary factor. This alludes to a false notion of empowerment that is conditional, which suggests that a woman needs to use her 'choices' to make herself 'beautiful' and 'marketable', by first making 'appropriate' purchases to beautify herself (according to society's standard of beauty), and only then is she 'empowered'.

Another point that was repeated over again was that these women really enjoy wearing weaves as they deem it to be more convenient to maintain than other hairstyles. Participant D explains, "I'm a fan of weaves because they make hair easier to maintain. For me one of the main things is the maintenance part because my natural hair is a lot of work, so the look comes as a bonus." Participant A offers another perspective, "All in all it's convenient. You know it's so hard to treat our hair. Our hair is very weak, and you need to take extra care of it. It's just so much admin, so I'd rather have a weave." This shows her negative attitude towards black hair, and this idea of 'ease' in comparison to 'effort' suggests that the same connotations previously held about black people, are internalised and still held today. To explore this argument of maintenance more closely, Mercer (1987) offers a practical explanation of hairstyling, "Black hair-styling may thus be evaluated as a popular art form articulating a variety of aesthetic 'solutions' to a range of 'problems' created by

ideologies of race and racism." In application, this suggests that these women identify weaves as the better option for them, as it allows them the opportunity to surpass the negative perceptions held about their natural hair, and align themselves with what is 'beautiful'. What 'difficult' means in terms of racial ideologies is another way of implying that being black is associated to negative connotations that are undesirable.

What has also been identified is that many black women actually do not know how to care for their natural hair as they have never been given the opportunity to manage their own hair, and have instead been ushered into learning about and managing their 'altered' hair (Tate, 2007). In addition to 'becoming beautiful' by purchasing weaves, the participants also get the "fuss-free" (Participant G) experience of having the desired hair. This is also indicative of the wide hold of beauty stereotypes, which has conditioned black women to live more like the dominant ideal. Women may alter their hair by using weaves to reach an ideal standard of beauty, which suggests that the dominant ideal of hair has not changed over time and is still a fundamental component of beauty. Alongside this, black women are also seen embracing their natural attributes, such as the 'booty', which shows how certain beauty ideals are rigid and unchanging, while others are more fluid. This leads to the discussion of the 'booty'.

BOOTY

The female body shape is another site that is pertinent to this study. Black women and African beauty, body and hair, are all areas that have been racialized, with slim or dainty features as the standard of beauty (Ashe, 1995). This arose from transnational flows of culture that have brought these trends to many black communities (Gilroy, 2000). The posterior, which is commonly referred to as "the booty" in today's terms, has come to be a symbol of the authentic black female body, as demonstrated and expressed by the women participating in the Instagram community. As a feature that was formerly only associated with the "deviant" black female body, having a larger than usual (in relation to the stereotypically formulated white body), perky posterior has, in recent times (especially as displayed on Instagram), come to be accepted as a highly desirable bodily feature.

Within the South African framework, Sara Baartman is a black female figure that is central to this discussion of the female body, with specific emphasis placed on the approach to the buttocks (Gqola, 2010). As an enslaved woman, Baartman was taken to Europe, and her body was put on display to be observed by people. She became a spectacle that was treated as an unusual object burdened with negative adjectives. Specific focus was placed on her large bottom, and attention was also drawn to her un-straightened hair and big lips, which are some of the terms that were used to describe her appearance, which was evidently not Eurocentric or considered desirable. Therefore, this view ascribed connotations of inferiority to her image (Wicomb, 1998). According to Gordon-Chipembere (2011: 7) "Baartman's buttocks coupled with her perceived hyper-sexuality created a Western historical trajectory of socio cultural images/imaginings of Africa and the black female body as inherently inferior, and thus a site to be plundered."

