

Presenting the ideal body: narratives of Instagram engagement by a group of
African Black women.

by

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is submitted in completion of the degree Magister of Social Science in Sociology (The Narratives Study of Lives) at the University of the Free State is my own work and throughout the dissertation I referenced other people's ideas properly, and I have never submitted this dissertation before for any degree at any other University.

I furthermore concede copyright of this dissertation at the University of the Free State.

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February 2020

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my late mother. Thank you for instilling perseverance and strength in me at all times. You enabled me to conquer my self-doubt, despair and challenges that I faced in my research journey. Ke a leboga Mama!

Summary

Instagram is a photo-sharing social network application that allows users to share pictures and short videos, also enabling its users to upload and share photos on other social network sites (SNSs). It is currently the fastest-growing SNS worldwide, as a result of its popularity among young adults. This study aims to conduct a phenomenological exploration into the motivations behind Instagram engagement, the lived experiences of young Black African women who engage with Instagram and the reasons behind presenting the ideal body on Instagram. The study also seeks to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of these young women and their experiences of portraying their ideal bodies on Instagram.

The theoretical foundations used in this study are phenomenology, social constructivist and interpretivist thinking, existential sociology, the dramaturgical theory, feminism, as well as intersectionality thinking. These theoretical frameworks guide the study to explore the participants' experiences through their own individual experiences. Therefore, the focus of this study is on how these participants experience their lifeworld (lived reality) on Instagram and how they socially construct their identity and femininity on Instagram.

This study's research participants comprised young Black women between the ages of 18 and 29 years of age, enrolled at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein campus. All of these participants are upwardly mobile and active users of Instagram. The data collection for this study is semi-structured in-depth interviews, with the aim being to obtain rich descriptions of the participants' narratives. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to present findings in such a way in order to maintain the voices of the participants.

The findings of this study explore the lived experiences of young Black women through their narratives. It seeks to discover the reasons behind each woman's engagement with Instagram and how it can influence her self-perception and body image. The findings explore how Instagram can influence how participants present the self when engaging with the SNS. Self-presentation is an aspect of this study that illustrates how an individual tends to present the better version of the self, namely the 'ideal self'. This is influenced by an individual being able to create an identity suited to her virtual identity on Instagram by using an individual's username, profile photo and bio; all of these contribute to the construction of an individual's virtual identity. This online identity used by the individual results in her being identity-conscious on Instagram, thus she wants to be seen looking at her best at all times. However, this version of the self by

an individual on Instagram is not necessarily an accurate reflection of her identity in reality. The individual is omitting certain aspects of her identity, which can be seen as presenting a fake identity, thus not the real or actual self (Lindahl and Öhlund 2013).

Furthermore, the findings of this study explore the experiences of femininity—how each participant experiences her body uniquely and how this influences her relationship with her body. Also, it explores their experiences with beauty and how African beauty standards have evolved and being renegotiated over the years. Lastly, the study explores the shared online experiences that create a sense of belonging to the virtual community. The community of users offers various experiences. It can either be positive experiences where an individual feels a connection with other users by sharing her personal experiences or the individual may not share her personal experiences.

Key words

Instagram

Engagement

Social networking sites (SNSs)

User

Instagrammer

Followers

Women

African Beauty

Body image

Self-perception

Self-presentation

Ideal body

Identity

Femininity

Phenomenology

Lifeworld

Lived experiences

Social constructivist

Interpretivist

Front and back stage performance

Impression management

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Introduction

“I grew up in a world where a woman who looks like me, with my kind of skin and my kind of hair, was never considered to be beautiful. And I think that it is time that that stops today. I want children to look at me and see my face, and I want them to see their faces reflected in mine. Thank you.”— Zozibini Tunzi (South Africa, Miss Universe 2019) (Jamiyla-Chisholm 2019). This statement by Zozibini Tunzi reflects how the representation of Black women’s body and beauty standards in the global beauty community has evolved. This is evident in the long historical dehumanisation and devaluation of the Black woman’s body, which is seen through images and stigma during and after slavery that influenced how Black women perceive their beauty standards. Furthermore, the influence that media—television, movies, magazines and social media—have on how Black women perceive themselves as imperfect and unacceptable cannot be underestimated. Beauty is evaluated from a wide lens of various socio and cultural contexts and still serves as a determining factor, against how the marked female body is scrutinised and evaluated. For this study, beauty particularly looks at how Black women negotiate and re-negotiate their Black African beauty ideals via the social network site (SNS) of Instagram and how beauty serves as a benchmark that determines a woman’s self-worth and how she presents her body on Instagram.

Instagram is a relatively new form of SNS and is a picture-orientated application that allows a user to share her photos on a variety of other SNSs and alter her photos by applying filters (e.g., different lighting and colour hues) and tweaking her photos. The SNS has a bio-section where the user is given 150 characters to explain who she is and what she does, enabling her to provide her preferred name or a favourite quote that resonates with her character. Instagram, similar to Facebook, also has the ‘likes’ and ‘comments’ feature (Stegner 2019). The ‘likes’ are an indicator that a photo, message, quote or a link is of interest and was able to attract the attention of the user’s followers. On Instagram, the notion of liking a picture is socially understood as positive reinforcement from the user’s followers. Instagram allows its users to build their brand image through pictures and videos and is far more effective at creating brand awareness than other SNSs. Instagram is also ideal for brand marketing of corporations, celebrities, public and private institutions or personal bloggers (Lim and Yazdanifard 2014:3-4).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the aspects mentioned above of Instagram engagement by a group of Black female students at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein campus, the dissertation utilised an interpretive phenomenological approach. The phenomenological approach aims to gain a deeper understanding of the everyday lifeworlds of research participants through their subjective interpretations. Phenomenology seeks to establish this deeper understanding by exploring and

investigating the reasons why the research participants engage with Instagram and why they present the ideal body. The focus lies on how these women perceive their lived reality on Instagram and how they feel and make sense of it. Therefore, this dissertation aims to gain an understanding of what it means to be an Instagrammer to an individual and how Instagram becomes a substantial part of her life. With this dissertation, the aim is also to gain insight into the virtual world of Instagram through the lens of these women's experiences and how they experience Instagram.

Furthermore, there are eight in-depth interviews, which are held with eight Black female students who are enrolled at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein campus. The purpose of the interviews is to explore the narratives and lived experiences of these women in order to gain an understanding of why Instagram is such an important part of their lives and also the reason behind presenting the ideal body. In chapters 4 and 5, the findings of this dissertation are presented through seven themes, each with subsequent sub-themes. The seven themes aim to illustrate the lived reality of an individual who engages on Instagram and how it subjectively influences how she sees herself and her body image. Furthermore, how she perceives others that also engage on Instagram and how she subsequently communicates meaning subjectively and inter-subjectively through her lived experiences on Instagram.

Chapter 1: Theoretical foundations and philosophical assumptions

1.1 Introduction to theoretical foundations

This chapter aims to provide a clear description of the theoretical lenses used in contextualising this study. The theoretical frameworks are positioned in phenomenology, social constructivist and interpretivist thinking, existential sociology, the dramaturgical approach, feminist thinking, as well as intersectionality thinking. This study aims to unfold theories related to the research participants' subjective and inter-subjective experiences. The focus is on the interpretative nature of the social media platform, Instagram, and also on the subjective experiences and perceptions of young women participating on this application, especially regarding their interpretation of beauty, social and existential body ideals, and femininity.

1.2 Philosophical assumptions

According to Ritzer (1975:7), a paradigm refers to "a fundamental image of the subject matter within science. It serves to define what should be studied, what questions should be asked, how they should be asked and what rules should be followed in interpreting the answers obtained". The interpretive/constructivist paradigm is "informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience" (Burrell and Morgan 1979:28). The interpretive/constructivist paradigm is therefore, interested in people: how they think, interrelate with others, their subjective views on their world, the manner in which they construct and understand their world (Thomas 2009:75; Wills 2007:6). The purpose of the interpretivist/constructivist is to try and understand the meaning that an individual ascribes to her actions and interactions with others in the social world (Weaver and Olson 2005:460; Outhwaite 2005:110). The meanings an individual attach to her world is shaped by how she connects and engages with other human beings (Creswell 2007:20). This study adopts a social constructivist and interpretative philosophical assumption. This approach originates within the context that an individual construct her sense of self and reality from her lived experiences. In qualitative research the philosophical assumption starts with assessing how the individual's personal experiences fit into the overall process of things. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011:12), philosophy represents the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that informs research. The philosophical assumptions are, therefore, typically the first set of abstract ideas in developing a study or research design.

Interpretative researchers aim to perceive reality through the participants' perceptions, allowing them to express themselves in their experience of reality. Therefore, interpretative researchers cannot be

detached from the subject being studied (Creswell 2007:18). When conducting qualitative research, four philosophical assumptions guide the research, namely ontology (a study of the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge can be justified), axiology (the role of values in research) and methodology (the process of research) (Creswell 2007:18). These assumptions are further discussed below (cf. Sections 1.2.1- 1.2.4).

1.2.1 Ontology

Ontology entails the study of the nature of reality (Creswell 2013:20). In interpretative research the nature of reality is perceived as subjective and is affected by how the researcher, and the research participants, perceive it (ibid.). Guba and Lincoln (2013:87) postulate that the nature of reality is all about the understanding of the real world in its existence and action. From an interpretivist worldview, a person's social world is constructed through multiple realities (ibid.:88). Thus, "reality is multiple as seen through many views" (Creswell 2013:11). According to Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann (1973:35-36), an individual interprets and perceives her everyday lifeworld from a conscious and mindful standpoint. The emphasis is on the idea that an individual strives to understand the reality and the world in which she lives and works through developing subjective meanings of her experiences in her lifeworld (Creswell 2007:20). The interest is thus to understand the unique individual experiences of each research participant in order to grasp the views about the nature of reality within the virtual world of Instagram within which she participates. This means for example, that the focus is on how an individual presents herself on Instagram through the influence of her social agents, such as her family, friends, traditional media, and social media. All these social agents construct her perceptions of what she considers as the ideal body image and beauty trends to follow and present on Instagram.

For Schütz (1970:72), the lifeworld or "Lebenswelt", refers to "the world of daily life [and is experienced] with the natural attitude as a reality". When reviewing the theoretical underpinnings of the lifeworld, an idea of common sense is ascribed to the natural attitude that an individual attribute to her everyday reality (Schütz and Luckmann 1973:3). Reality is seen as the "taken-for-granted and self-evident" way in which an individual is born into a world that is real and that existed before her (ibid.:4). Meanings and understandings of the social world are experienced within this everyday reality. This is where an individual experience a sense of consciousness and develops an appreciation towards norms, values, and beliefs within her social world. In addition, within this social world an individual form a sense of self-awareness and, an individual socially constructs her sense of reality from a subjective and inter-subjective point of view (cf. Section 1.3.1 Berger and Luckmann 1966).

1.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology concerns “how we know about what we know” (Crotty 1998:8) or “the nature of the relationship between the knower and what can be known” (Guba and Lincoln 1989:201). The epistemological debate is concerned with providing a philosophical grounding for deciding what kinds of knowledge are available and how we can ensure it is adequate and legitimate (Crotty 1998:10). The focus is on issues such as how we learn about reality and what forms the basis of our knowledge (Guba and Lincoln 2004:21). It also relates to the ontology, “the study of being” (Crotty 1998:10) or “the nature of reality” (Lincoln and Guba 1985:37). According to Crotty (1998:11), the ontological stance represents a particular epistemological stance. He emphasises the complementary nature of the terms when he cites the concept of realism, postulating that:

“...realities exist outside of the mind, and its complement objectivism, an epistemological notion asserting that meaning exists in objects independent of any consciousness; if one stance is adopted, so its complement”.

The epistemological debate in social research involves several issues. The first issue relates to the way in which knowledge is acquired. The second issue holds the view that knowledge is based on induction, a “bottom-up” process through which the researcher observes the world of the research participants (Crotty 1998:10). Therefore, the inductive process involves using specific evidence as the basis of a conclusion; specific evidence is first collected and knowledge and theories are built from this (ibid.). The opposite view to inductive reasoning, namely deductive reasoning is based on deduction, a “top-down” approach through which the researcher first develops a hypothesis based on general facts and then only collects specific evidence of the research participants’ everyday reality (ibid.).

In social research, deductive reasoning is mostly used when the researcher aims to unravel the patterned regularities of human action and seek to generalise the results onto the population from which the sample is drawn (Guba and Lincoln 2013:97). The purpose of interpretative research is not to produce empirical knowledge that can be generalised onto a target population, but rather to yield a subjective understanding of the lived experience of a situation within the natural context.

Therefore, the current study is not based on a set of predetermined assumptions that aim to provide generalised knowledge. The aim is also not to present knowledge that provides an objective explanation of the research participants’ lives. Instead, this study mainly follows an inductive research *bottom-up* process. Thus, the findings are subjective and interpreted through my interpretation.

