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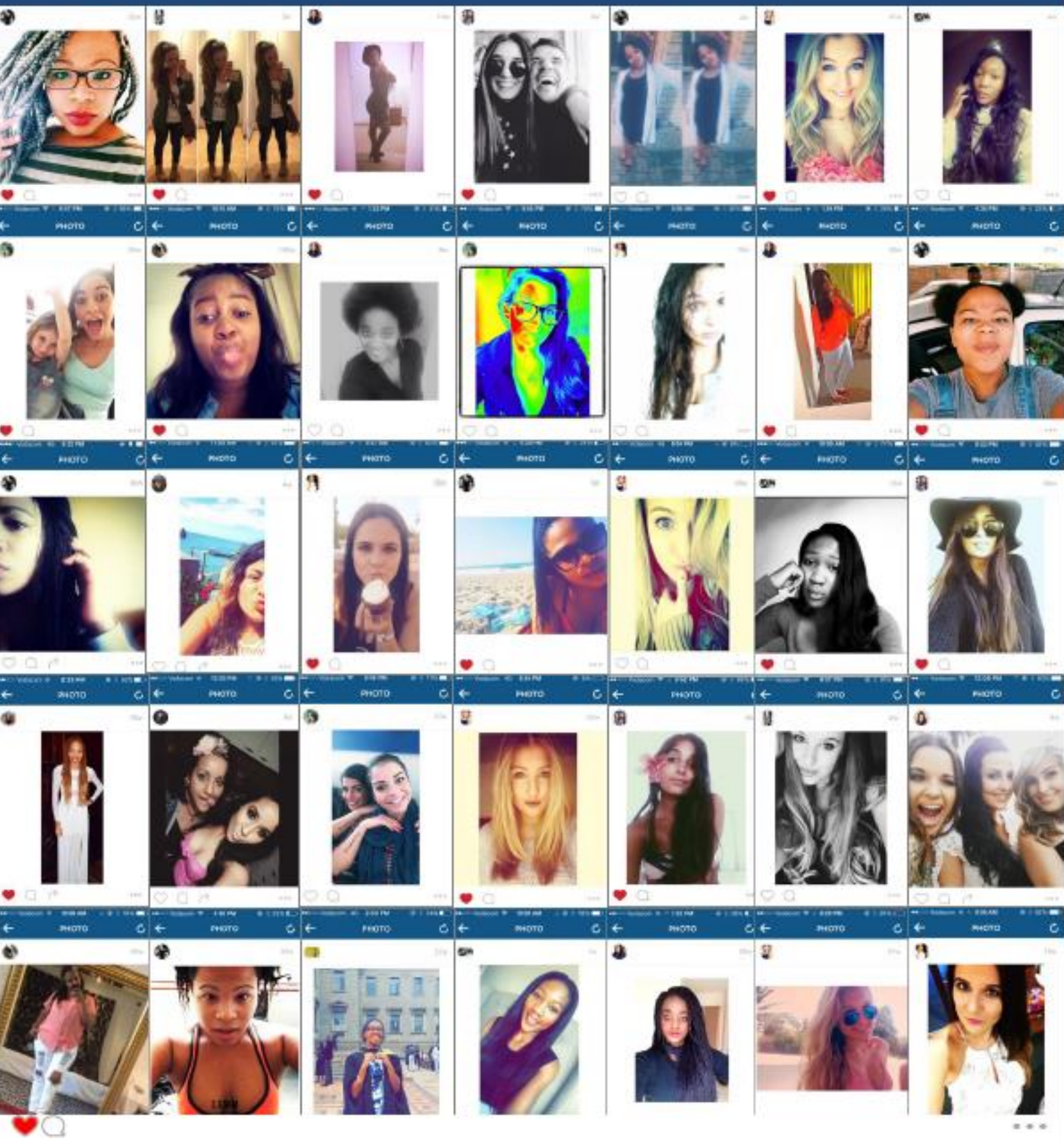



Believe in Yourself(ie): A study of young, ordinary, South African women who share selfies on Instagram

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A dissertation in fulfilment for Master of Arts in Media Studies

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2016

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Abstract:

This research study essentially sets out to explore the practices of young, ordinary, South African women who take and post selfies on social media platforms, like Instagram. The general commentary surrounding selfies is typically negative, and tends to frame the selfie-taker as a narcissistic, self-absorbed individual. Therefore, this study is interested in understanding what this very particular smartphone-enabled photographic technique means to this group of women, and in doing so, aims to determine whether or not there are underlying significances to such practices. This research study adopts a vast framework of literature in order to conceptualise and contextualise selfies in contemporary culture, by drawing on the rich history of self-portraiture and snapshots as well as concepts of mediation and the representation of the self online, in addition to describing the role that mobile technologies and social media platforms have played in contributing to cementing selfies as a cultural hallmark in today's society. This study is additionally grounded upon three dominant theoretical themes, namely narcissism, self-exploration, and self-regulation; and Christopher Lasch, Michel Foucault, Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill's theoretical contributions are predominantly referred to in an attempt to explain such principles adequately. Through the responses that were yielded by interviewing 14 young, ordinary, South African women, this research study essentially established that the practices of selfie-taking do in fact play a significant role in the lives of these young women, from empowering them and teaching them to learn to love and accept themselves again, to inspiring personal growth, capturing special moments and memories, and allowing them to feel accepted and as though they belong and have a fixed placed in society. Therefore, this study argues that selfies are not necessarily only about narcissism and self-obsession, but rather more about the notion of self-love and acceptance (for this group of participants at least.)

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1. Introduction

We are living an age of self-portraiture that is progressively being identified as the "Age of the Selfie" (Saltz, 2014). Selfies are suddenly ubiquitous and over the past few years the selfie has pushed its way into our collective consciousness. In 2013, 'selfie' was even declared *Oxford Dictionary's* neologism of the year and was accordingly defined as: "A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website" (Oxford Dictionary, 2013). One of the key reasons why selfies have become so prominent is because, as Iqani and Schroeder (2015: 3) note: selfies are not just reserved for the elite, but rather anyone equipped with a smartphone comprising a camera and Internet access. In addition, when we consider the vast amount of social networking sites that exist for users to engage with online as well as the countless innovative visual editing tools that are increasingly being made available on smartphones, it comes with no surprise that selfies have become a frequent feature in the ordinary, everyday, virtual lives of most digitally connected individuals (Iqani & Schroeder, 2015: 1).

However, selfies are not simply limited to the online identities of social network users – they are also renowned for making news headlines (Iqani & Schroeder, 2015). In 2013, U.S. President Barack Obama caused a media frenzy when he was caught taking a selfie with the U.K. and Danish prime ministers during Nelson Mandela's memorial service. Following that, comedian and talk-show host, Ellen DeGeneres, made news headlines in 2014 with her famous group Oscar selfie, which she captured with some of Hollywood's hottest and most celebrated celebrities. And finally, Pope Francis established his image as the people's pope when he allowed a group of young Catholic believers to take a selfie with him.

More recently, the latest and most innovative version of iPhone software – assumedly equipped with state-of-the-art face-recognition technology – has now introduced a permanent 'Selfies' album in the Photos application. This means that any selfies taken by respective iPhone users are now automatically allocated and safely stored in there once they have been taken – conceivably for the users' convenience. This suggests the fact that

selfies are not merely a fleeting fad, but rather a growing phenomenon that compels further exploration. As a result, this research sets out to investigate the practices involved in taking selfies and publicly sharing them on social networking sites like Instagram.

Trend forecasting and analysis firm, WGSN, interestingly notes that more than a million selfies are estimated to be taken worldwide every day. WGSN (as cited in Rubin, 2014) additionally predicts that selfies now account for almost a third of all photographs that are taken by consumers between the ages of 18 and 24. *Selfiecity* (2014) – a global researching project that investigated selfies using a combination of theoretic, artistic and quantitative methods – moreover established that regardless of which city they analyzed around the world, women took significantly more selfies than men. This ranged from a mere 1.3 times more selfies than men to as many as 4.6 times more (Selfiecity, 2014). I consequently argue that selfies have clearly cemented their place as a hallmark of contemporary culture – especially for young women. It is however equally important to acknowledge the role that technology, and smartphones in particular, have played in the rise of the selfie phenomenon.

As digital technology has become increasingly more powerful and portable, means of self-expression have fundamentally changed (Hess, 2015: 1629). Aaron Hess (2015: 1629) claims that to speak in this media milieu is to tweet, update a status, or post photographs to social networking sites. These forms of self-expression provide new means of communicating the self as well as articulating a sense of connection to others (Hess, 2015: 1629). Yet despite selfies' recent proliferation in contemporary society, the term – and more so the actual practices of selfie-taking – remains profoundly ambiguous and contested. There has been a tendency to categorize selfies into a common visual vernacular that seems to suggest a culture obsessed with itself, and when it comes to selfies and girls, much of the conversation has been negative. Selfies are predominantly viewed and spoken about as being narcissistic, erotic and suggestive, or yet another way for girls to judge each other on the basis of looks, and to seek validation for their own appearance (Hess, 2015; Fox & Rooney, 2015; Wickel, 2015; Sorokowski, Sorokowska, Oleszkiewicz, Frackowiak, Huk & Pisanski, 2015).

Anne Burns (2015: 1716) accordingly argues that the online commentary about the use and nature of selfies has a regulatory social function in that there is a connection between the discursive construction of selfie practices and the negative perception of selfie-takers. However, beyond a critique of the photographic form and content, Burns (2015: 1716) notes how the online discussion of selfies reflects contemporary social norms and anxieties, particularly relating to the behaviour of young women. In other words, the knowledge discursively produced on the subject of selfie-taking ultimately supports and reinforces patriarchal authority as well as maintains gendered power-relations by perpetuating negative feminine stereotypes that legitimize the condemnation of women's behaviours and identities (Burns, 2015: 1716).

Burns' ideas are especially relevant in an environment like South Africa, where the media climate is largely sexist and misogynistic. The media is an institution that is undoubtedly inseparable from the rest of society, and it plays a crucial role in how knowledge is produced and exists; since they constitute the collective locus where prevailing discourses are created, inscribed, repeated and normalised (Prinsloo, 2003). It is therefore apparent that gender identities are informed by specific social representations in the media (Morrell, 2001), and academics often claim that the media in South Africa (as well as abroad) tend to represent both males and females within conventional, stereotypical gender roles (Fourie, 2008: 317). More specifically speaking, the 'ideal' woman is typically depicted as a dependant homemaker or decorative sex object (Holtzhausen, Jordaan & North, 2011: 167). So, it consequently follows that if women are assigned problematic roles such as sex objects and dependants, room is actively created for a variety of negative perceptions to flourish (Mwilu, 2010).

On the other hand, Professor Peggy Phelan (as cited in Farmer, 2014) argues that photography, and self-portraits in particular, can shed light on how we interpret such gendered images. Images like the selfie can therefore actively challenge and contest the conventional images that are perpetuated by the media. Professor Phelan maintains that the selfie creates new angles of perspective and gaze, and more importantly, promotes the idea that representation is open for the insertion of the self (Farmer, 2014). Selfies consequently allow for the inclusion of the female figure by the woman herself as well as

the resulting displacement of the male gaze. It can accordingly be argued that the selfie is displacing the traditional notions of the female figure, whilst additionally allowing contemporary women to 'seize the gaze' that is typically bestowed upon them. This has important implications for improved equality surrounding representations of gender in misogynistic societies like South Africa.

Therefore, from a feminist perspective, I chose to research why young, ordinary, South African women take selfies, because as previously noted, South African media tends to depict women unfavourably (Gallagher, 2001; Buiten & Salo, 2007; Buiten, 2010); making them a group that is traditionally gazed upon and objectified. I subsequently aim to determine whether or not the act of selfie-taking allows for the appropriation and re-positioning of the male gaze; affording that same disadvantaged group of women opportunities for representing themselves in empowering and more favourable ways. Put differently, this study basically aims to discover the extent to which the act of selfie-taking actually contributes to or results in a liberating performance of gender and sexuality against a victimhood of female objectification. Thus, I am interested in selfies as a cultural artefact and social practice, rather than just the mere aesthetics of it.

It is important to note that this study is not trying to pathologize selfies by any means. It is more concerned with selfies as a practice that ordinary people do every day in their online lives. In other words, this study is interested in the ordinariness of selfie-taking in young women's lives – those who are not already celebrities and who are not pursuing careers in entertainment industries. These are simply ordinary girls doing ordinary things. They are studying, working and going about their lives, but they also take a lot of selfies. I am not merely observing young women who take selfies, but rather young, ordinary women who are not interested in fame or in becoming celebrities. Therefore, I am trying to understand what selfies mean from the situation of everyday life and ordinary culture – not something that is special, crazy, or weird.

As a result, the question that this research study fundamentally seeks to answer is how and why young, ordinary, South African women take selfies and post them online. What does this very specific practice of self-representation mean to young, ordinary, South

African women? And, why do they deem it necessary to share such intimate and private images on such vast public platforms? Is it simply a manifestation of narcissism, or are there actually underlying significances behind the practices of selfie-taking? This research study will ultimately allow me to uncover and make an argument about the significances of the practices of selfie-taking (should they exist), in relation to this very specific social group. Other researchers can then go on and explore this particular topic of interest with respect to other gender, racial and sexual identities.

Finally, it is worth noting that South Africa is a country of great extremes and wealth disparities, and this study is only looking at one very particular end of an extreme. The women involved in this study tend to view themselves as part of a global culture where they do not really identify with the local struggles and detriments that so many other South Africans are faced with on a daily basis. These women are ultimately part of a very privileged, social elite. Therefore, even though South Africa is not necessarily a Western country in its entirety, it can be said that more economically privileged individuals inhabiting the country – like the women involved in this research study – identify with Western, or more globalized norms and systems of thought, as opposed to the less-advantaged individuals whose lives are fraught with vicious cycles of poverty, disease and lack of opportunity, and who have less access to connect online and thus with others across the globe.

2. Defining, Debating and Theorizing Selfies: Overview of Literature

While there is an emerging body of literature on selfies, it is still a fairly new phenomenon, and thus another one of my main motivations for researching this particular topic of interest. However, there is a large body of existing literature and information that ties into the aesthetics of selfies, such as self-portraiture, digital photography and snapshots, and selfies can be described and explained accordingly. In addition, there is increasing literature on the processes of self-mediation as well as social networks and the various types of self-representations or identity work that takes place online. As a result, each of these concepts form the fundamental components upon which this research study is based, and they will therefore be elaborated on in greater detail below.

Discussing and Defining Selfies in Contemporary Culture

It is first and foremost important to outline what exactly the term 'selfie' signifies. According to Theresa Senft and Nancy Baym (2015: 1589):

> "A selfie is a photographic object that initiates the transmission of human feeling in the form of a relationship (between photographer and photographed, between image and filtering software, between viewer and viewed, between individuals circulating images, between users and social software architectures, etc.)"

Senft and Baym (2015: 1589) additionally describe a selfie as: "A practice or *gesture* that can send, and is often intended to send, different messages to different individuals, communities, and audiences." They maintain that this particular gesture may be dulled, intensified or modified by various elements, including: social media censorship, social condemnation, the misreading of a sender's original intent, or additionally by participating in the social exchanges that social media platforms, like Instagram, encourage, such as likes, comments or by 'remixing' the original version to that of their own (Senft & Baym, 2015: 1589).

On the other hand, although a selfie may signify a sense of human agency, in that it is a photograph that one knowingly takes of oneself and more so than not, shown to other individuals. Selfies are still created, exhibited, circulated, tracked and monetized through an 'assemblage' of nonhuman agents (Senft & Baym, 2015: 1589). Therefore, Senft and Baym (2015: 1589) argue that the politics of this assemblage renders the selfie – which is usually viewed as a daily gesture of propinquity and co-presence – into a constant reminder that once anything enters the digital, online domain, it immediately becomes part of the infrastructure of the 'digital superpublic,' transcending the time and place wherein it was original produced, seen or circulated. It is arguably for this reason that selfies function both as a practice of everyday life and as the object of politicizing discourses about how people ought to represent, document and share their behaviours (Senft & Baym, 2015: 1589).

Senft and Baym (2015: 1590) further highlight the issue of the society's monotonous and inaccurate conceptualization of selfies as only consisting of acts of vanity or narcissism, when the fact remains that selfies, as a genre, consist of far more than stereotypical young girls 'pouting' in their bathroom mirrors. As a result, Senft and Baym (2015: 1950) contend that when individuals pose for various different types of selfies, like political selfies, silly selfies, sports and fan related selfies, funeral selfies, selfies at places like galleries and museums, and so forth. A more precise language than that afforded by 19th century psychoanalysis is desperately needed to articulate what these people believe to be doing as well as the type of responses that they are hoping to elicit. Therefore, these are ultimately some of the key questions that this research study aims to contribute to in answering.

While the extensive proliferation of the selfie photographic technique is fairly recent, the selfie itself is far from being a strictly contemporary phenomenon. The photographic self-portrait is remarkably common in the earliest days of photography exploration and invention, when it was often more convenient for the experimenting photographer to simultaneously act as the model (Johnson, 1999). Technically speaking, the first photographic portrait ever taken was a selfie by Robert Cornelius in 1839 *(see Appendix*

A)[1]. However, this early form of photography required a lengthy exposure time, ranging from three to fifteen minutes, making the process virtually impossible for practically and frequently capturing self-portraits (Johnson, 1999: 100).

The contemporary selfie is alternatively a much more fast-paced, smartphone-produced version of a self-portrait that is almost always immediately distributed and inscribed into a social network. Thus acting as a tool of instant visual communication of where we are, what we are doing, who we think is watching us, and so on (Saltz, 2014). This golden age of the selfie was arguably prompted by *Apple* after launching the iPhone 4 in 2010 – the first ever smartphone installed with a front-facing camera (Apple Press Info, 2010).

In keeping with American art critic, Jerry Saltz (2014), selfies are: "… Something like art. They have a certain intensity and they're starting to record that people are the photographers of contemporary life." Selfies have subsequently moulded an innovative visual genre; a type of self-portraiture firmly distinct from all others throughout history. However, one feature of self-portraiture remains unchanged: the selfie still invites the viewer to meet the gaze of its creator, making it one of the most compelling of all artistic genres (Hudson, 2014).

Mehita Iqani (2015: 209) elaborates on this topic by maintaining that more so than not in previous forms of self-portraiture: "… Selfies present a record of a moment of extreme self-involvement." Iqani (2015: 209) continues that the selfie-taker is typically the focal point of the camera's attention, whilst additionally possessing the power and control over the manner in which the image is ultimately captured and framed. Therefore, since an external photographer is no longer involved in the mediation process of the selfie, the selfie-taker is now both the 'image-object' and the 'active image-maker' (Iqani, 2015: 209). In addition, the acts of editing and disseminating selfies further reinforce the fact that the total visual communication process is primarily regulated by the selfie-taker, thus placing "… all the semiotic power in the hands of the individual photographing themselves" (Iqani, 2015: 209). So, in this regard, selfies can be seen as the latest development in the long and fascinating history of self-portraiture.

[1] I have included these images in the appendices purely for the reader's general information.

Contextualizing Self-Portraiture and the Significance it holds today

Art historian and critic, James Hall (2014), brilliantly maps the history of self-portraiture in his book, *The Self-Portrait: A Cultural History,* from the earliest myths of Narcissus and the Christian tradition of 'bearing witness,' to the prolific self-image-making of today's contemporary artists. Hall's (2014) vibrant historical account of self-portraiture demonstrates how artists' depictions of themselves have formed part of a continuing tradition that dates back centuries. While portraiture was originally pioneered by the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, he reveals that it was only in the Middle Ages that artists began making identifiably individual self-images, as it was an era largely concerned with personal salvation and self-scrutiny, and only in the Renaissance, with its 'mirror craze,' did painters actually begin viewing themselves as worthy subjects for their own art (Drown, 2014).

Hall (2004) additionally states that the notion of the artist constructing themselves as a character in their own work may seem like an arch postmodern conceit, but from as far back as the 15th century, artists were already manipulating their self-images. Artists would make themselves appear older or younger to suit their own particular purposes, and they would also take on fictional and biblical roles in an attempt to heighten personal profiles (Hudson, 2014).

It can thus be argued that selfie-takers are similarly manipulating their selfies so as to produce an image that falls in line with their preconceived perceptions of self. It is no secret that Photoshop and other photo-editing tools taken over our media culture, as it relentlessly shoves unrealistically ideal images of models and celebrities into the eyes of ordinary people (Falletta, 2013). However, the latest development is even more disturbing, as photo-editing applications are now being made available on a consumer level and are predominantly being used by young women who possess smartphones to edit their selfies, and other images, before posting them online (Falletta, 2013). Together with these applications, social networking sites, like Instagram, incorporate obligatory, quick-and-easy photo-editing methods as part of the image uploading procedure. This editing process is very closely aligned to a manipulation process through which various

‘filters’ are applied to photographs with the intention of enhancing the original image (Flores, Quilty, Donnis & Ulrich, 2013: 3).

Nonetheless, it is significant to note that the images Hall (2014) discusses in his book are practices of self-appraisal, not ‘self-celebrations’ (as is presumptuously ascribed to the banal selfies that usually appear on social networking sites). For instance, Hall (2014) records how Michelangelo actually flays himself in the painting of *The Last Judgement* in the Sistine Chapel, as St. Bartholomew appears to be holding the painter's empty skin which has been peeled off with the butcher's knife in his other hand *(see Appendix B)*. It is therefore apparent that these particular stark portrayals of self directly oppose vanity.

Furthermore, in the 20th century, the act of self-portraiture transformed from a practice of self-appraisal toward a form of self-abuse (Hall, 2014). For example, Frida Kahlo depicted herself with her chest sliced open to bare a bleeding heart *(see Appendix C)*. Hall (2014) explains that Kahlo’s self-portraits were drawn as a metaphor of her pain, following a brutal accident that left her bedridden, and that her art not only dealt with her physical and psychological suffering, but also narrated her turbulent relationship with Diego Rivera. As a result, Kahlo’s self-portraits are beheld as expressive depictions of both her isolated yet determined sense of self.

Therefore, it is evident that in preceding centuries, self-portraiture held a meaningful purpose that was deeply attached to the artist’s personal salvation, honour, pain or love (Conrad, 2014). However, Peter Conrad (2014) argues that this purpose has been replaced with a weakened sense of self-exposure and publicity amongst contemporary artists. Nevertheless, Hall (2014) opposes this view and maintains that contemporary artists’ work is valuable and essential because it explores and challenges rigid social labels and sexual stereotypes that still exist today.

Marsha Meskimmon’s (1996) book, *The Art of Reflection,* provides another important piece of literature on self-portraiture, and it is particularly significant for this study because its main objective is to illustrate the manner in which women went about portraying themselves in the 20th century. Meskimmon (1996) fundamentally argues that by recognizing their problematic role as objects in art historical discourse, 20th century

women intervened in self-portraiture so as to recast themselves as subjects. Therefore, women's deconstruction of self-portraiture is further significant to the struggle for women's liberation. They firmly redefined and re-contextualized an area wherein women were ordinarily marginalized, if not disregarded completely (Steimer, 1999). And so, by examining self-portraiture from a critical perspective, women have appropriated and thus proven that they are in fact worthy of self-representation, just like men.

As women and as artists, the subjects of Meskimmon's (1996) book have invented new modes of appearance and self-representation that depict them as active subjects as opposed to passive objects – but also as objects of their own representation. So, by claiming their own subjectivity as well as an awareness of their objectivity, these women have accordingly become independent regulators and determiners of their own identities (Steimer, 1999). It is for this reason that self-portraiture became the preferred means of self-expression for women in the 20th century, as it enabled the transition from their objectivity to their subjectivity (Meskimmon, 1996). Therefore, by intervening in a marginal genre, women artists considerably increased the liberating and empowering control that self-portraiture gives the female artist today (Steimer, 1999).

It can accordingly be argued that young women who are living in contemporary society today and who obsessively post selfies are potentially attempting to reconfigure the ways in which they are viewed, such like these 20th century women. Thus selfies are not merely meaningless, self-absorbed images but, as declared by Saltz (2014): "… have changed aspects of social interaction, body language, self-awareness, privacy, and humor, altering temporality, irony, and public behavior."

Selfies are naturally not exactly the same as the traditional artistic or photographic self-portraits, as Saltz (2014) explains that selfies are typically casual, improvised and fast, and their primary purpose is to be seen here-and-now by other people, who are typically mostly unknown, on various social networks. So, in keeping with Iqani (2015), Saltz (2014) maintains that selfies are never accidental:

> "… Whether carefully staged or completely casual, any selfie that you see had to be approved by the sender before being embedded into a network. This implies control as

> well as the presence of performing, self-criticality, and irony. The distributor of a selfie made it to be looked at by us, right now, and when we look at it, we know that."

Therefore, art critic and culture journalist, Alicia Eler (as cited in Saltz, 2014), further suggests that selfies allow us to: "… Become our own biggest fans and private paparazzi," and that selfies provide: "… Ways for celebrities to pretend they're just like regular people, making themselves their own controlled PR machines." And, fascinatingly enough, selfies were not created by artists, but rather by all of us; thus classifying selfies as a type of 'folk art' that is expanding the language and lexicon of photography (Saltz, 2014). So, it is apparent that a rich history of self-portraiture already exists and continues to expand with technological innovations, like the smartphone. Where once they were the province of the elite, either in status or skill, smartphones and social media sites, like Instagram, have democratized self-portraiture, making them less precious and much more entertaining – hence, selfies. Therefore, selfies have evolved into a form of photography of contemporary, everyday life.

Snapshots: A Closer Look at the Aesthetics of Unprofessional Photography

In addition to selfies being seen as a type of folk art, they can also be viewed as an extension of the 'snapshot', or instantaneous, amateur photographs. A great deal of scholarly work on snapshots has focussed on its history (Jacobs, 2004; Buse, 2010; Berger, 2011; Batchen, 2008), but what I would like to focus on here is the aesthetic and message of the snapshot.

Johnathon Schroeder (2008: 5) describes snapshots as very straightforward and generally "unposed" photographs of everyday life that are rapidly emerging as an important style of contemporary communication. He further adds that snapshots appear as far less formal than typical photographs and are instead much more "real" and "authentic" photographs that capture the ordinariness of the everyday (Schroeder, 2008: 5; Nickel, 1998). Snapshots also capture a very specific moment of time and are intended to provide evidence of a vanished past in the form of images, and they are accordingly regarded as: "A devilish device designed to capture life but unable to convey it" (de Duve, 1978: 113). It can therefore be argued that although selfies capture how individuals look and what

they may doing at any specific moment in time, they are not necessarily self-empowering; since their distribution amongst various social networks can make them appear hollow and decontextualized in an abyss of Internet anonymity (Rawlings, 2013).

As a result, the ubiquity of selfies has led some scholars to question whether or not the practices of self-taking are in fact a reflection or promotion of a growing culture of narcissism in contemporary society. But perhaps, as Jenna Wortham (2013) suggests, selfies signify a new way of not only of representing ourselves to others, but of communicating with one another through images:

> "Rather than dismissing the [selfie] trend as a side effect of digital culture or a sad form of exhibitionism, maybe we're better off seeing selfies for what they are at their best – a kind of visual diary, a way to mark our short existence and hold it up to others as proof that we were here."

Adapting the Mobile Phone: The Impact of Camera (Smart)Phones on Personalized Photographic Practices

It is also important to bear in mind that selfie-taking and other such practices that are extending and creating innovative ways of seeing and representing both ourselves and the world around us, have predominantly been enabled by the introduction of camera phones. According to Larissa Hjorth (2007: 227), camera phones have been heralded as providing everyday users with the opportunities for two-way communication and socialization as well as self-expression and voice in a previously para-social or one-sided model of mass media.

Building on discourses of similar photographic practices and a so-called 'democratizing' of photographic media, camera phones are affording users with the ability to document, re-present and perform the everyday (Hjorth, 2007: 227). Hjorth (2007: 227) makes particular reference to the 'exchange' and 'gift-giving economy' underpinning mobile phone practices, and this is further exemplified by the camera phone's function of 'sharing' moments between intimates and strangers through various contextual

frameworks and archives, including: MMS, blogs, social media sites and virtual communities as well as actual face-to-face digital storytelling.

Hjorth (2007: 228) moreover notes that with almost all mobile phones now coming out with cameras, many users – who are not necessarily interested in photography as such – are becoming devoted experts in the making, circulating and socializing of their own images. So, amongst the hype surrounding the 'prosumer' (a producer and consumer alike), and the democratic potential of mobile media, one wonders what the reality for users will be. More specifically, does the camera phone allow female users to subvert mass media's objectification of women, as Meskimmon (1996) claimed self-portraiture did for 20th century women? Or, do these women merely perpetuate the same images and stereotypes consistent with their own objectification? These are additional questions that this research study strives to account for.

Angela Aguayo and Stacy Calvert (2013: 181) further argue that over the past couple of years, ordinary images – or, as Catherine Zuromskis (2008: 125) describes: "… The ones [images] made or bought by everyday folk from 1839 until now" – have made a significant reappearance in the form of mobile photography. As a result of the developments in mobile phone technologies, photography enthusiasts have found an outlet in newly evolving mobile media. Therefore, Aguayo and Calvert (2013: 181) claim that beyond the pure abundance of ordinary images, the participatory media culture around mobile photography has gained substantial influence in our collective social practices.

In addition, social networking sites, like Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, typically encourage photo-sharing as one of the key components of its platforms, inspiring a powerful form of visual communication (Aguayo & Calvert, 2013: 181). They more specifically note that these images are actually beginning to bridge our connections with one another (Aguayo & Calvert, 2013: 181). For instance, within the first year of operation, between 2010 and 2011, Instagram gathered more than seven million users, and today Instagram boasts over 300 million active users from around the world monthly (Instagram, 2015). But, over and above the vast quantity of amateur photography that it

has produced, the small, compact and easy sharing capabilities of Instagram has bred new interesting forms of image production and overall general content (Aguayo & Calvert, 2013: 182). These engaged media cultures thus enable photography as an everyday practice and a way of life; as a culture focused on documenting important occasions such as celebrations, travel, rituals, and so forth.

However, Aguayo and Calvert (2013: 182) contrarily note that there is also an immense escalation of the mundane; the redundant images of the private sphere that are posted online, creating new categories of photography, such as the selfie and the photobomb (DenHoed, 2012; Slavin, 2013). But, in accordance with Meskimmon's (1996) work, Aguayo and Calvert (2013: 184) argue that these images are examples of an emerging culture of how women have appropriated the lens, documenting the spaces of their personal lives in whichever way they choose to do so. The authors also note that certain images like the selfie are taken from personal devices of women living out their private lives in public (Aguayo & Calvert, 2013: 184). This essentially means that images which were once considered private are now transformed in that they are revealing and connected to others on social media sites. Therefore, the essential argument that Aguayo and Calvert (2013) make is that due to the ease of mobile photography, women are now afforded opportunities to capture personal images from their own perspectives, within their broader environments.

Identity Work: The Construction and Representation of the Self Online

With this in mind, it is finally important to understand the various ways in which individuals represent themselves online. However, one first needs to understand what exactly constitutes social media, or social networking sites, (as the terms are used interchangeably in this research study).

Social media is an extremely broad term that cannot simply be reduced to one, fixed definition. However, Danah Boyd and Nicole Ellison (2007: 211) propose a useful way of defining it, as they suggest that social media platforms are:

> "Web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of users with whom they share a connection and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system."

Social media consequently signify the most recent online spaces in which individuals can represent themselves, alongside a lengthy history of interest in online identity.

In relation to the history of online identity, the idea that self-representation (or identity work) occurs in a social context, through the interactions of the self with others is not new (see for example, Cerulo, 1997; Valentine & Holloway, 2002). However, Kerry Mallan (2009: 52) claims that social networking sites are different in that they provide new platforms for virtual identities to be constructed, visually-presented and thus narrated. Danah Boyd (2007) additionally maintains that the act of generating and sustaining profiles on social networking sites serves as 'an initiation rite' into these spaces for young people, which forms an integral part of contemporary youth culture.

Anders Albrechtslund (2008) makes a similar point by suggesting that participating in social networking sites is about the act of sharing yourself – or rather your constructed identity – with others; and Sonia Livingstone (2009: 407) reinforces his claims by stating that: "Selves are constituted through interaction with others and…self-actualization increasingly includes a careful negotiation between the opportunities (for identity, intimacy, sociability) and risks (regarding privacy, misunderstanding, abuse) afforded by Internet-mediated communication."

Steward Russell (2013: 4) moreover suggests that the proliferation of social media technologies over the past decade has resulted in the emergence of new Internet-mediated, online landscapes through which people organize their lives, and Nancy Thumim (2009) accordingly argues that in order to for individuals to participate in such landscapes; they have no choice but to represent themselves. Therefore, this notion of online identity is undoubtedly one of the most integral elements of this particular research study, because social media is practically being made use of as a productive framework through which to explore young women's debates around their own specific identities and representations online. However, in order to better understand the processes involved

in self-representation online, Enli and Thumim (2012: 88) argue that one first needs to understand what exactly 'mediation' entails.