However, it is clear that the attitude towards the once ostracized body is changing. This means that the culture around the hyper-sexualized stereotype about black women may have shifted and is now desirable rather than comical, although it is still hypersexual and it still works to place and display black women as a spectacle. Women that display their buttocks intentionally on Instagram as a strategic means of drawing attention to the shape and size of the black female body is worthy of mentioning. Participant A explains, "The pressure is really building up now. I'm seeing girl's doing squats now to get the black booty, and putting it all over Instagram, and that wasn't a thing before, and now it really is." Participant D builds on this argument, "now a certain form of woman is becoming a trend. And all women aspire to be that way. A certain form of woman is emerging, massive bum, small waist, big boobs, weaved up, with long eyelashes for days. That's the "It" girl." This observation implies that the buttocks associated with black women are treated as an exceptional feature. This also demonstrates that although features that are Western in nature continue to circulate in society, other features that were once excluded from those ideals are beginning to evolve into desirable aesthetic features.

This debate is entangled in a contradictory space, which claims that together with existing ideals, "today's aesthetic imperative represents not the return of a single standard of beauty, but the increased claims of pleasure and self-expression" (Postrel,

2000: 3). With more women embracing their bodies, even if it falls outside of the ideals, this could be approached as a form of self-expression that comes with a sense of pleasure in the way that women are able to express their individuality through their beauty choices. Participant J says, "If you've got the booty, girl, flaunt it." This suggests that for them as black women this is a pleasurable experience as it means they are 'embracing' what they have. Although this may be debated as not counting for much as the former strands of beauty still dominate the thought process of women, it is definitely present to some extent. Especially within the online social media realm where women are working on developing a certain female aesthetic that incorporates both hegemonic ideals, and new ideals as Participant D explained above.

This discussion around the emergence of "the booty" also relates to the previous chapter of Beyoncé, who as a celebrity has unashamedly promoted being "Bootylicious." Beyoncé, along with other celebrities such as Jennifer Lopez and Kim Kardashian who have naturally large bottoms, encourage pride in being curvaceous, and act in the promotion of positive body image among black women. This also encourages an attitude of embracing what they are naturally endowed with, and which women of other races are now striving towards having. This suggests a change, or a shift in beauty ideals and at the same time the flexibility of an area such as beauty, or instead the instability of such a category.

Women on Instagram are documented as 'working hard' by working out physically to achieve the 'booty'. They post pictures with accompanying hashtags, such as: #gainz; #bootyfordays; #bootyfull; #squatlife; #squatbooty, and which has now become a widespread phenomenon across the Instagram network. These women work hard through gym techniques to achieve what black women are classified as naturally possessing, which again reinforces Gill's (2007: 149) approach to the body as having to be manipulated to achieve acceptance. She states, "the body is presented simultaneously as women's source of power and as always unruly, requiring constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodeling (and consumer spending) in order to conform to ever-narrower judgments of female attractiveness." Because more white women, who are fitness-inclined have now adopted the '#gainz' or '#bigbooty' approach, it is now accepted and celebrated, and what was once labeled as being ugly and grotesque is now encouraged as being an ideal feature among other women.

Furthermore, by observing the participants' images below (Figure 8.13 and Figure 8.14), one can see the way in which the participants are posing, drawing direct attention to their hair and overall display, but more notably their body and the way in which they have intentionally positioned themselves to show off their naturally curvy bodies and 'bootys'.



Figure 8.13: Figure-hugging dress showing off her curves, and her long hair

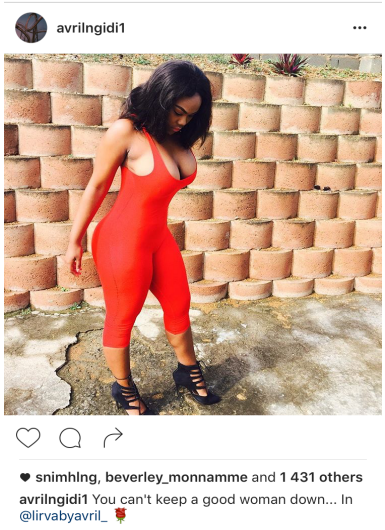

Figure 8.14: Posing in a way that shows the shape of her 'booty'

They are both self-objectifying, and also glamourizing this desirable feature. This also reinforces the freedom that women possess to exhibit their sexuality through hypersexual performances (Gill, 2007) as the pictures below reinforce.