1.2.3 Axiology

All researchers bring their own preconceived ideas to research. This is the axiological assumption that characterises qualitative research. The values and preconceived ideas that a researcher brings into a study plays an important role in how the research process is approached; she must recognise her orientations in order to achieve credible research findings (Creswell 2007:20).

Heron (1996:34) asserts that “our values are the guiding reason for all human action”. He further argues that researchers who demonstrate axiological skills express their own views as one of the bases for making judgements. Furthermore, these foundational judgements guide how a research topic is undertaken and explored. However, since I am the primary researcher and also due to the interpretative nature of the study, I will attempt to eliminate a sense of bias to my frame of reference in this research study. This bias will be reflexively acknowledged and countered by employing the theoretical constructs of phenomenology, existential sociology, social construction of reality, aspects of the feminist thought, intersectionality, as well as the dramaturgical approach. The choice of my philosophical approach represents a reflection of my values in the same manner as my choice of data collection techniques (Creswell 2007:23).

Another interesting notion by Heron (1996:36) in his discussion of axiology is “the possibility of writing your own statement and personal values in relation to the topic you are studying”. This will, for example, broaden my awareness of the value judgements which I am making in drawing conclusions from my data (ibid.:37). These value judgements may lead to drawing conclusions which will be co-constructed between me and other parties involved in my research project, such as my supervisor and the participants.

1.2.4 Methodology

According to Creswell (2013:20), methodology refers to the “process of research”. This study relies on the methodological notion underlying narrative research, which suggests the collection of life stories of young women who participate and document their everyday lives on Instagram. A key assumption will be that the narratives could enhance the understanding of the online identity and subjective nature of the research participants’ experience of Instagram and their respective meaning-making experiences. The data will be collected via purposefully designed semi-structured in-depth interviews, which will be conducted in English.

The study will be situated in a constructivist worldview and relies on the narrative approach for data collection. Emphasis is given to the subjective and inter-subjective themes found in the narrative

approach. The narratives will be co-constructed between the research participants and myself; each life-story is shared from both a subjective and inter-subjective perspective. The participants are all Black South African women from different Black ethnic groups, aged between 18 and 29 years.

1.3 Theoretical foundations

This study is informed by several interpretative theories that will provide the researcher with additional insights into the research participants' lifeworlds, namely phenomenology, existential sociology, the dramaturgical approach, feminism, and intersectionality thinking.

This research is positioned within the context of the social construction of reality (Ritzer 1983:208). This perspective aims to acknowledge that the world of everyday life is not merely taken for granted (Berger and Luckmann 1966:33), but rather that an individual is often aware of her external world and meaning-making occurs through her subjective thoughts and actions (ibid.). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to understand how each research participant interprets and makes sense of her lifeworld, which guides her through her daily interactions and social reality (ibid.:27). Within the context of the social construction of reality, a phenomenological approach supports the research.

Phenomenology aims to uncover the essence of experiences. In order to guide this research, Alfred Schütz's phenomenological concepts such as those of the lifeworld, subjectivity, inter-subjectivity, and stock of knowledge are used to understand how the research participants experience their sense of self; their female bodies, race and ethnicity, gender, identities, and social class. Schütz's theoretical work is of importance in this study, as his views incorporate how we perceive and understand our experiences. The other theoretical foundations used in this study, namely of the social construction of reality, the sociology of emotion, the dramaturgical approach by Goffman and how women experience their reality will be supplemented by exploring aspects regarding feminism. In the following sections, I will explore each of these theoretical foundations and discuss how each will be used in my qualitative research by theoretically positioning the interpretivist paradigm. In these sections additional emphasis is given to the theoretical frameworks of Schütz (1967; 1970 and 1973), Berger and Luckmann (1966), Goffman (1956), existential sociology, feminist literature, and ideas on intersectionality.

1.3.1 Alfred Schütz's phenomenological perspective

Phenomenology is a sociological approach aimed at uncovering the meaning people attach to their everyday reality. It seeks to understand how you perceive and experience your lifeworld, social reality and in the case of research, a particular phenomenon such as the use of Instagram. Phenomenology attempts

to demonstrate how an individual's vast collection of experiences influence and constitute to her lifeworld, and how these multiple experiences are connected to one paramount reality, namely our everyday life (Dreher 2003:142).

Phenomenology is an important theoretical framework for the conceptualisation of reality. It attempts to unravel the meaningful context within which many of life's actions and interactions between people occur (Ferguson 2006:17). The phenomenological perspective has made resounding impacts on the understanding of lived experience in human societies. It has also allowed other theorists to study the structures of human society subjectively and inter-subjectively with a more in-depth understanding of social reality and human life.

The significance of the acting human being is fundamental to the theorists of this school of thought. It maintains: "[the] everyday lifeworld is something that we have to modify by our actions or that modifies [sic] actions" (Dreher 2003:143). This perpetuates that an individual (micro) has the agency to change the nature of her reality but social reality (macro) can also change her behaviour. Phenomenology aims to bring together experience and consciousness in relation to the lived experiences of individuals. This occurs when the subjective experiences of individuals are not merely understood as subjective but are compared with the inter-subjective encounters one has in her lifeworld with other human beings (Flores-Gonzalez 2008:188).

Phenomenology attempts to understand and come to terms with how individuals understand the world which surrounds them (Inglis and Thorpe 2012:89). In order to achieve this, phenomenological inquiry has to familiarise itself with the inner workings of the consciousness of the subjects under investigation. The obsession of the mind with the presence of things entails how it treats subjective and objective experiences. According to Ferguson (2006:17), "the phenomenal is astonishing; the astonishing is phenomenal". The phenomenal refers to something extraordinary; outside the normal and ordinary. The phenomenal has the ability to manifest itself as both outside (phenomena), which constitutes an individual's experiences in her lifeworld, and within (noumena), indicating how the individual tries to make sense of her experiences in her social reality (lifeworld).

The main focus of phenomenological thinking is directed at the everyday ordinary life of individuals in a social reality where they (individuals) share aspects of the same culture, language, and a set of meaningful contexts that allow them to negotiate their everyday lives (Farganis 2014:245). The phenomenological thinking further examines how shared meanings are created through actions and interactions and how

the circumstances of everyday life enables those actions and interactions (Inglis and Thorpe 2012:86). As human beings, we do not merely create meanings and interactions independently, but we are guided by our natural attitude. Farganis (2014:246) asserts that we come to understand our social reality as a natural order and as existing prior to our existence in the world and also as the world that will continue to exist after we depart. Our perception about the world is in the *natural attitude*, as termed by Sokolowski (2000:42). According to Sokolowski (2000:42), the *natural attitude* is “our original, world-directed stance, when we intend things, situations, facts and any other kinds of objects... the default perspective, the one we start off from, the one we are in originally”. In sociological theory this is known as *practical consciousness* (Inglis and Thorpe 2012:89-92). Inglis and Thorpe defined practical consciousness “as the ordinary, mundane context in which individuals operate” (ibid.:90). The practical consciousness lies at the root of all human interaction in ordinary social life. For this study, I narrow the phenomenological perspective to the subjective and inter-subjective dynamics that occur between the individual and how she re/presents herself on Instagram (ibid.). In order to better comprehend how phenomenology can operate as a theoretical context for research, the following sections encompass a discussion on the concepts of the lifeworld, subjectivity and inter-subjectivity and stock of knowledge, as three important concepts within Schütz’s sociology.

1.3.1.1 The lifeworld

The lifeworld consists of the everyday life that “you” and “I” live in. It refers to how an individual perceives her everyday reality and influences how she makes sense of this reality. According to Schütz (1970:14), the concept “lifeworld” encompasses the cultural, taken-for-granted basis of social life and its effects on the thoughts and actions of the actor. It is characterised by existing assumptions that an individual experience and how meaning-making occurs in her consciousness (Rogers 1983:49). An individual construct, describes, and explains her reality according to the meaningful structures that she employs in order to perceive her lifeworld (Applerouth and Edles 2012:522). According to Schütz and Luckmann (1973:6), the lifeworld is not perceived as a singular experience, but rather a “pre-eminent reality...which we modify through our acts”. For Srubar (2005:560), the lifeworld, therefore, results from “an individual’s everyday actions, communication, interaction and interpretation from which social reality occurs” (ibid.). When employing the concept of the lifeworld in this study, Instagram can be regarded as a lifeworld within the context of the cyber community. Those who interact via Internet including Social Networking Sites (SNS) such as Instagram. Instagram serves as a constituent of their everyday life where social relations and interactions are established and maintained.

Schütz's phenomenological sociology concerns the "mundane, everyday world in which people operate", known as the *lifeworld* (Inglis and Thorpe 2012:90). The lifeworld is culturally bound since culture serves as an instrument that guides and enables an individual to interpret and understand her lifeworld (Rogers 1983:51). Culture is interrelated with the lifeworld and how an individual experiences specific events in her life (ibid.). Culture provides practical knowledge experience to the individuals within the lifeworld (Inglis and Thorpe 2012:90). According to Schütz, culture creates people's lifeworlds, including their common sense. Schütz refers to common sense knowledge as the "natural attitude" and it describes how individuals deal with their everyday life (Inglis and Thorpe 2012:90).

Schütz (in Costelloe 1996:249) suggests that only sociology is capable of describing the details of lived experiences at the level of daily life itself. This is the basis of Schütz's "phenomenology of the natural attitude" (ibid.). Everyday life is only possible as a result of the assumptions made about the structure of the world (ibid.). From this view arises the observation that in the naïve attitude of everyday life, the world cannot be viewed in the same way as it is under the lenses of scientific knowledge. Therefore, the natural attitude should be distinguished from structures of consciousness; the lifeworld which underlies it (ibid.:250). Studies conducted by Schütz found it difficult to differentiate between the structures of intentional consciousness and attitudes under which these structures can be understood (ibid.:251). Instead of distinguishing between these realms, Schütz uses the terms "lifeworld" and "natural attitude" interchangeably (ibid.).

The lifeworld refers to the *frame* and *stage* of social relations and actions (see Section 1.3.4 and 1.3.4.1 Goffman 1956 in Wallace 2005). Schütz (in Overgaard and Zahavi 2009:95) asserts that what is needed is a systematic examination of everyday life, and this requires a new type of sociological theory. To understand these actions on a scientific analytical level it is essential to examine the agents responsible for causing these actions (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009:101). The actions that people create in everyday life are made possible by the individual having typifications to work with (Inglis and Thorpe 2012:88-89). According to Inglis and Thorpe (2012:91), typifications refer to the very bases of all human thought and action. They create many aspects, if not the entire sphere of an individual's lifeworld (ibid.:88-89).

For example, when you are driving a car, eating, or walking, you are not consciously thinking about your actions, as you already acquired this type of immediate knowledge from previous experiences and which were transmitted to you by others (authoritative figures such as family, teachers, friends, and other individuals) (Overgaard 2007:104). Human life can be reduced to the use of typifications in the practical consciousness of individuals. The practical things a woman participates in when consumed by the act of

presenting herself on Instagram entails her set of embedded typifications she learned on the SNS, such as the type of jargon used on Instagram, and what type of pictures one needs to post of herself to attract viewers.

As a result, engaging on Instagram becomes practical knowledge to her, as she learned these ways of conducting herself on Instagram from other individuals who participated on this SNS. However, the typifications are not objective constructs that need to be formulated anew each and every time we encounter a particular social phenomenon. The world we are born into has already been interpreted and bestowed with meaning by those before us. The knowledge of these typifications and their appropriate use is an important aspect of the socio-cultural heritage passed on to an individual into the group by authoritative figures such as parents and teachers (Schütz 1970:74; Schütz and Luckmann 1973:228). Thus, typifications are socially derived.

1.3.1.2 Subjectivity and inter-subjectivity

The concepts of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are important aspects in this study and they represent the different roles an individual may occupy within her narratives of her Instagram experiences. From a phenomenological viewpoint, Schütz (1967:98) suggests that the notions of subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are not separate concepts but rather interchangeable, though in different ways.

According to Schütz (1970:163), the concept “inter-subjectivity” originates from the lifeworld as the interrelationship between the individual and others. The concept inter-subjectivity is defined as “... a world which we share with others of whom we have original knowledge of being in the world in the same way as we are” (Schutte 2007:531). The lifeworld is an inter-subjective world that is known and experienced by other human beings (Appleroth and Edles 2012:520). Human beings of different backgrounds do not only share the scientific and physical world but they also share, to a great extent, the same consciousness. This shared consciousness allows people from different social and personal backgrounds to function and interact with one another (ibid.).

Schütz (1970:168) does not view the everyday lifeworld as private to the individual, but rather as shared with others, and also being experienced and interpreted by others. Therefore, it is a common world to all of us (ibid.). In phenomenological sociology the lifeworld is experienced by more than just one person and it becomes known to us as something that can at any given time be viewed from innumerable standpoints (Sokolowski 2008:152). Overgaard and Zahavi (2009:93) assert that social reality is constructed by the individuals who are living, acting, and thinking within it. Nonetheless, individual subjectivities should not

be ignored, even though most of the assumptions, expectations, and prescriptions are socially determined. This social reality offers “multiple experiences” and meanings as people experience and understand things differently from each other (ibid.).