The concept of mediation foregrounds the processes by which meanings are produced. This in turns emphasizes the fact that meaning-making is negotiated, open-ended and ongoing, and that it involves institutions, technologies and people (see for example, Corner, 1994; Silverstone, 1999; Thompson, 1995). Thus, mediation is essentially based on the assumption that the production, circulation and reception of representations (or the actual 'practice' of media, as stated by Couldry, 2004) always take place in complex and specific contexts, and are processes where power is constantly exercised and negotiated (Enli & Thumim, 2012: 89). For that reason, mediation highlights the recognition of the ways in which social media has become embedded in everyday life. As a result, scholars have pointed out the problems in trying to maintain a clear distinction between the self online and the mediated self (see for example, Livingstone, 2009; Silverstone, 1999); since these boundaries are clearly porous (Enli & Thumim, 2012: 90).

Yvonne Jewkes and Kay Sharp (2003: 8) consequently state that: "Within postmodern analyses, identity is neither inherent nor fixed, but is rather an ephemeral, fluid entity which is open to constant negotiation, change and manipulation." Along these lines, identity is presented as 'multidimensional and amorphous' (Jewkes & Sharp, 2003: 2). However, it is important to bear in mind that such debates about identity were created long before the advent of digital networked media. Therefore, a useful starting point for examining the concept of identity is the work of Erving Goffman (1959), because his framework of 'self-staging' and 'image maintenance' articulates the fundamental debates around identity, which remain just as relevant and applicable within the age of new media.

Goffman's (1959) work on self-representation – which he describes as a ritual process of everyday social exchange – is considered seminal by many researchers in the field of identity management. Nancy Baym and Danah Boyd (2012: 323) maintain that Goffman: "…laid the groundwork for thinking about how even the most private of selves are formed in relation to diverse others, and how the challenges of differing audiences can

complicate self-presentation." Goffman further describes the process of identity performance, interpretation and adjustment as 'impression management' that formed part of a greater process whereby people seek to define a social situation through their behaviour (Boyd, 2007: 11-12).

Goffman's theory was obviously developed within the context of traditional, face-to-face situations, but Axel Schmidt (2011: 137) insists that his argument can be carried across to the current online environment and applied to spheres of mediated interpersonal communication, since:

> "The manner in which something is done and how the players go through the form of their interactions in relation to given situations, how people set the stage with reference to the anticipated structures of expectation, indicates how the players wants others to see them and the situation. With regards to the negotiation of self-image, it can thus be stated that it is not people and their physical manner of expression that are meeting, rather constructs in media that act as personal representatives. It is in this sense that we are talking about well-composed, deliberate and excessive expressions of self."

In keeping with Goffman's notion of performance, Schmidt (2011: 138) points to the power that these social forums possess, describing how they are: "… Inherently designed to construct gripping images, update stereotypes and hold them on centre stage." Alice Marwick and Danah Boyd (2010: 123) accordingly argue that social media platforms collapse diverse social contexts into one, making it difficult for individuals to manage their identities and/or impersonations.

Therefore, more than with any other medium, the traditional relationship between the physical context and the social situation is destabilized, as concepts of time and place are transcended. Social media additionally represents an ever-changing communication structure which offers platforms to present oneself in a stylised way; thus buttressing the idea that contemporary life exists within a world of spectacle, narcissism and performance (Jewkes & Sharp, 2003: 2).

Self-Promotion and the Rise of a Digital Reputation Economy

According to Russell (2013: 18), it is important to consider the growth of an online 'reputation economy' through which self-representation should be understood, along with the forces of capitalism which are guiding these practices of 'self-branding.' This denotes the commercialisation of social networking spaces.

One of the most prominent criticisms of online identity within the new media landscape links to tensions around commerce (Russell, 2013: 19). The commercialisation of the online culture has attracted widespread criticism from academic theorists, such as Cohen (2008: 18), who highlights the: "… extension of processes of commodification, capitalist social relations and market forces into multiple aspects of social life." So, as Internet access becomes considerably more necessary for participation in social life; corporations will continue to shape the online architecture in such a way as to suit their own narrow, commercial interests (Milberry & Anderson, 2009: 1). And, whilst accepting the revolutionary nature of new social media technologies, Kate Milberry and Steve Anderson (2009: 6) concurrently denounce how these technologies mark a new commercial invasion into social life.

In developing these debates around commercialisation, Russell (2013: 26) examines how capitalist structures interpellate people as brands. He maintains that it is imperative to evolve these debates by discussing how the conditions of social media platforms invite users to contribute to these processes through their own self-branding (Russell, 2013: 27). Alison Hearn (2008: 211) consistently argues that social networking sites: "… produce inventories of branded selves, [with their] logic encouraging users to see themselves as commodity-signs to be collected and consumed in the social marketplace."

Therefore, construction of online identity tied to capital has become a prominent feature of the social media landscape of today (Russell, 2013: 27). Hearn (2008: 201) stresses the fact that individual people, just like goods and corporations, are all implicated in a practice of 'promotionalism,' and accordingly attempt to generate their own 'rhetorically persuasive meanings.' Along these lines, she claims that the: "… Branded-self must be understood as a process of highly stylized self-construction directly tied to the

promotional mechanisms of a post-Fordist market" (Hearn, 2008: 201). Therefore, central to this notion of self-branding and identity management is the rise of a culture around digital reputation (Hearn, 2008: 201).

In keeping with Hearn, Jörgen Skågeby (2009: 62) consequently asserts that the often quantified display of numbers of friends, likes, views or comments that a person receives on a social media post is an instrumental aspect of such sites; and we are resultantly living in an "attention economy," where the scarce resource is not information, but rather attention.

Adam Arvidsson and Nicolai Peitersen (2009: 8, 9, 18) accordingly note how reputation is almost emerging as a new standard of value: What was once private information has become a public parameter that is predominantly deployed to determine an individual's overall social worth. This links to Hearn's (2011: 429) critique of how the public display and mediation of personal emotion is unequivocally connected to monetary value. Hearn (2011: 429) refers to the abundance of publicly rendered information about a person's affective bonds, giving: "… A sense of their total social impact, which can then be measured and represented as their digital reputation," and Tara Hunt (2009: 7) progresses her work by capturing the rising reputation economy with Cory Doctorow's (2003) concept of 'Whuffie'.

In other words, while Hearn (2011:430) states that the social capital which we invest in and exchange within online communities is displacing money and emerging as an indispensable form of online currency; Hunt (2009: 7) goes as far as to suggest that there may come a day where "…social capital is seen as a viable currency in the market economy." Despite the fact that this may seem exaggerated, Hunt's (2009) work fundamentally highlights the broader issue of how self-image and identity have become inseparably bound to capital within a reputational economy.

In closing, Hearn (2008: 213) significantly states that even if users are not self-consciously branding themselves on social networking sites, they still: "… Remain captive to and conditioned by the controlling interests of global flexible capital." This consequently ties back into the former argument surrounding commercialization and how

we are increasingly seeing the infringement of profit or status driven techniques in social networking; since capitalist structures of such platforms invite users to create their online social selves in ways that are progressively linked to social capital (Russell, 2013: 30).

Therefore, this body of literature has fundamentally established that although selfies are not a new phenomenon, there is much more to selfies than meets the eye; especially when selfies are viewed as an extension of self-portraiture. The broad history of self-portraiture illustrates how women intervened in this particular genre so as to recast themselves as active subjects in direct contestation to their former objectivity and lack of representation. This literature also highlights how the democratizing potential of camera phones, together with the contemporary advancement of social media, presents another way through which young women could be trying to appropriate the lens, and thus the gaze that is traditionally bestowed upon them. On the other hand, selfies could also be seen as a narcissistic manifestation of self-branding in today's attention-driven economy, where individuals' online identities and subsequent digital reputations are directly linked to their social worth and value. As a result, the complex and contradictory nature of these opposing views place a strong emphasis on the necessity to conduct additional research on this particular topic of interest – and more specifically, on the practices of selfie-taking. In other words, how and why do young women take selfies? What do these young women believe their selfies are saying? What responses are they hoping to elicit from their selfies?

3. Narcissism, Self-Exploration and Self-Regulation: A Theoretical Gestalt

This research study encompasses three dominant theoretical themes, which include: narcissism, self-care and self-regulation. Most of the popular commentaries surrounding young women's selfie-taking practices involve notions of narcissism and a heightened sense of self-importance, and it is therefore important to gain a better understanding about what categorizes narcissism in contemporary culture by referring to Christopher Lasch's (1979) work on the *Culture of Narcissism.* In addition, because this research aims to uncover the hidden significances of young women's selfie-taking practices, Michel Foucault's (2000) work on the *Care of the Self* will be explored so as to better understand self-exploration and subsequent identity formation more effectively. And finally, because this research study adopts a strong feminist angle, it is imperative to establish what exactly feminism means today in accordance with Angela McRobbie (2004) and Rosalind Gill's (2007) work as well as that of other influential feminist scholars. Since it is apparent that the postfeminist debates in this research predominantly rely on white, Western, female thinkers, it is worth noting that this owes to the fact that their respective work provides an appropriate theoretical framework for this specific study because of the fact that the research object is a specific type of globalized feminine practice. However, even though this research study largely draws from this particular sub-genre of feminist thought, this study by no means presents it as being universal, just as appropriate for the purposes of this research study.

Selfies as a Further Illustration of Society's Ever Narcissistic Embrace

In the *Culture of Narcissism,* Christopher Lasch was essentially concerned with how the radical economic and social changes in America, since the 19th century, affected society. In view of these changes, Lasch (1979: xv) describes a way of life that is dying:

> "The culture of competitive individualism, which in its decadence has carried the logic of individualism to the extreme of a war of all against all, the pursuit of happiness to the dead end of a narcissistic preoccupation with the self."

Therefore, Lasch took what was still barely a clinical term back then and used it to diagnose a pathology that seemed to have spread across all areas of American life (Siegel, 2010: 27). In his definition of narcissism, which was largely drawn from Sigmund Freud, the narcissist is driven by suppressed anger and self-hatred and escapes into a grandiose self-conception; using other people as tools of gratification and satisfaction whilst simultaneously craving their love and approval (Siegel, 2010: 27).

For that reason, Lasch (1979: 10) suggests that narcissists heavily depend on other individuals to validate their self-esteem and self-worth and consequently cannot live without an "admiring audience." In addition, despite contemporary American society having enormous freedom from family ties and institutional constraints, Lasch (1979: 10) maintains that this does not simply free individuals to stand alone or to wonder at their own individuality. Instead, it contributes to their insecurity which is only overcome by seeing their 'grandiose self' reflected in the attentions of others, or by attaching themselves to those who radiate celebrity, power and charisma. Therefore, Lasch (Lasch, 1979: 10) argues that: "… For the narcissist, the world is a mirror."

Lasch was not the first to note society's rising self-absorption. A few years earlier, Tom Wolfe (1976) wrote a cover story in the *New York* magazine, titled: *The 'Me' Decade and the Third Great Awakening.* However, where Wolfe (1976) celebrated narcissism as a millenarian outbreak of vitality and liveliness, and "the greatest age of individualism in American history," as he eagerly wrote, Lasch saw a profligate defiance of nature and kinship (Siegel, 2010: 27). Therefore, armed with Marx's conviction that economic forces shape character, along with Freud's insight into the bourgeois mind (Siegel, 2010: 27); Lasch (1979: 209) condemned contemporary American life by arguing that: "… Long-term social changes … have redefined work, created a scarcity of jobs, devalued the wisdom of the ages, and brought all forms of authority (including the authority of experience) into disrepute."

Lasch (1979: xiii) accordingly notes that during this period, American confidence had fallen to an all-time low and society was resultantly plagued with the "sense of an ending." Defeat in the Vietnam War, economic stagnation, the fear of depletion of natural

resources and being generally fatigued after the tribulations of the sixties, created a mood of pessimism which spread across the entire American society as well as other capitalist countries (Kelso, 2005). This pessimism led to a loss of resilience and ingenuity to confront problems of contemporary life and, in its place, people busied themselves with survival strategies, methods designed to prolong their own lives and programs guaranteed to protect and ensure both good health and peace of mind (Lasch, 1979: 4).

As a result, Lasch reasons that this loss of resolve and overall diminishing standard of contemporary American life drove Americans to become heavily dependent on experts (Scialabba, 2014). This primarily stemmed from the loss of "productive" and "reproductive functions" of the family – where "productive functions" refers to the skills required to meet material needs and "reproductive functions" signifies having and raising children (Lasch, 1979: 10). The American public had consequently lost the determination to overcome this wave of pessimism due to their weakened sense of confidence both in themselves and their country; thus resulting in the lack of solutions to the nation's problems (Lasch, 1979: xiii).

Lasch (1979: xv) finally argues that narcissism presented a way to overcome the "repressive conditions of the past," or to forget the past and attempt to find some degree of happiness in a miserable and desperate world. Americans consequently resorted to self-centred preoccupations with an emphasis on "psychic self-awareness," withdrawn from political involvement and concern for social issues; rather submerging themselves in material consumption as well as separating themselves from the sense of belonging to the past and the future by instead, "living for the moment" (Lasch, 1979: 12, 5). This was evident in Jim Hougan's work (as cited in Lasch, 1979: 6) where he noted that:

> "Survival has become the 'catchword of the seventies' and 'collective narcissism' the dominant disposition. Since 'the society' has no future, it makes sense to live only for the moment, to fix our eyes on our own 'private performance', to become connoisseurs of our own decadence, to cultivate a 'transcendental self-attention'."

So, in keeping with Lasch's ideas, I argue that young women's practices and public displays of selfies could be seen as an example of this narcissistic private performance as

stipulated above. In other words, the constant need to take selfies and share them on such vast public platforms could signify an obsession with self, and 'hashtagging' on selfies further encourages individuals to buy into social norms in the hopes of getting more 'likes' (or external validation) from their 'followers' or 'admiring audience' on Instagram. On the other hand, Michel Foucault (2005: 36) strongly opposes this view and rather argues that, "the concern for the self is linked to the exercise of power."

Selfies as a Means of Self-Exploration and Identity Formation

Even though the topic of politics permeates almost every piece of literature written by Foucault, Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (2011: 228) note that he came to see politics as an "ethics" that is not understood in terms of normative rules or a moral code, but rather as the self's relation to itself, or the manner in which one establishes oneself as a "subject" – where subject denotes the self-aware individual who is capable of choosing how to act (O'Farrell, 2005). Milchman and Rosenberg (2011: 228) additionally note that Foucault's ethical turn in the early 1980s did not lead him away from the political sphere, but rather in the direction of a reconceptualization of politics as an "ethical politics." Therefore, in the *Care of the Self,* Foucault (2000) clearly defines ethics as a relation of the self to itself in terms of its moral agency.

Arnold Davidson (2005) states that Foucault's relatively new concern with the self can be understood as being positioned at the intersection of his former themes of a history of subjectivity and an analysis of the forms of governmentality. While he clearly demonstrates a shift in focus away from 'disciplinary power' – or a mechanism of power which normalizes the behaviour of individuals in a social body (O'Farrell, 2005) – Foucault still links his notion of ethics to that of governmentality. According to Foucault (2000: 300), governmentality can be defined as:

> "The relationship of the self to the self … where governmentality covers the whole range of practices that constitute, define, organize and instrumentalise the strategies that individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other. Those who try to control, determine and limit the freedom of others are themselves free individuals who have at their disposal certain instruments they can use to govern others."

Locating this notion of ethics within a framework of governmentality is important because governmentality is not only concerned with practices of governing others, but it also concerned with practices of the self (Dean, 1999). As a result, Foucault (2000: 300) argues that it is the concept of governmentality that makes it possible to elicit the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others. Foucault (2000: 300) maintains that this is precisely what constitutes ethical work, and it is subsequently through these active practices of the self that subjects establish themselves; as these practices are not invented by the individual, but rather by society, culture and certain social and cultural groups accordingly.

In the case of selfies, those who are most popular on Instagram, like celebrities Kim Kardashian and Justin Bieber, dictate and normalize what types of selfies are acceptable to post as well as what is trendy and cool. For example, this includes positioning the camera at certain angles in order to achieve the most flattering image. However, unlike Lasch, Foucault would argue that this normalization and regulation of selfies actually allows users to represent themselves in ways that that appear successful, attractive and innovative, as opposed to narcissistic and self-absorbed. This primarily owes to the fact that popular Instagram users perpetuate certain ideals by showing off their own bodies as status symbols through their selfies, for instance, and as a result, when ordinary individuals follow suit, they too embody such elements of success and desire. Therefore, by actively participating in the practice of selfie-taking, and by following the 'rules' of how to take the ideal selfie as defined by popular Instagram users, could be one way through which selfie-takers are attempting to and, perhaps, succeeding in establishing themselves as ethical subjects.

With a new emphasis being placed on the relationship of the self to itself and others, Foucault (1992) consequently highlights the fact that this relationship is a continual process of negotiation that needs to be seen as significant, rather than the codes of behaviour themselves. And so, for Foucault (1992: 28), ethics is:

> "A process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and

> decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve and transform himself."

Selfies can additionally offer opportunities for introspection and self-examination because they allow an individual to be present in any particular moment. In other words, because the selfie-taker holds the camera in their hands when they are taking a selfie, they are also in control of how the image will look. As a result, selfies consequently allow individuals to see themselves for who truly they are, because by publicly displaying their own images on social networking sites, like Instagram, individuals can see themselves from a different perspective. Our gaze is essentially being appropriated to a 'gaze of self on the self'. Therefore, individuals can examine and scrutinize their selfies so as to learn what they need to transform or keep the same about themselves, in order to achieve their moral goals in becoming ethical subjects.

These notions of ethics therefore highlight its importance as they move beyond an engagement with ethics as simply being sets of competencies and moral codes to which individuals must ascribe, toward an activity of individuals who create their own subjectivity through a continuous activity of acting upon themselves in a process of monitoring, testing, improving and transforming. However, even though individuals produce themselves as ethical subjects through their own self-representative work, Foucault acknowledged that this work is still largely shaped by certain regimes of power. So, although people might be actualizing themselves, in control of their self-expression, and researching, understanding and thereby producing their own senses of self – all of that is still taking place within a system of constraint. Thus, individuals are never acting in a completely free, unencumbered, non-relative system.

It can nonetheless be argued that Foucault's work on the self and the care of the self fits in with the broader genealogy of sexuality, which started off with the production of sexuality as a professional discourse and evolved into this regime of ethical self-care. As a result, Foucault essentially casts the care of the self as a moral imperative, rather than as a manifestation of narcissism in contemporary culture. He also believes that in order to be viewed as a fully-functioning individual in society, individuals have to present themselves ethically, or as well-rounded and accomplished in every realm of their

physical being. This consequently ties into the idea of selfie-taking because people typically take selfies to present themselves in very particular ways aesthetically and therefore culturally; and that is precisely what makes the practice of selfie-taking so interesting and so important to the representation of oneself as an ethical subject. And so, instead of viewing selfie-takers as confidence-depleted narcissists like Lasch, Foucault would rather regard selfie-takers as confident identity explorers.

Selfies as Reinforcement of or Resistance to Patriarchal Authority

In some ways, Angela McRobbie agrees with Foucault, arguing that people – and particularly women – living in contemporary society are encouraged to become more self-reflexive by scrutinizing and evaluating their own lives and opportunities (Butler, 2009: 951). McRobbie (2009: 47) additionally rejects the assertion that the disruption of the old social order simply results in more opportunities for choice and agency; arguing instead that increased reflexivity often restores gender hierarchies and breeds new forms of patriarchal power. Therefore, it is important to understand to gain a better understanding about what postfeminism actually signifies for the women living in contemporary Western society.

Even though South Africa does not entirely classify as a Western country, the young women involved in this research study are part of a globalized middle-class; they are educated and privileged in various ways. In this view, it is to be expected to some extent that there are similarities or resonances between postfeminism culture abroad and locally (in South Africa and for this group of women at least). Therefore, even though I acknowledge that there may be very important research questions that come up about different iterations of postfeminism in different Global South locations; in this project I am specifically observing a more globalized identity of postfeminist culture.

In recent years, postfeminism has become a key term in the lexicon of feminist cultural critique, yet there is still little agreement about what postfeminism actually means. According to Rosalind Gill (2007: 147), the term is countlessly used and often contradictorily so, to indicate an epistemological break with second wave feminism, a historical shift toward a third wave of feminism, and a deteriorating political stance or

backlash against feminism. However, all of these ideas still fail to account for what postfeminism actually means, or what makes something postfeminist.

It is therefore valuable to think about postfeminism as the double-entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas (McRobbie, 2004). It is from this notion of entanglement that the idea of postfeminism as a sensibility develops (Gill, 2007), which characterizes large parts of contemporary culture. In an influential essay, McRobbie (2004) argues that what is most distinctive about postfeminist culture is the way in which a selectively defined feminism is both taken into account and denied. McRobbie (2004) goes on to argue that this double-entanglement facilitates both a doing and an undoing of feminism. In other words, young women are offered particular kinds of freedom, empowerment and choice in exchange for or as a kind of substitute for feminist politics and transformation (McRobbie, 2009). Therefore, McRobbie's significance in this context is the way in which she positions postfeminism as an object of critical analysis, rather than as a theoretical orientation, a new movement of feminism or a straightforward backlash.

In this sense, postfeminism becomes a term that can be used analytically, and Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff (2011: 4) further suggest that a postfeminist sensibility includes a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment. Gill (2007: 153) claims that ideas of choice and of 'being oneself' and 'pleasing oneself' are fundamental to the postfeminist sensibility that saturates contemporary media culture. These notions echo the emphasis of empowerment and 'taking control' that can be seen in today's talk shows, advertising and makeover shows to name a few, and Gill (2007: 153) moreover argues that all of these notions are reinforced by a powerful grammar of individualism.

One characteristic of this postfeminist sensibility in media culture is the almost entire removal of notions of politics or cultural influence (Gill, 2007: 153). This is seen not only in the relentless personalising inclinations of news, talk shows and reality television, for example; but also in the various ways in which every aspect of life is deflected through the idea of personal choice and self-determination (Gill, 2007: 153). For instance, the dramatic growth in the number of women having Brazilian waxes, or the acceptance of breast augmentation surgery by teenage girls, are widely portrayed as displays of women

pleasing themselves and using beauty to help themselves feel more comfortable in their own skin (Gill, 2007: 153). However, inadequate attention is given to the pressures that might influence such girls to think that major appearance-altering surgery will solve their problems, and even less to the commercial interests that are sustaining this staggering trend, like targeted advertising by cosmetic surgery clinics, as well as promotional packages that include mother-and-daughter specials or discount deals for two friends who have their boobs done together, for example (Gill, 2007: 153).

It is therefore apparent that the most dominant and fundamental notion in postfeminist discourses is that all of women's practices are freely chosen so as to portray women as being independent agents who are no longer constrained or controlled by any inequalities or power imbalances (Gill, 2007: 153).

Kate Taylor (as quoted in The Guardian, 2006) accordingly notes how:

> "[Twentysomething-year-old women] already see themselves as equal to men: they can work, they can vote, they can bonk on the first date ... if a thong makes you feel fabulous, wear it. For one thing, men in the office waste whole afternoons staring at your bottom, placing bets on whether you're wearing underwear. Let them. Use that time to take over the company. But even if you wear lingerie for you, for no other reason than it makes you feel good, that is reason enough to keep it on."

In this account, two very different types of the 'empowered female subject' are presented. Firstly, women intentionally use their sexual power to distract men in an attempt to take over business world as men evidently rule this domain (Gill, 2007: 153), and secondly, women are represented as simply ensuing their own desires to feel good about themselves (Gill, 2007: 154). The latter theme of pleasing oneself is by far the most common in postfeminist discourses and it is perfectly captured in this decade-old comment from Fay Weldon (as quoted in The Observer, 1996):

> "Young girls seem to be getting prettier all the time. There is a return to femininity, but it seems to me that most girls don't give two hoots about men. It is about being fit and healthy for themselves not for men."

Thus, while the idea that in the past women dressed in a certain way purely to please men is ludicrous; this significant shift toward the notion that women merely wish to please themselves does not provide an adequate substitute (Gill, 2007: 154). This shift portrays women as being completely free agents, although it cannot explain why: "If women are just pleasing themselves, and following their own autonomously generated desires, the resulting valued 'look' is so similar – hairless body, slim waist, firm buttocks, etc." Therefore, this shift ignores all of the fascinating and imperative questions about the relationship between representations and subjectivity as well as questions about how socially constructed, mass mediated ideals of beauty are internalised and made our own (Gill, 2007: 154).

As a result, McRobbie (2009) finally argues that individualism actually operates as a social process to constrain women's advancement in society. In other words, instead of being regulated by societal structures, postfeminist anxieties rest on the self-regulation of women by means of the language of personal choice and empowerment. In order to illustrate this line of argument more effectively, McRobbie (2009) discusses the content of various makeover television programmes, including *What Not to Wear* and *Ten Years Younger*. The self-regulation of women is illuminated by evidence of women consuming the supposed correct media choices in terms of personal styling, for example. These programmes are essentially about bodily failings, and through guidance from 'experts,' 'failures' learn how to make better or more 'correct' choices so as to fit into a postfeminist world where status is awarded through conformity (Butler, 2009: 952). McRobbie (2009) consequently views this as a highly disguised womanliness which is now adopted as a matter of personal choice.

On a similar note, Lasch (1979: 10) argues that the changing roles of women additionally contributed to the "malaise" (of narcissism) that gripped Americans. He maintains that the main problem with feminism was not so much the movement itself, but rather the problems it created (Lasch, 1979: 199). In other words, Lasch believes that feminism merely expanded the reach of capitalist individualism, furthering the destruction of community in favour of a greedy marketplace and a paternalistic 'therapeutic state' that subjected private life to the manipulation of professional experts (Willis, 1997).

However, postfeminist scholars, like Gill and McRobbie, assert that there is actually a certain politics to how women look and desire to look; since young women living in contemporary society have been conditioned to believe that in order to be successful, happy, empowered and free, they need to look and (re)present themselves in specific ways, as a direct result of them choosing to do so for themselves and no one else. Therefore, selfies can be regarded as one example of such representations as opposed to mere manifestations of narcissism.

Finally, the idea of the 'choice biography,' or the narrative of women's free choice and autonomy that encompasses postfeminist discourse is important because achieving attractiveness and desirability in a heterosexual context is overtly presented as something to be understood as being done for yourself and not in order to please a man (Gill, 2007: 154). And, as a result, the autonomous, active, desiring subject has become the dominant figure for representing the postfeminist woman (Gill, 2009).

Therefore, this research study is evidently founded upon three particular theoretical traditions, namely: narcissism, self-examination and self-exploration, and the postfeminist sensibility of self-management and self-regulation. Next I will turn to discussing the research methodology informing this particular research study as well as the manner by which the data was collect and subsequently analysed.

4. Research Methodology

This section of the research initially discusses the most suitable methodological tradition upon which this study should be centred and why. It then moves on to discuss the various stages involved in this study's research process as well as the sampling procedures and methods of data collection, generation and analysis employed.

4.1) Methodology

In research, two mutually opposed methodological approaches have emerged: positivist, or quantitative; and interpretive, or qualitative (Creswell, 1994). Whichever view we take affects how we go about uncovering knowledge and social behaviour, in addition to the methodology that we follow in our research (Creswell, 1994). The quantitative approach to research generally refers to philosophical positions that highlight the significance of scientific methods (Jakobsen, 2013). This tradition maintains that the world consists of regularities, that these regularities are detectable, and that the researcher can infer knowledge about the real world simply by observing it (Jakobsen, 2013). The researcher is consequently more concerned with general rules and trends, rather than with explaining them. Therefore, positivism is essentially based on knowledge gained from the objective verification of observable facts (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006).

One of the most prominent quantitative research studies conducted on selfies was *Selfiecity,* which was led by Lev Manovich and co-author Alise Tifentale (2015). For this study, computational and data visualization methods were used to analyze large numbers of Instagram photos from five global cities and then accordingly distinguished the users' selfies. This was done in an attempt to answer broad questions surrounding how many selfies were taken in these different parts of the world, what types of selfies were taken more regularly, and which genders took the most selfies in their respective countries.

However, due to the nature of this research question and its primary concern with investigating how and why young, ordinary, South African women take selfies, it can be said that qualitative research provides a more suitable methodological framework for the type of data collection necessitated by this research study. This is because the main

assumption underpinning qualitative research is that all human action is meaningful and has to be interpreted and understood within the context of social practices (Usher, 1996: 18). Therefore, in order to make sense of the social world, the researcher needs to understand the meanings that form and are formed by interactive social behaviour (Punch, 2005).

As a result, human action is given meaning in interpretive frameworks and it is the researcher's job to essentially make sense of what they are researching. This process is known as "double hermeneutic," because in the conduct of social research, both the subject (researcher) and the object (participants) of the research bear the same characteristic of being interpreters or "sense-seeking" (Usher, 1996: 18). Qualitative research methods are therefore often used to address questions about people's ways of interpreting and experiencing the world (Merriam, 2009: 13). Qualitative researchers are accordingly interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed. As a result, the ultimate purpose of qualitative research is then to explore and explain certain phenomena that are being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

Therefore, this research study used qualitative interviewing techniques with a very carefully recruited group of participants in order to understand the practices and significances of selfie-taking amongst young, ordinary, South African women who publicly share selfies on Instagram.

Another qualitative research study that has been conducted on selfies includes a cross-cultural study led by Anna Wrammert (2014), titled: *Selfies, dolls and film stars.* In this study, Wrammert explores the thoughts and experiences of young women in Sweden and India on how they use digital images for self-presentation on social network sites and to further understand the influence of surrounding social structures and cultural values. Moreover, Amy Nguyen's (2014) work in: *Exploring the Selfie Phenomenon,* additionally investigates how female users identify the act of uploading selfies as an expression of external affirmation or as an act of empowerment in terms of redefining beauty standards in Massachusetts.

In keeping with the principles of qualitative research, this research study fundamentally draws on long established traditions within Audience Studies to understand people's media practices, as it primarily focuses on the power that audiences hold over media texts as well as notions of audience activity and textual polysemy (McCance-Price, 2006: 16). Such approaches therefore discount the idea that texts only have one correct interpretation, or that meaning is inscribed by the institutional producer and resides within the text. Audience Studies consequently seek to account for differential readings and interpretations through studying audience reception (Moores, 1990).

It is however important to clarify that this research does not claim that the individuals being studied are an audience, because producers of selfies are also consumers of selfies. In other words, this research study re-conceptualizes audience members as individuals who are also very actively involved in producing certain images (and information), because new media – like mobile phones – blur the distinction between producers, consumers and users; resulting in 'prosumers'. Therefore, this study does not view an audience in the classic, old-fashioned sense, but rather as a much more complicated actor and subject alike.

4.2) Method

4.2.1) Ethical Clearance

A clear, detailed discussion of the stages involved in my research process will be discussed step-by-step below. It is however important to note that because my research involved gathering data from people, I had to ensure that I treated them fairly and that my research met certain ethical criteria. Therefore, prior to starting my research, I applied for and obtained ethical clearance and, hence, permission to begin my research from the Ethics Committee at the University of the Witwatersrand *(see Appendix D)*. In keeping with the specified ethical standards, I additionally provided each participant with an *Information Sheet (see Appendix E)* that outlined what my research was about and what was required of them. And finally, prior to conducting any research, participants were required to sign a *Consent Form (see Appendix D),* signifying that they understood what

my research entailed as well as the requirements of their role as a participant. This process subsequently granted the participants permission to take part in my research study.

4.2.2) Interview/Focus Group Background

In keeping with the Audience Studies approach, a total of 14 women were interviewed in one of two ways: individual interviews or small focus groups. Precisely nine girls were interviewed individually, and five girls were placed in one of two focus groups comprising of two and three girls respectively.

Interview and focus group discussions are those in which a participant or a group of participants are gathered to discuss a particular topic in the presence of a researcher (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996). Interviews and focus groups are both research techniques that naturally belong to the qualitative tradition and the data collected via these methods formed the primary source of data for my research study.

As with any method, there are both advantages and disadvantages inherent in interviews and focus groups. However, using both techniques proved complimentary, since the disadvantages of one were compensated by the advantages of another.

Individual interviews were used because they allowed for the detailed exploration of a single participant's responses without any contamination (Azzara, 2010: 16). These interviews were particularly valuable in yielding individual responses that were contextually located in the lived experiences of the participants. In addition, the individual interviews generally elicited longer and more complete answers from the participants, and their answers were also a lot clearer because they were not being spoken over or interrupted by fellow research participants.

However, as Minter (2003) notes, one of the biggest disadvantages of using individual interviews is that they usually take more time than other research methods and are extremely susceptible to the 'Hawthorne effect.' This refers to the notion that because of

the intimate nature of the interviews, participants may have distorted or given false responses with the desire to please the researcher (Opdenakker, 2006: 11).