Figure 8.15: Collage emphasize her 'booty' and her braided her



Figure 8.16: The rounded 'booty' as the focal point of this image

This aspect of their image that focuses on their rounded buttocks and curvaceous bodies, which they are prepared to put on display suggests that through the progressing constructions of beauty, black women are beginning to re-establish their pride in their image, because for once other women have a yearning for a natural feature of theirs. Participant A reinforces this, "As my eyes are opening I'm beginning to see beauty in a lot of African features. I'm loving how the media is also praising African women, and enhancing that kind of beauty, and making it apparent to people that it's not one type of beauty that exists." However, it is important to note that it required 'mainstreaming' of a normal physical feature for this racialized pride to emerge. Interestingly, when it comes to body image and the thin ideal, black women have shown a greater propensity to accepting and being satisfied with their own bodies than white women (Grabe & Hyde, 2006). It has also been found that they are less susceptible to eating disorders in comparison to their white counterparts (Molly & Herzberger, 1998).

This knowledge may lead to a greater understanding of the way in which the participants exhibit bodily confidence in their online images. According to post-feminist reasoning, what is necessary or what acts as preparation in the process of being successful is an "internal change that needs to take place as [they] can improve their self-esteem, confidence and help them to acquire cultural and social capital" (McRobbie, 2009: 30). This implies that 'success' involves effective 'self-policing' on all levels of a woman. This could also suggest that society is making provision for black women, although this would never be vocalized, or instead that black women are themselves using what they have to progress in life, even if it may be through the construction of beauty.

The changing notion of beauty still seems to hold paramount value in the lives of black women. With the expansion of social media, now, more than ever, more focus has been placed on women and their looks, and more pressure is exerted on women to make themselves look beautiful according to the set, online standard. As the participants revealed, hair is not just a marker of beauty for them, it also carries social weight as they construct their identity. With braids acting as an interim hairstyle and weaves emerging as the most commonly desired hair practice, they see this practice as their key to many opportunities, as well as the fact that it allows them the privilege of

knowing what it means to have hair that has accompanied the ‘face’ of beauty. What this also suggests is that some black women are prepared to pay any amount for hair if it means that they can have an experience that has in the past been exclusive to only the privileged white minority. Additionally, through the exploration of the booty, the current obsession with the female posterior as displayed on Instagram, may also reinforce that social media has been instrumental in assisting black women to take pride in their bodies which may be realised by them displaying a feature that is natural to them, which so many other women are now desiring of.

Chapter 9

Conclusion

My research question aimed to uncover the social, hegemonic and ideological underpinnings of the self-display of young black South African women on Instagram. In addition to that, I was interested in investigating how the performances and personas of these specific young women on social media relate to consumption and global celebrity culture; and how these ideologies are depicted through the aesthetics of the images that are posted. Through semi-structured interviews that were conducted, and through a visual analysis of the participants' Instagram profiles, I sought to answer these questions, exploring the findings using a thematic analysis, which explored discussions around, *authenticity; consumption; celebrity;* and *image*.

In Chapter 5 I discussed ideas around *authenticity*. I showed how the participants construct themselves in a way they consider to be authentic and real, which they illustrate by sharing aspects of their life, personal information, and images of an intimate or personal nature. Their idea of authenticity is very carefully planned around the fact that they continuously self-modify both their online and offline personas, and conduct themselves to fit certain expectations within the context of Instagram. The key finding within this chapter is that authenticity is a commodity that these young women use to enhance their standing among their community on Instagram. However, this authenticity is complicated, because most of the time it feels as though it is not genuinely real, but is actually a performance of authenticity. This reveals one of many contradictions that arose in the project. On the one hand, there is a need to be 'authentic' and to appear real by looking real, because that is what their followers want and expect of them. On the other hand, there is a less conscious awareness that only certain types of authenticity are admissible, and as such one is able to use their 'real life' as a commodity to perform their realness. This brings into question how empowering this kind of high-status, attractive Instagram life really is.