Each person interprets actions and situations based on her “uniquely articulated lifeworld”. Individuals, therefore, can never share the same experiences as it is too different from one another (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009:93). The women in this study might share similar views and meanings with their followers, peers, and society, but each will experience situations in her own way. When considering intersubjectivity, focus is given to an individual’s subjective experience of Instagram and the influence it has on her perceptions of beauty and body image ideals. This study also aims to emphasise similarities and differences in the way participants’ social realities are constructed.

1.3.1.3 Stock of knowledge

According to Schütz (1970:74), stock of knowledge may be viewed as practical knowledge that makes it possible for us to deal with the ever-changing situations that arise within the lifeworld in culturally acceptable ways. The stock of knowledge allows humans to understand their past and present in an attempt to try to determine the future (Flaherty 2009:224). An individual’s stock of knowledge is repository for her past lived experience. As a result, individuals are free to repeat or relive their lived experiences in free reproduction (Schütz 1972:105-106).

The individual’s stock of knowledge consists of the lived experiences of her body, her behaviour, and her actions, including the objects she has created (ibid.:100). This stock of knowledge creates ways of understanding the environment that is generally natural and familiar and that she hardly reflects on (ibid.). With the support of her stock of knowledge an individual acquires knowledge of her situation and of the limits thereof (Berger and Luckmann 1966:56).

Thus, an individual’s stock of knowledge becomes the primary means in which the subjective self tries to interact with her lifeworld and the objects, events, and actors that exist within it (Kotze 2013:16-17). In order to interact successfully with the actors in one’s lifeworld, requires an individual to have practical knowledge collected through experience and consisting of certain skills or recipes, or, most appropriately typifications (Berger and Luckmann 1966:56). A person’s social stock of knowledge assists her to interpret reality and organise it into categories of familiarity (ibid.). It provides the individual with dimensions of detailed information concerning the different positions of everyday social life that the individual encounters (Berger and Luckmann 1966:57). The knowledge it provides differs according to what the

individual already knows. It is not uncommon for an individual to take the knowledge she possesses in her stock of knowledge for granted (ibid.). This is normal and would require a situation that falls outside the ordinary for an individual to question her stock of knowledge. This is a result of her stock of knowledge being integrated with her social reality.

The concept of stock of knowledge plays an important part in this study's exploration of the lived experiences of a group of young women's engagement with Instagram. The continuous experiences an individual encounter in her everyday lifeworld plays an important role in how she re/presents herself on Instagram.

1.3.2 Social construction of reality

The everyday life presents itself as a reality that is open to interpretation by human beings and is essentially the lifeworld that is subjectively meaningful to them. The meanings attached to the lifeworld create a clear worldview for the people to whom these lived-experiences belong (Berger and Luckmann 1966:33). This perspective aims to acknowledge that the world of everyday life is not taken for granted by ordinary people in society, but rather claims that an individual is often aware that her external world is made meaningful by her subjective thoughts and actions (ibid.). According to Schütz, "all our knowledge of the world, in common sense as well as in scientific thinking, involves constructs or sets of shared abstractions or generalised idealisations relevant to a particular level of thought organization" (Flick, von Kardoff and Steinke 2004:89).

By making such an assertion, Schütz illustrates how knowledge is socially constructed and distributed. Human beings co-construct their knowledge, therefore, an individual's knowledge is mostly socially constructed by her family, friends, neighbours, acquaintances, and the media (Brooks 2002:163). Knowledge is continually shared and transmitted by individuals (ibid.). In the everyday lifeworld, knowledge is also socially distributed as individuals possess different types of knowledge. The research participants in this study might not share the same theoretical knowledge, but they might share the same practical knowledge on some of the everyday mundane activities or experiences they encounter in their lifeworld (Berger and Luckmann 1966:60).

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966:23), an individual takes reality of the everyday life for granted, although she may question why certain things happen and others not. She does not further investigate those rhetorical questions, but continues to live comfortably with them. This also explains Berger and Luckmann's position that human consciousness must be seen as the height of all social phenomena (Inglis

and Thorpe 2012:93). Their fundamental perspective is that reality is socially constructed and the sociology of knowledge is assigned by analysing how it came about. Berger and Luckmann (1966:62) further assert that the prevailing social order is not biologically given or a product of any biological process based on how an individual experience it. It is rather the nature of social order based on the consistency or inconsistency of its patterns and regularities, and it is a by-product of the structure of human consciousness.

The focus of this study is on the production of images rather than words or information since the creation of images are more subtle than words or information, which requires understanding of visual attention in order to form meaning construction in the creation of images. The concept “image” is useful in reminding us of the importance of the visual attention on non-verbal imagery—pictures (Gamson et al. 1992:374). Images are on the one hand, reproductions, but it has a second meaning as well, namely it is a mental picture of something that is not real or present (ibid.). The use of images on Instagram communicates meaning in how an individual construct her identity online and presents herself particularly her “ideal” self. The following section elaborates on existential sociology, which explains how emotions, feelings, and expressions are conveyed, especially pertaining to the online world.

1.3.3 Existential sociology

Existential thinking became prominent in Europe after World War II. It relates to the widespread feelings of disapprovalment and disillusionment experienced among large parts of the world, mainly the European populations. These feelings resulted from the horrors and atrocities committed during WWII. Existential thinking is very closely linked to feelings and experiences. It became particularly well known through the writings of the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre. It also received strong attention in the novels and essays of Algerian born French writer, Albert Camus (Kotarba 2009:141). Existential thinking places a greater emphasis or focus on individuals by concentrating on human conscious aspects such as people’s choices, responsibilities, and decisions (Kotarba 2009:142). The core issue in this philosophical thinking remains the orientation to the everyday lifeworld inhabited by individuals. According to Joseph Kotarba (2009:140), a key element of experience in the world is change, and to existential sociology change is a constant feature in people’s lives, their sense of self, their experience of social reality, and the culture that bestows meaning to their social reality.

Therefore, existential sociology can be understood as the study of human experience in the world in all its forms (ibid.). In a more detailed description, Kotarba (2009:140) elaborates on existential sociology as “a way of life, a passion for living, and an intuitive desire for the actual lived experience” (ibid.). Thus, it

becomes clear that existential sociology is more directed towards experiences of the individual in her society as opposed to how an individual exists as part of society as a whole.

Social media and the online world are fundamental aspects of human existence and everyday lived experiences in the contemporary everyday world. This is due to everyday life being full of expressions, signs, and symbols through which an individual creates her online persona, identity, and meaning in innovative ways. Existential sociologists are interested in various aspects concerning human beings' emotions and also very interested in examining the growing place that electronic communications, ranging from cell phones to the internet, play in contemporary everyday life (Jacobsen 2009:39).

This theoretical perspective emphasise the individual and emotion. It allows looking at the emotions (both verbally and non-verbally) of the research participants (Kotarba 2009:142). This theory will assist with describing the various ways individuals use to construct their identities within a variety of social and cultural contexts. It also explains the ways in which feelings and emotions have a bearing on virtual identity construction (ibid). Human actions are determined and influenced by an individual's feelings and moods. An individual's emotions and feelings shape and guide how she lives her life, the decisions she makes, how she interprets meaning, and also how she perceives her reality and the world (Adler et al. 1987:223; Fontana 1980:156). Therefore, an individual's experiences and interactions are influenced by emotions that determine and shape her subjective and inter-subjective meanings and actions and the bonds that exists between her and other people she interacts with on Instagram (Kotarba 2009:152).

Emotions are fundamental to a human being's understanding of the world. Women who engage with Instagram often communicate a lot about their worldviews through their posts on the SNS. This theory can help in providing an understanding of how women manage their complex emotions in order to conceptualise and create an identity that represents the "ideal" self (Jacobsen 2009:65). In the following section the understanding of how an individual expresses her emotions in her social interactions with others is explained in more detail.

1.3.4 The dramaturgical approach by Erving Goffman (1956)

Erving Goffman developed a dramaturgical theory of the self and society, which was inspired by sociologist George Herbert Mead's basic conception of social interaction and the dramaturgical theory was excerpted from his book *"The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life"* (1956). A background in sociology and a keen interest in social interaction equipped Goffman to create a solid and powerful theory of how people negotiate and validate identities in face-to face encounters (Uski 2015:28). Goffman used the term

“dramaturgy” in an attempt to help readers understand that in social interactions an individual is restricted by what she says and does, depending on her role, audience, and context (Wallace 2005). This is similar to actors on a stage; she plays roles specific to the setting and audience. Goffman referred to this stage as a “frame” and it represents what the actors interpret and agree to be the meaning of the situation. Thus, it is the context in which an individual says and does something (ibid.).

Scheff (2006:23) argued that Goffman was attempting to free his “readers from the culturally-induced reality in which he and they were entrapped”. Goffman dissected and analysed what many people took as “given” daily routines of their social lives. The metaphor of “life as a play” provided Goffman with the language to explore, understand, and write about human interactions.

Goffman’s dramaturgy consists of three main components. The first component, *performer* which implies that when a person is in the presence of others, she will tend to do things other people can understand and expect. Dramaturgy assumes that when an individual is engaging in any interaction, she is performing for those with whom the interaction takes place (Ritzer 2007). Thus, one’s identity is a fluid, constantly shifting entity based on the performance of the day. However, the performer requires an *audience* (the second component) that will attempt to understand and assess the performance. The third component is the *frame* which provides the means for analysing the organisation of everyday life and answering many of the questions an individual encounter (Wallace 2005). According to Entman (1993:52), “frame is used to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” Applying these three components of Goffman to Instagram, the first component, *performer* will be the participant presenting herself through others (her followers) by posting images and videos of herself. The *audience* (the second component) is her followers and the third component, the *frame* constitutes of Instagram where the individual communicates with her followers by posting images of herself, connecting with other users—liking and commenting on their pictures.

1.3.4.1 Front stage and Back stage performances

In “The Presentation of the Self in the Everyday Life”, Goffman analyses interpersonal interactions and how individuals “perform” in an attempt to portray a desirable image, using the theatre as an illustration of an individual’s contrasting *front stage* and *back stage performances*, which has similarities to the boundary between private and public life (Wolfe 1997:183). The aspect of creating and maintaining a personal identity on Instagram along with the creation of multiple realities can be related to Goffman’s theory (1956) about viewing each case in life as a *performance* (Ford and Jakobsson 2017:13). The front

stage is the physical location in which an individual performs for an audience. It is also known as the physical location where the individual, also known as the actor, presents herself to a viewing audience. When on the front stage, the actor is conscious of being observed by her audience and will perform to those watching and observing certain rules and social conventions. Failing to do so can result in losing face as well as failing to project the ideal persona/image the individual wishes to create (Goffman 1956:10). The back stage is private to the individual as no performance is required. The back stage refers to the place where the performer does not expect the audience; here a performer can relax and step out of character. It is a “safe zone” where the actor can stop her performance and simply be herself. This space is usually occupied by good friends and family. According to Wolfe (1997:183), Goffman “leaves the impression that the real reality is always offstage and behind closed doors”. These ideas of the self being a presentation of a role rather than an innate characteristic opened up the way in which sociologists view personal interactions. Rather than an individual having a natural way of being, her front stage persona becomes part of her routinised aspect of her everyday life which she no longer is aware of performing during her interactions with others (Goffman 1956:129). This theory of self being a performance can be understood with some support from aspects of the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966, cf. Section 1.3.2) and it comes from the understanding/acceptance of cultural creations and the nature of the individual’s environment that ultimately controls the way in which she performs the role of herself. Within every encounter with which an individual is faced with she [performs] a different version of herself—based on the type of social interaction she encounters herself in (Goffman 1956:43). The concepts of the *front and back stage performance* can be linked to an online and offline identity, where the online world is the performance an individual present on Instagram and the offline is the private self that is hidden from the digital world (Ford and Jakobsson 2017:13-14). This performance is controlled by an individual. In the section below focus is given on how an individual control how others view her via Instagram using the concept of impression management by Erving Goffman’s theory of dramaturgy (1956).

1.3.4.2 Impression management: expressions given and expressions given-off

Brown (1998:162) refers to performance as “a self-presentation, considering that it provides an individual with a way to create new identities and thus convince her to enhance herself”. Self-presentation is about communication. According to Goffman (1956:11), in self-presentation “an individual communicates emotions, inner feelings, social status, attitudes, and hierarchical positions by expressing the self through interactions with others”. Self-presentation is used to bridge the gap between what is socially acceptable and an individual’s self-concept of herself. An individual will control her impressions to create an

environment in which her self-concept is supported (Seehafer 2017:10). An individual who is engaging on Instagram tries to balance what she believes is her self-concept within the confines of the social behaviour accepted on the SNS (ibid.). An important concept here is impression management, which can be defined “as the various strategies people use to control others perceptions, generally in an attempt to be perceived by others as acceptable and authentic, and to avoid negative, disapproving perceptions” (ibid.:15). Impression management implies that an individual’s actions, appearance, engagement, and so forth all give away parts of her intent and purpose (Picone 2015:1).