For this reason, focus groups were used to obtain information that may not have been so forthcoming in the individual interviews. This is partially attributable to the fact that the dialogue between participants facilitates more relaxed discussions and opens the way for unanticipated avenues of discussion too (McCance-Price, 2006: 57). In another attempt to allow participants to feel comfortable to express their views, and in the interests of generating more open and relaxed discussion, I decided to place the participants with the closest social bonds in the same focus groups.

Nigel Fielding (1993: 142) notes that focus groups are very cost and time efficient, as group discussions allows the researcher to interview a larger number of participants in less time than would be needed to for individual interviews. And finally, focus groups were additionally used in order to facilitate the interplay of different femininities in relation to the practices of selfie-taking.

4.2.3) Recruitment of Participants

The young women participating in my research study additionally needed to be between the ages of 18 and 24. This specific age bracket ensured that all of the participants were legally allowed to participate in my research study, yet still fell within a certain youth market. This is because the youth (or young people) in South Africa typically refer to those existing between the age bracket of 18 and 24 years old (HSRC, 2012: 7), and youth is accordingly defined as: "A stage comprising of a series of transitions from adolescence to adulthood, from dependence to independence, and from being recipients of society's services to becoming contributors to national, economic, political and cultural life" (Curtain, 2003: 74). Therefore, I was interested in observing the role that selfies played in a sense of cultural involvement amongst this group of young South African women.

I recruited my sample by publicizing my research study and inviting individuals to participate in it via social media, specifically: Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. I

uploaded a post on each of my personal social media profiles that briefly detailed what my research study entailed and what exactly was required of participants. The young women who were interested in participating in my study were then required to comment on these posts and I got in touch with them accordingly. However, I did not obtain enough participants through these online platforms and resultantly turned to snowball-sampling to locate the rest of the participants.

Snowball-sampling simply refers to a non-random sampling technique that grows through momentum. This means that initial contacts (or participants) suggest further people for the researcher to approach, who in turn may provide further contacts, and so on (Deacon, Murdock, Pickering & Golding, 1999: 53). In other words, the young women who were interested in participating in my study put me into contact with additional young women who they knew took selfies, and it was through this process that I managed to obtain all of my participants. This consequently proved to be a particularly useful recruitment technique for my research study.

4.2.4) List of Research Participants

All of the research participants were guaranteed anonymity; therefore no participants are referred to by their actual names, but rather by their pseudonyms. In addition, all of the participants took selfies to varying degrees – some more than others – but what remains important is that they have all taken and uploaded selfies on Instagram nonetheless.

Participants	**Profiles**
Anne	Anne is a 21-year-old, white female who is in the process of studying a general Bachelor's degree and plans to pursue her postgraduate studies once she has completed her current degree. Anne regularly takes selfies and uploads them to Instagram, but she generally prefers to take selfies with other people rather than alone. Anne has very strong ethical and religious values and tends to open up a lot to people with whom she trusts and feels comfortable around.

Talicia	Talicia is a 23-year-old, black female who recently completed her Honours in Media Studies and is now in the process of attaining her Masters in Women's Studies. Talicia is evidently very passionate about gender equality and considers herself a feminist. She is also a prolific selfie-taker and frequently uploads selfies to Instagram; the majority of her Instagram posts are selfies. Talicia is a very outgoing and boisterous individual.
Maria	Maria is a 23-year-old, white female who recently completed her Honours in Media Studies and went on to complete an additional postgraduate certificate in teaching. She now works as a primary school teacher and plans to attain her Master's degree abroad at a later stage. Maria typically uploads selfies to Instagram, but they are usually together with other people (like friends and family). However, she does still post solo selfies, just not as frequently. Maria makes time for everyone and always puts other people before herself. She is also always willing to help others.
Theresa	Theresa is a 23-year-old, black female who completed her Honours in Public Policy and Government Administration and is now working as a business consultant for a private equity firm. Theresa was one of the most confident participants involved in this study and she took and uploaded selfies to Instagram often. Theresa is a very opinionated and strong-willed individual who does not let anyone or anything get in the way of accomplishing the goals she has envisioned for herself.
Georgia	Georgia is a 22-year-old, white female who has moved down to Cape Town to study her Honours in Finance and Investment Management at the University of Cape Town. Georgia is a loyal selfie-taker and her Instagram feed is proof of such. Her Instagram profile features a great deal of selfies, although she also posts a lot of pictures with other

	people and of other things. Georgia is an extremely down to heart individual who is easy to talk to and get along with. She has an unassuming and gentle character and is very considerate to those around her.
Whitney	Whitney is a 23-year-old, black female who has recently made the decision to stop studying Law and rather study a degree in hospitality in Malaysia (as she believes it is more in line with her personality). Whitney is relatively new to Instagram and takes a fairly equal amount of selfies and other regular photos. She also tends to post quite a few selfies of other people as opposed to just by herself. Whitney is a very easy-going and relaxed individual who has an extremely laidback approach to life. Whitney is very close with her friends and family and she is particularly fond of travelling and experiencing new people and places.
Macy	Macy is a 22-year-old, white female who completed a Bachelor's degree in fashion and is currently working as an accessory buyer for a fashion brand. Macy generally uploads selfies on Instagram, and she is usually either posing together with her boyfriend or best friend(s). She also posts selfies alone, just not as frequently. Macy is a very sociable and open-minded individual who values the relationships she has with others. She is extremely passionate about fashion and ultimately hopes to become a fashion buyer one day. She is also contemplating moving to Melbourne, Australia in the coming years.
Carol	Carol is a 23-year-old, coloured female who is looking to complete her Honours in Political Science. Carol tends to post more regular photographs on Instagram than she does selfies; but she still posts quite a significant amount of selfies nonetheless. Carol is a free-spirited individual who is accepting and understanding of others. She is loyal and incredibly enthusiastic about everything she sets out to achieve.

	Carol is the life of any party and the class clown; she is constantly joking around and often leaves others in hysterics.
Marilyn	Marilyn is a 22-year-old white, female who recently qualified as a Physiotherapist and takes great pride in helping others. Marilyn is a prolific selfie-taker as she posts a few selfies on Instagram on a regular basis – usually daily. Marilyn has recently lost a lot of weight and transformed her body; she is feeling more comfortable in her skin than ever before. Marilyn is an extremely bubbly individual who constantly walks around with a smile on her face and always finds something to laugh about. She fully embodies optimism.
Catherine	Catherine is a 19-year-old, white female who has recently finished matric and is currently training to become a beautician. Catherine predominantly posts selfies on her Instagram account and does so quite frequently. She also posts photographs with other people, but not as regularly. Catherine is very well-groomed and always looks presentable no matter the occasion. Catherine never misses out on an opportunity to party and lives in the moment.
Tamsyn	Tamsyn is a 22-year-old, black female who is currently completing her LLB degree. She has a passion for writing and photography and has recently founded her own blog. Tamsyn does not necessarily post a lot of selfies because she is more interested in capturing beautiful, scenic photographs of other people and settings for her blog and Instagram. Tamsyn has strong moral and spiritual values and is an immensely compassionate person. She understands the meaning of true friendship and is constantly there for those who need her most. Tamsyn has a very gentle but resilient demeanor and is very family-orientated. She also enjoys running and has participated in various marathons, including the *Old Mutual Two Oceans Marathon* in Cape Town.

Rachel	Rachel is a 23-year-old, white female who recently completed her Honours in Journalism and is currently in search of a job, which she hopes to find in the radio industry. Rachel is an avid selfie-taker as her Instagram profile boasts significantly more selfies than ordinary photos. She posts selfies both alone and with other people. Rachel is a thoughtful and selfless individual who is constantly helping out others wherever and however she can. She is also a charismatic and sociable person who genuinely appreciates the close-knit relationships she has nurtured with her friends and family.
Sylvia	Sylvia is a 23-year-old, coloured female who completed her Honours in Media Studies and is currently working as a client services' intern at an advertising firm. Sylvia does not use Instagram that often, but when she does, she posts more regular photographs than she does selfies. Sylvia is a very religious individual who takes great pride in helping out at her church. She personifies the fact that dynamite comes in small packages. Sylvia always tends to be in good spirits despite any obstacles are thrown her way.
Dina	Dina is a 23-year-old, white female who completed a general Bachelor's degree and currently works as a visual merchandising manager at a retail store. Most of the posts on Dina's Instagram feed are selfies and she uploads them on quite a regular basis. She is usually alone in her selfies, but she also includes other people in her selfies at times. Dina is a very flamboyant individual who grabs the attention when she enters a room. She likes to be heard and is not afraid to voice her opinions – even if it means going against popular belief.

4.2.5) Interview Setting

Influential researchers have hitherto suggested that the location of the interview and focus group discussions should be determined by convenience for the purposes of the research

participants, and that the location should be relatively neutral (Hansen, Cottle, Negrine & Newbold, 1998). Therefore, all of the interviews were conducted in the coffee shop or restaurant that was most convenient for the participants between September and November of 2015. For audio recording purposes and in attempt to keep exterior distractions at a minimum, I urged all participants to ensure that the chosen location was moderately quiet, or at least that the interview was not conducted during peak times.

4.2.6) Interview Guide

The flexibility and open-nature of interviews and focus groups is one of the biggest benefits associated with Audience Studies (McCance-Price, 2006: 51). This is primarily due to the fact that it allows participants to answer questions using their own terminology and vocabulary; as well as the potential of initiating debate around themes that may not have been obvious to or thought of by the researcher (Hansen et al., 1998). However, interviews and focus groups are still guided discussions and must have some sort of structure for the information they yield to be useful (McCance-Price, 2006: 51).

Therefore, the interview and small focus group discussions were fundamentally centred on the young women's practices of self-taking as well as the significance that this very specific technique of photographic self-portraiture held for them. This meant that discussions were semi-structured around 46 questions, focusing on a few specific and inter-related topics, including: selfies and Instagram, selfies and self-image, and selfies and gender *(see Appendix G)*.

4.2.7) Instagram 'Tours'

Social media was also used as a productive framework through which to explore young women's discussions and ideas surrounding their own identities and representations online. In order to accomplish this, I integrated visual reference points via the participants' Instagram accounts. In other words, the interviews involved 'tours' of the participants' personal Instagram profiles so as to gain a better understanding of the different types of selfies that these young women took and why.

Throughout these tours I took notes of what the participants were saying about their selfies as well as the various types of selfies that they took. Therefore, the interviews consisted of two predominant parts: the first part of the interview included the actual discussion about selfies, and in the second part of the interview I asked the participants to take me on a tour of their Instagram profiles. This draws from the "Go-Along" method which is a creative technique of data collection wherein the researcher moves alongside informants to collect information (Kusenbach, 2003).

According to Kusenbach (2003), the Go-Along method is essentially a research technique that involves participating in movement while conducting research; it mimics the notion of "following the people" as part of multi-sited ethnography. It is therefore a hybrid method between participant observation and qualitative interviewing. Similar to participant observation, it involves spending time with key informants, and it is also a systematic, outcome-focused manner of collecting information, much like qualitative interviews (Kusenbach, 2003).

Therefore, Go-Alongs can primarily be understood as social interactions positioned in larger fieldwork relationships (Kusenbach, 2012), which are usually operationalized while conducting other qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, and other forms of data collection, while on the move in physical, social and metaphoric spaces (Marcus, 1995). However, this research study appropriates Go-Alongs to a virtual environment. In other words, instead of asking participants to take me on a tour of their neighbourhoods, for instance, I asked them to take me on a (virtual or visual) tour of their personal Instagram profiles.

This strategy also proved to be a highly effective one, as the presentation of digital images elicited a great deal of talk and discussion about the meaning and significance that these types of self-representations held for these young women. In total, the interviews discussions generally lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

It consequently goes without saying that the participants additionally needed to have an Instagram account on which they regularly posted selfies, in addition to Internet access and technology too. It was however particularly important that the participants' Instagram

accounts were open to the public and had no privacy restrictions whatsoever; as this avoided any ethical complications as well as implied a very specific form of universal visibility that was ultimately central to the thematic of my research study.

4.2.8) Why Instagram?

Instagram was the most appropriate online platform to use in my research study because it is a smartphone photo-sharing, video-sharing and social networking service that enables and encourages its users to take pictures and videos, and share them on a variety of social networking platforms in addition to their own, such as: Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr and Flickr (Instagram, 2015) – thus, increasing the users' potential of visibility on an even broader scale. Instagram moreover provides users with a personal page that consists of a profile picture, a short biography section and a boundless selection of all the images and/or videos that they have most recently shared (Instagram, 2015).

Instagram is very popular at the moment and it is increasingly attracting millions of users from all over the globe. The *South African Social Media Landscape 2015* study found that Instagram is one of the country's fasted rising social networks, having increased by 65% over the past year, from 680 000 active users in 2013 to 1,1 million in 2014 (World Wide Worx, 2015). In view of that, the study concluded that South Africans are heavily contributing to the visual revolution in online usage (World Wide Worx, 2015). Therefore, Instagram is prompting a change in the ways in which individuals are beginning to document their lives, and how they choose to share it with others both locally and globally through mass media (Flores et al., 2013: 1).

4.2.9) Audio-Recording the Discussions

Before each interview discussion, I asked the participants for their permission to audio-record the session. Each participant was also asked to introduce herself so that I could accurately identify their contribution to the discussion and further ensure that the transcriptions of the discussions were correct.

4.2.10) Analysis of Discussions

The first task of transcription was undertaken as soon as possible after each actual discussion took place in order to facilitate accuracy and familiarise myself with the content of the interviews *(see Appendix H & I).* Once all of the discussions had been completed and transcribed, a thematic analysis ensued in an attempt to determine and highlight crosscutting, dominant and recurring themes of response in the narratives and discourses of the participants.

Thematic analysis is the most common form of analysis in qualitative research and it briefly refers to a categorizing strategy for qualitative data (Guest, 2012: 11). Researchers using thematic analysis typically review their data, make notes and begin to sort it into categories (Boyatzis, 1998: 7). As a result, thematic analysis essentially assists researchers in moving their analysis away from a broad reading of data and towards the path of discovering patterns and developing themes (Boyatzis, 1998: 7). Many researchers consequently use thematic analysis as a way of getting close to their data and developing some sort of deeper appreciation of the content (Guest, 2012: 11). Therefore, this method of analysis is particularly useful for researchers who are interested in looking for broader patterns in their work so as to conduct a more in-depth interpretation of their research (and those emerging patterns in particular).

Due to the fact that the amount of data generated by these discussions reached far beyond the scope of this research study, thematic analysis proved to be an effective tool for the systematic narrowing down of information into significant and relevant clusters of response; the grouping together of similar styles (or themes) of response.

4.2.11) My Role as Researcher

Since qualitative researchers take a reflexive approach to data gathering and analysis, the interaction between the researcher and participants involved in the research study is seen as a fundamental aspect in the production of knowledge (Flick, 1998). Therefore, my own subjectivities and that of the participants are considered to be important in the research process.

It is first and foremost important to note that my research was largely inspired by the fact that I belong to the same social group – i.e. young women – that take the most selfies, even though I am not a prolific selfie-taker per se. Nonetheless, I essentially belong to and thus had direct access to the community that I was interested in researching. This could have ultimately played to my advantage, because the young women were possibly more willing to participate in my research as I belonged to the same social setting or positionality as them; instead of being somebody who opposed or was critical of this type of behavior or lifestyle.

However, it should also be noted that the participants in this study could have also been inhibited by the fact that the person who was conducting the research and guiding the discussions was me; a young woman. In retrospect, a female interviewer of women may have potentially be problematic because she must maintain a non-judgemental and tolerant attitude in the face of possible bitchy, vain, aggressive, hyper-competitive and/or neurotic comments and discussion, so that she does not affect or limit the participants' responses. Despite this, my fundamental role as the researcher was to facilitate debate and discussion by guiding the conversation and keeping it focused; while allowing for alternative, but pertinent issues to be explored.

4.2.12) Potential Limitations and Researcher Positionality

In accordance with the *South Africa Country Report: Internet User Profile,* the increase in Internet usage has been strongly driven by younger South Africans between the ages of 16 and 29 years old as well as those who live in 'middle class' households (Analytix BI, 2012). This coincides with the idea that in order to access the Internet, individuals simultaneously need to have access to technology, and consequently have some form of economic privilege; especially when considering the growing digital divide in South Africa that largely owes to increasing wealth disparities between the rich and the poor.

Therefore, I acknowledge that an unintended by-product of choosing to do research with young women who possess smartphones and use Instagram means that I inevitably self-selected a very particular portion of the population that were more likely to be people who belonged to middle or upper income brackets, as opposed to those of lesser

privilege. However, this study still remained open to anyone who fit the criteria of young, ordinary, South African women between the ages of 18 and 24, who regularly and publicly posted selfies on Instagram.

The huge political and economic inequalities in South Africa as well as the expense of access to smartphones and the Internet further reinforces and explains why the majority of my participants landed up being individuals from economically privileged households, and I am aware that this may have had certain implications on the results found in my analysis. Some of these implications include the fact that the women involved in this study do not necessarily identify with or understand local struggles attached to poverty, for instance, and this research study can therefore only account for or speak to this particular group of women in a very diverse and complicated society, like South Africa; where selfies may mean something completely different in different settings. In other words, taking a selfie might mean something extremely different for an economically struggling young woman who is trying to make a living in her vastly poor township, as opposed to a young woman who lives in an affluent South African suburb and who is also financially secure.

Furthermore, because I made use of my own personal social media profiles and the snowballing technique, my positionality may have additionally influenced whom I ended up recruiting as my participants.

Nonetheless, I was particularly interested in studying young, ordinary women because I am one, and this is a group of individuals that I ultimately identify with, care about and have access to. I grew up in a relatively wealthy area, I attended a private school for the duration of my schooling career and I am educated at postgraduate level. So, this is the subject position I am speaking from and it may influence my analysis, but I have paid close attention to this and worked on reflexivity and awareness of different subjectivities throughout my interpretation of the data and the formation of my analytical arguments.

4.2.13) Closing Considerations

Finally, this study by no means claims to be representative of the entire South African population, or every type of femininity in the Global South, or of every racial identity and their nuances and how they intercept with different kinds of femininity. Instead, the participants involved in this research study are simply straight, cisgender women who are all feminine – some even hyper-feminine – and who are all extremely comfortable with their femininity, as they see it as a natural, existing part of their gender identities, as opposed to something that they are constructing or performing on a daily basis. These are the very specific types of women I studied and henceforth make claims about.

These young women are also all economically privileged to some extent as they all lived in reasonably affluent areas, attended private schools for the duration of their schooling careers and were generally all given cars from their parents – either brand new or second-hand – straight out of matric. This was expected to some degree as the participants were required to own smartphones and have access to the Internet and technology if they wanted to be involved in this study. Most of these young women additionally either had or were in the process of attaining university degrees, predominantly at postgraduate level.

Finally, this study tried to be sensitive to the potential that differences in responses and attitudes with regards to selfies between varying ethnic groups or racial identities could have existed; and although no major or significant discrepancies were found in the data that was retrieved for this particular research study, it was still taken into account.

5. Research Analysis and Findings

This chapter is concerned with analysing, discussing and making sense of the data that was generated throughout the abovementioned research process. It considers the interview and focus group discussions in relation to the literature and theory that this particular research study is grounded upon. As previously noted, the use of thematic analysis facilitated the identification of regularities and patterns that emerged during the interview and focus group discussions, revealing five dominant clusters of response, or themes. These include: *Selfies as the New Normal, The Labour of the Selfie, Beauty: The Desire to Look Good versus Self-Acceptance, Instagram 'Likes': the Development of an Attention Economy or the Development of the Self through Self-Exploration,* and *Seizing Youth: Capturing Today For Tomorrow.* However, that the young women involved in this particular research study were not all found to have equal responses or reasons for their selfie-taking practices as well as the significances that selfies held for them. Therefore, this indicates the importance of theorizing themes in mobile terms; yet each theme will be discussed separately below nonetheless.

Furthermore, some participants had stronger opinions about the practices of selfie-taking and were therefore more open and willing to speak about it than others; hence why certain participants are referred to more frequently than others throughout the analysis. Furthermore, I fully accept and value each of my participants' respective lifestyle choices and personalities. However, what I am attempting to do is establish a connection between the things that these young women have told me with larger and more influential structural questions to do with gender, representation and expectation within society.

5.1) Selfies as the New Normal

Huge technological advancements undeniably impact upon the manner in which we live and go about our ordinary, everyday lives. In other words, as a result of the progression of smartphones in recent years, photography and our fundamental means of self-expression and communication have too evolved; making it much easier and more accessible than ever before. So, even though self-portraiture has always existed, it has

never existed as prolifically before, since self-portraiture was never as readily available as it is today (albeit digitally).

Therefore, a common reaction to the practice of selfie-taking amongst the young women involved in this research study was this notion that selfies are nothing more than a photograph; a static image captured by the individuals on their respective smartphones. Whitney accordingly stated that selfies are: "… Just another picture taken with a better angle, better camera, that's all; it's just convenient."

In addition, most of the young women interestingly noted that they had always taken pictures of themselves, even before owning a smartphone that incorporated a camera; this often culminated in a struggle between an actual camera and their reflection in a mirror to get a decent picture of themselves. For instance, Tamsyn recalled: "I'd take like, I don't know, a digital camera and try turn it around, or take it in a mirror," and Talicia accordingly maintained:

> "You know, even before I didn't have a smartphone I would still take selfie pictures and it would either be on a phone or an actual camera, but mostly on a phone; because I guess that's what you have on you most of the time. … Even when I used to have 'brick-phone' cameras and whatnot, you know, you'd try taking a selfie with the brick-camera and snap away, and hopefully it came out good."

Therefore, the advancements in smartphone technology have certainly made the function of taking a picture of oneself much easier; since smartphones have now allowed the user to be in complete control of their image and, as Whitney accordingly noted: "… allows them to take better pictures."

It is consequently evident that although the introduction of the front-facing camera has made it much easier to take better pictures of oneself, the young women involved in this particular research study did so before then. So, these young women have apparently captured 'self-portraits' (or selfies) long before the front-facing camera was invented, perhaps just not as frequently or easily. As a result, the participants argue that the recent proliferation in selfies could be attributed to the emergence and associated handiness of the front-facing camera, as opposed to the rise of a narcissistic culture obsessed with

itself – as Christoper Lasch (1979) suggests – for example; because if the function of the front-facing camera was not to take a picture of yourself, then, as Tamsyn rightfully questioned: "… What else would you use it for?"

Another theme that arose that was attached to the normalness of taking selfies was the mere convenience of it. The selfie now allows individuals to effortlessly capture pictures of themselves, with or without other people, or in the presence of a particular scenic backdrop, and so forth. So, selfies essentially allow an individual to become their own independent photographer because, as Dina highlighted: "… You don't have to ask someone else to take your photo – you can do it on your own." In addition, because you are entirely in control of your selfie, you also have the power to ensure that you look your absolute best and henceforth produce favourable looking pictures of yourself; people can monitor whether or not they are pulling off their most flattering pose at their most satisfying angle without a hitch, and that the lighting is doing their pictures justice, rather than casting a shadow over their face, for instance. Rachel provided a great example of this when she stated that:

> "I think it's a convenience thing and, you know, when you've asked somebody to take a photo of you and it doesn't look great, you're like, 'Argh, damn!' and you get disappointed because you don't want to ask them to take it again; you don't want to bug them. So, you're like, 'Okay, ya, it's fine, don't worry about it,' and then you leave disappointed because you don't have that moment captured perfectly; whereas now you can pull out your phone and do it by yourself – and you can see it happening and make sure that you don't have three chins!"

Marilyn reinforces Rachel's ideas in saying that: "You can have a certain angle, like when people take a photo they're always like, 'This is my good side' – selfies follow the exact same principle." Macy similarly acknowledged that: "… We have more control over the selfies because we know which way we look good and you can position yourself accordingly; make your collar bones stick out, cover your arm with your hair and so on."

Therefore, selfies apparently allow individuals to produce the best possible versions of themselves in the format of a picture (consistent with their preconceived ideas and

opinions of self), because they are ultimately in control over the entire photographic process. Although, selfies are not simply viewed as being convenient to these women because their pictures no longer necessitate the assistance of another, exterior person, but also because they have produced a new sense of visual communication amongst their respective social cohorts. In other words, selfies are now being used as a new type of social conversation that no longer requires actual written language.

So, instead of these women having to type out word-for-word what they're doing, they can simply send a picture now. Selfies consequently also hold the potential for a deeper connection with other people; they're not merely photographs, but rather photographs with a message. This links to the above-mentioned work of Angela Aguayo and Stacy Calvert's (2013: 181), wherein they maintain that images like selfies are actually beginning to bridge our connections between one another. Sylvia additionally declared that selfies have made typical conversation more interesting and creative, in addition to being more convenient, because:

> "… Most of the time I think I take selfies just for my personal purposes. So, let's say if I'm going for a job interview, I'll take a selfie and then I'll send it to a friend or whatever, then they'll know without me having said a thing. … I think most of the time I just take selfies to be silly or to show someone what I'm doing; instead of having to type it out … it's usually just because it's more practical for me. … I can just take a picture of myself in my gym outfit or whatever and send it to you and you'll know that I'm about to work out or whatever."

Whitney adds that: "… Sometimes you'll be on WhatsApp, you know, and then someone will be like, 'What are you doing?' and you just send them a selfie; even if you're just sitting on the couch." And so, in this respect, selfies encapsulate the notion that 'a picture speaks a thousand words,' because they are literally doing the talking for the individuals who are sending the selfies, rather than the individuals themselves. As a result, selfies are increasingly being regarded as more convenient than ordinary types of photographic procedures because the photographer is in complete control of the outcome of their photograph – over and above being able to use selfies in an innovative, yet simplistic

visual form of communication with their friends and family that is more stimulating and imaginative than ordinary, typed language.

In view of the selfie being an extension of the snapshot, the women suggest that selfies provide a similar function in the situation of everyday life. Consistent with Schroeder (2008), snapshots (or selfies in this regard) are essentially authentic photographs of ordinary life that capture a very particular moment in time and offers proof (in the form of images) of a past that can never be relived. Jenna Wortham (2013) accordingly suggests that selfies do not only offer new ways to represent ourselves to others, but also allow for the production of a unique type of visual diary; a way to recollect our short existences and show it to others as evidence that we have left our mark behind. Anne captured this function of the selfie when she unfortunately declared:

> "… Funnily enough, ever since my father passed away and I was looking for photos of us and just other things like that were happening, I realized we didn't actually have many photos of us together. So, especially lately, I make a thing of it to take selfies; even if it's not going to go on Instagram, just for memories sake and all of that – it's so important to have that to look back on."

Anne further maintained the significance of capturing selfies, beyond convenience or looking good, in stating that:

> "I think it is very important because you're keeping record of your life and stuff like that. One day if you look back it'll remind you of fun times, and I always have a fear that when we're old and we lose our memory, we'll lose all these good memories. So, at least we'll have these pictures to remind us."

Therefore, it is evident that selfies can additionally play the role of a memory collector and protector, due to the fact that these young women are not simply capturing pictures of how they look and where they are, but also whom they are with and the special and momentous occasions that they could be celebrating.

Thus, the predominant deposition amongst the participants in relation to selfies and the ordinariness and convenience of it, was just that; selfies are normal photographs that form

part of a routine of their everyday lives, nothing more and nothing less. In other words, many girls insisted that because of their access to smartphones, selfies have just become another thing for them to do. So, these women implied that they believed that selfies did not hold any deeper, underlying significance for them.

This further ties into Roger Silverstone's (1994) ideas surrounding television and everyday life. In his early work, Silverstone (1994) suggests that the television is a central dimension in our everyday lives and its meaning and influence differs according to our individual circumstances, mediated by the social and cultural worlds which we live in. Silverstone (1994) also investigates the enigma of television and how it has sewn its way so deeply and intimately into the fabric the household; serving as a backdrop to family dinners, or to cooking and doing the dishes, for instance. So, in the same way that the television became a natural part of people's everyday lived experiences, I argue that selfie-taking and social media (as afforded by smartphone technologies) has too become saturated into the normalness and commonness of everyday life.

However, when reviewing the rest of the data collected from the interview and focus group discussions, there was also such a deep scrutiny of the self amongst all of the girls and such a great deal of effort went into ensuring that they produced selfies in line with their preconceived visualizations of themselves. For example, Dina acknowledged that: "… I think for me personally, I'm so self-criticizing, so I'll like stare at that selfie for like 500 hours before I post it to make sure it's okay to go on Instagram."

So, it is evident that the simplicity of taking a selfie was ultimately (and ironically) juxtaposed by the amount of effort these girls put into capturing the 'perfect' selfie. Therefore, I accordingly argue that selfies are not just normal, convenient, everyday photographs that are typically taken out of habit or routine, but instead these photographs actually play a deeper and more substantial role in the lives of these young women. As a result, some of the key significances will be discussed in greater below.

5.2) The Labour of the Selfie

The women involved in this particular study had a tendency to suggest that selfies are not vastly important to them, but rather an ordinary part of their everyday lives. They disregarded the underlying significances of selfies as merely being a convenient, routine behaviour, or an image that was simply captured for memory's sake, and so forth. This idea is reinforced by Schroeder (2008), where he argues that selfies can be considered as another type of snapshot; it's about memory, leisure, and all such things. However, through a closer examination of the data collected from this study, it is apparent that there is in fact something happening on a deeper and more important level when selfies are being taken and posted online. There were all these additional statements that were made by the participants which reveal that there is actually a political aspect to their practices of selfie-taking and online sharing.

There are certain kinds of emotional repercussions to the practices selfie-takers, and there is also a very particular type of labour that is being employed by the women in an attempt to take the perfect selfie. These politics evidently do not solely form part of a broader, everyday routine. Carol accordingly noted how:

> "We choose one selfie out of the billions we take to submit and put them on social media. So, we decide how everyone – our peers, other women and men – are going to see us. It's all in our hands, even with the editing process; it's our choice whether we want to slap on a filter or just give people a raw image. … It is empowering."

Therefore, this particular theme is interested in determining what it actually means when a young woman is taking 30 photographs, for example, in order to get one that is good enough to go online; or that she at least considers good enough. That is quite a substantial amount of time and effort to dedicate to taking photographs of oneself. So, I am trying to understand what it mean in terms of the labour that is required in order to put oneself out there in public in a very precise manner. Does it tie into anxieties about how to take a good photograph? Or, is it instead linked to anxieties about how to look good? What does it mean that these women are actually scrutinizing each of their pictures so carefully so as to find one that they think is acceptable to go online and represent them?

As a result, I am going to analyze and think about what the participants are saying in relation to the postfeminist sensibility because, in today's society, women are still continuously told that they are valued by their looks and how they present themselves as being empowered, in charge, sexy, beautiful and so on. I will also pay specific attention to the amount of work – both aesthetic and emotional – that goes into presenting a very particular version of oneself online; since it is apparently not just a repetitive, ordinary practice as they claim – there is unquestionably something going on behind the scenes of selfie-taking and online, public sharing that is deserving of more careful thought.

5.2.1) Politics of the Aesthetic

It all begins with a very specific camera angle: a smartphone tilted at 45 degrees just above your eye-line is generally deemed the most flattering (Day, 2013). Then a light source: this is usually either the forgiving beam of sunlight that shines directly through your bedroom window if you're lucky, or otherwise a smartphone's bursting camera flash reflected in your bathroom mirror, as preparations for a girl's night out commence. And then, of course, come's the pose: the slight raise of an eyebrow, sucked-in cheeks or the sideways smirk captures your sexiness; unless, of course, you've opted for the less than serious look, pulling your tongue out, or indulging in that infamous 'duck face' that features on one too many girls' Instagram feeds. Or perhaps, as Elizabeth Day (2013) puts it, your go-to selfie pose comprises the doe-eyed stare and mussed-up hair which denotes natural beauty, as if you've just woken up and can't help looking like this.

It does not end there. Once the perfect selfie has eventually been captured, the most flattering filter is then slapped on, along with the several other modifications that photo-editing apps now offer on smartphones. Then, with the single tap of your finger, your selfie is finally ready to be uploaded onto Instagram, and you once again offer yourself up for public consumption. At this point, you impatiently wait for your notification's feed to begin to flood with several tiny orange heart emoticons, and for a brief moment you actually feel 'liked' – because your picture is literally getting 'liked' over-and-over again.

Until, of course, the urge to take another selfie for Instagram strikes again and this entire process relives itself.

Most of us have found ourselves caught up in this addictive selfie-cycle, and we probably cannot deny the fact that we have taken a selfie at least once in our lives. From this description, it is apparent that a significant amount of work goes into capturing, or rather producing the perfect selfie. It is however essential to stipulate that the amount of work employed in selfies naturally differs amongst the girls involved in this research study. Nonetheless, each respective participant worked to produce (and thus display) a very particular image and type of femininity in their online lives. Therefore, this sub-chapter is interested in understanding the politics involved in the aesthetics of the selfie, from a postfeminist perspective.