In Chapter 6 I discussed *consumption*, and what it means in the lives of the participants, and in the construction of their ideal identities. The images posted by the participants show high-status items, and the way that they speak about their

engagements, reveals their pursuit for status, by possessing these items. The following that they gain on Instagram reinforces that certain items hold social value. The act of buying, using and owning certain types of objects is framed as liberation and individuality. But, as the theory and some of the interviews show, it is often not empowering, and it often does not lead to individuality. Nonetheless, these women's experiences with consumption are so intimately intertwined with their sense of status, and their sense of their own position in the world and on Instagram, that they are tied to consumption in a way that they constantly redefine themselves by it. Displays of gender and displays of status are intimately related to certain modes of consumption, and it is through fashion and 'self-expression' that these women believe they are reflecting an ideal version of femininity, which ignores the influence of trends and societal expectation. This shows the inherent contradiction that scholarly writing on post-feminism is trying to prove that women are sold a version of freedom, and a version of liberation, that is framed as a 'pleasurable' experience of choice, but this 'freedom' is very much within strict constraints, and the notion of 'choice' is actually prescribed by societies expectations.

In Chapter 7 I discussed *celebrity*, and the important role celebrity figures fulfil in the lives of the participants. I showed how the participants use black female celebrities such as Beyonce and Rihanna as inspirational figures in their lives who are involved in their understanding of empowerment, freedom and individuality, and the construction of their ideal identities. This shows a widely-accepted idea of a certain definition of success, and a notion of female empowerment that is attached to attaining a following, an accumulation of a certain level of financial wealth, and fulfilling multiple feminine roles. These ideas were formulated around neoliberal thought, by highlighting that these women believe the particular level of success that celebrities have attained can be achieved through hard work. It emphasizes that although all women are suggested to have the same opportunities to achieve equal levels of success, this form of 'liberation' and 'success' is available and accessible to those people who are able to 'successfully' mimic and emulate the celebrity. Although this performance, and the status attached to it can be attractive, there are restrictions and regulations involved in attaining star persona, as it develops within tight constraints that ignores gender and class inequalities that exist, limiting some women's access this version of success.

In Chapter 8 I discussed *image,* with regards to the way that the participants model themselves in their Instagram images, and how they speak about beauty and body image. I have shown that hair is a major component in the participants' overall image, and they choose to use weaves as a defining feature of their identity, and a fundamental component of beauty. While it may appear that the participants are internalising whiteness, the weaves that they use show them conforming to more of a dominant idea of beauty, which is still characterised by white features. This shows that beauty is still defined by previously held characteristics, and hair still holds an unchanging value in most women's identities. The notion of individuality and freedom is impeded by the necessity to modify their hair, and conform to global trends of accepted beauty. At the same time that certain beauty trends remain, other ideals such as the ideal body is changing. The discussion of the black booty reveals that dominant notions of female beauty are being replaced by current fascinations of white women with curvier, well-rounded features associated to the black woman. This links to a creation of black pride, in the way that the black female body, which was previously disregarded, has now become a highly desirable feature. This shows that the negotiations around changing beauty ideals are an on-going global experience among all women. However, in as much as the process around beautifying oneself can be a liberating experience where one has a chance to create the ideal image, this is structured within a dominant idea of beauty that informs behaviour.

The Importance of the Research

The research that I have conducted around the self-display of young black women on Instagram has never really been explored within the context of South Africa. There has only been a Western exploration of this topic, which has not investigated the experiences of young black women in an advancing modern context. Therefore, my research is adding to understandings of how global, neoliberal, post-feminism, celebrity culture manifests itself in the global South.

Avenues for Future Research

People who are interested in exploring this material on self-display on Instagram could consider taking this research further, by doing an ethnographic, sociological study of the followers on Instagram. More specifically, this research could investigate the 'normal' women who follow other women such as the participants, but are themselves not celebrities or 'Insta-celebs'. The aim of this research could be to investigate what exactly this act of 'following' means to them, or what their motive is, or the purpose they hope to achieve by 'following'.