Impression management comprises two types of communication in which an individual engages in strategic activity in an attempt to convey an impression to others. These impression management behaviours consist of expressions that she *gives* and *gives-off* (ibid.:12-13). Expressions that she *gives* involve “verbal symbols or their substitutes” (ibid.:14) and are mainly intentional. Therefore, an individual must constantly be on her guard to practise ‘expressive control’ when on the social stage. Expressions *given-off* include “a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor” (Picone 2015:1) and can be both intended and unintended. The expressions given-off include “non-verbal communication such as physical appearance, facial expressions, gesture, tone of voice, and bodily movements” (ibid.:16).

Goffman argued that expressions given-off are less controllable than expressions given. There are numerous things that can go wrong with her performance which might betray the fact that she is not really the person who her act portrays on stage. As an individual gives and gives-off impressions, she is consequently presenting herself. According to Goffman, he [she] finds it important to present a self that is accepted by the audience he [she] is in front of. In addition, Goffman also considered more established metaphors such as the *mask* as a means for deception in face-to-face interaction since “a mask of manner can be held in place from within” an individual and can bring forth certain aspects of herself during the interaction, while also hiding others (ibid.). His “mask” is the conception an individual construct of herself, the role she strives to live up to and what she aspires to be (Picone 2015:12).

The distance between the actor and her audience makes it easy to manage impressions, to exhibit certain aspects of herself during front stage interactions whilst simultaneously concealing others, and to hide certain parts of the face. Moreover, Goffman considered this to be a reflection of the splitting character of herself (ibid.:15), whereby the self is divided. These metaphors do not, however, imply that the individual construct a different persona completely during front stage interactions, but rather that the mask worn, or the splitting of character marginalises certain aspects of the individual. However, while

applying this notion in the context of Instagram, it becomes important to consider that there is a wide range of people who can access the content and the construction of identity cannot be done through face-to-face interactions. Therefore, the perceptions become of interest for the owner of the Instagram account, since she is dependent on first impressions to be favourable for her Instagram account and is most likely to show aspects of herself and life that she feels are more desirable to be revealed on her Instagram account and to conceal those she regards as private.

The concept of *idealisation* has been affirmed by Goffman (1956) to be a motive for individuals to employ the metaphorical mask or character split in the front stage. This refers to the “enactment of performances that idealise one’s intentions, rather than portraying an authentic version of herself” (Hogan 2010:378). In other words, attempts are made to present an idealised version of oneself suitable with society’s norms, making prominent the aspects of self that are socially endorsed (Barnhart 1994:1). The pressure of idealised conduct was elaborated by Goffman (1956:23) through the context of literature on social mobility, which established that in most societies there is an idealisation of the “high echelon, and an attendant aspiration to move into some high strata”. He asserted that when portraying oneself as being from this higher social position, it is associated with material wealth, and the actor attempts to control aspects of self that the audience observes (ibid.).

Goffman’s (1956) concepts of *front* and *back stage performance*, *impression management* and *idealisation* lend themselves to micro-level research on the social networking site Instagram. Through this lens, we are able to understand an individual construct of her online identity on Instagram, how she re-negotiates her sense of femininity on the SNS through the experiences she encounters which have an influence in how she presents herself on Instagram.

In modern society, the development of social media platforms and diverse features such as photos, videos, likes, followers and friend links, has enabled users to present a wide variety of identity standards online (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013:102). As Goffman’s work preceded the arrival of the Internet, the emergence of online social interaction has created discussions about whether his dramaturgical model and other related concepts are appropriate in the online world and social media research. Goffman’s conception of face appears to be embedded in the cognition of individuals, which according to Arundale (2009:40), is an impracticable framework to utilise in modern society, and must be modified to integrate developments in research and technology. However, Miller (1992:7) maintains that interaction in the online world is a natural expansion in Goffman’s theory, with the styles of self-presentation in SNSs linked to non-electronic presentations of self. As Goffman’s original conception of the self-presentation is

supported by evidence of its transferability to the digital world, the following section will explore the literature of feminist thinking, as this study is on female participants who engage on Instagram, therefore it is appropriate to include feminist thinking as one of the theoretical frameworks within the study.

1.3.5 Feminist thinking

This section draws on the ideas of prominent feminist theorists in order to shed light on issues affecting women's everyday life experiences. Feminist theories are "wide-ranging systems of ideas about social life and human experience developed from woman-centred perspectives" (Lengermann and Niebrugge 2012:454). Feminist theories aim to reconstruct the conception of women from being "viewed as objects to being seen as subjects", concentrating on the lives of women (Shayne 2007:1685). These theories present the social world of women from their own understanding and points of view (Lengermann and Niebrugge 2012:454).

According to Beasley (1999:1) and Shayne (2007:1685), the concept of feminism is complicated and complex to conceptualise. Rabe (2014:158) describes feminism as both men and women being granted the same rights within society. In Lengermann and Niebrugge's (2012:457) view, feminists want women to be fully recognised. According to hooks (1982:150), "to be a feminist in any authentic sense of the term is to want all people, female and male, to liberate from sexist role patterns, domination, and oppression." This definition of feminism implies that all sexist thinking and actions are the problem, whether those who perpetuate it are female, male, child, or adult (hooks 2000:12).

Feminism strives to uncover and understand how women see and understand their surroundings, and how they live and make sense of their own everyday lives (Winkler 2009:8). However, feminism is not a unified paradigm and there are particular approaches that each identifies as different problems with regards to women in society. This research study draws from a range of feminist approaches such as liberal feminism, post-modern feminism (including the Black feminist thought), and intersectionality thought.

Before I start explaining what these approaches represent, I will briefly introduce three waves of feminism. The first wave, called liberal feminism, started in 1918-1948 and was associated with the attainment of the right to vote for White women and that of equal rights (Rabe 2014:158). This grew into the second wave, called Marxist feminism, which emerged within the twentieth-century and lasted until the early 1980s (ibid.). According to Delamont (2003:2), the second wave of feminism focused on "social reform such as health care, right to conception and the end of sexual double standard". This feminist movement also sought to raise awareness regarding the domination of women in a patriarchal society,

especially within its various institutions (Rabe 2014:158). This second wave of feminist thinking was influenced by a period of activism and passionate stances taken by women (Delamont 2003:2). This movement portrayed incidences involving conformist women shaving their heads and burning their brassieres in front of courts and parliaments (ibid.). These experiences of the second wave of feminism as a movement led to the third wave of feminism.

The third wave of feminism, known as radical feminism, addresses “gender oppression” where men had the “fundamental and concrete interests in controlling, using, and oppressing women” in the form of domination (Lengermann and Niebrugge 2012:470). This domination is deeply embedded in society by the system known as patriarchy, where men’s interests are of primary importance. This system of patriarchy promotes men’s privileges and regards men as superior to women (ibid.:470-471). The social order is structured in such a way that women’s interests and values are dominated by men. Women are oppressed in positions such as employment, the economy, the family and media, as their interests, experiences, and benefits are of secondary importance. As a result, they are viewed and perceived as inferior and under the authority of men (Hamilton 2007:46; Roberts 2006:99; Inglis and Thorpe 2012:244).

The third wave of feminism includes post-modernist feminist thinking and can also be referred to as post-structuralist feminism. The main argument here is that women across the world do not share the same struggles and the same experiences as portrayed in the previous feminist approaches (Collins 2000:19). Post-modern feminism, therefore, discourages the usage of “one unified voice” of women since they differ in terms “of race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation” (Braidotti 2003:202-203). This notion of “sisterhood” cannot be assumed on the basis of gender, as not all women face similar situations, especially in terms of inequalities and everyday life challenges (Pelak 2007:2396). This movement emphasises the fact that women differ from one another, as they face different challenges and respond to those challenges differently (Lengermann and Niebrugge 2012:1678).

This study is positioned in focusing on how a woman re/presents herself on Instagram. Therefore, it explores post-feminism on media culture. Post-feminism on media culture combines postmodernist and constructionist perspectives and seeks to examine what is distinctive about contemporary articulations of gender in the media (Gill 2007a:147). Post-feminist media theory was an important development in the field of mass communications that arose in the 1980s. The concept of post-feminism presumes that gender equality, women’s rights, and female independence have been achieved, rendering that the traditional feminist movement no longer exists (McRobbie 2008:537). This perspective became more widespread through the 1990s, resulting in the development of post-feminist media studies.

Pioneer theorists such as Susan Faludi (1992:23), perceived post-feminism and its fundamental assumptions to present a backlash against feminist goals and values, especially those embodied by the second-wave feminist movement. Faludi's *Backlash* (1992) played an important role in illustrating how examples from different media, namely magazines and advertisements targeted young women, and film and television portrayals paved the way for a post-feminist backlash. Post-feminists showed qualities of feminist-minded career women who are overly emancipated to the point at which the women's liberation movement alienated them from fulfilling romantic and maternal instincts. These characteristics of a post-feminist women are presumed to be an integral part of the feminine identity, yet still opposing to the "masculinised" feminist agenda (McRobbie 2008:532). Hence, the women's liberation marginalised post-feminist career-orientated women who also chose to fulfil a romantic relationship (marriage) and childrearing. The post-feminist women were also seen as the non-conformers to the feminine ideals of beauty, maternity, and unassertive complacency and they entirely rejected conforming to these portrayals of femininity. In return, the media offered women a "troublesome" brand of "popular" or "commodity fetishism" (McRobbie 2008:532), an extension of post-feminism, in which women's empowerment and individual freedom of choice are taken for granted and women are encouraged to exercise newfound freedoms through consumer choices in an attempt to enhance their feminine sexuality, which is presented as their primary source of power and identity (Gill 2007a:150).

Gill (2007b:5) elaborates on this notion and includes a discussion on how post-feminist media operate under a seemingly feminist guise, thus promoting certain kinds of freedom in the name of feminism such as the expression of sexuality, rather than real feminist politics. While many academics considered how post-feminism is represented in traditional popular culture (e.g., print media, film, and television), few applied these concepts to digital forms of communication. Dobson (2015:202), however, explored how the prevalence of social media technologies are contributing to more sexualised constructions of young women and girls. Dobson argues that on Instagram (which allows for the user to present herself in a way that may differ from her authentic self), many young women and girls are choosing to present the 'perfect' representations of self, for example, through "selfies".

This phenomenon led to the "sexualisation of culture" in which women and girls are normalising extreme female sexuality through their user-generated content and self-presentation. While Dobson's work explores how female social media users are contributing to sexualised constructions of modern women and girlhood, this study draws from the post-feminist concepts applied to social media in order to explore how women re/present themselves on Instagram. The woman's body is the main foci on Instagram and

the following concepts of the male and female gaze explain how the genders (male and female) view women differently.

The male gaze is based on the idea of a depreciating presentation of women in culture. The term “male gaze” was introduced by Laura Mulvey (1975), which refers to a “sexual imbalance” in how men perceive women. According to Green (1998:41-42), Mulvey views the male gaze as a form of voyeurism used in an exercise of a man’s power. That voyeurism [sic] “as such is a double-edged indicator of male power”, which “is as much as a way of reducing women as is it of desiring them, and can often be satisfied by simply dismissing their view”. The male gaze theory was first used to understand Hollywood cinema narratives, and also offer a conceptual framework for thinking about the role of looking into women’s subject formation (Riley et al. 2016:96). Mulvey (1975:4) suggested that when watching a film, the viewer unconsciously identifies with the active male protagonist, while distancing himself from the woman on the screen, either by making her an object of desire or annihilating her (e.g., killing her off or revealing her inauthenticity). According to John Berger (1972:47), “men act while women appear” and women internalise a surveyor of concepts which brings them to a point of surveying themselves on their own. For years women had to deal with the long predicament of thinking about themselves as objects to be viewed, judged, and interpreted, such as works of art. It has been suggested that women are taught that their bodies are always visible and available for judgement to the unknown male watcher and this surveillance is a reflection of sexist social power structures, which aim to control and subordinate women (McKinley 2011:684).

This study endeavours to further examine the women’s experiences of the gaze in order to reveal in more depth, the varying ways they engage with their bodies and also how they develop (or learn) to enjoy participating and interacting with the Instagram community. These are often presented in forms that are interpreted insufficiently through simplistic narrations which suggest that “posting of selfies” or “perfect selfies” are the sole motivation. However, there is a deeper meaning attached to the posting of selfies. Therefore, Instagram can be viewed as a SNS that promotes the construction of identity and body and is also an important platform to explore issues surrounding embodiment and the gendered self.