The political aspect of the aesthetics of selfies refers to the broader questions of what these women believe to be doing or saying when they upload selfies to Instagram. In other words, what do these different representations of the self as beautiful (or not) mean in a postfeminist moment. On the one hand, there are girls who put a conscious effort into looking good before posting a selfie on Instagram. For example, Catherine declared: "I feel like I need to look great, otherwise I won't post it." Anne interestingly added: "I'll admit: I definitely don't want to put an ugly photo on Instagram. … It's the same thing as when you're going for a job interview, you're only going to accentuate your good aspects," and Tamsyn reiterated these ideas when she stated that:

> "I definitely think I put up selfies of myself looking nice; like if I were really tired and not feeling great about myself, there's a very, very low probability – like probably 0,5% - that I'll actually put up a selfie looking or feeling like that. Also, I think most people generally just try to always only show our best side; so I feel like it's just inherent in human nature. Even if it wasn't social media, even if was at like church or something, I'm sure people put on their best faces – it just so happens!"

On the other hand, there are girls who celebrate their normalness and outwardly adopt a careless attitude when it comes to selfies by seemingly posting raw images of themselves. Sylvia perfectly captured this sense of defiance when she answered:

> "I'm not actually all about only showing the beautiful side of me! So, if I think it's a cool photo, I'll upload it, whether I'm on my best looks; or whether I've just woken up; or whether I'm sweating from Sweat 1000. If I just feel like I want to upload the picture, I'll upload it. As I said, I'm not uploading it for the people or for the likes; I'm uploading it for myself, because at that particular moment, that's what I want to share. But ya, even the bad ones I'll sometimes upload, it's not a biggie to me."

In addition, Theresa similarly explained: "So, I've taken a few selfies, like you know when you pull funny faces without makeup and stuff like that? I've uploaded certain selfies like that, so whether it's with makeup or funny selfies, I'll still upload it," and Carol also noted: "… I share both; average and beautiful selfies, and the reason being is that, more than anything, I just want to share me. … I like to just tell stories sometimes, or just share moments."

Therefore, it is apparent that the girls involved in this research study either openly admitted to only posting selfies when looking their best, or they alternatively suggested that when it came to taking and posting selfies online, they did not abide by any rules or regulations and instead posted pictures of their normal, authentic selves, regardless of the criticisms that they might have faced.

However, from a closer examination of the girls' responses and Instagram profiles, it was obvious that noneof them actually ever posted completely raw and self-exposing images. In fact, it was quite apparent that these girls only felt comfortable exposing certain aspects of themselves, and accordingly only rebelled against certain ideals of beauty (as specified by media culture). Therefore, they only experienced a sense of freedom in choosing how to depict themselves up to a particular point. This additionally relates to aforementioned the concept of mediation, which is essentially grounded upon the assumption that the production, circulation and reception of certain online representations (and in this case, selfies), always take place in complex contexts, and further involve various practices where power is exercised and negotiated (Couldry, 2004).

As a result, online identities are typically 'multidimensional and amorphous' (Jewkes & Sharp, 2003: 2), as they are constantly open to negotiation and manipulation; although

this negotiation and manipulation of self-expression and self-actualization always occurs in a system of constraint. This consequently denotes the idea of 'conditional freedom' (Chouliaraki, 2008), wherein a person only exercises agency within a fixed set of options. Talicia provided a perfect example of this when she admitted that:

> "… I guess I mostly post selfies if I think I look really nice. But I mean, I'm the type of person, especially with pictures, like I don't really care what my face looks like, just as long as I don't look fat – because I don't like to look fat in pictures no matter what. But, in terms of a selfie and how my face looks and stuff, like, um, I don't really have to look that that amazing; I can look however [I want]."

Talicia therefore illustrated this notion of conditional freedom by declaring that her face did not necessarily need to mimic the beauty of a model. In fact, she was not even concerned if her face looked quite average in a photo, but her face absolutely could not look fat by any means. As a result, Talicia pushes or rebels against neoliberal and patriarchal power structures by allowing herself to look relatively mediocre in pictures; yet she is conditioned by it in the sense that she praises thinness and accordingly refuses to post a picture of herself looking fat – she absolutely will not. So, this notion of not caring that some of the girls suggested was ultimately hypocritical; since all the girls involved in this research study revealed some level of concern when it came to their selfies.

This in turn means that the girls who are putting up 'careless' selfies after having just woken up, for example, are working equally as hard to produce a particular version of themselves as the girls who deliberately take time to put on makeup and do their hair before posting a selfie. Some girls are consequently trying to produce a certain narrative of self-identity as not caring, or as not being controlled by the expectations of patriarchy, but they are still essentially caring about not caring; whereas the other girls are openly professing to care about how they look.

It is accordingly evident that these girls all undeniably employed a particular kind of labour to produce and display very specific, but diverse versions of femininity; and these different femininities were all very carefully curated and consequently required constant

management. As a result, regardless of whatever version of the postfeminist moment that these girls ultimately embraced, they all had to self-regulate, self-produce and thus work on their image; so as to maintain that particular image of themselves on social media platforms like Instagram. So, even though there might be different aesthetics and different politicizations of those aesthetics; what's underlying them all is this labour to regulate their own identities.

For that reason, it can be said that the politics of the aesthetics are interconnected with postfeminist systems of thought; since the postfeminist sensibility in particular comprises a central focus on individualism, choice and empowerment (Gill & Scharff, 2011: 4). In other words, these women felt empowered by being able to choose which version of femininity they wanted to produce, and they accordingly believed they were doing so for themselves through self-regulation and self-production, rather than because they were being instructed to do so by more powerful and influential structures of patriarchy. In addition, Gill (2007: 135) further claims that the notion of 'being oneself' is also fundamental to the postfeminist sensibility, and that is essentially what these girls believed to be presenting: their true, authentic selves – whether it was via showcasing their supposedly careless, impromptu selfies, or their beautiful, perfectly-posed selfies; since the choice was theirs (according to their beliefs).

Therefore, these varying depictions of femininity ultimately boil down to the fact that some women are working within the system of patriarchy in order to be successful, taken seriously and to do well in their lives; since appearance is essentially seen as the gateway to all of those additional forms of fulfilment or validation. Alternatively, other women are more concerned with disrupting and breaking down the entire system as a whole; and they believe to be doing so by resisting the dictation of 'ideal' beauty accordingly.

5.2.2) Emotional Labour Invested in Selfies

Taking and posting selfies online undoubtedly requires a certain sense of self-awareness and a certain desire to present oneself publicly in a very particular way. However, selfies are not only meaningful to these girls in ways that are just purely about how they look, but in fact, also in ways that have to do with how taking and posting selfies online makes

them feel. As a result, this sub-chapter aims to ascertain the extent to which a specific form of emotional labour is employed in the practices of selfie-taking and public sharing.

Individuals can undoubtedly use digital technology to manipulate their own image as much as they like; but the truth about selfies is that once they are online, a person can never control how other people see them. Therefore, it can be said that posting selfies on public platforms, like Instagram, somewhat place an individual in a very vulnerable position, because they are offering themselves up for public consumption and, in doing so, conceivably expose themselves to complete scrutiny and thus judgment on a potentially global scale.

For that reason, even though the selfie-taker might work hard to try and produce a certain image of themselves, the greater public might perceive that selfie in an entirely different light. So, the practice of sharing selfies online can actually be quite risky. This additionally contributes to the danger of selfie-taking, since the selfie-taker's image and sense of self can potentially be compromised if the public's views of them are not consistent with their own. This means that the narrative that these women work so hard to produce, regulate and maintain can consequently be destroyed by the click of a button, (or the lack thereof.)

As a result, a sense of thrill or nervousness can naturally arise when selfie-takers upload their images to Instagram, because they can never be completely certain of how their followers (or even the broader public) will receive them. Therefore, the selfie-takers nervously wait in suspense as they discover whether or not the public accepted, or rejected, their very carefully curated depiction of self. When selfies are well-received by the public, they tend to get a substantial amount of likes and supportive comments. However, when the public do not enjoy a particular image, they generally do not afford it the benefit of likes or comments, or they alternatively post quite harsh and nasty comments. For instance, Maria noted:

> "… if I do put an actual selfie on, or when I have put an actual selfie on, it can be like a big deal because it can feel like rejection, or not rejection, depending on how people receive it (or how many likes you get), or even just how you feel afterwards can be a big

> thing. But because it can be such a vulnerable moment – you're literally putting up a picture of just yourself – you do open up to criticism (if anyone's ever brave to write it there), but you do open yourself up to that possibility of negative stuff."

Sonia Livingstone (2009: 407) previously buttressed these ideas by suggesting that (our) "selves" are constructed through our interactions with others and self-actualization increasingly includes a careful negotiation between opportunities for identity, sociability, and so forth, and the associated risks of cyber-bullying, abuse and misinterpretations that are afforded by digital (or online) communication. For that reason, it can be said that a relatively significant amount of emotional labour is also invested in the practices of taking and sharing selfies online, and selfies are therefore not merely about looking good, but also about how people receive them and consequently view the selfie-taker.

In addition, Tamsyn accurately illustrated someone of these anxieties when she stated that:

> "… I get bummed if I put up something that I really like and then other people don't like it. I'd love to say it doesn't bother me but I'll get touched; I switch off my notifications otherwise it drives me crazy, but then when I go on obviously I'll see how many likes and whatnot. So, it does having a bearing."

Therefore, Tamsyn had to physically turn of her Instagram notifications because she could not stand the suspense of not knowing whether or not her selfie was going to get enough likes, or rather, symbols of approval. Maria similarly explained: "It's important for me to get a certain amount of likes. ... Because it's a sense of approval," and Whitney further added:

> "I never used to worry about the likes, but now it's like, 'Shit! It's been up for an hour and only got five likes! Take this off!'… I think because it's a way of showing that people agree with you because when you took the picture and you were sure enough to put it on Instagram, you were like, 'Okay, this is a good picture!' But then if people don't like it, it's like, 'Maybe not!' But you know it's a good picture and just because a lot of people don't like it, you doubt yourself."

This consequently indicates the fact other people's perceptions of an individual may moreover impact on how that individual see's themselves, and this fundamentally ties into broader questions of social rejection and acceptance; since the desire to be accepted is an integral part of the human species.

People undeniably care deeply about social rejection and acceptance (Fiske, 2004), and being accepted by other people represents the core motive of belonging (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). In other words, individuals want to connect with other people in their social circles and wider communities, in order to survive and thrive. So, the core motive of belonging matters because it facilitates other core social motives, such as: socially shared understanding, a sense of controlling one's outcomes in life, enhancing the self, and trusting close others (Fiske, 2004). People are thus noticeably healthier, happier and more successful if they are not socially isolated and, as a result, the human motive to belong is essentially universal.

Therefore, I argue that the reason why so much emotional labour is invested into the practices of taking and sharing selfies online is because people ultimately want to be accepted, and when they post a selfie, they cannot be certain of whether people will accept or reject it; hence the selfie-takers' associated anxieties. The public's perception of the selfie-taker subsequently impacts on their emotions (or on how they feel), because obviously if they are accepted, they will feel a sense of happiness and belonging, but if they are rejected, they will feel socially isolated – like they have been 'cyber- ostracized' – and they could accordingly suffer from deep sadness and apprehension in that moment as well as begin to lack general well-being in the long-term, should this rejection persist (as Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000 note); resulting in a diminished sense of self-assurance and reliance.

However, when considering the fact that Instagram users understand that they are potentially opening themselves up to scrutiny on a global level, it indicates some degree of awareness that their selfie could be seen by anyone around the world (who is registered on Instagram), which is essentially a sort of fame in itself – what if their selfie went viral? Therefore, even though this research study solely deals with ordinary women

who claim to have no interest in being famous, I argue that the practice of posting a selfie on Instagram is to some extent related to something more extraordinary, which links back to celebrity culture; as celebrity status is defined by a tension between the ordinary and extraordinary (Marshall, 1997; Rojek, 2001).Thus, even though being famous might not necessarily appeal to these women, perhaps they are simply intrigued by the possibility of it; hence their heightened anxieties surrounding posting selfies on Instagram. In addition, being globally visible links back to the idea of globalized femininities that these young women are not even questioning that they are a part of; they are just taking for granted that they are the same as the other women who appear on Instagram from different parts of the world.

5.3) Beauty: The Desire to Look Good versus Self-Acceptance

The smartphone selfie has unquestionably established itself as a contemporary form of self-expression. Yet, there is still contestation concerning whether selfies are simply a harmless fad, or rather a dangerous indication of society's ever-narcissistic embrace. Of course, Christopher Lasch (1979) would argue that selfies are inherently narcissistic and that every narcissist needs a reflecting pool. So, just as Narcissus gazed into a pool to admire his own beauty, social networking sites, like Instagram, have become the virtual pools of our everyday contemporary world.

In addition, the common, everyday rhetoric surrounding selfie-takers seems to suggest that they have an inflated sense of self (Burns, 2015: 1716), which allows them to believe that their friends (or followers) are actually interested in seeing them lounging around in bed, with puckered lips, in a real world headshot. It essentially imitates the action of looking in a mirror all day long, and openly letting others see you doing it. Selfies are thus also strongly regarded as a manifestation of society’s obsession with beauty and looks.

However, this is only one side of the story and I aim to address both. Beauty, or physical appearance, was arguably an inescapable theme of this research study, considering the fact that the interview and focus group discussions were predominantly centred on self-image and the representation of oneself online. The following analytical chapter is

consequently interested in determining the extent to which the young women involved in this research study are influenced by the beauty standards set forth by the media, and how this accordingly impacts upon their self-confidence and selfie-taking practices alike. This chapter moreover aims to understand whether or not selfies are merely manifestations of narcissism, or if they do in fact serve a different purpose.

Therefore, it is first important, and equally interesting, to map out what these women considered to be the 'ideal beauty'; since it is imperative to understand what they were measuring themselves up against.

5.3.1) Ideal Beauty: "How I wish I looked"

The final section of the Instagram tours, (which were carried out in the second part of the data collection process), required the girls to explain me what their favourite Instagram selfie was and why. Through the discussions of their favourite selfies, I have formed a construction of the ideal beauty in relation to the views of the young women involved in this research study only.

A common theme of response that emerged during these discussions was this idea of women putting themselves through pain in an attempt to improve their physical appearance – to make themselves more aesthetically pleasing – because, after all, women are constantly reminded that 'beauty is pain'. Carol admitted to this in stating that:

> "I had at least five selfies I chose 'as favourites'. … I really like this one though, at first for superficial reasons; my eyebrows are semi-decent, my skin is really good here and my hair is half did and looks good. But, also because it shows my frustration with having to get my braids done; the caption is literally: 'Busy doing braids, you really have to be emotionally prepared for this.' I'm so over it, and at the same time, I had to take a selfie of my suffering and sort of remind myself why 'I'm suffering for beauty' – something my mom always said. So, I picked this one because you can literally see my frustration or upset."

Talicia reiterated this notion of 'suffering for beauty' when she explained that: "I had just actually gotten my eyebrows done in this selfie, because I never have ever really done my eyebrows. So, I went to get them threaded and it hurt like shit."

Another theme that Dina and Macy strongly emphasized through their responses was the concept of social acceptance. Nathan DeWall and Kastle Hall (2011: 256) accordingly note how acceptance – in romantic relationships, from friends, and even from strangers – is absolutely fundamental to humans. The authors further clarify that belonging to a group was probably helpful to our ancestors; since, living in a group helped early humans survive harsh environments (DeWall & Hall: 257). Because of that, belonging to a group still helps people feel safe and protected today, even when walls and clothing have made it easier for one man to be an island entire of himself (DeWall & Hall, 2011: 257). DeWall and Hall (2011: 258) also warn that acceptance has an evil twin: rejection. Being rejected or excluded is associated with poor mental health; and exclusion and mental health problems can later join together in a destructive loop.

Rebecca Adams (2004) thus postulates that friendships are generally institutionalized in many globalized societies. In other words, obligations to friends or intimate partners are socially mandated, and such commitments are thus publicly displayed and celebrated so as to receive the social acceptance and recognition that individuals so deeply desire.

As a result, it can be argued that these young women deemed it necessary to display their friendships and relationships in order to confirm and gain approval of their established social relationships; be it with friends or intimate partners. For example, Dina noted that:

> "This is my favourite selfie because I really remember a great memory from this day; so I captured a great time in my life where I was with two school friends and one of them got married. It was just genuinely such a fun day and an amazing wedding and there was just so much love; it's just genuine friendship."

Macy further reiterated this idea of love and social fulfilment in stating that: "…We were both happy and it's an 'in the moment' photo. It's almost validating that I'm in a happy relationship; I want people to know that." In this regard, it is evident that it is not merely enough for an individual to personally know that they possess honest, genuine friends, or

that they are in stable, healthy relationships; there is also a dying need for others to notice and approve of these bonds too.

An additional pattern that recurred over-and-over again in the young women's responses was this idea of looking 'pretty'. For instance, Anne went on to explain that: "… I hate my hair up and I feel like in this photo it actually looks nice." Therefore, even though Anne is not necessarily enthusiastic about how her hair looks tied up, it could be argued that she felt the need to capture it because she liked how she looked when she usually would not; which was unusual and thus deserving of public dissemination.

Theresa moreover signaled this notion of how having good hair forms an intrinsic part of looking good, by stating that: "This one I specifically took because I had just curled my hair with bendy-rollers. So, the results are showing people that I look bomb as fuck!" Moreover, related to the theme of hair was a tendency amongst the girls to prefer their hair once they had lightened it with ombré, for example. Ombré is the French word for shadow or shade (Merriam-Webster, 2015), and it accordingly denotes a popular type of hairstyle that gradually becomes lighter towards the ends of the hair, instead of customarily lightening from the roots. In other words, the hair colour is graduated from dark to light; typically from dark, brown roots to gradually lightening throughout the hair until the ends are light brown or blonde in colour.

For instance, Macy liked a specific selfie and subsequently Instagramed it: "… Because I looked pretty and my hair looks like ombré," and Maria agreed with Macy by declaring that: "… I just like it because… my hair is like that ombré and curled. So ya, I like it." As a result, the girls felt the need to publicly display themselves on Instagram once they had lightened their hair, as they both believed it looked better than their original pitch black hair.

Sylvia in particular also highlighted the importance of having a great smile and being tall, in addition to having a good set of hair, when she stated that: "I like this selfie because of my big smile and I actually look tall."

Several women additionally demonstrated how certain alterations in bodily appearance (with makeup, for example), held the potential to increase their overall sense of confidence. For instance, Georgia explained: "… I think it comes down to the fact that I felt like I looked nice… because I had a tan … and I was going out, my makeup was done; so, I took a photo," and Maria also noted the significance of makeup when she stated that: "I just like it because my makeup looks nice… and my eyebrows are on fleek."

On the other hand, there was also a burning desire to look good without makeup on; to be a 'natural beauty'. This was brought to my attention when Tamsyn stated that: "I didn't have makeup on, I had glasses on, and it actually came out cute," as if she were beating all unexpected odds; or that women are not supposed to look good without makeup on, especially if they wear glasses. Maria further reiterated this notion of natural beauty when she proudly declared:

> "… I didn't have makeup on, I'd just washed my hair, so at the time I was just like, 'Okay, let me just take one.' So it was basically showing that even though I don't have makeup on, I still look good and I'm going to show it."

Finally, Macy went on to explain that:

> "… I'm trying to show everyone that I'm natural. But, even though I'm natural, I'm still pretty type thing; that's the look that I wanted to go for. Even though like you can see I still have like a little bit of lip-ice on, and I definitely had like just a little bit of makeup, even though like I've got no eye shadow, no nothing. So, I feel like, I was trying to prove to everyone I'm beautiful with no makeup on type thing."

Therefore, it is evident that being naturally beautiful was aspired to, even if that look was created by the help of exterior, non-natural products, like makeup. Ingun Klepp (2009) supported this idea when she specified that being perceived as naturally beautiful takes precedence over having to work hard to look good in most Western countries. Even though South Africa is not necessarily a Western country in its entirety, the women involved in this research study view themselves as part of a global culture, due to their

social and economic privileges that displace them from the local struggles that many other less-advantaged South Africans face.

Joanne Entwistle (2000) backed Klepp's ideas by suggesting that this links to both inner and outer qualities in the beautiful person, as the naturally beautiful – from ancient times onwards – are seen as special humans given something wonderful from their respective Gods. As a result, people who have to work hard to look good risk being perceived as vain or foolish (Entwistle, 2000).

This subsequently links to theme of 'effortless beauty' that also surfaced in the women's responses. Whitney, as well as a few other girls, aspired to this sense of effortless beauty, wherein they did not have to try hard to look good, it just so happened; it came naturally – hence the need to capture this almost rare occurrence. Whitney stated that:

> "I really like this one because I look good. The whole point of taking this selfie was like… I woke up that day, I remember, I was so chilled and my mom was like, 'Let's go out,' so I was like, 'Okay.' I just threw something on and when I looked in the mirror I was like, 'I actually look good, you know, let me take a picture.' And it's not even just about the face, because selfies are always like face, face, face! So, it was almost like an effortless approach to getting ready and when I saw I looked good, I felt like I needed to capture it."

This consequently illustrates the preference of not having to work hard to look good. Beauty is thus much more appreciated when it comes naturally and without work. Finally, another prominent response that was constantly repeated in the women's discussions was the idea of being skinny. Being skinny was relentlessly praised and being fat was expectedly frowned upon. However, it was not enough to just be thin – these girls wanted to look emaciated. There was almost a need to ensure that their bones stuck out, or at least showed to some degree. Maria stated: "Okay, so I think I like this one because I look skinny. You can see my bones sticking out, so I like that I look skinnier than what I actually am," and this was further implied by Macy when she reported: "because I'm so dark and I look thin and you can see my bones… that's also why I like it." Marilyn also celebrated thinness when she explained that:

> "… Recently I've lost weight and I don't ever – if you go through my Instagram, you won't see any body shots of me, ever, and like, this was two weeks ago – and I put it up because I was like, 'Fuck yes! I am l losing weight, so I will post this!' For the people that haven't seen me for three years, this is what I look like at the moment – I'm not that chubby chubs anymore!"

It is therefore apparent that despite the participants in this study being relatively diverse in terms of their race, body shape, height, eye and hair colour, and so forth, they all still subscribed to very particular and similar aesthetics of beauty. Through the discussions of the women's favourite selfies, it is evident that they collaboratively described a tall, skinny, light-haired woman who is well-kept and has great facial features, like a nice smile, a small nose and full, well-shaped eyebrows, and who is also mentally healthy and thus able to make and maintain strong, authentic social bonds, both with friends and intimate partners. In addition, these girls praised the idea of a natural, effortless beauty which is accordingly ascribed to their ideals of beauty; such that all of the formerly-mentioned attributes of the 'perfect woman' just so happen naturally and without any work.

However, this exists in paradox with the idea that 'normal' women have to endure pain and suffering in an attempt to look more like their vision of ideal beauty and thus less like their normal, authentic selves. This consequently highlights the unrealistic expectations that women have for themselves, and this is in part created and sustained by the beauty and fashion industries; wherein photos of models are so photo-shopped that the models do not even look like themselves. So, how are ordinary women supposed to mimic such images when not even models can – naturally at least?

It can consequently be said that these women's ideas of what beauty means is largely influenced by the media and how women are constantly depicted and put on display. These women undeniably subject themselves to extreme self-judgment and scrutinize each of their pictures so meticulously, so as to produce certain images that are (in their own personal opinions) okay to go online and thus in accordance with their particular expectations and views of what they consider to be beautiful. Their responses are

additionally indicative of the fact that these women are relentlessly working on themselves in order to look a specific (or more favourable) way.

5.3.2) Aspirational Beauty: "I would look better if…"

It is important to note that just like most ordinary women; the participants involved in this study were normal human beings who looked nothing like the models who typically appear on the covers of magazines. The participants also made clear to me that they were fully aware of the fact that such images of models are almost one hundred percent of the time photo-shopped, airbrushed, or edited to one degree or another; literally making their case of beauty inaccessible – as it simply is not real. Yet, interestingly enough, these young women still lacked confidence in their own appearance and rather aspired to and even tried to achieve the unrealistic beauty that the edited pictures of models conveyed. For instance, Georgia noted that: "I think seeing all these other girls on social media looking so perfect makes me feel unconfident; even though half of it is either photo-shopped or actual models whose jobs are literally to look like perfection."

Therefore, this sub-chapter aims to determine the extent to which the participants involved in this research study were confident, or rather lacked in confidence as well as whether or not changing certain features of their physical appearance would enhance their overall confidence; thus making them more self-accepting.

Out of all 14 girls who were interviewed, only five were relatively confident in themselves. However, of those five, only one girl, Theresa, was completely happy with her physical appearance, as she stated that: "… I wouldn't change anything [about it]!" This is undoubtedly alarming, as basically all of the girls involved in this study wanted to change at least one feature of their appearance, and more than half of the girls lacked complete confidence in how they looked naturally.

Anne declared: "I am not at all confident in the way I look," and Georgia agreed with her in admitting that: "Honestly, I don't think I'm confident." Catherine and Rachel mutually confessed that they had their fair share of days of feeling confident, however these were usually short-lived, as Dina explained: "Sometimes we have 'fat days' and we're like,

‘Argh! I feel like I have a huge muffin top!’ Or, our jeans will feel super tight!” Marilyn further stated that she was not confident at all, and went on to explain: “… that’s why I’m on this huge diet at the moment,” and Macy reiterated these ideas by declaring that: “I’m also not confident, that’s why I like to go to gym and stuff.”

These are just a few illustrations of the ways in which the women declared or accounted for their lack in confidence, and they were apparently quite harsh on themselves. On the other hand, the girls who were confident in themselves actually demonstrated a much lighter sense of overall happiness; they were evidently not as hard on themselves. Talicia captured this spirit perfectly when she reported that:

> “I do think that I am beautiful and I think a lot of the time I struggle to say it, and I think other people also struggle to say it because you’re almost afraid of coming across cocky or, like, full of yourself. Whereas, there’s nothing wrong with feeling confident and just knowing that you are a beautiful person and not being that way at all.”

Maria added onto this point when she stated that:

> “I suppose what makes me confident is that I do have good genetics. So, I guess I know I’m pretty. And, also what makes me confident is the fact that I have a brain, so I’m able to hold a conversation and not seem stupid. So, I think it’s just a combination of both really; that I can stand in front of people and speak and not sound like a complete fool, combined with how I look externally.”

It is therefore evident that confidence did not merely come from an aesthetic point for some of these women, but also from the acknowledgment of their intellect. This essentially falls in line with Michel Foucault’s (1992) work, wherein he argues that in order to be viewed as a fully-functioning individual in society, a person must present themselves ethically, or as well-rounded and accomplished in every realm of their physical being. Therefore, women should not only be beautiful, tanned, skinny, tall, and so forth, they should also be educated, work hard and have successful careers; but beauty is essentially the entrance point to every additional form of validation or approval for women.

And then, finally, there were the 'in betweener's' who were generally quite confident, but understood that it is unrealistic to look your best every day of the year. For instance, Carol declared that: "I'm not confident all the time. I have days where I'm like, 'Oh, hey there good looking!' and then some days where I'm like, 'Ugh, you troll!'" And, Tamsyn reinforced these ideas when she stated that:

> "I wasn't always confident and I don't think that I'm perfect in accordance to any standards; but I think that I am comfortable in the way that I look and it took me a long time to actually feel okay with it. … Also, I waste a lot of time in that space if I don't feel good about myself because then I'm like, 'I'm not going to want to do this, I'm not going to want to do that; I'm literally going to do nothing,' and then I'm not actually living. So, I've just sort of learnt to become happy with how I look."

As a result, it is additionally important to note the impact that lacking confidence and not feeling good about oneself can have on a person. They do not want to be seen out in public or attend social gatherings because they simply do not feel good enough about themselves or confident enough to do so; they simply feel inadequate and unworthy.

Interestingly though, as previously noted, most of the time when the girls admitted to being confident, there was always a '…but!' For example, Sylvia admitted:

> "I am confident and happy with the way that I look, but I would definitely like to have a bigger bum and like smaller lips – goodness gracious! Ya, smaller lips, definitely! I've always wanted to have smaller lips because I've always felt like my lips were so big; but generally I am happy and comfortable with the way that I am."

It is consequently evident that almost all of the young women who participated in this research study lacked confidence to some extent. These women accordingly suggested that their levels of confidence would undoubtedly rise if they could change or alter certain features of their physical appearance. For instance, Anne indicated: "Well like, obviously I've got my little issues, I think everyone has their little issues, you know? So there are maybe a few things I'd change, for example: I think my nose is too big."

Therefore, she highlights the fact that it is almost natural for girls to have insecurities; as though it is just a by-product of media culture and the beauty industry that has been accepted in contemporary society. Talicia interestingly added onto this particular point when she stated that:

> "I'm the most confident about my face, but when it comes to my body that's a whole other story; that's like a history. … Just like every girl, I have weight issues; I feel insecure about that at times … I guess, weight issues have always been a thing for me, so if I could change something, it would definitely be the rest of my body … I just need to diet, but that's just like really hard."

In addition, Rachel stated: "I'd change a lot about myself, but mainly my weight," and Catherine and Dina agreed with her, declaring: "Ya, just my weight," and "Me too," respectively. Maria similarly maintained: "… I don't think I'd change my face, but I would change my body," and Macy continued: "Ya, like when I look at those chicks' pictures on Instagram – which always comes up on my feed – of like all of these amazing abs and stuff… Yes, I know I'm not overweight or, you know; but deep down I still wish I had that." Macy thus illuminates the fact that although she is not overweight by any means, she is still not slim enough; being thin is not nearly enough anymore.

Finally, Marilyn explained: "… I mean, sure, would I like to lose weight? Yes! But in the same way, I am working my ass off to lose weight right now. So, I can change it, it's just going to take some time before it happens." So, Marilyn yet again demonstrates the amount of labour and effort that women are expected to put into their appearance because the messages articulated by society tells them that they are not good enough; they need to be skinnier, prettier, tanner, and so the list continues.

It is therefore apparent that the majority of the women involved in this study wanted to change their bodies; they wanted to be skinnier, or more toned. Thus, the key feature contributing to the women's insecurities or lack of confidence was their weight.

In her book on sexualisation of the female body, Figga Haug (1999) documents women's fears of fatness, and she analyses their associated shame and disgust when they perceive themselves as being too heavy (or fat.) The symbolic reference point for the women in

her study was the body of the fashion model, as she undoubtedly ascribes to the perfect narrative of the slim and healthy female body. However, the women in Haug's book as well as in this particular research study (and numerous other feminist critics of the fashion industry, see Bordo, 2003; McRobbie, 2009), are well-aware of the fact that the bodies of fashion models are most likely unnaturally thin and possibly unhealthy. Yet, these beauty ideals continue to make a profound impression on a large proportion of women around the world (Rysst, 2010: 33).

Therefore, it can be said that despite these women understanding that it could potentially be life-threatening to be so thin, they still aspire to that particular ideal of beauty because it is favoured, praised and privileged in most major fashion and fitness magazines, as well as in contemporary culture in general. According to Lauren Muhlheim and Tabitha Farrar (2014), women are relentlessly given the message from a very young age that in order to be happy and successful, they must be thin and fit. The authors maintain that every time women walk into a store, they are surrounded by images of emaciated women on the front covers of fashion magazines or equally thin mannequins (Muhlheim & Farrar, 2014). Therefore, it is of no wonder that thousands of girls starve themselves or regularly exercise in an attempt to achieve what the fashion industry considers to be the ideal figure.

The media clearly has an influence, and regardless of gender, people desire to look like the images they see on television, in the movies and in magazines. For instance, television shows featuring thin actresses make viewers feel as though they too need to be thin or be super fit in order to be successful or worthwhile. However, these actresses have more than likely endured excessive hours of exercise and deprived themselves of adequate nutrition in order to maintain their thin figure. Some celebrities even resort to plastic surgery to slim down and enhance their overall appearance. In addition, television programs promote weight stigma by stereotyping and making fun of larger characters, and it accordingly conditions people into believing that being thin is important and necessary (Muhlheim & Farrar, 2014).

Furthermore, Muhlheim and Farrar (2014) note that a recent study linked time spent on Facebook (and various other forms of social media) to increased rates of disordered eating. Therefore, individuals who spend a great deal of time on social media sites, like the women involved in this research study, are subjecting themselves to an additional forum for self-comparison against a thin ideal, which has typically gone through various touch-ups and has been air-brushed to make the models in those particular images look impossibly perfect. Therefore, women are undoubtedly under immense pressure to be thin, and they are lead to believe that the only way they can be accepted in society is if they are thin; or they will simply end up with heightened feelings of inadequacy.