This study has shown that young black South African women construct their identities and their ideal selves within a complex space of contradictions. Their spectacular self-displays on Instagram suggest freedom, individuality and a sense of empowerment, but what is not considered is that they are, to a large extent constrained and still controlled by societal norms and expectations. It is these dominant forces that drive their online displays, and it is their unconscious conforming to these structures that serves to uphold and facilitate their success on social media.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Department of Media Studies

School of Literature, Language & Media University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa

1 Jan Smuts Avenue; Braamfontein; 2000
Johannesburg,
South Africa
Tel: +27 (0)11 717 1000

Information Sheet

Purpose of the Study:
As a Media Masters student at WITS, I have to carry out a research project as it is a Masters by Dissertation Degree. The study is concerned with exploring the social media site Instagram. But more specifically the way in which women depict and display themselves on Instagram, in terms of the display and definition of femininity and how this facilitates the rise and formation of a strong, influential online personality.

What will the study involve?
The study will involve a visual analysis of photos posted on Instagram that depict various elements of femininity and elements of a popular culture lifestyle. In conjunction with this, interviews approximately one hour in length will be conducted with 10 females to gain an in-depth understanding of the reasoning and motivation behind the multiple practices which constitute the online activity of women, and which are ultimately then displayed on Instagram.

Why have you been asked to take part?
You have been asked because you have an active Instagram account and you have been observed frequently participating on this platform. Your pictures display specific, unique elements of femininity and beauty, as well as a very large following that will be useful in my study, and will be worthwhile to study.

Do you have to take part?
You are not bound to participate. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the research at any point that you feel necessary. You also have the option of withdrawing before the study commences, even if you have agreed to participate, or discontinuing after the collection of data has started.

Once the data from the interview is collected, you have the option of withdrawing within two weeks of participation, and you may suggest that the data is destroyed. When you sign the consent form, you are consenting to the use of your name in the interview, as well as having the interview tape-recorded. You are also consenting to the fact that your identity will be kept anonymous in the write-up report, and the information that is elicited will be kept confidential. You will also be able to keep a copy of the information sheet and the consent form.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?
I will ensure that no clues to your identity appear in this research project. Any extracts from what you say that are quoted in the thesis will be entirely anonymous, through the use of pseudonyms. I will ensure that any images used will have no link to the content shared in the interviews.

What will happen to the information which you give? The data will be kept confidential for the duration of the study. On completion of the research project, they will be retained for a further six months and then destroyed.

What will happen to the results?
The results will be presented in the Masters Dissertation. The results will be seen by my supervisor, a second marker and the external examiner.

What are the possible advantages or disadvantages of taking part?
There are no benefits or disadvantages involved with taking part in the study.

What if there is a problem?
At the end of the interview, I will discuss with you how you found the experience and how you are feeling.

Who has reviewed this study?
Approval must be given by the WITS Ethics Committee before studies of this nature can commence.

Any further queries?
If you need any further information, you can contact me:

Name: Callan Dunn
Contact Number: 0814787377
Email Address: callandunn@gmail.com

Alternatively, you can contact my supervisor:

Name: Nicky Falkof
Contact Number: 0117174165
Email Address: nicky.falkof@wits.ac.za

If you agree to take part in the study, please sign the consent form overleaf.

[Over…

Appendix B

Consent Form for The Use of Images

I …… agree to participate in Callan Dunn's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing. ☐

I am participating voluntarily. ☐

I give permission to Callan Dunn to access my Instagram profile and make use of my pictures. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted. ☐

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up of this report, and there will be no link between my identity and the interview material. ☐

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the long essay and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

☐ I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

☐ I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed…….. Date……..

Appendix C

Consent Form for the Recording of the Interview

I …… agree to participate in Callan Dunn's research study.

The purpose and nature of the study has been explained to me in writing. ☐

I am participating voluntarily. ☐

I give permission for my interview with Callan Dunn to be tape-recorded. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether before it starts or while I am participating. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use the data within two weeks of the interview, in which case the material will be deleted. ☐

I understand that anonymity will be ensured in the write-up of this report, and there will be no link between my identity and the interview material. ☐

I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted in the long essay and any subsequent publications if I give permission below:

(Please tick one box:)

☐ I agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

☐ I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview

Signed…….. Date……..