1.3.6 Intersectionality theory

The emergence of the Black Feminist approach led to the development of intersectionality; a theory addressing the inequalities caused by the intersection of race, gender, and class (Davis 1993 in Collins 2000:19). The term “intersectionality” emerged in 1989 when American critical legal scholar, Kimberlè Williams Crenshaw, referred to it in her seminal critique of US antidiscrimination law and its failure to

acknowledge Black women's unique experiences of racism and sexism as simultaneous and inseparable. She sought to demonstrate how women's experiences were influenced by a number of social issues. The theory was further developed by Patricia Hill Collins (2000), a leading sociologist, who described intersectionality as a concept that illustrates Black work as an intellectual and activist activity (Schmidt and Mestry 2014:30). The theory serves a number of purposes, but is mainly a catalyst for change, addressing equity issues in the workplace, and promoting social justice. Thus, intersectionality theory acknowledges Black women's unique expertise and provides a space for their voices to be heard outside of the Western mainstream (ibid.). As a theory interlocking systems of oppression, intersectionality claims that systems of race, social class, and gender shape Black women's experiences (Collins 2000:12).

In this study, the theoretical context of Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality theory is applied in an attempt to understand how the intersection of race, gender, and class impacts on the female participants' construction of femininity in everyday life and their experiences on Instagram. Within these digital stories lie rich research sites for exploring identity, performance, and the ways in which bodies become discursively inscribed, especially as social media users insert their selves into cyberspace, and the immediate, political, public, and easily disseminated dialogic spaces that social media offers (Meyer and Rowe 2012:74).

Social media offers an opportunity to revisit Erving Goffman's (1956) *Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* in more complex ways (Johnson and Boylorn 2015:4). As Boyd and Ellison (2008:21) stated: social network applications such as Instagram, offer unprecedented possibilities for identity performance research due to social networking sites leaving digital trails of users mirroring, supporting, and challenging everyday practices.

The purpose of intersectionality thinking is to firstly, recognise "the significance of multiple categories' explanatory power". Secondly, to recognise "the vast intragroup differences instead of singling out aspects of identity as if it is discrete, neat concepts we can separate" (Johnson and Boylorn 2015:4). Within social media contexts, social networks create a space to study the ways in which women insert their intersectional identities into the virtual world through performativity (ibid.). Performativity, "rests upon a constitutive theory of language" [and]... presupposes the idea that words are active as well as descriptive... and have the capacity to do things, whether provoking an estrangement between meaning and performance or creating new meaning" (Slinn 1999:64). The way a woman's body is presented on Instagram illuminates not only what is brought to being (performativity), but also "what it does once it is

constituted (in performance) and the relationship between it and the other bodies around it” (Johnson 2001:10).

1.4 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the philosophical assumptions underlying the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological approaches utilised within the interpretivist paradigm. The chapter begins with an explanation of the interpretive/constructivist paradigm which outlines an understanding of the world as it is viewed from subjective experiences of individuals. Furthermore, the theoretical frameworks of phenomenology, social construction of reality, existential sociology, the dramaturgical approach by Erving Goffman, and feminist thinking aid in conceptualising the study and also serves as a theoretical guide to this study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter encompasses a discussion on the conceptual frameworks that support this study's exploration of the lived experiences of young upwardly mobile Black South African women engaging and interacting on Instagram. The chapter begins with an overview of Instagram and what constitutes social media in the broader spectrum, including what influence social network sites have on a woman's body perception and agency. This literature review focuses on how an individual's online self-representation impacts her sense of self-acceptance and emotionality when engaging beauty and body image ideals. As mentioned in the previous chapter (cf. Section 1.3.1-1.3.3), the research explores Black South African women's online lived experiences and how such research participants identify and adapt their physical appearance and femininity in order to meet a socially defined beauty trend. Through the socialising and beautifying of the body, a socially influenced individual obtains a greater online presence through her followers and likes and subsequently becomes a trendsetter.

2.2 Social theory and the body

Over the past 30 years, the body and its representation received the academic interest of various researchers. Some significant contributions in debates concerning the body and socialisation include Sheila West (2012), Thomas Cash (2003), and Iris Marion Young (1980). These authors made it evident that the way in which a woman represents herself physically is a reflection of how she identifies and accepts herself socially. The female body is a cultural object and has been redefined over time as a result of extensive cultural and historical change. According to Tshgofa (2014:1), the body is a contested site of struggle, which is especially true for women who do not fit into the traditional ideals of beauty. Before globalisation, societies were more likely to define beauty according to their own culture and beliefs. In some parts of Africa, a woman's beauty included not only her voluptuous and rounded body but also her hard work, strength, personality and the way she carried herself. However, globalisation has simplified notions related to beauty and femininity by focusing solely on a woman's physical features (ibid.). By looking at the body from this perspective, the body has become a form of commodity that must be constructed and nurtured by fashion trends, make-up techniques and dietary regimens (Heggenstaller 2017:37).

Women struggle with constant anxiety (need and effort) to always look 'put together', as a result of being gazed upon by both men and other women (Young 1980:15; Craige 2006:162). Women's bodies are objectified and controlled by other's subjective judgements, desires, purpose, and direction, rather than as a manifestation of personal choice, identity, and intention (ibid.). Consequently, women feel the pressure to look, be, and behave in a way which is socially expected of them (ibid.). The constant scrutiny women experience encourages them to perceive themselves and their bodies through the eyes of the other or as Iris Marion Young (2005 in Heggenstaller 2017:34) stated: "...the socialised female body is an object... a fragile thing... [whose] social existence [is] the object of the gaze of another". Thus, making use of cosmetics, changing one's hair and maintaining the body via dietary restrictions are all measures taken in an attempt to become socialised objects which are pleasant to be *gazed* upon (Young 1980:155).

Body image is an integral and ever present, but changing ideal in an individual's everyday lifeworld. According to West (2012:1), body image is defined as "one's own holistic view of oneself and body". Cash (2003:2) stated that body image is "a varying psychological and physical experience of embodiment with regard to one's physical appearance, inclusive of one's self-perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours regarding one's body". Furthermore, body image involves self-evaluation of an individual's physical appearance which is encouraged by inconsistencies between her perception of her body and valued physical features related to her cultural association and social reality (West 2012:5). In addition, women often experience conflicting feelings regarding their body image since they want to adhere to beliefs about what their body is, what they want it to be, and what it is supposed to be (Yu, Damhorst and Russell 2011; Bissell and Rusk 2010 in West 2012:1-7).

Over many generations, it has been a cultural and societal norm for women to experience greater anxiety about their physical appearance and attractiveness in relation to men (Mazur 1986:282). Men also experience pressure to conform to a particular beauty ideal or look, however, women do not place so much emphasis on the importance of the physical attractiveness of men as men do on women (West 2012:6). Thus, a woman's preoccupation with looking a certain way could be influenced and determined by men as well as socially sanctioned ideals regarding what is deemed beautiful, attractive, and sexually appealing. In contrast, beauty has more to do with how an individual feel about herself, and it is influenced by how deep an individual's 'roots' [cultural identity] are, as this gives an individual a sense of identity and self-worth (Ribane 2006:17). However, researchers found that perceptions of beauty are more influenced by the mass media, social interactions, culture and the social media, than an individual's personal identity and self-worth (Tembo 2010:17-18). The following sections look at embodiment, how a woman embodies

her body in the virtual world, how women of colour's beauty are represented on virtual spaces, and what constitutes and defines beauty and Black African beauty.

2.3 Embodiment of the body in the virtual world

The body is an important part of the self-concept, and body image plays an important role in contemporary society as “a means for constructing, symbolising, and expressing one's self” (Fisher, 1986:23; Schouten, 1991:415). According to Gabe et al. (2005:73), embodiment is defined as “the lived body, our body being in the world, as the site of meaning, experience, and expression”. This is influenced by how an individual subjectively embodies her body, also including her inter-subjective experiences of her body with other women within her social reality. This construction of her body and the associated body image, therefore, serves as a form of socialisation and a means of signifying one's self-worth, status in social relationships, and lifestyles (Thompson and Hirschman 1995:142). This study focuses on the presentation of Black women's body and beauty ideals on Instagram. The purpose of this research study is to gain insight into the individual and unique experiences of women who post images of themselves on Instagram. In the post-modern society, the body is conceptualised as a means of communicating or conveying an impression, thus to signify meaning by displaying the body (Vicdan 2008:13). This visual representation of an individual's body via Instagram has considerable impact on how she communicates with others and conveys meaning to others (ibid.). Focus is given to her personal understandings and themes connected to her feelings surrounding her self-perception, body perception, and how she makes sense of her femininity through visual online interactions with others. The following sub-sections elaborate further on embodiment by explaining how Black women's sexuality was represented historically by Western views. Also, how these Western views shaped society's definition of the concept of beauty from a Black women's perspective.

2.3.1 The representation of Black women's sexuality

According to Marshall (1996:523), in modern African society, there is an omnipresent perception that White values, culture, and lifestyle are superior to that of other racial groups. This often implies that African cultures and traditions are devalued and side-lined. Historically, when comparing Black women with White women, Black women were often seen as immoral in relation to the supposed chastity of White women (ibid.). Under colonialism, women of colour were perceived as hypersexual due to “images used to justify [their] sexual exploitation” (Marshall 1996:524).

The image of a Black woman being sexual emerged during slavery, as it was common for White men to take advantage of their position; White women similarly had relations with Black men via slavery (Young 1996:178) albeit to a far lesser degree. The sexual relationship between the master and female slave served two purposes: to increase the labour force through the production of more slaves and to control Black female slaves (ibid.:179). Female slaves were sexually exploited and at times blamed for luring their owners into sexual intercourse; as slave owners did not assume any responsibility for their actions. It appears that the image of Black women being willing to engage in such acts has endured over time and is deeply embedded in cultural history and perception (ibid.:181). A remarkable example was Sarah Baartman whose body was used to reinforce the notion that Black women's voluptuous bodies are mainly designed for sex (Thompson 2008:78). Women of colour were represented in a negative light and undesirable negative connotations attached in the form of "Oversexed Jezebel"¹, the "tragic mulato"² and the "Mammy figure"³ (Thompson 2008:79).

Due to a long history of dehumanisation and devaluation through images and stigma during and after slavery, the construction of Black female beauty is reflected in a particular way in the media and social interactions, causing Black women to believe that they are imperfect and unacceptable the way they are. Women of colour often strive to be at the epitome of the Western beauty standards of long hair, lighter skin, and a slim body. Although the events mentioned above occurred in a historical context as a result of the Western influence on particularly African-American women, Black women in South Africa often still integrate their heritage and cultural ideals into their look through traditional prints, beads, and braided hair (Shelembe 2014:16). This, however, does not imply that Western beauty ideals do not influence them; in reality, they are always caught between their African beauty standards and Western beauty standards (ibid.:17).

¹ *Oversexed Jezebel* refers to the promiscuity of Black women (Thompson 2008:79).

² *Tragic mulato* refers to women of mixed race. Although most White men did not (openly) find Black women sexually attractive, sex across racial lines were illegal and practiced in secrecy (ibid.).

³ The *mammy figure* is a racial caricature of African women (ibid.).

2.3.2 Social construction of beauty

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966:4) identified and developed the social construction of reality theory, which postulates that human beings derive all knowledge, including their everyday life from social interactions (ibid.). Social interactions take place through the social world and learning takes place through interpersonal interactions influencing how an individual perceives, understands, and engages her everyday reality (ibid.). As a ubiquitous force, mass media play an important role in the social construction of reality, especially since the media can bring forth awareness of people, society, culture, and other indirect events (Snell 2017:17).

Beauty is defined as the “...combination of qualities, as shape, proportion, colour, in human face or form, or in other objects, that delights the sight” (Concise Oxford in Synnott 1989:610). However, this definition cannot encompass beauty in its entirety as it incorporates a diverse set of meanings at various levels and dimensions such as the “physical or spiritual, inner or outer, natural or artificial, subjective or objective, positive or negative” (ibid.). Throughout history the concept of beauty is constantly redefined and changing as seen in academic work analysing the shifts in beauty advertising (Snell 2017:18). Beauty still functions as the determining factor against which women are evaluated and judged by others; from the male gaze to social gaze (Black and Sharma 2001:112). Fiske et al. (2010:876) termed this inter-subjective and social comparison the “sociometer” and stated that these judgements can and do influence how a woman perceives and accepts her sense of self-worth, both physically and emotionally (Travis et al. 2000:240).

The concept of beauty is evaluated through various lenses as well as in relation to a wide range of attributes. Beauty has been broadly categorised as an aesthetic category from the perspective of philosophical and artistic traditions, and more recently reclaimed as a culturally constituted category from the sociological point of view (Peiss 2001:14). In general, however, beauty is seen as an aesthetic category (ibid.). The concept of beauty evaluated through the lenses of sociologists and feminists, among others, have criticised and challenged the aesthetically oriented and universal view of beauty due to lacking the social, cultural and historical mechanisms that encompass beauty, contending instead that beauty is a culturally constituted phenomenon (Peiss 2001:16).