It is however equally important to note that the women involved in this particular study actually completely understood and acknowledged the fact that their perceptions of beauty were influenced by the media and societal pressures. For instance, Maria declared:

> "It literally is drummed into my head. Like, you know, you would never really watch a TV show, or see a magazine shoot, or whatever with a girl who's not thin. So, the fact that it's what you constantly see does play a factor in how I would then view myself and how I then want to look … And no matter how many times you tell yourself, 'Ah, but plus size models,' and I know that's annoying in itself, why must people call it 'plus size'? I don't even know! So then why is it that I must now refer to myself as plus size and be okay with that when that's not even okay or accepted as normal in society? Like, it's still not okay! It's so stupid, it aggravates me. And like, of course I've been told that I'm 'normal,' but sometimes I'm like, 'I'm probably not then,' because I don't look like these models. It's ridiculous actually, it irritates me; these labels, this conformity, it's irritating."

Talicia interestingly added:

> "Um, it's definitely because of societal pressures and there's always this insecurity that's there, like: you need to be slimmer, you need to be this or you need to be that. I don't have, I guess, enough self-confidence to make me feel like, 'Okay, the way I am right now actually is okay.' Even though I know I do exude confidence, and people always say, 'You're so confident and comfortable in your skin and stuff,' but I think even by saying that, it's almost saying like, 'Even though you're not trying to conform to this

> mould that society makes you want to strive to be, I guess, in terms of being good looking,' you know? Which is kind of also saying that you're actually not that beautiful. But, I mean, my whole life, like since I was 11, I've had multiple body image issues, I guess. But ya, it definitely is because of society and the pressures that we girls, especially, are placed under. So, that's what kind of gives me that reason for wanting to be slimmer."

And finally, Georgia continued: "I just think I have a lot of insecurities … have to do with – which I know is bad – but comparing myself to other girls I see in magazines, on Instagram and everywhere else." Therefore, these women completely understand that the images that are perpetuated by the media are influencing their beauty ideals and their associated aspirations. Yet, ironically so, some of the girls did not even believe that the beauty standards as dictated by society are in fact beautiful, as Talicia notes:

> "… The thing is that I don't want to be skinny because I actually don't look good skinny, like, I just look weird; I like being thicker, but more slim thick than thick the way I am right now. So, I want to be slimmer, still have my booty, still have thighs, but a smaller and flatter tummy type thing."

Nonetheless, there is still a desire to attain those ideals; even if it is only to some degree and not completely. So, why is it that these women still continuously put immense effort and work into resembling something that they essentially dislike? Foucault (1977) argues that this owes directly to the fact that the body is a target of subtle disciplinary practices that seek to regulate its existence. In other words, different disciplinary practices in schools, the army, the hospital, prison, the manufactory, and so forth, produce 'docile bodies' with an inclination to obey regimes of power in society (Foucault, 1977; Dworkin & Wachs, 2009). Inspired by Foucault's ideas, Angela McRobbie (2009: 61) maintains that patriarchal authority today, in the age of third-wave feminism and postfeminism, is exerted through the commercial domain's entanglement with the fashion-beauty complex:

> "The Symbolic (patriarchal authority) discharges (or maybe franchises) its duties to the commercial domain (to beauty, fashion, Magazines, body culture, etc.) which becomes the source of authority and judgment for young women."

In other words, the commercial domain encompasses disciplinary gazes, the content of which is constructed and defined by some dominant "Symbolic" (Rysst, 2010: 16). Therefore, women begin experiencing their bodies as though someone is watching them, and this consequently leads to disciplining bodily practices, or what Nikolas Rose (1999) argues is an element of 'governing the soul'.

As a result, McRobbie (as cited in Rysst, 2010: 16) maintains that the formation of hegemonic femininity connected to a postfeminist façade can successfully operate without feminist opposition because consumer and popular culture, over and above government policies, inscribe old concepts from feminism; including empowerment for women and 'your own choice' in their strategies towards young women. So, essentially what people come to believe as being their own choice is actually influenced by the "heterogeneous assemblage of technologies" (Rose, 1999: 217), where cosmetic surgery or (over)exercising at gym, for example, may be understood as such technologies (Edmonds, 2009: 5).

'Governing the soul' consequently takes place by people thinking that they are doing what they are doing out of free choice, without reflection from where options originate. Carol provided the perfect example of this when she explained why she would want to change certain features of her appearance:

> "… There're definitely some things I would change about myself because of my own personal preference; because of my own things that I want for myself. So, there're things that I can work toward, for example: to just be healthier, and be more toned."

As a result, Carol evidently believes that she wants to be healthier and more toned because of her own, independent choice, and she subsequently ignores the influence and society and its regulatory and disciplinary functions have had on her. So, as Foucault, Rose and McRobbie respectively argue, it is for this exact reason that patriarchal authority is still successful in governing the masses of today; because it presents or offers certain ideals in a very particular way that encourages people (and in this case, women,) to idolize and replicate them through their own self-regulation. In other words, the women are made to feel as though they are aspiring to such ideals because of their own

personal choice, as opposed to being forced or told to do so by larger and more influential societal powers.

5.3.3) Redefining Beauty: A Step towards Self-Love and the Diversification of Beauty

Contemporary society tends to condemn the selfie because it is regarded as nothing more than narcissistic pleas for attention. Yet the responses that surfaced in my research proved that there is actually much more to selfies than plain narcissism; instead, selfies are gradually becoming more about self-love and the acceptance of oneself.

Jessica Lovejoy (2014), positive body image advocate, maintains that the beauty and fashion industries in society evidently set ridiculous standards of beauty, because almost every surface in society is splashed with highly retouched images of both men and women who fit the 'perfect' aesthetic; they are far too slim, muscular, stunning and perfect – something that ordinary humans are not.

Contemporary society is swamped with images of perfect people whose beauty does not actually exist; because it is not real, but rather fabricated. Yet, the desire to want to fit that perfect image is still very compelling for a large number of individuals. This is because the messages that the media disseminate conditions people to believe that in order to be accepted into the very society that they belong, they need to look like the photo-shopped images of models that saturate advertisements or fashion and fitness magazine covers, for example; and if they do not look like them, it can dreadfully be assumed that they will immediately be classified as: 'ugly'.

So, in this way, individuals are essentially taught to compare themselves to others, to admire and aspire to the perfect pictures of the perfect people, with their flawless skin, tiny waistlines and immaculate sense of fashion (Tatum, 2014). Thus, people begin to crave these images of perfectness; when they see them, they defiantly think: "I want to (and I will) look like that!" But now, in the age of the selfie, I argue that individuals are beginning to take all back; and the reason is not because they are perfect – because they definitely are not – but rather because they are real.

Today, millions of people are taking pictures of themselves and sharing them on social media sites, like Instagram, or hanging them in their homes and giving them to friends and family as gifts. Most of these images are not airbrushed or touched up like those that appear on magazine covers, for instance; they are authentic. Selfies resemble artworks of real, different people who naturally have flaws and live ordinary lives. People are creating their own, new definition(s) of beauty; hence, this sub-chapter is interested in understanding the degree to which beauty is now being redefined, or that the definition of what beautiful means is diversifying. It also aims to gain better insight into selfies as a form of self-love, as opposed to merely being a manifestation of narcissism (as it is typically thought to be), because as Theresa declared: "To me, selfie means self-love, self-appreciation."

I argue that selfies are this generation's way of resisting against larger and more influential societal power structures; it is our way of coping with the countless years of body-policing and regulation from the media and our broader social circles. Selfies are now allowing individuals to embrace themselves and their bodies, by overcoming body-image issues and, of course, the self-loathing that generally develops as a by-product of the beauty and fashion industries that women are customarily exposed to. Selfies are teaching women that it is okay to love themselves and be proud of who they are and how they look; despite not fitting the image of perfection that is endlessly disseminated by the media. And so, I maintain that selfies are not merely about vanity, narcissism or the obsession with oneself; but rather, selfies are important for the reasons listed above.

Whitney accordingly insisted that selfies matter because: "…With a selfie, you don't need anyone to tell you that you look nice; you're telling yourself that. So, that in itself is a form of self-love and also acceptance, even if I don't like the model in magazines." Carol maintained these ideas by noting that:

> "I do think to an extent it definitely is a sense of self-love and self-acceptance because when you take a selfie, you're looking at yourself; you're analysing things about yourself; you're putting yourself under a microscope. And then, to take it further by posting the selfie means that you've accepted it and you're willing to put it out there to the scrutiny of the public eye. So, you might not always get a positive response, but to be

> able to withstand that and put it out there anyways, even though someone might not double-click it, or like it. But, it is a sense of like self-love and acceptance, despite what everybody else says."

Georgia further reiterated these notions when she stated that:

> "I definitely think that selfies are a form of self-love. Society wants all girls to fit into the same box that defines beauty, but 99% of us don't. So, when you put up a selfie it's basically showing the world that even though you don't fit into that box, it's okay and you accept it, like: 'Hey world, I know I don't look like that, but it's okay; this is me!'"

It is consequently evident that through the process of sharing selfies, these women showing the public (on a potentially global scale) that they are no longer embarrassed or afraid of being photographed and, more importantly, that people of all shapes, sizes, genders, races, ethnicities and backgrounds are beautiful – because they are inherently different and thus unique. And so, as Lovejoy (2014) upholds, selfies are essentially giving the organizations that have relentlessly bullied women about their looks and weight the proverbial middle finger. Macy accordingly stated that: "Selfies are like saying: 'You know what? I'm happy with who I am,'" and Marilyn similarly explained:

> "I specifically love the selfie movement purely because it's like self-appreciation. So, it's a reminder that you're beautiful no matter who you are and you can take a selfie and feel good. It's okay to be like, 'I am beautiful,' you know? It's not a negative thing to do that."

It is thus evident that there is progressive resilience against the painful and unachievable beauty standards that have been set by a faceless bully – the media –who has affected the confidence, self-worth and pride of millions of people worldwide for far too long. As a result, selfies are providing a platform for the profound expression of self-love and the associated (and new found) self-esteem that so many individuals have been lacking for as long as they can remember; thus resulting in the representation of a more diverse range of bodies and faces in the online realm. Theresa captured this diversification perfectly when she explained:

> "I think the notion of selfies allows the definition of beauty to kind of be fluid because different faces that we come across are still seen as beautiful; they'll still get a lot of likes. So, that's allowed the stereotypical notion of what beauty is to kind of transform because now you have beauty which is about having a big bum and a small waist, for example, and there's also different hashtags, there's: *#BlackIsBeautiful, #SlenderNeverDies*. So, beauty is really now no longer a fixed term, which I think it important."

Therefore, beauty no longer only comprises the tall, skinny, light-haired woman who is well-groomed, but still naturally and effortlessly beautiful, with perfect facial features, as previously described. The definition of what it means to be beautiful is now expanding and incorporating a more comprehensive range of physical features, where fatness, for example, is no longer as feared. Theresa revealed: "You no longer have to be skinny to take a selfie; you can just be you and you'll still get likes and you'll still feel good after taking a selfie."

Now, almost everybody is posting selfies for their own particular reasons, and it does not have to be seen as a bad thing, or as society's ever-narcissistic and egotistical embrace. Rather, individuals are only now, at long last, beginning to accept who they are and how they look; they are taking their bodies and accordingly publishing their selfies on public platforms, like Instagram. However, this is not merely because selfie-takers are attention-seeking individuals who have an inflated sense of self, (as attention is unsurprisingly received on social media sites); but more so because of the fact that they are publicly demonstrating their love for their bodies and also for who they are. Marilyn captured this spirit perfectly when she declared that:

> "… even like when you have no makeup on and your hair's a mess and you've just woken up and you take a selfie, you can still be like: 'I'm a beautiful person.' Just because society makes you feel like you have to look like a model with these long eyelashes and perfect eyebrows to be beautiful, doesn't mean you're not. It's not true; I feel like beauty is different for everyone, and everyone is beautiful differently."

Therefore, women are beginning to create their own definition of what beautiful means; beauty is now more about accepting and embracing our flaws, whilst simultaneously

challenging unrealistic and harsh social norms and expectations. Ideally speaking, all women want the media to do is distribute more realistic and attainable forms of beauty, and all women also desire to share equal representation in the media too (Tatum, 2014). So, what better way to represent your true, authentic self, with your own unique beauty, and your own style, than by posting a selfie for the world to see? Because, as Maria put it: "… If you're comfortable in who you are – even if you don't look perfect – and you can let people know that by posting a selfie, then you're accepting yourself, and that, for me, is self-love."

Therefore, it can be concluded that a selfie can (to some extent) actually be a more authentic representation of beauty than the traditional images that media typically parade. In an article for *Psychology Today*, Sarah Gervais (2013) – an Assistant Professor in Social Law and Psychology – wrote that: "Instagram (and other social media) has allowed the public to reclaim photography as a source of empowerment… [it] offers a quiet resistance to the barrage of perfect images that we face each day. Rather than being bombarded with those creations… we can look through our Instagram feed and see images of real people – with beautiful diversity." In keeping with Gervais, Macy notes: "… By not conforming to ideals of beauty and by posting these selfies, you showing that you accept yourself regardless of how society says you should look." Thus, Instagram (and other social media platforms alike) additionally offer individuals the opportunity to see below the surface; to catch a glimpse into the makings of people's daily lives. We get a sense of those things that make the ordinary, everyday extraordinary (Gervais, 2013).

5.4) Instagram 'Likes': The Development of an Attention Economy or the Development of the Self through Self-Exploration

Instagram, like any other social network, is based around having friends or 'followers'. Ultimately, the point of Instagram is to 'follow' various people, and once you have followed them, their photos automatically show up in your news stream. You can then 'like' a person's photos and/or 'comment' on them too; since likes are typically appreciated, as are positive, elevating comments. But, it is for this exact reason that the

selfie has become the critical symbol of the narcissistic age to some, as they argue that selfie-takers are indiscriminately seeking some sort of social validation in the form of Instagram likes, for example, from their peers and the larger community. However, from the responses garnered in my interview and focus group discussions, it was evident that this is not necessarily the case. Therefore, this chapter aims to address the significances that the amount of Instagram likes that a selfie received, held for the women involved in this particular research study. In other words, did Instagram likes matter to these women, and if so, why? Is it because likes simply act as a form of validation, further strengthening the negative stigmas surrounding selfies as simply being indicative of generational narcissism and/or moral decline, or is there in fact something more noteworthy that is going on?

Alison Hearn (2008: 211) argues that social media provide "… inventories of branded selves, [with their] logic encouraging users to see themselves as commodity-signs to be collected and consumed in the social marketplace." In other words, she stresses the idea that social media encourages individuals to become implicated in a process of self-promotion and self-praise. Linked to this idea, Jörgen Skågeby (2009: 63) asserts that the typical quantified display of the number of followers, likes, comments, and so forth that appears on a person's Instagram profile is undoubtedly an instrumental feature this app, and she consequently ascertains that we are living in an 'attention economy,' wherein the threatened resource is not information, but rather attention (Skågeby, 2009: 63).

Similarly speaking, Christopher Lasch (1979) further maintains that narcissists use other people as tools of gratification and satisfaction, whilst concurrently desiring their love and approval. For that reason, he declares that narcissists heavily depend on other people to validate their own self-worth and they consequently cannot live without an 'admiring audience' (Lasch, 1979: 10); in the same way that Instagram users assumedly rely on their followers to authenticate and confirm what they believe to be true about themselves by simply double-clicking, or liking their selfies. However, Talicia repudiated such claims when she explained that:

> "I think likes are important because we are social beings and we almost crave human interaction, we crave, I guess, human validation or at least some form of it. So, for example, when you do well in school, you get validated for it, you get certificates; there's always something. Even though you know you've done well, you've seen what marks you've got, but getting a certificate just gives it that extra, I guess, meaning towards it. So, it's the same with a selfie; yes, you know you look good in the picture and stuff, but it's nice. The feeling of somebody else knowing and liking it or commenting that, 'Wow! You look so good!' just gives it that extra meaning of: 'Okay damn! I really do look good and everybody agrees with me.' So ya, I think that's why it is important for us to get likes… I just think we are, by nature, social beings and whatever we do that is successful or that looks good or whatever, we would like someone else to acknowledge it. And, I think people front a lot by that because that don't want to admit it because they're scared of sounding vain or whatever, to say like, 'Ya, um… I look good in this picture,' or whatever. Or, they say like, 'Ugh, I don't take selfies!' Yes, selfies may not be for all people, but it doesn't mean they don't look for validation in other parts of their life. We're all different people so a lot of people may like the selfie, but other people may like it in grades or whatever else it is."

It is consequently apparent that selfies and the associated likes that they receive are not only about seeking external validation for being beautiful, for example; but it actually operates on a much deeper and more natural level. Carol perfectly captured this notion when she stated that:

> "There is a bit of weighting to how many likes you get on a selfie, and I think it's just a natural thing to feel like you belong or you're accepted, or your lifestyle's even just accepted, you know? Or, even who you are is accepted."

Therefore, social media platforms, like Instagram, essentially act as a present-day tool for the broader community to display their acceptance of a particular individual on a public level because it is important for people to feel included in society – and not because they are egotistical and in constant need of the attention of others.

This is important because all human beings possess an inherent desire to be accepted in society. In view of that, Charles Cooley (1902: 152) suggests that the degree of personal

insecurity that an individual exhibits in social situations is accordingly determined by what they believe or assume other people think of them. This refers to Cooley's (1902: 152) concept of the 'looking glass self,' and it subsequently maintains that a person's self grows out of a person's social interactions with others; as opposed to the attention that they give us. As a result, the view of ourselves comes from the contemplation of personal qualities and impressions of how others perceive us (Cooley, 1902: 152). In other words, how we see ourselves does not actually come from who we really are, but rather from how we believe others see us. Therefore, the main point of Cooley's concept of the looking glass self is that people shape their self-identities based on their understanding of others perceptions of them. And so, he maintains that we consequently form our own self-image around the reflections of the responses and evaluations of others in our social environments because human beings are naturally conditioned to do so; it is ingrained in our DNA and therefore not narcissistic as Lasch warns. Whitney reinforced these ideas when she explained that:

> "I think likes are a way of showing that people agree with you because when you took the picture and you were sure enough to put it on Instagram, you were like, 'Okay, this is a good picture!' But then if people don't like it, it's like, 'Maybe not!' But you know it's a good picture and just because a lot of people don't like it, you begin to doubt yourself."

This further reiterates the fact that an individual's sense of self is undoubtedly deeply rooted in other people's perceptions of them; as they will essentially perceive themselves accordingly. So, together with Cooley's concept and the responses yielded by my own research, I accordingly argue that the following holds true for Instagram and the accompanying social exchanges that this platform offers, such as 'likes'. Therefore, instead of viewing Instagram likes as an attention-seeking, popularity contest between self-absorbed individuals and their followers, I in fact maintain that receiving likes on selfies can actually facilitate self-exploration and the formation or development of one's self-identity; since one of the most effective ways to know yourself is to see yourself as others see you (Rutledge, 2013). I consequently view Instagram likes as being a relatively important feature of the app – even if it is to gain some sort of validation – because as Maria explained, it provides individuals with: "… a sense of approval … or self-

affirmation that I'm good enough," and as previously noted, human beings are social animals, driven by the need for connection with others and social validation alike. Everybody possesses the desire to be valued, appreciated and included in particular social groups or settings that we see as important, or that matter to us.

Selfies also hold the potential to assist the process of self-exploration because they offer individuals opportunities to expose different facets of themselves, such as the glamourous side, the silly side, the adventurous side, and so forth (Rutledge, 2013). So, an individual's followers begin to learn much about them as they accumulate different information over time, and they can subsequently show their support or preference of certain aspects of an individual by liking certain selfies over others, and so on. An individual can accordingly gain a better understanding of their followers through the pictures that they ultimately land up liking. Hence, Instagram likes do hold some sort of significance for the women involved in this research study for such reasons.

Michel Foucault's (1992: 28) work can additionally be used to describe this notion of self-exploration, because selfies and their associated likes can potentially offer opportunities for introspection and self-examination, as they allow an individual to be present in any particular moment – and also because the individual is able to see themselves for who they authentically are. In other words, by publicly displaying themselves on Instagram, they are able to re-appropriate the (male) gaze that is typically bestowed upon them, to a 'gaze of the self on the self' (Foucault, 1992: 28). Thus they are afforded the chance to see themselves from the perspective of an outsider – or their followers. They can accordingly examine and understand themselves more clearly (and also more in line with the perceptions of others), so as to achieve their moral goals of becoming ethical subjects (Foucault, 1992: 28).

However, Instagram likes were not necessarily equally important for all the women, as Theresa explained: "… If it's just like an ordinary selfie, the fact that I put it on Instagram, I think it's worth a thousand likes. So, I don't care about how many likes I get," and Sylvia similarly noted that: "… If I think it's a cool photo, I'll upload it … I'm

not uploading it for the people or for the likes; I'm uploading it for myself because at that particular moment, that's what I wanted to share."

It is consequently evident that selfies were not only regarded as being important because they held the potential to provide the poster with a sense of approval or acceptance, as Anne alternatively stated: "My Instagram posts are for me, it's not for validation. It's simply just telling people my story kind of thing, I guess." In this respect, Instagram essentially acts as a running documentary of a person's life and accordingly offers its users the ability to create a life narrative through images (Rutledge, 2013). Anne further maintained that:

> "I think my Instagram selfies are very important because you're keeping record of your life and stuff like that. One day if you look back, it'll remind you of fun times and I always have a fear that like when we're old and we lose our memory, we'll lose all these good memories, so at least we'll have these pictures to remind us."

In other words, a person can always go to their Instagram feed and look back on their motives for posting such images as well as remember and relive some of the emotions and experiences that they had previously captured through their selfies. For that reason, it can be said that likes were not viewed as being as important as documenting important memories and moments, for example, for some of the girls in this research study.

Therefore, it can be concluded that one of the ways by which people ultimately form their identities is based on how others see them. And so, as long as they are interacting with others on Instagram or just generally, they are essentially placing themselves in a moment of vulnerability that could potentially influence or impact upon their own self-image. This is an inescapable process that will continue throughout a person's life, which some people will evidently be more sensitive to than others; as this is apparent in the fact that some of the women in this research study valued Instagram likes more so than others did. Hence, Instagram likes do hold a particular significance for some of the women because it facilitates their own self-exploration, examination and thus development, over and above providing them with a sense of approval and acceptance on not only a physical level, but also an emotional one – as this is an integral part of human nature. Thus,

contrary to popular belief, these particular women did not actually value likes because they are narcissistic, self-obsessed creatures who simply thrive off the attention of others and consequently could not live without it.

5.5) Seizing Youth: Capturing Today for Tomorrow

One of the less manifest themes that were present in the data collected for this research study was the idea of selfies as capturing youth; or in fact how these young women presently looked. It has previously been established that young women are undoubtedly the biggest population of selfie-takers, and I consequently argue that one of the reasons for this owes to the very fact that they are capturing themselves in the prime of their lives; whilst they are still young and thus considered more beautiful. Therefore, this chapter seeks to understand how and why youth is seen as being preferential in society, and how these girls – subconsciously or not – understood that and acted accordingly.

In her book that deals with confronting age, Laura Clarke (2011) notes how we are living in an 'anti-ageing culture' that undeniably favours youth. Clarke (2011: 1) explains that ageing is met with heightened anxiety, uncertainty about the physical truths of growing older and the associated loss of social currency. These are the type of messages that can be found in the advertisements that women are constantly bombarded with. She maintains that beauty columns, talk shows, Internet websites, Hollywood movies, television programs about cosmetic surgery or fashion makeovers, and motivational posters in fitness gyms all comprise the restrictive appearance ideals for women (Clarke, 2011: 1). So, as Clarke (2011: 1) suggests, and consistent with the previous findings of this research, an increasingly unobtainable beauty standard for women is epitomized by: "A *young,* thin, toned, healthy, White, suntanned body with flawless and wrinkle-free skin, perfectly coiffed hair, little to no body hair, artfully applied makeup, and the latest fashionable trappings." Therefore, women are ultimately afforded social value in accordance to their own resemblance of this particular beauty ideal (Bartky, 1998; Brown & Jasper, 1993).

Ageing consequently poses an immense threat to women's sense of identity, perceived femininity and sexual desirability (Clarke, 2011: 2), but Roberta Seid (1989: 17)

contrarily argued that: “Age is an enemy of beauty, but it need not be. If we discipline ourselves … we, too, will preserve the source of our beauty, a youth body.” Therefore, Martha Holstein (2006: 320) states that: “Ironically, after years of struggle, as women have achieved a stronger status as agents than ever before, we face an escalating set of expectations about our bodies. Thus, the scope of beauty work, which Samantha Kawn and Mary Traurner (2009: 50) define as: “Specific appearance and beauty practices performed on oneself … to elicit certain benefits within a specific social hierarchy,” continues to grow with the creation of further beauty products and services, over and above the ruthless exhuming of the female body for possible ‘flaws’ in desperate need of beauty interventions (Clarke, 2011: 2); evidently reflecting and further highlighting society’s obsession with youthfulness and appearance.

It can accordingly be said that youth and beauty are given high status in society and that age-related appearance changes, such as wrinkles, sagging skin and grey hair, are inevitable, yet these changes are rarely seen in a positive light (Rumsey & Harcourt, 2005). Maggi Saucier (2004) consistently maintains that this has produced a generation that is uncomfortable with growing old and believes that age-related appearance changes are something to be prevented or masked, rather than embraced. And, although the pressure on men’s appearance is continuously increasing in contemporary society, the messages disseminated by the media tend to affect women more due to what researchers refer to as the ‘double standard of ageing’ (Sontag, 1979). This term basically denotes the idea that male ageing is viewed as a positive thing, leading them to become more distinguished and refined; whereas female ageing is perceived negatively and thought to lead to the loss of looks and social value and importance in society (Sontag, 1979).

Therefore, I argue that the women involved in this particular research study took selfies, for one of many reasons, because it allowed them to capture a very particular moment in their lives; of where they were, what they were doing, and how they looked. But because selfies are usually taken at arm’s length, what they can capture is evidently limited. In other words, a selfie only really has the capacity to capture an individual’s face or, at the very most, their upper body too. Thus, I maintain that when these women take selfies, they are ultimately only capturing how they looked whilst doing something, or being

somewhere; as opposed to the latter as well. So, when these women insist that they take selfies for memories' sake and so forth, they are essentially taking selfies to capture memories of how they presently look: young. For example, Anne stated: "I suppose selfies all come down to like capturing the moment, and like having memories," and Maria further explained:

> "I feel like it's a good way to kind of store your memories; it's like your own photo album, but online. It's a memory bank, so you can always go back and see what you've done it the past. So, it's never really lost as time goes by, you never really have to go through the archives and find the photos; it's always going to be there. So, that's why I like it."

As a result, I maintain that these women feel compelled to incessantly take selfies because, whether they realize it or not, this is the youngest and therefore most beautiful that they will ever be, (naturally at least). There is also a sense that these women know that they are valuable because they are youthful and that they are thus worthy of public exhibition. And so, this is one of the reasons why young women could potentially be the biggest population of selfie-takers. Sylvia reinforced this idea when she explained that:

> "… I think [I take selfies] for memories, well, for me anyways. So, for example, if I get my makeup done at a place, I'll take a selfie of that because it's not something that I do all the time. So, that's a memory that I'll want to keep so that I can look back on it whenever I feel like it."

Yet ageing was not often met with anxiety or fear amongst some of these women; they instead viewed ageing as a natural process. In other words, the idea of fulfilling beauty or being beautiful was seen as a preoccupation of youth, and that ageing meant coming to accept their changes in appearance as outside of their control or lowering their expectations of what it means to beautiful (Tiggemann, 2004). Additionally, older people are not exposed to the social pressures that emphasize the importance of appearance (Halliwell and Dittmar, 2003), and their attention consequently shifts from concerns about appearance to concerns around their health and what they can do with their body (Baker and Gringart, 2012). For example, Talicia asserted:

> "I just like taking them [selfies] because it's nice to have pictures of yourself, I guess, if you look nice, or if you're doing funny things, or if you're with friends and family for memories, or even like, you know, when I'm older I can look back at my selfies like, 'Oh my gosh! Look how cute I was!' or, one day to show my kids like, 'Hey! Your mom used to slay! I may look ratchet right now but your mama used to look good.' I don't know, like, I guess it's all part of a memory thing, and I know we take like thousands and you may only need a couple of pictures to be like, 'Hey! This is what I used to look like,' but I don't know, it's just like something we do."

Therefore, it is obvious that Talicia does not expect to exude immense beauty as she grows older, as she simply believes that this is a function of youth. Maria mirrored this notion and demonstrated the fact that she understood the importance of capturing and displaying her beauty right now, while she was still in the prime of her youth, when she declared: "I like to sometimes, not all the time, showcase my beauty. Selfies are also about embracing how you are and how you look in this moment and it's basically saying, 'It's totally fine by me!'" And so, she is essentially admitting that she knows that she is worth being seen now because she is young, and she also knows that her youth is not everlasting.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the emotions associated with ageing are experienced differently by everyone, but what remains true is that we are living in a society that strongly promotes and instills an anti-ageing narrative. To age means to lose social value and to be young means to be beautiful. Because the women involved in this research study were still living out their youth, I consequently argue that they took selfies as a means of seizing their youthfulness because they understood and valued the fact that this is the youngest they will ever be. So, in this respect, selfies acted as a tool to capture and hold onto their youth, because even once they age, they will still be able to look back at their selfies and reminisce on the beauty that they once displayed. It can thus be said that women living in contemporary society are still so convinced by the argument that their looks are the most valuable thing about them, and this accordingly goes back to how evacuated a woman's sense of self is in contemporary media culture. Finally, it is apparent that this particular type of representation on Instagram is undeniably linked to broader and more influential systems of media representations.

5.6) An Overview of the Complex and Contradictory Nature of Selfies

The responses yielded by this research study were extremely wide-ranging and often contradictory at times. On the one hand, the young women claimed to participate in the practices of selfie-taking purely because of the convenience of it. The advancements in smartphone technologies have undoubtedly made the function of taking a picture of oneself much easier, and have additionally allowed the user to be in complete control of the outcome of their image. In this regard, selfies were also viewed as just another ordinary thing to do every day, and they moreover contributed to a new type of visual form of communication that is much more rapid and interesting than our typical, written language. Furthermore, selfies were also seen as an extension of the snapshot; as they allow us to effortlessly capture and store our memories for our own recollection purposes. Therefore, one of the central opinions amongst the young women in relation to selfies was the ordinariness and convenience of it; selfies were simply considered to be normal photographs that form a routine part of their everyday lives.

However, this claim of ordinariness was contradicted by the amount of aesthetic and emotional labour that the young women invested into their selfies. In other words, every woman worked hard to construct a very precise type of femininity online, and regardless of whatever version of the postfeminist sensibility that they embraced, these women all had to constantly self-regulate, manage and consequently work on their image so as to produce and uphold that same particular representation of themselves online. Similarly, the process of uploading and publicly sharing selfies online had certain emotional repercussions, and placed the selfie-taker in a vulnerable position. This is because a selfie-taker can never be entirely sure of how their selfie will be received by their followers, and so they wait in anticipation as their notification feed will soon reveal. This consequently links to the integral need for human beings to be accepted in society by their social circles and broader communities, and rejection is thus obviously undesirable.

Another theme that arose was that of beauty. Despite the young women all being relatively diverse in appearance from race, body shape and height, to eye and hair colour,

weight and so forth, they all ascribed to extremely similar notions of what beauty means and looks like. Therefore, I argue that their perceptions of beauty are largely influenced by contemporary society's media culture and its dissemination of unrealistically beautiful models, through Photoshop ad other such editing tools.

The expectations set forth by the media were largely problematic because almost all of the girls involved in this study voiced their lack of confidence in their natural appearances and believed that being thinner and more toned would increase their overall self-esteem. This potentially owes to the fact that the model typically featured in media campaigns is generally extremely thin, and people want to look like the images that they see on billboards, in high-end fashion and fitness magazines, and so forth.

Alternatively, these same young women explained that because platforms like Instagram encourage ordinary people to share raw and authentic pictures of themselves, the definition of beauty is starting to expand; beauty is becoming more fluid. In other words, when ordinary girls post selfies that look nothing like the images that they are relentlessly bombarded with by the media, they are essentially resisting against such unattainable ideals. Therefore, women are beginning to embrace their flaws and differences and they are accordingly learning to love and accept themselves for who they are, rather than trying to be or look like someone that is not real.

However, when women post selfies, they are often criticized for trying to receive some sort of social validation for their appearance in the form of Instagram 'likes', for example, and are accordingly viewed as narcissists. But, in keeping with Charles Cooley's concept of the looking glass self, I contrarily argue that because an individual's sense of self is deeply rooted in other people's perceptions of them, selfies can actually facilitate self-exploration and the development of one's self-identity. In addition, I contend that even if a selfie-taker is searching for validation or approval from their peers, it links back to the idea of social acceptance, and this should consequently not be viewed as narcissistic because humans are conditioned to belong.