The evaluation of beauty as a sociocultural and historically constituted phenomenon, reveals its highly controversial nature. “Beauty is a contested category today because we both long for and fear its seductions” (Brand 2000:15). When the complexity of beauty is deconstructed, it could be seen as liberating and pleasurable by “activating the realm of fantasy and imagination” although it can also be

seen as equally enslaving (ibid) as it is also a defining element through which the female subject is characterised (Travis et al. 2000:240). Beauty, however, still functions as the determining factor against which others judge and evaluate the female subject (Black and Sharma 2001:105) and it serves as a benchmark that determines her self-worth (Travis et al. 2000:243). Exploring *beauty* as a sociocultural and historically constituted phenomenon (Peiss 2001:18) and as a product of the values and beliefs in which it is embedded (Reischer and Koo 2004:300), thus refers to its socially constructed nature.

As a socially constructed phenomenon, beauty is neither universal nor fixed (Isa 2003:36). Beautification ideals and consequent trends are the results of shared socio and cultural understandings regarding what is perceived as beautiful and desirable. Beauty ideals and trends are encouraged and further represented through media-based platforms, such as billboards, magazines, television, as well as various social networking sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram). Media functions, therefore, create and reinforce the reality embedded in the social world not through reflecting it, but by representing the meanings of shared understandings of what is regarded as reality (Ibroscheva and Ibroscheva 2009).

2.3.2.1 Beauty from a Black African perspective

The concept of beauty from the African perspective is broad, as it focuses on both the internal and external qualities. However, what or who is considered beautiful varies among cultures. What remains consistent is that many notions of beauty are rooted in hegemonically defined expectations which refers to the traditional definitions of defining beauty in different African contexts (Matiza 2013:161). Although definitions surrounding beauty ideals differ, this research study seeks to explore and analyse how the African social concept of beauty has informed literary critics in their work.

Beauty is often subject to the hegemonic standards of the ruling class since “beauty is an elusive commodity” and definitions of beauty vary among cultures and historical periods (Matiza 2013:163). The African approach to the concept of beauty is holistic (ibid.:164). The Western ideas of beauty refer to a slim figure, a light shade of skin, and a great deal of height. The African ideas in this regard are quite different, though. In the discourse on the Acholi people (North-East Africa), p’ Bitek (1986:31) emphasised that physical beauty “is not beauty for the sake of being beautiful, it has its own purpose, for example, a well-developed body in the case of a woman means having rounded buttocks and stiff and big breasts”. This indicates that a bigger-bodied woman will bear children in marriage and it also represents the functionality of Black African beauty (Matiza 2013:164).

2.3.2.2 Beauty defined from a South African context

In South Africa, the definition of beauty has changed from exuberantly curvaceous dark women to slender 'yellow bones'. While some women are riding the wave of unapologetically affirming their natural African beauty, most modern South African women struggle to validate their skin as beautiful (Motseki and Oyedemi 2017:138). Thus, the lighter the skin complexion, the more attractive a woman is perceived to be (ibid.). This is largely due to African beauty being viewed as diverse, and also due to beauty standards often reflecting those of Western ideals. The very notion of being a South African is still a complex issue that cannot be simplified as being solely about skin colour or hair, but rather a reflection of current fads and trends based on American ideals; promoting lighter skin, straighter hair, and a slimmer but more shapely figure.

Social ranking based on skin tone, ethnicity, and culture is considered prevalent amongst Black women in South Africa (Williams et al. 2008:444). According to Thompson and Hirschman (1995:463), ethnicity can be defined "as a social group that shares a similar identity, history, culture, language, physical features, and beliefs". Ethnicity plays a role in the classification of Black people in South Africa. Harries (1989) states that some ethnic groups consider their cultural practices and beliefs as more superior than others, mainly based on skin tone. For instance, the Zulu's, Sotho's and Xhosa's often classify themselves as light-skinned, which is superior to the Tsonga's and Venda's who are dark-skinned and consequently associated with backwardness, manual labour, and participation in black magic activities (ibid.). Furthermore, access to resources and power were not only based on being Black or White but also the "kind of Black" that one was (Deng 1997).

The influence of international trends on perceptions of beauty is evident in South Africa (Ribane 2006:24). There appears to be a clear division based on skin tone within the South African community. Currently, and during the Apartheid era, having a lighter skin implied having more opportunities in life (ibid.:11). Ribane recalled that having a lighter complexion represented ultimate beauty. As a result, having a lighter skin implied that these women got all the attention from the most popular and well-off men and generally seemed to become more successful than dark-skinned women (ibid.:11-12). Khan (2011:1) states that the issue of colour became indistinguishably connected with the image of beauty for Black women.

Although South Africa has seen great improvement and progressive change socially, politically and economically, the heritage of Apartheid ensures that the link between self and socially perceived self-worth based on skin colour, still exists (Khan 2011:2). History conditioned Black women to accept the notion that having a fair, lighter skin leads to a better life and that their inferiority is a direct consequence

of their dark skin. One may consider such historical notions of the significance of skin colour as the reason for the practice of skin bleaching amongst South African women. These trends led to terms such as “high-yellow”, “yellow-bone”, “chocolate” and “blackberry” in Black communities to differentiate women based on their complexions (Wilder 2010:200). The influence of celebrities such as Kelly Khumalo, Khanyi Mbau, Mshoza and Nigerian singer Dencia (Reprudencia Sonkey) are a few African black celebrity females who bleached their skin and it conveyed a message which suggests that to be darker is associated with being inferior or less beautiful to women of colour. Many of the local celebrities also intentionally dictate beauty trends on SNSs through their postings and comments concerning body types and body augmentation that they consider beautiful (Motseki and Oyedemi 2017:137). Social media creates a space where celebrities can present public virtual performances of new beauty trends and examples of these beauty enhancement practices include skin bleaching, long hair extensions and weaves, efforts to attain slender bodies, and buttock augmentation (ibid.).

Our fixation as South African Black women is more on being colour blind; we want to be seen as ‘progressive’, but it appears we are very colour-conscious. Black women in South Africa are more reluctant to see how we, as Africans, define our beauty. The very notion of being African is still a complex issue that cannot be simplified as being solely about skin tone or choice of hairstyle. Therefore, it will take much more than ‘pro blackness’ movements to remedy centuries of what we perceive as natural beauty.

2.3.2.3 21st century beauty, the media, and celebrity culture

Today, the beauty most women strive for in an attempt to reach what they see in magazines and movies simply is not real. It is impossible since technology blurred their image of beauty to the extent that an individual cannot distinguish between real and digitally enhanced beauty, especially on websites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Tumblr (Aquaro 2012). Beauty is not merely strived for in physical appearance but also, and more importantly desired for, in the digital and online spaces (ibid.). However, traditional perceptions related to beauty are re-negotiated and represented in captions associated with “hot” and “sexy” (Aquaro 2012).

For centuries women have been sexualised by men and currently, it is more explicit than ever before. Furthermore, women are now encouraged to be more independent, youthful, tough, sexually liberated, and ambitious fashionistas (e.g. The Kardashian/Jenner family). The media is propagated with teen-stars starring as the hottest sex symbols, or children becoming famous as “it girls” after an “accidental” scandal of some sort (Korsnes 2013). Reality-TV became a trend, and you can now be famous for being famous, which again began a whole new level of fame obsession. The modern society is very loud, so one has to

scream even louder for attention. For example, Lady Gaga represents to modern society what Madonna represented in the 80s. Television shows, movies, and music videos seem more like soft porn, and the stage outfits look like lingerie (ibid.).

The 21st century beauty standards are consistently being re-evaluated and challenged. At times we see the re-emergence of past trends, such as fuller eyebrows in recent years. Musicians such as Beyoncé and reality star and businesswoman Kim Kardashian West replaced models on magazine covers with their more voluptuous body type (Brettingen 2016). In addition, the rejection of beauty standards regarding “make-up free selfies” exist with the current beauty trend being influenced by how unique you are (ibid.). The first real change in the 21st century women’s body image occurred when Jennifer Lopez (an American singer, actress, dancer, and producer) embraced her round shape buttocks, although lately she and other trendsetters such as the Kardashian’s, Beyoncé, and Jennifer Hudson are sporting very thin figures which could be due to the Hollywood pressure of looking young and fit.

The present-day beauty image is an age of body image conflict; today’s women are expected to be a sum of all the ‘ideals’ such as thin but curvy, trim with ample breasts and buttocks, and a flat tummy, with a thin waist and curvaceous hips (Brettingen 2016). Women are bombarded with images of the ‘perfect woman’ on television, in magazines, and on billboards (Leslie 2011:1). The celebrities and models mostly represent these prototypes and go to extreme lengths to maintain a particular body shape and image. In addition, the media do not show society that the most featured images of celebrities/models were Photoshopped. The Photoshop application digitally removes imperfections and flaws, which enhances perfection within the current norms of beauty (ibid.). By emphasising perfection and beauty, an individual may re-evaluate herself against social ideals and find differences that could lead to an identity crisis. This “happens when a person questions and struggles with one’s self (concept) and loses one’s peace of mind and even sense of purpose” (Yoon 2015:8).

This reveals aspects relating to how beauty ideals are embedded in the media, how various media platforms and social realities shape and control how an individual perceives her beauty. According to McLuhan (in Leslie 2011:32), the media as an institution

“...determines how people think, feel, and act... the messages we receive through the media are so influential in our lives that we are no longer aware that our feelings, ideas, and opinions are being shaped by technology and the messages it carries”.

This is particularly apparent to the vulnerable young population, who often unwarily accept that media icons such as Kim Kardashian West are what they should strive for in appearance and character. However, social reality icons such as Khloé Kardashian, Kylie Jenner, and Paris Hilton did not become famous through philanthropic or academic achievements. The media rather focused on their social status and mediated popularity (Heggenstaller 2017:49).

2.4 Traditional media influences on women's beauty and physical appearance

The traditional forms of media include television, billboards, radio, and magazines (La Mar 2018:35). The standards of beauty in general and the “look of beauty” in particular are created and defined by how the beauty culture, which represents a massive market in the presence of cultural gatekeepers such as cosmetic manufacturers, advertisers, and women's magazines (Isa 2003:41). The procedures of the beauty industry are supported by media and advertising channels, which create and communicate cultural values and norms regarding the beauty ideal; the “culturally prescribed and endorsed ‘looks’ that include various features of the human face and body, and thus define the standards for physical attractiveness within a culture” (Calogero et al. 2007:261). In modern society, nearly everyone has a cell phone which is nothing less than a miniature computer or TV filled with all forms of social media (ibid.). These images are repetitive and practically impossible to escape from in everyday life (Gaffney 2017:5).

Mass media is an instrument used to influence its audience in many ways, although most people would like to believe that they are not affected by advertising. This is due to advertising being rapid, cumulative, and mostly subconscious (Chapman 2011:1). While the media attempt to target every individual, the level of exposure is dictated by gender, with the majority of harmful messages focused on women (ibid.). In magazines, for example, women often feel inferior regarding how they look, as individuals rely on an image to relate to a feeling. According to Kilbourne (in Chapman 2011:1), “the body language of girls is usually passive, vulnerable, and very different from the body languages of boys and men”. This highlights the idea of weakness in women “whereas men are given dignity and strength”, despite the media being larger for women, women's value and worth are represented as smaller compared to men (ibid.). This fallacy highlights the gender-divide in media that affects how women embody their physical appearance and are judged more harshly than men (Gill 2007a:150).

In South Africa, skin pigmentation sets the tone of beauty amongst numerous Black women in our country. Thus, if you have a lighter shade of skin, you are perceived as superior and enchanting. The doctrine of fair skin and the humiliation of dark skin dates back to the ancient times of colonial prejudice; still echoing

and moulding the panorama of dark-skinned individuals of African lineage (Mvinjelwa 2018). We are faced with the predicament presently of numerous African women elevating their skin appearance by whitening with a mind-set of attaining a fair skin complexion. The effect of this movement is that the media's influence can take away young women's natural confidence and instigate the obsession with "perfect" and "flawless" celebrity beauty that does not exist (ibid.).

The debates surrounding 'good' hair is another interesting topic centred on especially Black women by the media (Nyammoh and Fuh 2014:55). Many Black women adopted the worldwide movement of embracing synthetic/natural human hair, which is apparently interlaced with being superior, beautiful, and viewed as a Western form of appealing and acceptable hair in comparison to nappy hair (Mvinjelwa 2018). The various well-known Black female celebrities such as Bonang Matheba, Minnie Dlamini, Khanyi Mbau elevate natural Brazilian and Peruvian weaves as the "prominent" appeal for a "gorgeous" Black African woman. This indicates that beauty ideals are embedded in Westernised perceptions where Black celebrities and models embrace the Western beauty ideals; only a minority of Black women embrace African trends, with several Black models being ambassadors and spokespersons of beauty products that were previously targeted for White women. These examples include Bonang Matheba who became a spokesperson for Revlon Cosmetics (SA) since 2013 and, Nomzamo Mbatha who is the first South African face of Neutrogena since 2015 (Tjiya 2015).

In conclusion, the emphasis on hair and skin on beauty is mostly due to Black South African women's conception of beauty being focused on hair and beauty, which is found on social network sites such as Instagram where women find ways to enhance their beauty through hair and skin products (e.g. make-up). However, social media has created a *homogenised expression of beauty*, where Black women share the same or similar trends of hair and beauty from all over the world via access from social network sites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. The *homogenised expressions of beauty* can be seen in different hair and beauty trends ranging from wigs and weaves, to embracing natural hair trends and 'perfecting' the fuller-eyebrow tutorials (Motseki and Oyedemi 2017:137). The following sections elaborate more on the influence of social media in how it shapes an individual's virtual and social identity.

2.5 The Birth of Social Media

Technology is an ever-expanding phenomenon connecting users with one another. One of the easiest and most convenient ways for people to communicate in this technological age is through social media and social networking sites (Mullin 2017:4). Social media (often referred to as social networking or SNSs) can

be broadly defined as a platform for broadcasting information, while social networking refers to a platform for communicating with one another (McMillan 2011). The practice of social networking sites encompasses the creation of an online self, providing a place in which an individual can “type oneself into being” (Sundén 2003 in Housley, 2017:6). Thus, creating an online identity by having a biographical profile on who you are, your interests, your studies and your career for people to know more about you before they can request to being your friend or follower. As a result, if your online identity appears interesting to the individual, they can request to be your friend (addressed as on Facebook) or follower (addressed as on Instagram).

Social networking sites (often referred to as SNSs) are websites and applications that enable users to create and share personal content on digital platform networks with selected friends and followers. These forms of media have revolutionised how women interact with each other, and according to Pittman and Reich (2016:155) women between the ages of 14-40 years are the most avid users. SNSs allow like-minded individuals to interact on an international scale by being able to judge herself against other women (Lupinetti 2015:2). Also, SNSs allow an individual to create an identity and interact with other women from within a purely emotional connection.

SNSs fulfil many wants and needs via virtual communication. It is a convenient method of communication which provides an individual with the ability to stay connected with her friends and family (Knight-McCord et al. 2016:22:23). SNSs are highly efficient due to it being one of the many methods of communication that allow users to share information (ibid.:22:23) quickly. SNSs such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, and Google Plus have become vastly popular over the last decade and guide novel communication and information sharing venues (Cheikh-Ammar and Barki 2014:1).

A social networking site gives the user the ability to create a public or semi-public profile with a detailed description of herself. An individual who participates in the usage of SNSs commonly uploads a profile picture demonstrating her appearance combined with a description of her occupation and education; these details allows other users a more comprehensive understanding of the individual (Haferkamp and Kramer 2011:311). A SNS enables a user to generate her own content and it provides her control of what is produced online. Apart from being an SNS user, this individual is also a receiver of other’s profile information (ibid.).

SNSs provide an attractive, convenient way for individuals to maintain personal relationships and remain informed about selected topics. However, when an individual processes various digitally altered and

edited information, such as pictures and videos (Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe, 2007 in Wesseldyk 2017:5), the individual can use these photos/videos as a means for critical self-evaluation and social comparison (Festinger 1954 in Wesseldyk 2017:5). According to Vogel et al. (2014 in Wesseldyk 2017:5), the viewing of “perfect” self-images can be problematic, as SNS users may experience incongruent emotions such as low self-esteem, especially when compared with others (friends, family, and celebrity culture). A continuation of this discussion follows with the focus placed on the SNS, Instagram, and the evolution of the *selfie*.

2.5.1 Instagram

Instagram is a relatively new form of communication where a user can share her updates by taking photos and tweaking it by using filters (Hu et al. 2014). This platform was launched on the 6th October 2010 and acquired by Facebook in 2012 (Ting Ting 2014:1). The photo platform application was designed by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger who combined the words “instant” and “telegram” (Otayfk 2017:8). Instagram is a social network site that shares photos over the Internet through an application that allows users to alter their images by applying filters and sharing their photos on a variety of other social networking sites (Tyer 2016:30). Photos are usually changed or altered in order to accumulate ‘likes’ from one’s friends and followers⁴.

The concept of ‘likes’ is specifically designed for social media, which allows a person to signal her approval in material posted to another individual’s social media portal (Tyer 2016:31). Social media ‘likes’ are an indicator that a photo, message, or link is of interest and was able to attract attention (McPartland 2013:447). In addition, the notion of *liking* a photo on Instagram is culturally and socially understood as positive reinforcement from other users (Doherty 2017:27). By obtaining the most ‘likes’ on a photo, indicates social desirability and attractiveness (ibid.). It is assumed that appearing socially desirable and attractive to other users is a key motivator for sharing certain kinds of content online.

Instagram has become an instrument to connect, educate, and inspire people (Otayfk 2017:8). In contrast to SNSs such as Facebook and LinkedIn, Instagram can be used as a platform for corporations, celebrities, public institutions or individuals using an anonymous online identity (Housley 2017:7). This photo

⁴ Followers on Instagram are addressed as “friends” on Instagram. They are the users that follow you; these followers can see your posts on both your profile and on their feed (Agam 2017:87).

application also allows its users to become aware of social, political, and local issues by searching hashtags (#) and using an “explore” feature (Orth 2016:35).

The majority of its users include personal details about themselves in the bio section on their profile page. It offers characteristics and personal information related to the individual and may be set as private through the locked account settings (Orth 2016:35). When the user’s profile is available to view, the profile may be grouped into specific categories. These include eight categories: self-portraits (selfies), friends, activities, captioned photos (memes), food gadgets, fashion, and pets. Many of these categories have connecting hashtags and more popular accounts that will share other users’ posts through the process called “Regramming” (Orth 2016:35). The process of “Regramming” refers “...to the act of sharing a post with the original poster’s user information included in the comments section or as a text box placed on the original content” (ibid.). Many of the practices or language use online are vernacular and depend in essential ways on the social network site being used.

According to Gibbs et al. (2015:259), each social network site comes with its own exclusive combinations of styles, grammar, and logic, which can be distinguished as constituting a “platform vernacular”, or a popular type of communication. Similar to Twitter, Instagram includes hashtags and tagging by using the @ symbol, also known as a handle, in front of their profile name (Orth 2016:36). Hashtags (#) are used to join larger and more diverse conversations to the platform (ibid.).

Women participate more on Instagram as opposed to men, as it gives them a social link to their favourite celebrities and brands in one-easy-to-use application (Wesseldyk 2017:8). Female Instagram users have been seen to be more focused on photographic related activities such as posting images (Housley 2017:5). Furthermore, Housley (ibid.) found that young women’s examination of their visual presentation of self on Instagram is likely to uncover incorporation of internalised sociocultural ideals of what is seen as beautiful in society; both in facial and bodily appearance (ibid.).

Instagram is not merely a SNS where an individual is actively presenting herself, but it is also a space for her to receive feedback from others (Majilang 2017:10). This act of receiving is beyond the passivity game as simply looking at and being exposed to other women’s images; having a powerful influence on the user’s attitude, perception, and behaviour. This reveals that an individual’s self-concept can be influenced by the images seen on Instagram.

2.5.2 The evolution of “selfies

We are living in an era of self-portraiture that is increasingly being recognised as the “Age of the Selfie” (Saltz 2014 in de Aguiar Pereira 2016:1). 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”... [and] a practice or *gesture* that can send, and is often intended to send, different messages to different individuals, communities, and audiences.”

Senft and Baym (2015:1589) uphold that the selfie is a gesture that may be dulled, intensified, or modified to prompt a particular reaction from social disapproval to desire. The posting of selfies on Instagram encourages social exchanges between the user and her followers by use of likes and comments.

Selfies have become enormously popular and it is nearly impossible to visit any social media site without seeing a friend’s face pop up in the media platform. According to Iqani and Schroeder (2015:407), one of the reasons why selfies have become so popular is:

“Selfies are not just reserved for the elite, far from it. In fact, selfies are perhaps best understood as a ground-up phenomenon. Armed with smartphones containing cameras and Internet access, anyone can take and share a selfie on an expanding number of social network platforms; and it seems that almost everyone does.”

Although many selfies show their subjects looking their “best” (acting sexy, posing, or smiling) many show the users making funny facial gestures (playing the fool or pouting), being controversial or political, or using the hashtag for ordinary pictures (Iqani and Schroeder 2015:407). Therefore, taking, posting, and viewing selfies has become a daily habit for many individuals and their mere pervasiveness makes it relevant to know more about the consciousness of taking selfies and their social influences. When taking a selfie, the individual has the opportunity to view how she looks and decides what to show, before capturing the photo and posting it on Instagram (ibdi.:405). The selfie comprises of unique cues that allow one to communicate a specific message about herself that is more likely to be different from other photos she posts. For example, an individual posting a picture of herself obtaining her degree on her graduation day may convey a different message as opposed to her posting a picture of herself with her friends on a

road trip to Cape Town. This shows how selfies are becoming a convenient tool for the visual expression of oneself on Instagram (Nesvadba 2017:2).

The phenomenon is described by Boetker-Smith (2015:99) as “a boundless proliferation of images being made on a daily basis by people who do not necessarily think that the selfie is a reflection of oneself, but do understand that it is a reflection on the representation of oneself”. Goffman (1956:23 cf. Section 1.3.4) postulated that social interactions between individuals are essentially a performance; this unique conceptualisation of identity formation through the metaphor of dramaturgy is highly applicable to the analysis of self in the online world today. The selfie has become a common feature of most digitally connected individuals. The study of the relationship between Goffman’s concept and current research on online identity formation and interaction gives rise to a potentially interesting analysis of the individual’s visual expression of self through this popular feature (Nesvadba 2017:3).

Amfo-Asiedu (2017) states that there has been a positive transition in recent years in how Black women affirm the perception of beauty standards for Black women. This change is seen with the recent euphoria of the ‘Melanin fever’ where the darker skin is becoming desirable and more Black women are proud to embrace the darkness of their skin colour. Hashtags on social media such as ‘Melanin popping’ or ‘My melanin rocks’ are examples hereof. However, one often finds on Instagram women openly admitting to skin bleaching. This indicates how the indoctrination of Western beauty standards are still deeply embedded in Black women’s perception in how they see themselves and what construes the ‘ideal beauty’ in society (ibid.). Black women are socialised into believing their bodies, skin tone, hair, and beauty trends do not comply to the Western society’s expectations of female beauty (Nesvadba 2017:9), thus even with these pro-Black beauty movements, many Black women are still reinforced in their perceptions by the Western beauty standards (ibid.).

2.5.3 Perceptions and re/presentation of the online self

Before discussing what is meant by visual self-representation on social media, we need to think about the term representation and what it means. According to Walker Rettberg (2017:3), representation refers to [sic] “an object, a sign that is seen as constructed in some way, and that stands instead of an object to which it refers”. On the other hand, a presentation is perceived as “an act, something that a person does, so talking about presentations that allow us to analyse the way that the person acts to present themselves” (ibid.). It should be noted that the concepts of representation and presentation are used differently in different fields of study. In this dissertation, I use these concepts similarly than Walker Rettberg’s description of representation and presentation, as explained above.

In his textbook *Representation* (1997), Stuart Hall describes three approaches of representation, namely: reflective, intentional, and constructive. The first, is the *reflective* approach, refers to a reflection of reality: “language like a mirror, to reflect approach” (Hall 1997:24). The second, is the *intentional* approach; in which one assumes that “words mean what the author intends what they should mean.” However, both the reflectional and intentional approaches are seen as flawed by most modern-day theorists. Most theorists today, including Hall see representation as *constructed*, which is the third approach. A representation “it cannot mirror reality because we all have different experiences and interpretations of reality” (ibid.:24). Furthermore, words and images and other representations can be interpreted very differently in different contexts or cultures (Hall 1997:25).

Concerning the representation of the online self, the idea is that self-representation occurs in a social context, through interactions with others. According to Mallan (2009:52), social networking sites are different as they provide new platforms for virtual identities to be constructed, visually presented and, thus, narrated. Participation on social networking sites concerns the act of sharing the individual’s life experiences, or rather her self-perceived and constructed sense of self (personal and social identity), with others (Albrechtslund 2008 in de Aguiar Pereira 2016:16). This understanding is further expanded on by Livingstone (2009:407):

“Selves are constituted through interaction with others and self-actualisation increasingly includes a careful negotiation between the opportunities (for identity, intimacy, sociability) and risks (regarding privacy, misunderstanding, abuse) afforded by Internet-mediated communication”.

The increase in the evolution of digital platforms and online photo sharing has generated a vast body of academic literature on online self-presentation (Nesvadba 2017:3). However, most research has focused on the *if* and *why* a certain demographic group, primarily college students, portray themselves online and exclusively on analysing identity construction on the platform Instagram (Aerni 2014:31). Research found that images on Instagram support the notion of limitless, constructed self (ibid.), thus the objective of this research is to obtain a deeper qualitative understanding of social media behaviour on the social network site, Instagram, by examining the complexities of contemporary self-representation.