Lastly, the final theme that emerged during this research was related to the idea of the snapshot, or the selfie as enabling memory banking. Because we live in an anti-ageing

culture, youth is evidently praised and ageing is met with certain anxieties and fears. Therefore, I argue that because the women involved in this research study are still living out their youth, they understand that it is not everlasting and thus feel the need to incessantly capture themselves as they look right now – in the prime of their lives – because they know that they are not going to look like this forever, and consequently need to have tangible memories to look back on and remind themselves of the beauty that they once displayed.

6. Conclusion

Selfies are pictures we take of ourselves on our smartphones, typically with front-facing cameras. Selfies are beginning to show up all across various social media platforms and they are usually – but not exclusively – taken by young women. This phenomenon has more recently garnered much attention because the frequency of selfies that appear online increases by the day. Therefore, this research study fundamentally set out to explore and examine young, ordinary, South African women's practices of taking and sharing selfies on Instagram.

These self-created self-portraits are typically regarded as proof of cultural – or at least generational – narcissism and moral decline, and the general online commentary surrounding the practice and nature of selfies consequently has a regulatory social function in that there is a connection between the discursive construction of selfie practices and the negative perception of selfie-takers. However, I argue that selfies in fact provide individuals with opportunities to send different messages to different individuals and audiences as well as to represent themselves in very particular ways.

In order to contextualize selfies in contemporary culture, selfies were described in accordance with the rich body of existing literature on the history of self-portraiture. This study maintained that self-portraiture essentially continues to expand with technological innovations, such as the smartphone – hence the selfie. Snapshots were additionally used as a means to explain selfies as an unprofessional, amateur photographic technique that is ordinarily used to capture and store every day moments and memories, in addition to rapidly emerging as an important new tool of present-day visual communication.

In an attempt to better understand the significance that selfies hold in today's climate, young women's selfies were also compared to twentieth century women's interjection in the art of self-portraiture, which was done in an attempt to recast themselves as subjects and thus in direct resistance to their objectification and marginalization. I consequently argue that young women who take selfies today could actually be trying to reconfigure the ways in which they are seen through their own self-produced representations online.

As a result, rather than viewing selfie-takers as narcissistic individuals who embrace an inflated sense of self, I contrarily view selfies as by-product of technology-enabled representation and communication. Where they were once the domain of the elite – either in status or skill – smartphones and social media platforms have democratized self-portraiture, making them less treasured and more pleasurable.

In keeping with the above, this study also highlighted the importance of the role that technology and smartphones in particular, along with social networking sites, have played in the rise of the selfie phenomenon. This is because smartphones are now generally fitted with cameras, both front-facing and regular lenses, and this essentially encourages users to capture, circulate and socialize their own images. In addition, social media sites, like Instagram, encourage photo-sharing as one of the key features of its application. Therefore, photography is now enabled as an everyday practice, and we are increasingly becoming a culture that is obsessed with capturing and documenting our everyday, lived experiences.

In order for individuals to be able to participate in such social media technologies and their associated Internet-mediated, online landscapes, they have no choice but to represent themselves. This representation generally involves much self-management and identity regulation as people attempt to produce very particular images of themselves, and accordingly need to work hard in order to maintain such images. However, such representations are often criticized for being narcissistic, self-promotions that are contributing to the emergence of an online reputation economy. It is for this reason that sceptics warn of the commercialization of the online culture, wherein online reputation is emerging as the new standard of value or online social currency.

However, instead of viewing selfies as narcissistic acts of self-promotion, or desperate forms of exhibitionism, I argue that selfies actually enable self-exploration and identity formation in a world that constantly tells women that they are not good enough, and it additionally provides young women with opportunities to challenge and resist the idealised images that they are relentlessly bombarded with by the media.

This draws from two of the main theories upon which this research was grounded, namely: Michel Foucault's work on the *Care of the Self,* and Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill's contributions to postfeminism. Foucault essentially argues that in order to be considered a successful and fully-functioning individual in society, one needs to present themselves ethically, or as accomplished in every realm of their being. This links to the practice of selfie-taking and how people try to present themselves in very particular ways aesthetically, and therefore, culturally too. In this view, selfie-takers can be regarded as confident and brave identity explorers.

On the note of representation, McRobbie and Gill maintain that although women deeply believe that they want to look and act in very specific ways because of their own independent choices, they are still subconsciously conditioned by narratives of choice, individualism and empowerment that are perpetuated throughout society. It is for this reason that the women involved in this particular research study all ascribed to similar ideals of beauty, for example. However, resistance can be noted when these women put up raw images of themselves that are in complete opposition to the idealised beauty that is promoted by the media. Yet these women are still working extremely hard to represent this particular type of femininity.

Therefore, even though women are told that there is no longer a need for feminism – as they having voting rights, work in corporate environments, and so forth – their actions and systems of belief are still largely informed by more powerful patriarchal structures in society that promote discourses of highly disguised womanliness (or girly-ness) as an arrangement of free and personal choice.

In his work on the *Culture of Narcissism,* Christopher Lasch continues that the changing roles of women were one of the key contributions to the malaise that gripped Americans – where malaise refers to the manifestation of narcissism that spread across all corners of the country. He argues that American confidence had fallen to a record low after the atrocities of the sixties, and that Americans resultantly preoccupied themselves with self-help and survival strategies, which were aimed at prolonging their lives and ensuring

good health and peace of mind. In this way, Lasch believes narcissism took over Western society as well as other capitalist parts of the world.

For Lasch, the narcissist relies on others to validate their self-esteem and self-worth and they consequently cannot live without an admiring audience. In this view, selfie-takers are seen as confidence-depleted narcissists who are looking for validation from their Instagram followers by putting up selfies in the hopes of obtaining numerous likes and elevating comments. However, the responses yielded in the interview and focus group discussions of 14 young, ordinary, South African women proved otherwise in several instances.

Therefore, it can be concluded that selfies do in fact offer women some opportunities to represent themselves in empowering and favourable ways, because the women involved in this particular research study openly admitted to taking and posting selfies on Instagram in order to challenge and fight against the unrealistically beautiful and objectified images of women that the media relentlessly disseminate, with their own ordinary, but authentic and flaw-filled digital self-portraits. This practice accordingly inspired these women to love and accept their natural selves – imperfections and all – as opposed to aspiring to shallow, unobtainable ideals of beauty; since this ideal simply does not exist. I consequently argue that selfies can also be seen as a practice of self-love, and not only narcissism, as it takes a certain level of courage and self-acceptance to be able to represent oneself online – open to the public criticizers and admirers alike.

In addition, these women also claimed to post selfies on Instagram because it was just another thing for them to do. Social media platforms, like Instagram, encourage photo-sharing as one of the key features of their applications, and innovations in mobile technologies, such as the camera phone, have aided the sheer convenience of everyday photography. Smartphones and social media sites have therefore effortlessly allowed for pictures to be taken and distributed faster and easier than ever before, and it is for this reason that the young women argue that there has been a proliferation of selfies over the past few years. In other words, with increased access and handiness of digital photography, there is accordingly a greater frequency of self-portraiture, merely because

it is just easier to do. Furthermore, because we live in such a fast-paced, ever-changing society, selfies also allow individuals to capture and store memories away safely so that they can readily be recollected at a later stage in life. Thus, another one of the women's motivations for taking selfies was because it of its function as a memory bank.

On that same note, another interesting reason why these women took part in the practice of selfies is because they are still living out their youth – the prime of their lives. We live in anti-ageing culture where ageing poses a threat to a woman's sense of identity, perceived femininity and sexual desirability. It can accordingly be said that youth is attributed high status in society and age-related appearance changes, such as wrinkles, sagging skin and grey hair are rarely viewed positively, despite their inevitability. This generation of women is uncomfortable with growing old, because female ageing is perceived undesirably and thought to lead to the loss social value and importance in society. Therefore, these women are prolifically taking selfies during this period of their lives because they understand that their youth is not everlasting and they are evidently not going to look like this forever; hence the need to have tangible memories to look back on and remind themselves of the beauty that they once displayed.

Finally, because of the fact that a person's self-perceptions are born out of his/her contemplation of personal qualities and impressions of how others perceive them, and because human beings are driven by the need for social connections and social acceptance (as this is an innate part of humanity), I argue that Instagram 'likes' are in fact an important feature of the application as it allows others to publicly display their acceptance of an individual, and this positively reinforces that individual's sense of self and identity accordingly. Continuing on this point, I argue that selfies can additionally enable self-exploration and the development of one's self-identity, because selfies allow an individual to see themselves from the same perspective as others view them; or as they naturally exist. This consequently allows people to scrutinize and examine themselves more clearly, from a more detached stance, so as to learn what changes they need to make in order to achieve their moral goals of becoming ethical or fully-functioning individuals of society. So, although Instagram 'likes' might be important to selfie-takers (in this study at least), it is not merely because they are narcissistic, social beings who are

desperate for the attention and devotion of others, but rather because the human race is conditioned to belong, and individuals are curious creatures who continuously want to learn more about themselves in order to progress.

It is consequently apparent that selfies are not simply manifestations of narcissism as the general conversations surrounding them typically seem to suggest. Therefore, this research study has proven that there are in fact deeper significances that underlie the practices of young, ordinary, South African women, involved in this study at least.

Due to the fact that this research study was limited in scope, further research could investigate this particular topic in relation to a broader range of gender, ethnic and racial identities as well as different socio-economic groups. This is because this research only examined straight, cisgender women, who were all feminine and economically privileged to some extent.

Even though this study tried to be sensitive to the possibility that differences in responses and attitudes with regards to selfies between varying ethnic groups and racial identities could have come up, no major or significant discrepancies were found in the data that was retrieved for this particular research. This could owe to the fact that the interview discussions did not necessarily allow for such debates to flourish, as this research study did not have enough room to explicitly question and investigate how race and ethnicity influenced the women's selfie-taking practices, nor was it a central theme to this particular study. Thus, future research could definitely look at such questions, because it would be interesting and important to understand how certain identities are different and what those differences mean in an unequal society like South Africa. This is important because the women who have to sit for hours on end to get their hair braided, versus the women who merely have to blow-dry their hair for 30 minutes, undoubtedly have very different experiences of beauty, and those experiences are racialized.

Furthermore, this studied solely focused on a specific type of globalized femininity, and predominantly relied on white, Western, female feminist scholars. So, although experiences of beauty and different variations of femininities were not central themes in this research, they are other areas, along with broadening the genre of feminist thought,

that this study could be extended to or developed for new research in the South African context, as it is quite clear that there is a growing amount of research about postfeminist culture in other settings, such as: Simidele Dosekun's (2015) work on hyper-feminine style in Lagos, as well as skin-lightening in Bollywood stars and across India and other Asian countries at large (Shevde, 2008; Sylvia, 2014; Glenn, 2008; Hunter, 2011).

Finally, because the women involved in this study were all relatively economically privileged, they all had relatively easy access to Internet and smartphones and consistently kept up with the latest trends in both social media and their everyday lives. So, this particular group of women accordingly viewed themselves as part of a larger global culture, and this may have influenced their responses accordingly. Furthermore, these women usually took selfies as an aesthetic practice rather than a culture practice, because they were not necessarily taking selfies to say something about themselves in terms of their cultural identities, but instead about their gender identities and their identities as cosmopolitan world citizens who are participating in this very particular global practice. Therefore, researching less advantaged economic groups could yield much different but equally interesting information which would make for an extremely fascinating comparative research study, because such groups identify with the local struggles of poverty and lack of access to basic resources and human needs, for instance. Or, exploring how selfie-taking might play into larger cultures of aspiration and consumption in a vastly unequal society like South Africa would also be an interesting way to develop this research.

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8. Appendices

- Appendix A:
  Robert Cornelius' Selfie

- Appendix B:
  Michelangelo's Self-Portrait

- Appendix C:
  Frida Kahlo's Self-Portrait

- Appendix D:
  Certificate of Ethical Clearance

- Appendix E:
  Information Sheet

- Appendix F:
  Sample of Consent Form & Participants' Signed Informed Consent (in no particular order)

- Appendix G:
  Interview Guide

- Appendix H:
  Individual Interview Transcript

- Appendix I:
  Small Focus Group Discussion Transcript

**Please note that all interview transcripts can be made available should they be required. Not all interview transcripts were included in an attempt to save paper; only one individual interview transcript and one small focus group discussion transcript were included so as to illustrate the process that this research study followed.*

Appendix A

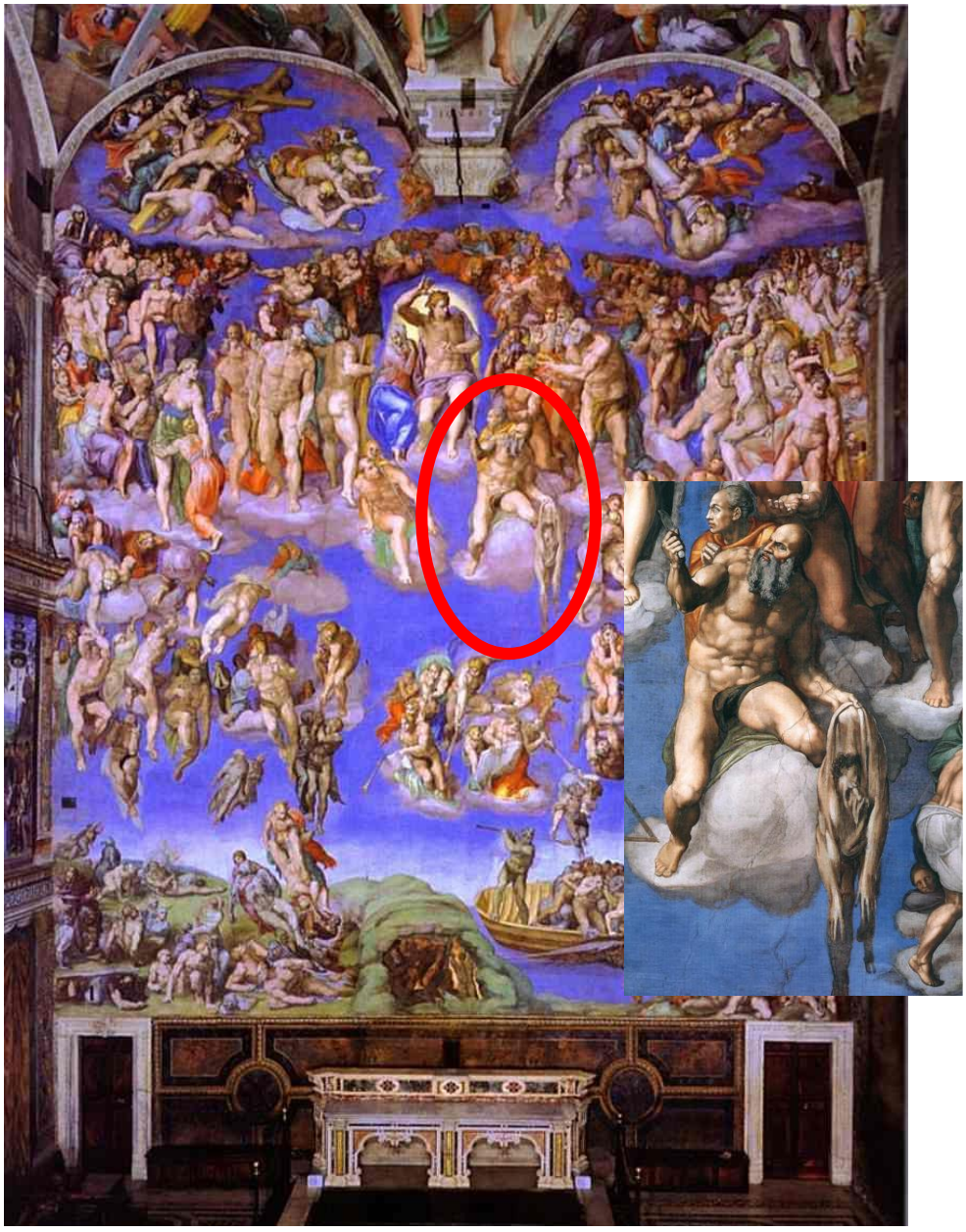


"The first light picture ever taken. 1839." by Robert Cornelius

Retrieved from the World Wide Web

https://www.google.co.za/search?q=robert+cornelius+self+portrait&biw=1536&bih=667&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=CTtzVb_eKYW17gacroCwCQ&sqi=2&ved=0CBsQsAQ

Appendix B



"The Last Judgement" in the Sistine Chapel by Michelangelo in 1536-1541

Retrieved from the World Wide Web

http://www.abcgallery.com/M/michelangelo/michelangelo54.JPG

Appendix C



"The Two Fridas" by Frida Khalo in 1939

Retrieved from the World Wide Web http://arlindo-correia.com/100701.html

Appendix D

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Pereira

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: H15/09/31**
PROJECT TITLE	Me, My Self(ie) and I: A study of young, South African women who share selfies on Instagram
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Ms J Pereira
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Literature, Language & Media Studies/
DATE CONSIDERED	18 September 2015
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	12 October 2018

DATE 13 October 2015 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Professor M Iqani

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix E

"Me, Myself(ie) and I: A study of young, ordinary South African women who share selfies on Instagram"

Hello ☺

My name is Jessica Pereira and I am a Media Studies student at the University of the Witwatersrand. I am currently conducting research for fulfilment of my Research Masters which is centred on the practices of selfie-taking. My research aims to answer some of questions surrounding how and why young South African women take selfies and what it means to them.

I have chosen to research young women between the ages of 18 and 24 in particular because this youth market has been found to frequent social networking sites more so than other ages, and I accordingly intend to prove that there is in fact much more to young women's selfies than meets the eye by uncovering some of these hidden significances.

So, I am kindly inviting you to participate in my research because you are a young, selfie-taking woman between the age of 18 and 24. Participation simply involves a once-off interview of around one hour in which you will be asked a series of questions related to your practices of selfie-taking, as well as to take me on a tour of your Instagram account. The interview will be recorded so that I have some form of audio data to refer back to at a later stage in my research, and the tour of your Instagram is purely to get a better idea of the types of selfies you take and what they mean to you.

The interviews will be conducted at any coffee shop or restaurant that is most convenient for you any time between September and November 2015. For recording purposes, please ensure that it is a reasonably quiet or empty spot.

It is also important to note that participating in my research will **not** result in any rewards and it is therefore your own voluntary choice to participate. Also, if you do choose to participate in my research but then decide to withdraw at a later stage, or refuse to answer any questions posed to you for whatever reasons, you will not be penalised in any way whatsoever!

Finally, the results of my research will be placed in my dissertation. All of the participants involved in my research, my supervisor, my reader, the person marking my dissertation as well as anyone who has access to the Wits library Internet catalogue will have access to this information and will be able to view my final dissertation. Before I submit the final edition of my dissertation, you will be provided with a full copy (or summarised version if you prefer), so that you may read through it and approve that you and your views have been represented adequately and accurately.

If you have any questions related to my research, or you would like to discuss my research further, please do not hesitate to contact me (jessepereira@msn.com or 082 301 0505) or my supervisor, Dr. Mehita Iqani (mehita.iqani@wits.ac.za or (011) 717 4123), at any given time.

Thank you, Jess!

Appendix F

"Me, Myself(ie) and I: A study of young, ordinary South African women who share selfies on Instagram"

Informed Consent

I, _____, hereby agree to participate in the research being conducted by Jessica Pereira. I have been clearly informed about what the research entails and understand that my role as a participant only requires me being interviewed by the researcher and giving her a tour of my Instagram account. It has additionally been made clear that if I choose to subsequently withdraw my participation, or refuse to answer specific questions, I will not be pressured to do so or penalised in any way whatsoever. I also understand that participating in this research study will not result in any rewards and it is therefore my own voluntary choice to participate.

- Permission to audio record interviews: ☐Yes ☐No
- Permission to publish your selfies from Instagram if need be: ☐Yes ☐No

Signed (by Researcher): _____

Signed (by Participant): _____

Date: _____

Appendix G

Interview Guide

- Selfies & Instagram

1. When did you get your first smartphone phone?
2. Have you always taken pictures of yourself, or did you only start when you got a camera phone?
3. What is a selfie?
4. What does the word ‘selfie’ mean to you?
5. When did you first start taking selfies? Why?
6. Why do you take selfies now?
7. How often do you take selfies?
8. How do you feel before/after you’ve taken a selfie?
9. How do selfies make you feel in general?
10. When do you get an urge to take a selfie(s)? Why?
11. Why do you think it’s necessary to take selfies?
12. How important are selfies to you? Why?
13. Do you take selfies in private or public, or both? Why?
14. When did you first start using Instagram? Why?
15. Why do you like Instagram?
16. How did you find out about Instagram?
17. Why is your profile public?
18. How do you feel when you get new ‘followers’? Why?
19. Is it important for you to get a lot of ‘likes’ on your selfies? Why?
20. Do you edit your selfies before posting them on Instagram? Why?
21. Do you ‘hashtag’ when you upload new selfies? Why? And if so, what?
22. Do you only share selfies when you think you look beautiful, or do you also share selfies when you’re not feeling so great about yourself? Why?
23. What do different these different types of selfies mean to you?

24. Why do you think it's necessary to share such an intimate and private image of yourself on such a vast public platform that basically anyone from around the world can see?

25. Do selfies still hold the same importance when you don't share them on Instagram, for example?

26. How would you feel if you couldn't take selfies and share them on social media platforms? Why?

– Selfies & Self-Image

27. How important is your image to you? Why?

28. Do you value your looks as an important aspect of self? Why?

29. Are you confident in the way you look?

30. Are you happy with the way you look?

31. Do you think you would post more/less selfies if you were happier/less happy with the way you look? Why?

32. Do you think selfies are vein? Why?

33. Are there more to selfies than simply showing the world how you look, what you're wearing, where you are, etc…? Explain.

34. Are selfies a form of self-love and acceptance? Explain.

– Selfies & Gender

35. Are selfies equally important for women and men? Explain.

36. In your opinion, is selfie-taking a gendered practice? Explain.

37. Why do you think women generally take more selfies than men?

38. How do you feel when you see women posting selfies versus men posting selfies?

39. Do you think that selfies are important for women? Why?

40. Do you think more men should start taking selfies? Why?

41. What role do you think selfies play in women's lives? Explain.

42. How do you think selfies have improved, or deteriorated, women's lives?

43. Do you think selfies are here to stay?

44. Do you think selfies are empowering women? Why?

45. Do you think selfies are just another way for women to judge and compete against each other? Explain.

46. How have selfies changed your life?

Appendix H

Talicia's Interview: Part 1 – Questions

Interviewer: *When did you first get a smartphone?*

Talicia: *My first smartphone I got in 2012, and it was an iPhone 4S.*

Interviewer: *Okay. Have you always taken pictures of yourself or did you only start taking pictures of yourself when you got your smartphone?*

Talicia: *I have always taken pictures of myself, but I think the smartphone made it easier to take selfies because of the front camera. But, before that, even when I used to have 'brick-phone' cameras and whatnot, you know, you'd try do a selfie with the brick-camera and, be like, snap away and hopefully it comes out good.*

Interviewer: *Okay, so essentially you would always take pictures of yourself on a phone, regardless of whether or not it was a smartphone? As long as it had a camera you would take pictures on it and not resort to other means, like, you know, an actual camera?*

Talicia: *Well, ya. You know, even before when I didn't have a smartphone I would still take, like, selfie pictures and it would either be on a phone or an actual camera, but mostly on a phone, because I guess that's what you have on you most of the time.*

Interviewer: *Okay, ya, that makes sense. And now, you keep on bringing up the word 'selfie'. So, what is a selfie?*

Talicia: *Um, I would say is a selfie is a picture that you take of yourself. So, it doesn't count if someone else takes a picture of you by yourself; it has to be you, kind of, I guess, holding the device that's taking the picture. And, you pretty much strike a pose for it and you got your selfie.*

Interviewer: *Okay, so that's essentially how you would describe or define a selfie. But now, what does the word selfie mean to you? Like, does it mean anything specific to you? When you hear selfie, or when you say selfie, does it hold any personal significance?*

Talicia: *Uh, Okay. Um… I don't know. A selfie to me, I guess, it's like, you know, when you take a picture of yourself obviously you want a good picture to come out of it and, it kind of like, it doesn't, its not like, something that deep I guess. But, its like, usually, lets say im having a really bad day or, you know, I'm feeling like really shitty, like, 'Ugh, I probably look disgusting today!' And then let's say one day I look good and I'm like, 'Hey! Like, let me just capture this and let me take a selfie!' Or, if I'm looking to get a new profile picture of some sort, or just to have like random pictures of myself on my phone – I'll put it up. But, it's, ya, like… That's a good question because you never really think about what exactly it means to you, but I guess it's just a way of, I don't know? Expressing yourself, or, maybe, making yourself feel even, even if you're not necessarily insecure. But, you know, you to show a little something something. I don't know. I don't know if that makes sense?*

Interviewer: *Okay cool, I get it! So, do you almost think selfies are a way to show off yourself? Not necessarily bragging, but accepting yourself and flaunting what you have? So, you might not be insecure, and selfies are actually just a way to prove that you're confident in how you look?*

Talicia: *Yeah, I think so, like, I don't necessarily think like all people that take selfies are, um, bragging that they're beautiful, or bragging that, you know, they're the shit or whatever. But, I think like sometimes you just want to be like, 'Oh shit! I look good today, like, I'mma post this shit and let other people see it!' Or, you know. So like, I do agree that there are people out there who are self-centred, or who are insecure and look for 'likes' or acceptance to make them feel, to, what's the word? To confirm, I guess, or validate that they are beautiful and stuff. But, I think like, personally for me, like, you know, I'll take a selfie, I'll take a nice*

picture ad be like, 'Oh ya! This is hot! Like, let me post it!' Because I like it and, shit, like, let other people see it, it's fine, it's not necessarily because I'm being insecure or I think, like, you know, I'm full of myself or whatever, no. Ya so, it's just showing off, I guess, self-confidence and just having fun with it and just having pretty pictures because I think everybody likes a pretty picture once in a while, yes? Instagram has just, or whatever, social media has just provided a platform for it to be more than once in a while, you feel me?

Interviewer: *Okay, so, if you're looking good, and you think you're looking good, why do you feel the need to share it on a platform like Instagram? Because, if you're looking good and you want other people to see that you're looking good, isn't it then a thing of vanity? You know, are you not simply searching for a reaffirmation of your beauty? You want people to be like, 'Wow Tam, you're looking good!' But if you know you're looking good, then why do you need other people to see that as well? Does that make sense?*

Talicia: *Okay, um… I guess there could be a level of vanity to it because if you know you look good, you don't need people to, you know, show or let other people, um, say you look good or whatever. But, I feel like you could argue that for anything. So, why do people get dressed nicely, or put make up on, or look good? Because, they just want to look good, or like, even if they know they look good, they're going to go out like that and people are going to tell them. It's always nice to feel complimented and, you know, just know that somebody else thinks that you look good too; not necessarily because you're insecure, but because it's just nice. We like to know that, you know, I guess, like, it's not only just us seeing that we look good, and I guess it's just the culture that we've been brought up in, I guess. Like, social media culture, or, especially with Instagram. Like, for instance, Twitter: Twitter is an app that you,*

*it's almost like people describe it as you having a conversation with yourself and hope that other people comment on it. It's like, why do you 'tweet' then, or tweet, like, random stuff? You hoping, like, someone else just replies. It's just the way we like to interact, I guess. And so, the same with like Instagram; Instagram is more like communicating through pictures. So, if you want to post a picture that looks good or post a picture of what you're doing, you're going to post a picture and it'll be nice if someone else comments and says something – it's just the way we are. And yes, I do agree, there may be a level of vanity with it because there'll sometimes, like, I'll post a picture and be like, 'Shit! I know I look good here, like, let's see if other people it or not.' But, I don't think it's to the extent that you can only argue that it's only for, it's only because we're just, its just vanity and just like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm just so beautiful! Oh my gosh, everyone thinks I'm beautiful!' *puts on hyper-feminine accent*. Yes, I may think I am beautiful but, like, I'm not doing it in a way that's like, you know, trying to be like, 'Yeah! You know I'm beautiful so you better like this!' I don't know, like, I just don't agree that it's 100% that, I think it's just we like to know other people think this about us, but we're not, well I personally am not thinking that like, 'Oh my gosh! Like, I am so beautiful, everybody needs to like my photo, and it's shows that I'm just so beautiful' *puts on hyper-feminine accent*. You know? So, and it's not only that. Like, for me, I wont only post selfies; there'll be selfies on my Instagram, there'll be pictures of what I'm doing, or like, if I'm with my family or whatever. And, in those pictures too, I may look good or I may look average or whatever, but I'll just post it because that's just the culture, I guess, of Instagram.*

Interviewer: *Okay, going back to the part where you say that you think there's a level of vanity to selfies, and that it's also nice for other people to*

acknowledge that you look nice. So, it might not necessarily be a vanity thing, but you just want to know if other people are seeing what you're seeing essentially. So, in your opinion, why do you think it's important for other people to publicly express your beauty, or that you're beautiful? Like, why do you need to know that other people think you're beautiful as well? Do you know what I mean?

Talicia: *Um… I think because we an=re social beings and we almost crave human interaction, we crave, I guess, human validation or some form of it. So, for example, when you do well in school, you get validated for it, you get certificates, there's always something. Even though you know you've done well, you've seen what marks you've got, but getting a certificate just gives it that extra, I guess, meaning towards it. So, it's the same with a selfie; yes, you know you look good in the picture and stuff, but it's nice. The feeling of somebody else knowing that, ' Wow! You look so good!' just gives it that extra meaning, you know, or bump, I don't know, I guess, cherry on top of, 'Okay damn! I really do look good and everybody agrees with me.' So ya, I think that's why it is important for us because just like when you have a boyfriend and you make an effort to look good and you want him to compliment you, 'You look good,' it's just a nice feeling to have. Um…ya. I just, I think we are, by nature, social beings and whatever we do that is successful or that looks good or whatever, we would like someone else to acknowledge it. And, I think people front a lot by that because that don't want to admit it because they're scared of sounding vainor whatever, to say like, 'Ya, um… I look good in this picture,' or whatever. Or, they say like, 'Ugh, I don't take selfies!' Yes, selfies may not be for all people, but it doesn't mean they don't look for validation in other parts of their life. We're all different people so*

a lot of people may like the selfie bit, other people may like it in grades or whatever else it is. I don't know if that makes sense.

Interviewer: *Okay ya, 100%. Now, when did you first start taking selfies and why?*

Talicia: *Man, um… Now, a selfie right? A picture we take of ourselves, whatever, you are holding the camera or the phone with a camera, blah blah blah. So, before it was even known as a selfie per se, I think, I like, took my first selfie, ugh, in my teenage years because we used to have cameras; like actual cameras, not phone cameras and take pictures of ourselves and friends and whatever. But, less selfies were taken then, I feel, because it was more, I guess, difficult because you had to turn the camera and take a few pictures at a time just to get one right one, do you know what I'm saying? So, what I feel gave selfie the name selfie is because of the front camera. I feel like that where's this craze or this thing was made out taking pictures of yourself, almost to, you know, kind of make people feel like, I don't know like: once you must something a thing, you'll get people who are against it lie, 'Oh my gosh! I don't do selfies!' or, I don't do this or I don't do that, do you know what I'm saying? I don't know, like, I'm trying to find the right words. But ya, I feel like selfies have been here for a long time, it's just that now they've been given a name. Even, like, my uncle and he's in his 40s or something, whatever, my parents, you know, they'll always be like, 'Hey! You know, we were taking selfies long before it was even a thing.' You see old picture of them from back in the day; back in the day when you couldn't even see what the picture looked like, you'd just take the picture and develop the pictures and there you'd have a selfie. So, I feel like, um… Yeah, I mean like, I took my first selfie ages ago but just in terms of, like, why selfies are such a big thing. And then on top of having the front camera, having Instagram made it even more of this craze*

and this kind of obsession where like, 'Oh, everybody's taking selfiesthese days,' when it's like, 'Uh, it's actually not that new.' It's just now that we've made it a thing and given it a name, now people want to be like against it or, kind of, put people down who do it or say like, 'Oh, you so full of yourself, you take selfies!' You know what I'm saying? So ya, that's what I think.

Interviewer: *Okay, ya, that makes a lot of sense and my mom often says the same thing. But now, how often do you take selfies?*

Talicia: *How often do I take selfies? Um… Maybe like, gosh, I don't know. Maybe once a week, you know? Once a week ill have a session of selfie taking, I guess. Um… But ya, it's not like an everyday thing for me personally, to be honest. Even if you go through my phone, like, I'll take pictures a lot with friends, like, selfie pictures with friends alone, so… Oh ya, so do you know selfies with other people or selfies by myself? Because if you mean by myself, then that's more like once a week, sometimes I can go two weeks without, like, it just depends. It depends if I'm doing a lot of stuff or going out a lot and dolling up a lot. If I don't like, doll up necessarily, I don't necessarily a selfie, but I'll take a lot of pictures with friends or with my family or whatever things I'm doing. But, selfies alone, I do less of, I guess.*

Interviewer: *Why do you take selfies more so when you've dolled up, in comparison to when you haven't?*

Talicia: *Um, I guess because I've put in more of an effort with my appearance when I've dolled up. So, you know, taking a selfie is like, 'Yo! I put that work in! Let me see how good I look in my selfie.' And then, if I want to post it, I'll post it. And then, I get, I guess, people like it and stuff, it's nice, it's like, you know, you've put an effort into it. I do take some selfie, I guess, when I'm not like dolled up with make up or anything, but ya, it definitely is more, I*

guess, when I ya, I've just put on proper clothes and I look better, I guess?

Interviewer: *So how important is it for you to get a lot of likes on your selfies? And why?*

Talicia: *Um… I think for everyone, and I think a lot of us don't like to admit, but we like 'likes.' And, if you get a lot of it, it's awesome, but if I don't, I wont necessarily delete the photo because I didn't get a lot of likes. It's just kind of like, 'Uh, okay, well. I guess I expected more but whatever!' It's not that big of a deal; whereas I know some people who literally delete, um, pictures if they don't get a certain amount of likes. For me it's not that deep; ya, I freakin' like 'likes' and it's nice if I get a lot of likes and comments, but I'm not trying to be deleting photos because I didn't get a lot of likes, do you know what I'm saying? Because then it's just like, uh… Then I'm really, like, fishing for, I don't know, like really only taking these pictures for people to tell me if it looks good or not. Some people are really like, 'If I don't get a lot of likes then I'm going to delete it,' and I don't do that. It's really nice to get a lot of likes, I guess it makes you feel good, like, 'Yeah! I look good, blah blah blah…' But, I'm not going to delete a picture because of not getting a lot of likes.*

Interviewer: *Okay, but at the same time, if your picture doesn't get a lot of likes do you feel upset, or like, not as beautiful as you thought?*

Talicia: *No, I don't feel upset or not as beautiful as I thought. Definitely not, like, it's just kind of a thing like, 'Oh okay, I didn't get a lot of likes but it's fine.' It doesn't run that deep for me like, 'Oh my gosh! Maybe I don't look that good in this picture.' If I think the picture looks good, I think it looks good, so, I will post it. But, I think one thing I find funny, I guess, because I guess I don't understand it is when people like their own photos to get that eleventh like. You know, there's always a joke about those people*

sneaking in that like to get eleven likes. And the reason I find it funny is because usually when you post a picture it's because you like it, so you don't need to go now and like your own photo to show that you it – obviously you like it because you posted it, do you know what I'm saying? So ya. But, I mean, in terms of me being upset or not feeling as beautiful as before it doesn't happen to me.

Interviewer: *So, how do selfies make you feel in general? Like, how do you feel before taking a selfie and after taking a selfie?*

Talicia: *Um… That's a funny question because I never really think about that. Before I take a selfie, I don't know, like… I just take the selfie. Afterwards if, uh, I'll look at them like, 'Oh, this is nice, or this one's not so nice,' and I'll delete the ones I don't think are nice. And like, that's it, like, I don't know how to describe how I necessarily feel. If I think it's a really nice selfie, I guess, happy. If not, I'm not necessarily sad, I'll just delete it or just leave or whatever. But before taking a selfie, it's not like a deep process I go through like, 'Okay, let me set this time aside for my selfie, let me do this' *puts on hyper-feminine accent*. Yes, obviously before I'm taking a selfie I'm angling my face to whatever way I want it, so maybe that's putting in effort or putting work into it, and then way that makes me feel… I don't know, I honestly don't know how to answer that.*

Interviewer: *Okay, and when do you get urges to take selfies? Like, when are you like, ' Okay, I need to take a selfie!'*

Talicia: *Oh my, the urge? Uh, I don't get a tingling feeling necessarily to take a selfie *laughs*. But as I said, like, I guess when there's a day where I think I really look good or I've really put in that effort to look good then I'll take a selfie. But, it's not like all the, it's just like, especially if I'm going out and I have time or whatever, like, just before we go out I'll take a few selfies; if not, it's not that*

*serious, I wont be like crying when I get home and be like, 'Man! I didn't take a selfie and I looked so damn good yesterday!' Or, if I'm drunk or whatever, the next day I won't be crying because I was too drunk to take a selfie *laughs*. But ya, like, it'll just be randomly. I don't know how to necessarily describe the urge, but, you know, in general terms I'll usually take selfies when I think I look good or I've really put in that work to slay or look 'on fleek' as they like to call it these days.*

Interviewer: *So do you only share selfies on Instagram when you think you look beautiful, or do you also share selfies where you're not feeling so great about yourself, or when you're not looking so good? Like, when do you actually decide to post a seflie?*

Talicia: *Um, I guess mostly if I think I look really nice. But I mean, I'm the type of person, especially with pictures, like I don't really care what my face looks like, just as long as I don't look fat – because I don't like to look fat in pictures. But in terms of a selfie and how my face looks and stuff, like, um, I don't really have to look that that amazing. But, you know, I'll take the selfie if I think I look good, I guess, in person. If the picture comes out, like, I think it looks average or whatever and I want to post it, I'll still post it, it's not too much of a train smash, I think? Um… But, ya. It's just, I just take them whenever. And maybe some days I won't be feeling so great, like, ugh, I look funny or whatever in person, then I'll just take a picture and if it looks nice I'll be like, 'Ah, this is nice,' to bring me up again, I guess. But, it's not necessarily like I'm, um, you know, I only use selfies to feel good about myself, you feel me?*

Interviewer: *Okay, so then why else do you take selfies if it's not just to look good or, like, feel better about yourself?*

Talicia: *That's a good question; let me just think about this.*

Interviewer: *Take your time.*

Talicia: *I mean, sometimes I just take a stupid selfie or take, like, pull a funny face just for fun, and it's not necessarily about me trying to look good or whatever, it's just doing things for fun and then, I guess, posting that look, you know, funny. But I guess most of the time it is about looking good, uh; but they're times where, you know, I'll take just a random selfie and just do like stupid shit or whatever, you know?*

Interviewer: *So you do you think it's necessary to take selfies and how important are they to you?*

Talicia: *Why is it necessary to take selfies? Uh… I don't know. Honestly, I don't know how to answer that question because I don't think that there's a huge necessity to it, it's just doing it whether you want to or not. Uh, but, how important are they to me? I guess… How important are selfies? Man, I don't even know *laughs*. I don't know, like, I just like taking them because it's nice to have pictures of yourself, I guess, if you look nice, or if you're doing funny things, or if you're with friends and family for memories, or even like, you know, when I'm older I can look back at my selfies like, 'Oh my gosh! Look how cute I was!' or, one day to show my kids like, 'Hey! Your mom used to slay! I may look ratchet right now but your mama used to look good.' I don't know, like, I guess it's all part of a memory thing, and I know we take like thousands and you may only need a couple of pictures to be like, 'Hey! This is what I used to look like,' but I don't know, its just like something we do.*

Interviewer: *Okay, great! But now, do you take selfies in private or public or both, and why?*

Talicia: *Um, I guess in both because, you know, in private either it's when I'm by myself like getting ready and stuff and just before I leave to go somewhere; but mostly I'll be with a friend or something, or she'll be busy doing something and I'll be taking selfies. Or even*

*in like public public, I'll take with like friends and stuff and even ones alone, like, it doesn't really matter. But, I think I have a feeling like when you take a selfie in public where people are around you, you know, people just look at you and the thing that always comes to my mind is like, those means where it's like, 'Could you not stare while I take a selfie! Like, you're acting like you don't do it' It's just like they kind of look at you like, 'Oh my gosh! She's taking a selfie!' *puts on hyper-feminine accent*. And I think it can get to some people even though you don't want it to because you don't really care; but, it's just more, like, annoying, like just chill the fuck out, you're acting like you don't do that shit, you know?*

Interviewer: *Ya completely! Okay, now we're moving onto Instagram. So, when did you first get start using Instagram and why?*

Talicia: *I first started using Instagram in 2012 when I got my first iPhone and the only reason I downloaded it was because my brother told me about it. He was like, 'Do you have Instagram?' and I was like, 'What is that?' And he was like, 'What! It this app that everyone's on overseas and it's coming now to SA.' So then I downloaded it and I was like, 'Oh okay cool, like, Instagram.'*

Interviewer: *Okay, and did you immediately start uploading selfies or have you only started uploading more and more selfies more recently?*

Talicia: *Um, I think initially because there were all these filters and cool things I was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is so cool!' So then I uploaded a few selfies and put a few filters and stuff. And actually like, before Instagram I would take selfies, but not as much as I do now that I have Instagram, I guess. Well, initially. So, I'd take a few and I remember sharing them to even Facebook and my sister had messaged me and was like, 'Oh your gosh, the pictures you've taken are so nice,' because I hardly used to take like too many*

pictures. I don't know. But ya, I guess Instagram changed that a bit because it was more of a platform for just pictures, you know?

Interviewer: *Ya, that makes sense. So, do you edit all your selfies before posting them on Instagram?*

Talicia: *Um… Ya, like initially I used to like edit quite a bit. Even now, like, if I just want to fix lighting or just to enhance the picture, I'll do it. Um… But, I think over time, the more editing that I do is more sort of natural editing, I guess, because I really like contrast between dark and light colours especially, so you'll notice on my Instagram that my pictures are very bold; whereas, some people like light throughout. So ya, I do filter quite a bit.*

Interviewer: *And why do you like Instagram?*

Talicia: *Um, I like Instagram because I think I'm a very visual person and I like, like, communicating through or looking at pictures or posting pictures and all of that. So, with an app that, um, was like that I was like, 'Ya, I like this app!' whereas Twitter, for example, is more about posting random statuses. So ya, that's why I like Instagram.*

Interviewer: *Okay cool. So, why do you share such intimate and private pictures of yourself on such a public platform that basically anyone, if they really wanted to, could see?*

Talicia: *Um… I don't mind sharing a snippet into my life and things that are going on just to be like, 'Oh, this is what I'm doing, blah blah blah,' I guess for people to see and, you know, I can be like, 'Oh, I've done this before too,' or whatever. I think it's more of a way of expressing ourselves. We constantly do things that express ourselves; even before technology people used to write, or um, dress a certain way or whatever. So, I think it's just a form of expression and like sharing with people what you to do, because as I said before, we're social beings and like to share and*

communicate and, um, I guess, have a bit of validation or whatever. I don't know if that makes sense.

Interviewer: *Okay. Do selfies still hold the same importance for you if you don't share them on Instagram?*

Talicia: *Ya, I mean, like, Instagram's not the only place that I would share a selfie. So, whether it's Instagram or not, it's not that important I guess. But, I guess, just because Instagram's kind of an app that caters more towards that, or just pictures per se, um, that's where you'd mostly find them. But, other than that, it's not a train smash if it isn't shared on Instagram.*

Interviewer: *Okay, sorry, I should have been more specific. I meant, like, if you didn't share them on any social media platforms. So, if you just take a selfie and keep it in your camera roll forever, never share them publicly.*

Talicia: *Oh okay. Um… I guess, they wouldn't have as much, (I don't know if value's the right word but let's just go with that for now), value because they're not shared. Just because, usually if we take pictures it's to show them; even back in the day they were developed for when family comes over or friends, you'd whip out your picture box and be like, 'Oh look at these pictures back in the day and look at these pictures of me,' you know what I'm saying? So, I guess, for you personally there's value to it, but having it shared socially adds a bit for people to see like, 'Oh my gosh, look how nice she looks here,' you know what I'm saying? So ya, I think it would lose a bit of its importance or value.*

Interviewer: *So do you think part of the selfie-taking process is the actual sharing of the selfie on a public platform?*

Talicia: *Uh, ya, I do think so. Um… Obviously there are times where you just take a selfie and it stays on your phone just to look at or use for something else, but I think majority of the time selfies can be taken for public sharing. But, in terms of me, like, I think it's*

50/50, like, you know, part of my selfies I'll share, part of them I just keep on my phone to look at or whatever, or maybe at a later stage I'll post it or do something with it, or I just keep it, you know what I'm saying?

Correction: Maybe it's about a 60/40, 60 more for public sharing, 40 for myself, yeah…

Interviewer: *Okay, so how would you feel if you could take selfies but there were no public platforms for you to share them on? Like, do you think you would even take selfies then?*

Talicia: *Oh yeah, I probably definitely would because I mean I did even before Facebook, like, I only joined Facebook in 2007, um… And, before that, if I had a camera I'd just take them on the camera and leave them there, like, if they get looked at, they get looked at, if not, you know what I'm saying? So, um, I don't think it's a train. But, because we're so used to the way the culture of selfies now, going back to that would be kind of a different story.*

Interviewer: *Okay, I understand. Now we're onto the 'selfies and self-image' section. So, how important is your image to you?*

Talicia: *Like, in terms of the way I look?*

Interviewer: *Ya, like, your overall look.*

Talicia: *Oh ya, that's definitely important to me. I like to look good, I like to feel good, so ya.*

Interviewer: *But why? Why do you feel the need to look good and feel good?*

Talicia: *I think it's just a way of expressing myself and just, you know, feeling good about myself. So, I love fashion, I love dress up, I love looking good for myself, looking good and being complimented by other people; I don't necessarily have to be complimented by other people to feel like I look good, if I know that I look good, I know I look good. Yes, I know I can have moments of insecurity, especially like now; I know that I've gained a lot of weight so it's nice when, you know, people tell me I look good, it's like, 'Shit, I actually still*

*look good even though I'm a fatty right now.' But ya, I think everyone a level of, you know, imagery or self-image importance because it's how we, I guess, perceive ourselves and, I guess, accept ourselves. And yes, there are those select few people out there who just do not give two shits and are happy that way; I'm just not one of them. *laughs*.*

Interviewer: *So do you value your looks as an important aspect of self? So like, when you're comparing it to your personality, your intelligence, and stuff, are your looks very important to you and why?*

Talicia: *Um… Yes! My looks for me are very important. Um… Especially if I'm liked going to an event or going out, but other than that… They always important to me but I guess it's the level of effort that I put into, you know, making myself up or just like making myself look good. Like sometimes I can go without make up and just put mascara and that's it and just walk out the house, like I don't have to be full blown everything all the time. But, my image is important to me because it's kind of like a depiction, I guess, partly of who I am and how I maintain myself. Ya, it is kind of important for me for people to notice like, 'Hey! This girl really takes care of herself and she looks good and it shows.' It just gives you that extra good feeling, I guess, about yourself. Um… And so, it's one factor, yes, the way I look, as well as being an intelligent person and being a whatnot, whatnot.*

Interviewer: *Okay cool. So, are you confident in the way you look?*

Talicia: *Yes I am, especially in terms of my face. I'm the most confident about my face, but when it comes to my body that's a whole other story; that's like a history. But, generally with the way I look, I am confident. Um… Just like every girl I have weight issues, I feel insecure about that at times; but, in general, I think that I don't make a bad good looking person *laughs* to put it lightly.*

Interviewer: *So, do you think you're beautiful? Be honest, I don't judge. And also, are you happy with the way you look or is there something you'd change? And what would it be?*

Talicia: *Ya, I do think that I am beautiful. And, I think a lot of the time I struggle to say it, and I think other people also struggle to say it because you're almost afraid of coming across cocky or, like, full of yourself; whereas, there's nothing wrong with feeling confident and just knowing that you are a beautiful person and not being that way at all. And, um… no, I'm not completely comfortable, I guess, with myself because I could… I guess, weight issues have always been a thing, so if I could change something, it would definitely be the rest of my body; but in terms of my face, I'm pretty confident in that. Obviously there'll be days where I'm like, 'Oh! I'm having a bad day with the way I look,' but it's not necessarily a train smash for me where I think that I'm not attractive at all. But ya, definitely something I would change is my weight and my body, but that if I believed in plastic surgery. Other than that, like, I just need to diet, but that's just like really hard *laughs*.*

Interviewer: **laughs* But why do you think you need to lose weight to be happier with yourself? What's wrong with being the way you are now?*

Talicia: *Um, it's definitely because of societal pressures and there's always this insecurity that's there, like: you need to be slimmer, you need to be this or you need to be that. I don't have, I guess, enough self-confidence to make me feel like, 'Okay, the way I am right now actually is okay.' Even though I know I do exude confidence, and people always say, 'You're so confident and comfortable in your skin and stuff,' but I think even by saying that, it's almost saying like, 'Even though you're not trying to conform to this mould that society makes you want to strive to be, I guess, in terms of being good looking,' you know? Which is kind of also saying that you're*

actually not that beautiful. But, I mean, my whole life, like since I was 11, I've had multiple body image issues, I guess. But ya, it definitely is because of society and the pressures that we girls, especially, are placed under. So, that's what kind of gives me that reason for wanting to be slimmer. And, the thing is that I don't want to be skinny because I actually don't look good skinny, like, I just look weird; I like being thicker, but more slim thick than thick the way I am right now. So, I want to be slimmer, still have my booty, still have thighs, but a smaller and flatter tummy type thing.

Interviewer: *Okay, cool. Um… Do you think selfies are vainand why or why not?*

Talicia: *Um… I think that it depends, so I don't think all selfies are vein. I think it depends on the person you are because vainpeople do exist and, you know, they'll, I guess, take a whole bunch of selfies and that'll be all they have. But, I don't, uh… I don't actually know if I can even say that the statement I just said is true. I think it just depends on the person you are and, you know, ya, it just depends on the person you are. Some people may see it as vainbecause, like, why do you need to take a picture of yourself to put on social media if you know you look good and stuff, which is fine. But, I guess your reasoning behind it, you know, means the most, I guess, to you and you shouldn't really care. But, I know a lot of people who are so scared of looking vainand are so insecure, like I have friends that'll be like, 'Oh my gosh! I posted a selfie, people must think I'm vein!' Like, I just don't care, I don't care what you think; if I want to post a selfie, I'mma put a selfie up.*

Interviewer: *Okay. So are there more to selfies than just simply showing the world how you look, what you're wearing, what you doing, where you are? Like, is there more to a selfie than just that, or is that basically what their function is?*

Talicia: *Um… I think that's pretty much their function and, like, ya, if you're feeling good about yourself, you know, and just like to share things because we like to be social about things we do in life, so ya.*

Interviewer: *Do you think selfies are a form of self-love and acceptance? And then explain your answer, like yes or no and why.*

Talicia: *I think that yes they can be because, you know, you're confident enough, you can post your pictures and not really care that people may have others perceptions of why you're posting it; you're just posting it because you like the picture, and you like to post pictures for people to see. Or, it can be a form of insecurity, where you're constantly looking for people to validate your appearance so that you feel better about yourself. It just depends on who you are.*

Interviewer: *Okay, but speaking from your perspective, when you putting selfies online. Do you think it's a form of you loving yourself and accepting yourself and how you look, as opposed to how society says you should look?*

Talicia: *Oh yeah, especially because selfies just usually focus on your face. So yeah, it is about accepting myself and loving myself for me.*

Interviewer: *So, do you think selfies are equally important for men and women? Or, do you think selfie-taking is a gendered-practice, as in it's more of a feminine thing to do as opposed to a masculine thing to do?*

Talicia: *No, because, especially due to Instagram and having Instagram accounts, I think it's pretty equal. Guys do like to front as if, like, it's not the same, but you do get a lot of guys where if you go through their profiles it's literally just selfies. So, I think people like to portray it that way, but in actuality, I don't think that's the case; I think its pretty equal in terms of selfie-taking.*

Interviewer: *Okay, but some important studies that have been done in accordance with Instagram data have proved that in almost in*

every country, women take significantly more selfies than guys. So, why do you think that's the case? Why do you think women generally take more selfies than men?

Talicia: *I think that is because it's more acceptable for women to take selfies and, you know, pose in pictures and do all these things because it's perceived to be a 'girly' thing, like. 'Ah, girls take selfies. Girls always try and doll up to look pretty and then take pictures and do all these girly things!' whereas, guys, when there's pictures of them it's usually in a masculine stance and, you know, it's not necessarily because they said, 'Let's take the picture.' So, I think guys don't post them as much because, as I said earlier, people put have put a negative perception on it when selfies became a 'thing,' so it's kind of like, 'Ugh, I don't participate in those things; those are girl things.' I don't know if that makes sense.*

Interviewer: *Okay, so how do you feel when you see girls posting selfies versus guys posting selfies? Are you like, 'Um… That's a bit gay of him,' type thing, or do you feel the same when you see both of them posting selfies?*

Talicia: *Um… I mean. I don't know, like… I think because now I'm used to selfies, it's not a big deal if I see a guy; although, maybe sometimes we'll make fun of friends. What I find funny is when guys pout or something because, you know, you see they're trying hard, I guess, to make it look good; whereas, it's more acceptable for girls to do that and it doesn't necessarily look like you're trying hard, you know, just because of the whole gender thing. But, I think I'm more used to it now that I don't really judge, you know?*

Interviewer: *Okay, so do you think that more men should start taking selfies? Or, do you think that it's fine that there's still this gender imbalance with selfie-taking?*

Talicia: *Ya, I think they should because there's nothing to really be ashamed about. If you want to take a picture of yourself, just take it and post it. And, I think by doing that, society will become more accustomed to it and used to it, so there'll be now like, 'Oh my gosh, guys don't take selfies and only girls do' *hyper-feminine accent* because there's no, like, real basis to that argument of view, I guess. You feel me?*

Interviewer: *I feel you. So then, do you think that selfies are important to women, and why?*

Talicia: *Um… I mean, ya, I think they are, I guess. Like, as I said, people just like to post pictures, take pictures of themselves, you know?*

Interviewer: *Okay, what role do you think selfies play in a women's life?*

Talicia: *I think, like I said earlier, it's a way of expressing yourself, um… You know, feeling good about yourself and wanting to share if you look good, or share something funny. It's just; I think it all comes down to a way of expressing yourself. Um… That's for me personally, I guess.*

Interviewer: *And also, how do you think selfies have improved or worsened a women's life, if any?*

Talicia: *Improved or worsened? Um… So, made people look real good, a lot of pictures to look at, I guess. And, the worsened part of it for people who are insecure or just like attention, or people who are actually vainit's, you know, feeding towards that personality. That's what selfies have done, by making it a 'thing,' it's because an excessive thing for those types of people. For other people, though, it's just another way to express yourself.*

Interviewer: *Okay, and do you think selfies are empowering women? Or, do you think it' just another means for women to judge one another and compete against each other on the basis of looks?*

Talicia: *Um… I still do think it may be another platform for women to judge each other, because I still think there is an issue with that*

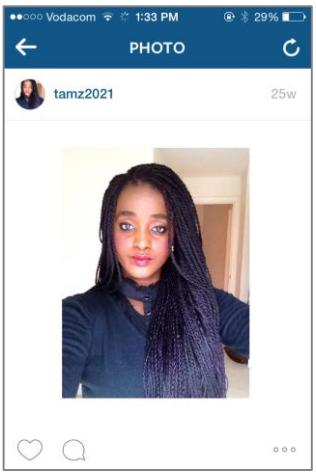
and women-hate towards each other. But, I still think there is a level of empowerment to it; being confident, showing yourself off and not caring that people have these other types of perceptions of you – like thinking that you're being vein, or whatever – is empowering.

Interviewer: *Finally, how have selfies changed your life, if they have at all? And, do you think selfies are here to stay, and why?*

Talicia: *Uh, I don't think they've dramatically changed my life, but again, I just think it's another way to express myself and, I guess, show off or show when I look good, or my beauty, or whatever. But, I definitely think they're here to stay because, I mean, it's just a big thing right now.*

Talicia's Interview: Part 2 – Instagram Tour

Which is your favourite Instagram selfie and why?

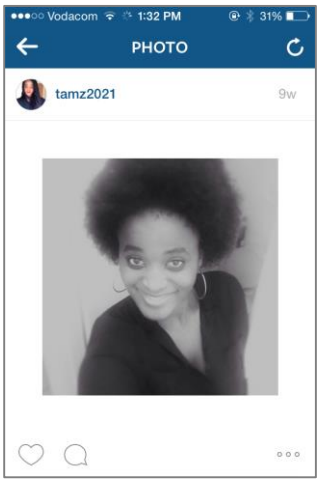


This is my favourite selfie because I think the lighting was perfect and my makeup was 'on fleek,' especially my eyebrows which I usually have trouble with. And, you can also see the tint of purple in my hair and my braids look awesome.

Why did you post these selfies?



Okay, I took this selfie because firstly, we were at the White House and the lighting was really as we were taking group photos, so I was like, 'Hey! Let me try and sneak one in of myself,' because I think I was looking really hot that day because I was supposed to be seeing boo-thang. So ya, and it just came out really hot so I was just like, 'Let me post it!'



I posted this selfie because it's kind of like my hair grow progress. So, I had just taken out my braids and my hair had grown so much, so I was like, 'Oh my gosh, this is amazing!' So, I took a few pictures, and actually, by taking the pictures I was going to share them, I was just going to show my family. But then I was like, 'Hey! This picture

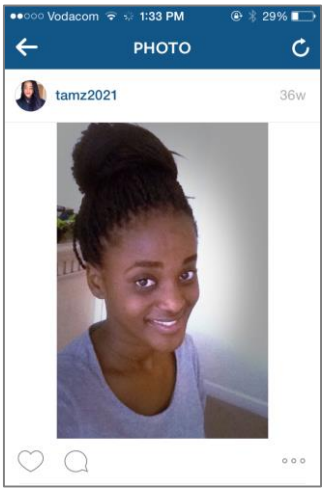
actually looks really good and I think I look cute with my 'fro hair.' And, I also feel like, especially with my natural hair pictures, a lot of the time I think when I post them, because I'm still a bit shy wearing my natural hair out as I've never done that before, seeing that people think it's nice and stuff kind of makes me feel good about it. So that's more about, you know, getting a bit of validation from people that I actually look good in it. So ya, I can admit that.



Um… I really love the dress in this selfie and of course I love my hate, and I just wanted to take, like, a really hot picture for a profile picture, like on Whatsapp or whatever. So, I took one in a long mirror, and, um… Ya, and I thought my butt looked really good, so I posted it because I was like, 'Yeah, I think I look good.'



So, in this selfie, I think I was having a bit of a 'fat day' and we had just gone shopping, and when I put the clothes on I was like, 'Okay, they look cute.' And so, when I took the selfie I was just trying to see if I'd look good in 'going out' pictures, um… Taking like a nice, sexy selfie and it come out nicely and I was kind of feeling myself.

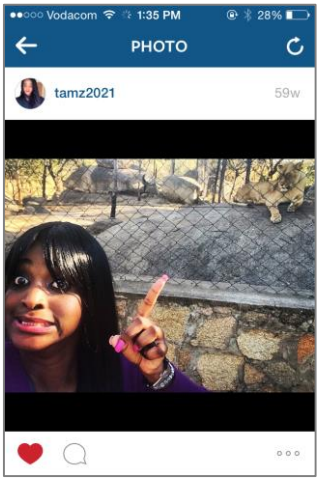


I had just actually gotten my eyebrows done in this selfie, because I never have

ever really done my eyebrows. So, I went to get them thredded and it hurt like shit, but ya. And then, I had just woken up and I thought I tied my bun really nicely and I had, like, no make-up on. And usually, if I do tag, you know, #NoFilter or, you know, #NoMakeUp or whatever, I normally like playing around because people expect you to tag that, so I just put it, like, jokingly; even if people know that I'm not, like, I don't really care what people think. Um… And, I thought I looked really nice in the picture, so I posted that one.



Uh, why did I take this picture? I don't know, I just liked my outfit, I guess. And, I hardly wear white pants, so I was just like, 'Oh okay, I actually look good, I want to take a picture,' and ya, I took one.



This selfie was kind of like a comical thing, like taking a selfie with a lion type thing. And that one was definitely for people to see, and like, comment on because I know it was funny and, like my facial expression, I know I was being stupid. So, um… Ya. I just liked it and I was like, 'I have to post this picture with this picture with this lion.' So ya, and there were huge, we were actually on holiday in Zim.



Um… In this selfie I was really, like, tired and just, like, drained from my research and I just, like, I put on this hat because I was bored and then I liked it. And then, um… I took this picture and I really liked it so then I decided to post it and associate it with my studying and being like, 'procrastinating,' as just, like, a comical thing. I still thought that I looked nice in it though.

Appendix I

Micaela & Monique's Small Focus Group Discussion: Part 1 – Questions

Interviewer:	*When did you guys get your first smartphone?*
Micaela:	*I'd say about four years ago.*
Monique:	*I only got mine in January last year.*
Interviewer:	*Okay, so did you always take pictures of yourself or did you only start when you got the front facing camera?*
Micaela:	*I only started when I got the front camera.*
Monique:	*Well, I used to take pictures of myself but I've started taking more with the front facing camera.*
Interviewer:	*Okay and what is a selfie to you guys?*
Micaela:	*For me a selfie is when you flip your camera to face you and you take a picture of yourself.*
Monique:	*Ya.*
Micaela:	*I don't know. You see, I don't feel like it's such a selfie when you're with someone, but if it's by yourself, by selfie, when it's just your face in the photo – then that's a selfie. But I feel like if you switch the camera but you're with someone else, I don't know; I feel like it's not such a selfie anymore.*
Monique:	*I feel like when you flip the camera with a friend taking a photo, it's a selfie by it's not like when you're referring to a selfie in a distinct way; a selfie is only of your face.*
Interviewer:	*Okay, so it's basically when you're taking a picture of yourself with the front camera?*
Micaela:	*Yes, with only you in it.*
Interviewer:	*Okay and what does a selfie mean to you guys? Does it have any meaning to you? Like when you think of a selfie, what do you associate with it?*
Monique:	*Honestly, from like the media, songs; I don't think about it at all. I don't feel like it's even… I don't know how to explain it.*

Micaela: *Okay, wait. Repeat the question.*

Interviewer: *So, when you hear the word 'selfie,' what does it trigger in your brain? What does it mean to you?*

Micaela: *It means someone taking a picture of themselves; that's what it means.*

Monique: *Ya, okay. But I feel like it doesn't end there. Um… Like there's so much talk about the selfie; when I take a selfie I don't really care, it's not really important. I'm like indifferent to it; it is what it is.*

Micaela: *I don't know if this is of any interest but apparently selfie is in the dictionary now.*

Interviewer: *Ya, since 2013. Okay, when did you guys start taking actual selfies?*

Micaela: *I think the minute I got my smartphone which was about three, four years ago.*

Monique: *It was about three years ago. I didn't have my smartphone yet but I made a plan; even when I didn't have a front camera, I used to use a mirror and take it like that.*

Interviewer: *Okay, why do you guys take selfies now?*

Monique: *Okay, I take selfies because I feel like I'm really fat. If someone takes a photo of me longshot, I'm like, 'Heck no! This is the ugliest photo!' I don't feel good about myself; I feel depressed. If I take a selfie I'm like, 'Okay. Ah, I look good in this picture.'*

Interviewer: *Do you mean you only take selfies of your upper half then?*

Monique: *Yes. Well, I recently started taking photos of my lower half, but normally I prefer taking selfies of my upper half just to make myself feel better; and I feel good.*

Micaela: *I think I take selfies out of convenience; I can't be like, 'Baby bro, will you please take a photo for me?' You know?*

Monique: *Oh, that is true.*

Micaela: *My mom can't take a photo, my dad can't take a photo, my brother can't take a photo; so I actually do it out of convenience. So, if I*

want to share what I look like today on social media, I'm not going to ask them to take a picture; I'm going to take a selfie myself.

Monique: *Okay, mine's not like that, I could easily ask my mom or my sister. They're always like, 'Let me take a photo of you,' and I'm like, 'Do not take a photo!' But with a selfie I'll be like, 'Okay, I'll take a selfie!'*

Interviewer: *So, do you think it's because you're in control of how you look? Like you can position yourself how you want?*

Monique: *Yes.*

Micaela: *Yes.*

Monique: *You can have an angle… Like when people take a photo they're always like, 'This is my good side,' and selfies are exactly the same thing.*

Micaela: *Ya, we have more control over the selfies because we know which way we look good and you can position yourself accordingly; make your collar bones stick out, cover your arm with your hair and…*

Monique: *For me, my cheeks… I always think my cheeks are so fat so I put my hair over them like this *covers cheeks with hair*. My mom's always like, 'Why's your hair always like this in all your photos?' and I'm like, 'Mom, my cheeks are too chubby to be shown!'*

Interviewer: *Okay, how often would you guys say you take selfies?*

Monique: *I probably take… Not from Monday to Friday because I'm in my work clothes and I look terrible. I would say definitely once on a Saturday; at least once on a Saturday and a Friday night. If I'm going out in the week, I'll take one as well. If I go out every day, I'll take one every day.*

Interviewer: *So like, if you were on holiday you'd probably take one every day?*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Monique: *Ya.*

Micaela: *Um… I only take probably on the weekend. I won't even bother taking them on a week day because I'm in my work clothes and I*

don't necessarily feel pretty during the week; like I don't put much effort in going to work…

Monique: *I don't put any effort and I wear the same clothes every single day. You know, I always wear scrubs so there's nothing new to show.*

Micaela: *Um… What else? I was going to say something…*

Monique: *I would say even… Okay, I would say once a day!*

Micaela: *You take a selfie every day?*

Monique: *Once a day or at least once every second day.*

Micaela: *If I do take a selfie it's just like one as a joke to like David or something.*

Monique: *Or even if it's just before I go out, or if I'm in the car I something; I'm just checking if everything's okay and I'll take a selfie.*

Micaela: *Ya, ya, ya.*

Monique: *My front camera I use a lot as a mirror, like if I'm out and I need to check if my makeup's smudged.*

Interviewer: *Okay. Do you guys ever get an urge to take selfies? Lie, 'Oh my gosh, I need to get this in a selfie!'*

Micaela: *Yes, I do. Like if I feel like I'm going out and I look pretty, I need to post it! I mean, like you can't waste a good outfit and a good hair day and a good makeup day, you have to just post it! So, I do feel the urge to take a selfie sometimes, ya.*

Interviewer: *When you're looking fresh?*

Micaela: *Yes, when I'm looking fresh. Ya.*

Monique: *Um… I feel like I can't say no, but I don't feel an urge; I just do it naturally. I feel like it's second nature to me now that I don't even get an urge to do it.*

Interviewer: *Okay, how do you guys feel before you've taken a selfie and after? Let use the example of taking a really good selfie versus a really bad one.*

Micaela: *If I take a good one then I'll feel very pretty about myself and like I can conquer the world.*

Monique: *Ya, afterwards I'm like, 'Oh wow, I look good.' If I take a bad one then I'm like, 'Okay, that is not going up anywhere! Delete!'*

Micaela: *Ya. When I don't take a nice selfie, ya, it doesn't make me feel very good.*

Monique: *But when I take a bad selfie I don't feel like I look ugly in real life, I'll just be like it's not good enough to go on social media. Or I'll be like, 'Okay, just not today, not today – I'll take another one tomorrow.'*

Interviewer: *Okay. How do selfies make you feel in general?*

Micaela: *Actually lately I feel embarrassed about it sometimes because people make you actually feel embarrassed about it.*

Interviewer: *How?*

Micaela: *Because they're like, 'Ah, you so vain! Why you posting so many selfies?' And if you're out at a party and you busy taking a selfie, people will look at you like, 'Ah, that's so vain! They're forever taking selfies!' So, sometimes I actually feel self-conscious taking a selfie.*

Monique: *I 100% agree, but you know, when they get a lot of likes I don't care *laughs*. I feel like it's so controversial that we're taking selfies, but I feel like other people are feeling bad about themselves because they aren't taking selfies.*

Micaela: *Ya, ya, ya.*

Monique: *I don't think it should be an embarrassing thing; so what if you want to take photos of yourself?*

Micaela: *Ya, so like slowly I've actually learnt to not care.*

Monique: *Ya. Sometimes it makes you feel very self-conscious, like, 'Oh my gosh, another selfie?' I don't want to post that or take one!*

Interviewer: *So why do you still post it if it makes you feel like that?*

Monique: *Because I just don't care; I feel good about myself. Like, I don't know, you get lots of likes; you feel good, you feel pretty.*

Interviewer: *So you do it as a form of self-validation?*

Micaela: *Ya; the self-validation is higher than the embarrassment.*

Monique: *Exactly! It's feeling good, it's rewarding; I'd rather feel good and embarrassed than not good at all.*

Interviewer: *Okay. Why do you think it's necessary to take them? Like why take a selfie, what's the point? Do you know what I mean?*

Monique: *I don't think there's a point; I feel like you just do it because it makes you feel good. I don't know.*

Interviewer: *So is that the necessity of it?*

Monique: *Ya, to get like a self-reassurance.*

Micaela: *Ya, I do that.*

Monique: *I absolutely take it for self-reassurance.*

Micaela: *100%.*

Interviewer: *So then are selfies important to you? Like the act of taking them and posting them.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Interviewer: *For that reassurance?*

Micaela: *Yes!*

Monique: *I don't know. I feel like I would absolutely say that, yes, they are important; but then I feel like it's not really important.*

Micaela: *No, it is!*

Monique: *But if I didn't put up a selfie for a year, I don't think I'd feel any different.*

Interviewer: *But how do you think your self-confidence would be if you didn't?*

Monique: *It would probably be lower. So then it is important, ya.*

Micaela: *Ya!*

Interviewer: *Okay, now back to that public/private debate. Do you only take selfies in private or do you also take them in public?*

Monique: *No, I take them in public as well. I don't care *laughs*.*

Micaela: *Uh… Ya, I prefer taking them in private, but now I've learnt to take them in public.*

Monique: *Oh, of myself? I won't take a photo of just myself in public. Ya, I won't do that. Like, of just me? No.*

Interviewer: *Why not?*

Monique: *I feel like there's a difference; if I'm drunk, I will just take one, I don't mind taking of myself. Also, if it's a new environment, you know, and I want to catch something, then I'll take a selfie no problem. But like those ones you take by yourself in your room, like if it was just me, like I want to get my good hairstyle in, I won't take that in public.*

Micaela: *Yes, yes!*

Interviewer: *Why not?*

Monique: *Because at home you focus of angles and all that; in public I won't focus on that, it's just about taking the photo. And it's like, 'Oh, that was terrible!' but you don't care, at least you've got the scenery or whatever.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Interviewer: *But now why do you think it's so embarrassing?*

Micaela: *Because people judge*

Monique: *Ya, people judge you.*

Interviewer: *So, do you think there's a stigma against selfie-takers?*

Micaela: *Yes!*

Monique: *Absolutely! I feel like every girl takes selfies and girls that judge other girls also take them; I don't understand.*

Micaela: *Ya!*

Interviewer: *So then do you think it is a thing you should do in private?*

Monique: *No! I don't think so.*

Micaela: *No! It's become such a phenomenon.*

Monique: *I feel like we should move away from this whole thing that we can't take one in public.*

Interviewer: *But then do you think it's acceptable to take it with other people in public?*

Micaela: *Yes!*

Monique: *Absolutely!*

Micaela: *Ya, ya! That's so chilled.*

Monique: *That's so fine.*

Interviewer: *So if you're alone it's like completely vain, but if there's at least just one person or a dog or anything with you…*

Monique: *Then that's fine!*

Micaela: *Yes, yes! Then it's fine; even if there's a pet!*

Interviewer: *Do you judge people who take selfies in public?*

Monique: *No! If I see a girl that takes a photo I'm like, 'Wow!' I like it and I'm not judging her.*

Micaela: *Ya. I don't know if you've noticed but I've slowed down.*

Monique: *Ya, you used to take a lot of selfies.*

Micaela: *Ii used to take a lot of selfies and now I've liked stopped because of people thinking that I'm vain and stuff.*

Interviewer: *Do you guys think you are vain though?*

Micaela: *No. There's nothing wrong with feeling like you look good and you look pretty, but don't go an edit it to make yourself look a million times better just to get more likes. That for me is vain; put yourself up. So, if you're staying true to you then that's not vain.*

Monique: *Ya, I agree with that 100%. My mom is always like, because I take so much – not even selfies – just photos, she'll always be like, 'Agh, you so vain!' You know, because I'm always taking photos. But with that said, my self-confidence is so terrible, like I don't know… I mean, I think I've got a pretty face, but I don't feel pretty when I go out with other girls... But when I take a selfie I'm like, 'Okay, I look good!' So, if that makes me vain, I don't care, then I'm vain. But I don't feel like I'm vain, I don't think so.*

Micaela: *Ya, me too. I feel the same.*

Interviewer: *Okay, now we're moving on to Instagram. When did you guys first get it?*

Monique: *I got it way after you; I got it two years ago.*

Micaela: *I got my smartphone and I think I got Instagram maybe six months after that.*

Interviewer: *Why did you get it? Like how did you hear about it?*

Micaela: *Because at that point Facebook had died down and now Instagram was the thing. Ya,*

Monique: *And I got Instagram because I was the last person out of our group to get it and everyone was like, 'Monique, you have to get Instagram! You just have to get it!' and I was like, 'Okay, let me get Instagram .'*

Interviewer: *Okay, why do you guys like Instagram?*

Monique: *I like it because I like to see what other people are doing.*

Micaela: *Ya. I like it because it's pictures; I love looking at pictures, I hate reading.*

Monique: *I love pictures.*

Interviewer: *So, you're both visual people?*

Micaela: *Yes.*

Monique: *I prefer photos but I love to read though.*

Micaela: *And I'm a very creative, artistic person so I like looking at pretty pictures and when they're like… If it's like a picture of like someone with a landscape behind them or something, I think that's amazing.*

Interviewer: *Okay, why is your profile public?*

Monique: *Why should it be private?*

Interviewer: *Okay, fair enough. But selfies are very intimate pictures so why do you feel the need to share these pictures of yourself on such a public platform that literally anyone in the world can see?*

Micaela: *Because I want other people to think I'm pretty.*

Monique: *You see, when you get Instagram, it doesn't come private and you have to take it off to be public, it's the other way round. So, I feel like people that put it on private have a need to be private. I mean,*

I understand exactly what you're saying, I don't have a new to show the world myself, I just don't care. It's not like it has my private information; it's a picture of my face. I feel like it's not giving such detailed information, so if they see a photo of you, a stranger, they're like, 'Okay, it's a photo of a stranger.'

Micaela: *I think I put my profile on private because if I do post something like a selfie – and I know this completely contradictory but – I don't want to be judged by certain people. So, that's why if I know they're not following me, I know I can post that picture because I know I'm not going to be judged.*

Monique: *You see, I feel the exact opposite in the sense that if I know someone – Instagram if very big, you can follow a million people or they can follow you or whatever – but I'm not really friends them and they follow me on Instagram, I'm going to follow them back; even if you don't like them, you're still going to be following each other. It's like when you see someone out in public, if they greet you, you're going to greet them back – even if you don't like them. I feel like strangers can see my profile, they're not going to influence my life at all, so I couldn't care less if they see it or don't see it. Private people are the one's that'll actually judge you; your friends, not the strangers.*

Interviewer: *Would you say that your profile's also public so that you can get more likes?*

Monique: *I don't care about that.*

Interviewer: *Okay guys, how important is it for you to get a lot of likes and comments on your selfies?*

Monique: *Not important for me.*

Micaela: *I like to get lots of likes.*

Monique: *I like to get lots of likes; the more I get I'm like, 'Woah! I got so much likes!' But I don't have to; if I get ten, eleven likes then I'm like, 'Okay, I got eleven likes. Whatever.' But also, I think people*

*don't like good photos because they're jealous of you, so time's if I don't get a lot of likes I'm like, 'Huh, maybe I look really god!' *laughs*.*

Micaela: *Yes, ya. Can I tell you, I even know like… I'll post my picture at certain times so that I know that everyone sees it. I'm being honest, like on a Sunday at 6 o'clock I'll post it because everyone's at home; if you post it at 12 o'clock, everyone's at lunch, no one's going to look at it and no one's going to like it.*

Monique: *Oh, I've never thought of that; I post them whenever.*

Micaela: *I'll be honest, my Instagram, I like it, I don't know… You know like a Tumblr account where I want everything to look pretty and I want everything to like… It's like a form of art for me; I know that sounds weird, but it is. I like everything looking pretty; I'll choose only one photo… I want my Instagram to look pretty and have meaning.*

Monique: *I feel like when I look at your Instagram I'm like, 'Ah Gosh, her Instagram is so gorgeous!' It's exactly like what you're saying! Like if you're going out and you put one up, you'll put one photo out of the whole night and I don't mind putting fifteen photos on.*

Micaela: *Yes, yes! But the only reason I do that is because I like my Instagram to look artistic and pretty. But that's because I'm artistic and I like that; I'm creative, that's just me.*

Monique: *I mean, I used to say to my sister, 'Should I put this one up? Or should I put this one up? They're both nice but I don't know which one I like,' and she'd be like, 'Put them both on, who cares?' So, now I do. But when I look at yours I'm like, 'Oh my gosh, this is such a nice Instagram,' then when I look at mine it's like millions of photos *laughs*. I just don't care, now I don't care.*

Interviewer: *Okay. Do you guys edit your selfies before posting them on Instagram?*

Monique: *How do you mean edit?*

Interviewer: *So, do you just put filters and play around with lighting and stuff, or do you do the extreme; photo-shop?*

Monique: *No, I don't do that. Sometimes I put a filter, sometimes I don't; it depends if the lighting's bad. But I don't photo-shop, I don't even know how to photo-shop.*

Interviewer: *So, you're basically dealing with the colours?*

Monique: *Ya.*

Micaela: *Ya so, I just also deal with the colours and stuff. I only have one app on my phone that I use to change the lighting; the colours, that's it! Um… I did once; I have one picture when there was this new app that came out that made you look a bit thinner and I've used that once. I'll show you which picture, but I've never ever used it again.*

Interviewer: *Okay, so do you guys only put up pictures where you think you look beautiful and like, 'Wow! I look good in this picture,' or do you also put up not-so-good ones of yourself?*

Micaela: *Ya, I think I'll post it; like if me and David have a cute photo, even though I might look so great, I'll still post it. There are a few like that that I've posted recently.*

Monique: *Like this morning I put one up with Klar and I don't look good in this photo but I put it up. But if you're talking about like just of my face, like just of me and I look terrible, then I won't put one up.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Interviewer: *Why not?*

Monique: *Because I don't think I look pretty.*

Interviewer: *So, it's not going to give you that validation?*

Monique: *Ya.*

Micaela: *Ya like, for example I posted this picture which is a cute picture; I don't think I look like a supermodel though.*

Monique: *What? I love that photo! I don't know what you're talking about; you can't even really see your face.*

Micaela: *Ya, I know what you're saying but it's not like a gorgeous photo of me per se; but it's just a fun one and I didn't care.*

Monique: *Oh wait! Although, like I take a lot of photos with my cat and I look terrible, but it's just that the cat looks so cute; then I'll put it up, then I don't care.*

Interviewer: *Okay, so do you guys only take photos when you're perfectly poised and you know this is the perfect angle, or do you also take ones where you look stupid?*

Monique: *Oh no. I put ones where I look stupid.*

Micaela: *I put crazy ones.*

Interviewer: *So, what do these different pictures mean to you? Like the crazy face versus the sexy, nice, gorgeous picture.*

Micaela: *I like having a nice difference.*

Monique: *I like having the difference as well, but I feel like back in the day people used to judge you for the crazy face and be like, 'Ah, this girl's drunk.' But now I feel like its opposite with the ones that are crazy, people will be like, 'Ah, she's having a good time,' and the selfies are like us as girls…*

Micaela: *As opposed to the posed pictures, the crazy ones are more natural.*

Monique: *Selfies have actually completely changed that around; it's gone from judging you as being crazy, to judging you as being fun.*

Interviewer: *So, do you think it gives you some sort of personality like, 'Look! I'm not always this perfectly poised person!'*

Micaela: *Yes!*

Monique: *Definitely! You've got the perfect wording.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Interviewer: *Okay. So, do you guys think selfies would hold the same importance for you if you couldn't share them on social media? Like would you still be taking them?*

Micaela: *I don't think I'd take them as much.*

Monique: *Ya, I was going to say I'd probably still take them, but nowhere near as much as I take them now.*

Interviewer: *Why not?*

Monique: *Because I'm taking them for that validation; so if I'm not going to get it, why take it?*

Micaela: *Yes!*

Monique: *Because I'm taking them for my own validation, but when someone comments, 'You look lovely,' that's triple the self-validation.*

Micaela: *Ya, ya, yes!*

Interviewer: *Okay cool. Now moving on to selfies and self-image. How important is your image to you; do you think your looks make up a big part of who you are?*

Monique: *Yes, I do.*

Micaela: *Ya, I feel like they do.*

Monique: *Like those people that literally don't care about themselves look like slobs.*

Interviewer: *So, why is it important to carry yourself well?*

Monique: *I don't need to wear makeup all the time; I just need to look presentable because life is like that.*

Micaela: *Ya, I don't know. I guess because that's what people judge you on first; before they even speak to you they're looking at you.*

Monique: *Oh ya definitely. That's exactly why for like a job interview, you need to look good. I mean, any job that's like a salesmen, you need to look presentable because then no one's going to take you seriously or respect you.*

Interviewer: *Okay, are you guys confident in how you look?*

Monique: *No, I'm not; that's why I'm on a huge diet at the moment.*

Micaela: *I'm also not; that's why I like to go to gym and do this and that.*

Interviewer: *Okay, but are you guys happy with yourselves or would there be things you'd change?*

Micaela: *I don't actually know to be honest. I can't give you a straight answer.*

Monique: *You see, I'm always fighting that subconsciously because like I wouldn't want to change anything about myself, so I feel like it's who I am.*

Micaela: *It would be wrong to.*

Monique: *Exactly. But I mean, sure, would I like to lose weight? Yes! But in the same way, I am working my ass off to lose weight right now. So I can change it, it's just going to happen – I'm wouldn't ask for a miracle.*

Micaela: *Ya, like when I look at those chicks' pictures on Instagram which always comes up on my feed of like all of these amazing abs and stuff… Yes, I know I'm not overweight or, you know; deep down I still wish I had that. So ya.*

Interviewer: *Okay. Do you think you guys would be posting more selfies if you were happier with yourselves?*

Monique: *No, I think I'd be posting less.*

Micaela: *Ya, that makes sense.*

Monique: *Less selfies, more photographs of like full body pictures and me standing there instead of a selfie.*

Interviewer: *Okay, so would you post more pictures with yourself if you were happier with yourself?*

Monique: *I wouldn't post more… Maybe I'd post the same amount; I feel like I post a bloody lot already *laughs*. I wouldn't post more.*

Micaela: *I don't know.*

Interviewer: *If you had your ideal body, do you think you would be posting it?*

Micaela: *Ya, I would. I think I'd be posting a lot of it. I would never post a bikini photo of myself right now; that I'm not confident enough to do now. Unless I like took it from a really good angle and it made me look so good, like the one that I showed you that I took in*

Ballito; like I've taken it at such an angle that you can see my body, but you can't really.

Interviewer: *Okay. Do you guys think selfies are vain?*

Monique: *No.*

Micaela: *No!*

Interviewer: *Why not?*

Monique: *Yes, the make you feel good about yourself but it's not saying, 'Ah, I'm beautiful!'*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Monique: *But, I suppose, it does absolutely have an element of being vain in it.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Monique: *It absolutely does.*

Interviewer: *So, is it vain to think you're beautiful?*

Monique: *No, I don't; I feel like everybody should feel that way. Just because we've been brought up in a society that always tells us we're not beautiful because we don't look a certain way, now when we do feel beautiful, it's vain. Why can't we feel beautiful?*

Micaela: *Yes, exactly.*

Monique: *I hate that, it's pathetic! I don't feel like you're vain if you think you're pretty.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Monique: *I don't find that vain at all. It's like if you're vain and you have to flaunt like, 'Ah, I'm so gorgeous! Look how beautiful my hair is!' Then that's vain.*

Micaela: *Yes!*

Monique: *So, no, I don't think so. You should think you're beautiful; people who don't think they're beautiful, I feel sad for them.*

Micaela: *You should be allowed to feel beautiful.*

Monique: *But even like when you have no makeup on and your hair's a mess and you've just woken up, you can still be like, 'I'm a beautiful*

person.' Just because society makes you feel like you have to look like a model with these long eyelashes and perfect eyebrows to be beautiful… It's not true; I feel like beauty is different for everyone.

Interviewer: *Okay. Do you think there's more to selfies than showing the world where you are, what you're doing, who you're with, how you acting…?*

Monique: *It's an absolute confidence booster; in showing where you are and what you're doing, you're re-assuring your confidence.*

Micaela: *Ya; it's not just about a picture, there's more meaning to it.*

Monique: *I'm not posting it just to show you this where I am, this is what I'm wearing, but it's also for like self-validation.*

Micaela: *Ya, I agree!*

Monique: *It's not just a photo; it means more to you than a normal photo.*

Interviewer: *And then do you think selfies are a form of self-love and acceptance?*

Monique: *Yes.*

Micaela: *I do.*

Interviewer: *Why?*

Monique: *Because…*

Micaela: *How else do you tell yourself that you love yourself?*

Monique: *Ya.*

Micaela: *Like that is a way of saying, 'Look…'*

Monique: *It's saying, 'You know, I'm happy with who I am.'*

Micaela: *Or how I look. How else do you tell yourself that you love yourself type thing?*

Monique: *I can't go up to Micaela and be like, 'Ah Micaela, I love myself!' *laughs*.*

Micaela: *Exactly.*

Monique: *But I can post it and people can be like, 'Wow, she thinks she looks good. So what?'*

Micaela: *Yes, ya.*

Interviewer: *Okay, now the last sections: selfies and gender. Do you think selfies are equally important for men and women?*

Monique: *I absolutely do!*

Micaela: *Ya; I just feel like they get judged on it ten times more than a woman.*

Monique: *Ya!*

Interviewer: *Why?*

Monique: *I don't know, because they're bros!*

Micaela: *Just the way, like… 'You can't take a selfie!' *puts on hyper-masculine accent**.

Monique: *But let me tell you something, the guys I know are always like, 'Ah, my hair looks good,' or the gym selfies. Come on, have you seen those gym selfies on Instagram? There's like millions of them.*

Micaela: *Ya!*

Monique: *But if it's just a guy, like I don't mind it; I enjoy it.*

Interviewer: *So, you don't think it's like a feminine thing?*

Monique: *I don't think so.*

Micaela: *I do, I do.*

Interviewer: *So, do you think it's a gendered practice?*

Monique: *I mean, I don't want my husband to be taking selfies.*

Interviewer: *Why not?*

Micaela: *I don't want my husband to be vain; I want my husband to be a manly man.*

Monique: *No, but we just said it doesn't make you vain.*

Micaela: *Okay ya, I know *laughs**.

Interviewer: *No, but be honest; if you had to see a guy always posting selfies of just himself…*

Monique: *He would be vain as AF.*

Micaela: *Ya, I just think it's like arrogant.*

Monique: *There we go, that's the word. Because I feel like guys don't have these issues with themselves the same way women do. So like, we*

do it for self-validation; they can put up one for self-validation, but when they're posting it all the time then I'm like, 'No.'

Micaela: *Okay, here: If you get an overweight guy, he will not get beaten up about it as much as a woman, I think. Because as a woman, you have to have a bikini body, you have to have this, you have to have that; I just feel like there's so much more pressure on a women.*

Monique: *Yes! A chubby man can be in a costume and it's fine, he'll get a hundred likes, he's having a good time on the beach. A chubby woman, it's like, 'Why are you taking a photo on the beach? Go put some clothes on!'*

Micaela: *Ya, exactly.*

Monique: *But if we're talking about guys in like their suits who are going out and they're like, 'Let me take a photo,' then I feel like you are arrogant!*

Micaela: *Exactly!*

Interviewer: *So, do you think more women take selfies than men because there's more pressure on us, so we need more validation?*

Micaela: *Yes, 100%!*

Monique: *Ya, absolutely!*

Interviewer: *Okay, so when you see girls posting selfies how do you feel, versus when you see guys posting selfies?*

Micaela: *I feel like for a woman it's okay; I feel like I'll judge a guy. It's arrogant.*

Monique: *I feel like it depends how many he's putting; if there's one that's going up, I don't know, I'll like it. But if it's like two days later and then another one, then I'll be like, 'Ah, this guy!' It just depends how many he's putting up.*

Micaela: *Yes. I'll judge a guy; if it's a girl, I won't judge her.*

Monique: *I don't judge girls.*

Micaela: *Ya, I'm not going to judge her as much. Although, it also depends how often she's posting them and how edited they are.*

Monique: *Oh ya.*

Interviewer: *Okay, do you think selfies are important for women?*

Monique: *Yes.*

Interviewer: *Why?*

Monique: *Because it makes them feel good about themselves; and I think it's very important for women to feel good about themselves because of the society we live in.*

Micaela: *Yes!*

Monique: *Otherwise everyone's just going to be depressed and on pills.*

Micaela: *I agree.*

Interviewer: *Okay and do you think more men should start taking selfies?*

Monique: *No. I don't think they should be taking more; I think just leave it how it is now.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Monique: *I don't see an issue with it at the moment.*

Micaela: *I like a man who feels that that's not important to him…*

Monique: *Exactly; secure about himself! I don't want to be with a guy that's taking a hundred selfies.*

Interviewer: *So, do you think it's actually like a historical thing because traditionally women are always the one's being looked at? So now, women are putting themselves on display for men again and they still have control over us in that way.*

Monique: *I feel like that's exactly why we want a guy that doesn't take selfies, because of that control; guys need to be that man, they don't actually have to care.*

Micaela: *Ya! That's a wussy.*

Monique: *Not necessarily a wussy, but confident in himself. I want a guy that's confident in himself; he doesn't need to take selfies.*

Interviewer: *Okay and how do you think selfies have improved or deteriorated women's lives, if at all?*

Monique: *Women in general?*

Interviewer: *Ya.*

Monique: *I feel like both; I feel like they've improved women's self-confidence.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Monique: *But I feel like at the same time, it's also put women down.*

Micaela: *Like if someone takes a selfie and maybe, I don't know, has to put something that's not accepted; they might get a nasty comment about it.*

Interviewer: *Like in her bra and panties?*

Micaela: *Ya. And if someone takes a selfie and maybe her body's showing in the selfie and her body's not to the specific standards of what society thinks it needs to be; she might get judged on it.*

Monique: *And I feel like that's a huge problem.*

Micaela: *That could make her feel worse about herself when she thought she didn't look bad.*

Monique: *My thing also is that I follow people on Instagram for motivation and to be healthy or whatever. So, I follow models that will put up photos in their bra and underwear and I'll like them like, 'Oh my gosh! They so sexy!' But if Micaela had to go put up a photo in her bra and underwear, I'd be like, 'Micaela! Why are you in your bra and underwear?'*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Interviewer: *But also, as a model, their body is their product; they have to promote themselves. So, I feel like it's all appropriated.*

Monique: *Ya.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Interviewer: *Okay and do you think selfies are here to stay?*

Monique: *Yes.*

Micaela: *Yes.*

Monique: *I think they are*

Micaela: *And I think they're just going to revolutionize and get better and better. Like, now we've introduced the selfie stick, there's a gopro, there's this… I think there's going to be more technology to make us look even better; to make us feel even more confident about ourselves.*

Monique: *I don't know what's going to come but there'll be an advanced selfie almost; I don't think it's going anywhere.*

Micaela: *Ya!*

Interviewer: *Okay. Do you guys think selfies are empowering women?*

Micaela: *Yes, yes. I mean, we've been talking about it…*

Monique: *I know, I do.*

Interviewer: *Do you think it's got anything to do with instead of society telling us how we should look; we're telling society how we do look?*

Micaela: *Yes! That's a good way to put it.*

Monique: *That is an excellent way of putting it.*

Interviewer: *So, you have control over your appearance and you're not letting society tell you, 'Look! You need to be thinner,' or whatever.*

Monique: *Ya! And I can look like this and people will still like my photo; which means I am actually pretty!*

Micaela: *Ya, ya!*

Interviewer: *Okay, and do you think selfies are just another way for women to judge each other and compete against one another?*

Monique: *I don't, but I feel like lots of women do.*

Micaela: *Ya.*

Interviewer: *So, you don't judge and compete but you think a lot of women do do that?*

Micaela: *Yes.*

Monique: *Ya. When I see like your selfies, I'm just like, 'Love it! Love it! Love it!' But I do feel like – I guess it depends on your personality – there're lots of people that have those competitions.*

Micaela: *Yes; there's competition between women in general, never mind being on a phone or social media; there's that natural competition already.*

Monique: *Ya, whether it's a selfie or not.*

Micaela: *Even if we go to a party and she looks better than me, or she's wearing the same dress as me; all of a sudden you don't like her.*

Interviewer: *Okay, and then last question: How have selfies changed your life, if at all? Like what impact had they had on your life?*

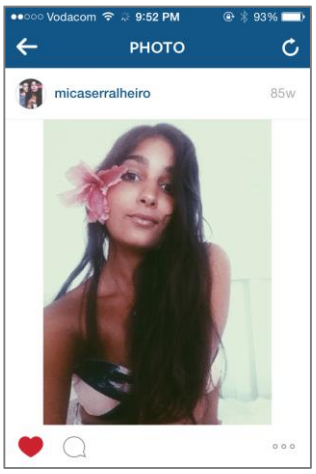
Micaela: *They've made me feel more confident.*

Monique: *They've made me feel more confident, too. Absolutely.*

Micaela: *Ya; prettier, sexier.*

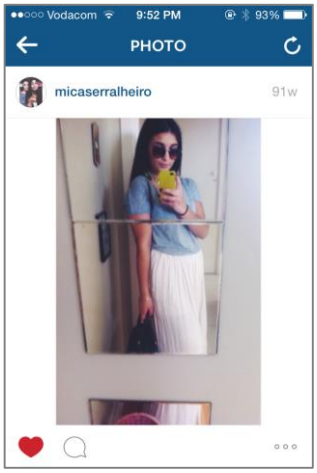
Micaela: Part 2 – Instagram Tour

Which is your favourite Instagram selfie and why?



Okay this one, um… I think it's because it's like I'm trying to show everyone that I'm natural. But, even though like I'm natural, like I'm still pretty type thing; that's the look that I wanted to go for. Even though like you can see I still have like a little bit of lip-ice on, and I definitely had like just a little bit of makeup, even though like I've got no eye shadow, no nothing. So, I feel like, I was trying to prove to everyone I'm beautiful with no makeup on type thing. And also because I'm so dark and I look thin and you can see my bones and it's like, so ya; that's also why I like it.

Why did you post theses selfies?



Um… Because I had this whole thing of showing my outfits and I wanted to be a fashionista and – well, I still want to be – so I like showing people that I have style like and that, ya, I dress well, I suppose.



Um… Because we were both happy and it's an 'in the moment' photo. It's almost

validating that I'm in a happy relationship; I want people to know that.



Oh, it's because I wanted everyone to know I cut my hair; and I wanted validation on if everyone thought I looked nice with this hair.



Because I looked pretty and my hair looks like ombré-ish and I had cool accessories on; I wanted to show the accessories as well. Ya.

Unedited picture



Edited picture



Monique: Part 2 – Instagram Tour

Which is your favourite Instagram selfie and why?



I think I look pretty. I think I look nice because I like my hair and my eyes look really good in this photo, and I got – for me, I don't have a lot of followers, whatever – a lot of likes.

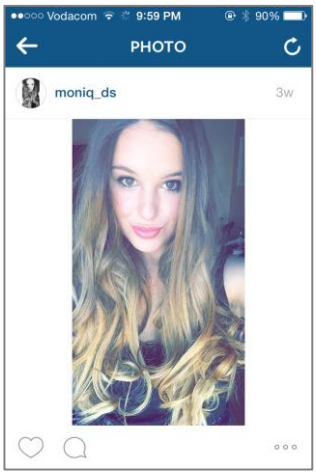
Why did you post these selfies?



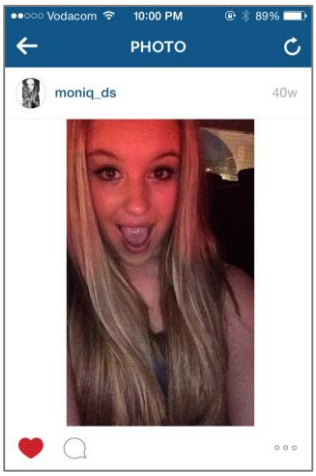
*Because recently I've lost weight and I don't ever – if you go through my Instagram, you won't see any body shots of me, ever, and like, this was two weeks ago – and I put it up because I was like, 'Fuck yes! I am l losing weight, so I will post this!' People that haven't seen me for three years, this is what I look like at the moment; not that chubby chubs anymore! *laughs*.*



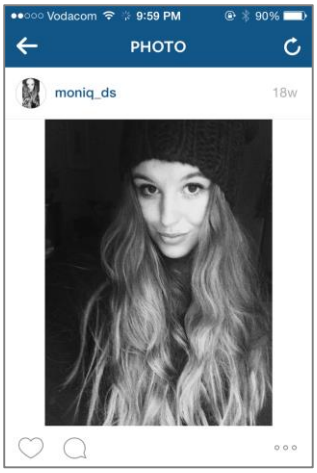
*This one I put up because I thought I looked good; I liked what I was wearing and I wanted to show people. But then, if you're really looking at it, I could've easily put up only one, people would've still been able to see; I put up three because I liked my hair like that and like that *laughs*. But it's exactly the same; I just liked it at the back and in the front – so, it's exactly the same.*



*Um… Again, I think I looked pretty *laughs*. I thought I looked nice; my hair looked nice.*



*Oh because I was going to a concert, I was excited; I wanted to show how excited I was to go to Jared Leto. I was like, 'I'm so excited,' in this photo *laughs*.*



This is because it was the beginning of winter and I hadn't put a beanie on ages – and my favourite, you know, is beanies – and I was like, 'Heck yes! Selfie with beanie.'