2.5.3.1 Visual representations of the self online

Worldwide, people are taking, sharing, and viewing selfies, thus improving the social and cultural importance of the digital self-portrait (Iqani and Schroeder 2015:407). Wendt (2014:10) states that the

act of posting and taking photos has become second nature for young adults of this generation that they post of themselves on SNSs such as Instagram. Many women follow selfie-taking trends, with some of the most common types being the duck face, a facial expression made by pushing one's lip upward to give the impression of pouty lips, group selfies, mirror selfies (one takes a photo of herself in a mirror), gym selfies, and rselfies (relationship selfies) (Nesvadba 2017:9). In addition, snapshots and unposted selfies have been established as another selfie-trend. According to Zuromskis (2013:57), these photos (snapshots and unposted selfies) are usually appearing rushed or casually composed in an attempt to convey a more 'natural', unconstructed, and spontaneous self, with Iqani and Schroeder (2015:409) further describing how these photos are generally connected with family, leisure and friends.

There is an important association between photos being posted online and the notion of traditional beauty and perfection, with 'beautiful' pictures predominantly being posted by women (Aerni 2014:36). According to Ducheneaut et al. [2009:1], online users are predominantly aimed at the Western notion of beauty, with older women striving to create leaner, as well as younger and more fashionable, versions of themselves. In addition, scholars (Aerni 2014:6; Iqani and Schroeder 2015:409) discovered that women attempt to look their 'best' through posing, flexing or smiling, thus attracting attention.

According to Aerni (2014:33), taking a selfie is reported to be more 'complicated' for many women as they think they have to look beautiful in order to post one. Aerni also found that photos deemed 'beautiful' generate the most 'likes', and these 'likes', according to Wendt (2014:27), "act as a compliment, providing both personal validation and the *gift* of beauty of users' networks". Filters and other manipulation tools were utilised in order to enhance appearances (Bullingham and Vasconcelos 2013; Wendt 2014). Furthermore, Warfield (2015:6) discovered that women strive for a balance between an image that portrays them as traditionally beautiful and interesting to an audience, and one generating a connection to the body and one's authentic self. This idea was supported by Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013:106), who found that women generally desire to present themselves as honest or candid rather than completely re-creating a new online persona.

This suggests that users strive to construct a beautiful online self or an exaggerated performance of self with certain claims to authentic identities and experiences that reflect the ideal view of a self that is projected to the outside world. Whether an individual is viewed as portraying an authentic identity is, however, dependent on the definition imposed by the individual (Nesvadba 2017:10). According to Rettberg (2017:15), photos should not be taken as a literal truth representing an authentic self, as it is a way for the user to represent how she could be different. The case of Essena O'Neil (2015), a famous

Instagram user, further supports this claim. She edited the captions of her photos to reveal “manipulation, mundanity, and insecurity behind them” (Hunt 2015), posting descriptions such as:

“I had acne here, this is [was] a lot of make-up. I was smiling because I thought I looked good. Happiness based on aesthetics will suffocate your potential here on earth (Essena O’Neil cited in McNeal 2015)”.

Through the lens of Goffman’s (see Section 1.3.4.1) ideas posting a photo online can be interpreted as front stage acting. It can be linked to the notion of impression management, where one selectively tweaks her appearance. Furthermore, applying the metaphor of the masks, an individual conceals certain attributes while revealing others that contribute to shaping a beautiful, ideal online-self portrayal.

2.5.3.2 Instagram and the filtered reality

Instagram and other SNSs bombard users with an abundance of photos that reinforces the current cultural standards of beauty (Wesseldyk 2017:6). Due to Instagram’s editing application, posted images may not be true reflections of how an individual look, but rather carefully selected and altered representations of herself. These editing features encourage the illusion of ‘perfection’. An individual uses Instagram in order to fulfil a need such as social-acknowledgement, in an attempt to communicate, nurture or maintain social relationships, and to meet a beauty ideal or fashionable trend (Apodaca 2017:5). Some of the women are unaware of how much they rely on Instagram to express themselves and, therefore, do not realise how they re-negotiate their personality and even sense of self (Nilsson 2016:17). It is becoming more and more normal to pose and take pictures of oneself and to post them on Instagram; young women view this as normal behaviour in their everyday lifeworld (Wendt 2014:10).

One key factor that differentiates photos on Instagram from traditional photographs taken with a regular camera is the various filter options offered to the user by Instagram. Wendt (2014:12) states that many people are encouraged to rely upon the post-production and editing process than the initial unedited image. Instagram filters can radically transform the lighting, colour, and contrast of the image with the press of a button, which alters the original image. The filters can be applied to images in order to create a variety of visual effects. The user simply chooses from a series of filter icons that represent various styles of analogue photography to transform the appearance of her photos; many of the filters artificially age images. According to Wendt (2014:13), “the filters and hashtags we add to our selfies enhance our images and make them appear extraordinary to us”. And the *likes* feature acts as a form of reinforcement to the

user, which motivates her via personal validation to continue sharing filtered and edited selfies or even the original selfies depending on what type of selfies an individual like to post of herself.

According to Rettberg (2014:26), filters fascinate the individuals as they give the image of strangeness that defamiliarises her life. The filter makes it clear that the image is not entirely hers through a sense of edited distance. The Instagram-style filters may make the individual's selfies and photos of her everyday life seem unfamiliar, although, the filter itself is often repeated with the result that the defamiliarisation effects wears off and becomes a cliché (ibid.). For the most part, Instagram photos are not intended as art. They are a way of heightening daily experiences and making them special through social approval to the individual herself. By placing filtered selfie images in a blog or an Instagram feed allows the individual to distance herself while seeking a sense of social approval through the promotion of a (new) beauty ideal or trend.

2.5.3.3 Keeping up with being an “Instagrammer”

Newspapers, radio, television, and film used to be conventionally the most studied media platforms by researchers for their use (Apodaca 2017:8). According to Katz et al. (1974 in ibid.:9), the individual is perceived as active in choosing the media she consumes. However, SNSs require the user to take a purposive and active role in participation; whether commenting on pages, liking photos, or following other users. This involvement is driven by various motives such as to engage with others for entertainment or self-promotion; blogging⁵, micro blogging ⁶ or vlogging⁷ (Apodaca 2017:9). In a study conducted by Sheldon and Bryant (2016:90-91), they found that the most common motives for using social media were: to escape perceived problems for emotional release; to enhance personal relationships and sociality, to re-negotiate one's personal identity, and to keep up with/reinforce knowledge about others and to create a personal brand and promote one's business on social media.

The gratifications of using visually-based social network sites mainly emphasise self-expression and visual representations (Sheldon and Bryant 2016:89). There are various reasons why users report using SNSs, namely to keep in touch with old and current friends, to post or look at pictures, to make new friends, and to locate old friends (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke 2008:168-172). Furthermore, DiMicco and Millen

⁵ Blogging is the process of writing a blog, an online journal in which you share your thoughts about a particular subject with readers (Apodaca 2017:9).

⁶ Micro blogging is also an effective form of social media platform which the individuals generally use for creating some short and regular posts (Ellison and Boyd 2013). The companies use microblogs for making regular instant posts regarding their promotions so as to create maximum brand awareness among potential buyers on social network sites (Apodaca 2017:9).

⁷ Vlogging is a blog, or web log, that includes video clips (ibid.).

(2007 in Doherty 2017:24) found that prominent motives for online social networking included themes of social comparison; seeking social acceptance; as well as the desire to be perceived as professional, desirable, and attractive. Women often engage in protective tactics in an attempt to manage her self-presentation, especially when they place more attention and importance on the judgments of other women (Doherty 2017: 24).

Living in a digital age with total control over self-presentation creates another self-esteem contradiction, where self-esteem is enhanced with the ability to choose and edit profile pictures presenting the ideal self (Kearney 2018:9). This constant comparison to other profiles often indicates negative effects on the self, where the individual perceives other women as happier or more successful (Chou and Edge 2012:118). Thus, the same practice used to boost self-esteem may also fail and prove to be detrimental to one's confidence (Diefenbach and Christoforakos 2017:3).

According to Kanter (2018), the more active an individual is on Instagram and the higher the number of her followers become, the more she feels inclined to build a brand name for herself. In addition, engaging on Instagram is not only about posting images anymore but marketing oneself to potential "endorsements" who want to recruit one as a model, blogger or vlogger. In addition to how an individual keeps up with being an Instagrammer is the process to keep up with what is new and trending. Furthermore, the studies conducted by Goffman (1956) and Fiske (2010) demonstrate how individuals adjust their behaviours and interactions in real life in order to fit in today's society. Individuals spend a significant amount of time over SNSs such as Instagram, in order to interact with other people (Nilsson 2016:12). It is not only essential to feel a sense of belonging or being connected to other people at work or at home. An individual also now strives to feel a connection and feel appreciated by her online peers (ibid.).

Couldry (2012:256) termed this sense of belonging or connection with others as a feeling of "togetherness". Being part of this togetherness also involves negative effects. For example, the acronym *FOMO* has been constructed and stands for *fear of missing out* and is especially common amongst young people who spend an immense amount of time on social media (Franchina et al. 2018:1). *FOMO* reflects a sense of having to be constantly connected and taking note of what everyone is doing. The feeling of having *FOMO* means that you do not know exactly what you are missing out on when you are not online, but have a feeling that you are not allowed to participate and experience the fun (ibid.). Researchers found that the pursuit of likes and a sense of appreciation is addictive and affects the dopamine levels in the brain. This hormonal effect on the brain is comparable to the "high" experienced by the use of cocaine

(Phys.org 2014). FOMO has been shown to play a negative role in an individual's life and her well-being, as it is believed to trigger negative emotions such as loneliness, lack of self-worth and depression through social media use because when other users on Instagram portray their lavish lifestyles and achievements, the individual might feel left behind or not meeting the societal expectations of being successful and trendy (Turkle 1995:123).

2.5.4 The influencers of Instagram

The influencers on Instagram can be characterised as “Microcelebrities” or “Instacelebs”. The Instacelebs are a new approach of online performance. These individuals (microcelebrities or instacelebs) expand their recognition by using technologies such as blogs and video vlogs (Senft 2008:184). In addition, Gorry and Westbrook (2009:197) state that influencers “represent a sort of autonomous outsider endorser” that shape individuals’ attitudes by using Instagram due to their influential energy. Therefore, advances have been created to distinguish and track the influencer’s relevance to a given brand or association. The influencer relies on aspects such as the number of followers, ‘likes’ or the number of times a post is shared. The individual with micro-celebrity status or the ‘Instagram celeb’ on social media is often called “social media influencers” or “bloggers” (ibid.). These influencers can vary from well-known to unknown actresses and models, fitness trainers, friends of celebrities, chefs, and affluent people who enjoy the media attention and promoting life-style trends (ibid.). Irrespective of how these individuals perceive their sense of self, they actively display and promote their personal lives to a large number of followers (Abidin 2016:9).

Instagram usage to an ordinary user heightens comparisons between her ordinary everyday life with celebrities and Instacelebrities lavish lifestyles, which could lead to implications for her life satisfaction (Brown and Tiggemann 2016:38). Celebrities use Instagram to share pictures of their personal and professional lives with fans (ibid.). The proliferation of information posted by celebrities further expands as a follower publicise it to her own social network site (Seo and Hyun 2018:2). Celebrity studies posit that celebrities represent and personify the core values of a capitalist economy, such as individualism, consumerism, and materialism (ibid.). The content and images of celebrities disseminated by mass media typically emphasise celebrities as successful, happy, and glamorous (ibid.). Instagram not only increases the volume of celebrity-related information but also promotes disclosure of the more private and personal aspects of their lives, often accompanied with their lavish off-stage life and upscale consumption (Seo and Hyun 2018:2). This intensified exposure to celebrity life, both private and public, via Instagram can become a basis of follower satisfaction through identification with and association to celebrities (ibid.).

Celebrities use the Instagram influencers, also known as Instacelebs to enhance their brand, although, this relationship is interchangeable since the celebrity's brand and her interactions with celebrities enhance Instaceleb status. The Instaceleb gains recognition by potential endorsement companies who want to endorse her in their brands because of her interactions with celebrities.

Instagram usage to an ordinary user heightens comparisons between her ordinary everyday life with the celebrities and Instacelebrities lavish lifestyles, which could lead her having implications for her life satisfaction (ibid.). An individual may imagine and try to imitate the success of her favourite celebrities in the hope of experiencing positive feedback on her Instagram account which also leads to an increase in her sense of life-satisfaction (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017:5). Djafarova and Rushworth's research indicates that women are more predisposed to social influence than men (ibid.). The female user is more susceptible to copying similar kinds of social media posts and be more inclined to purchase goods that become known to her via Instagram, or personally used by her favourite celebrities (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017:5). In the section below, the concept of identity is going to be discussed mainly focusing on digital identity portrayed via Instagram.

2.6 Identity

The concept of identity includes various multifaceted aspects. This has attracted a lot of attention and debate in the social sciences, especially pertaining to how identity influences an individual's sense of self in her everyday lifeworld. Wetherell and Mohanty (2010:390) state that identity is understood either as illuminating an individual's uniqueness of self, character, and personality or as an elusive term that has "no analytical value". For purposes of this research, the concept of *identity* is viewed as being "multiple and fluid" rather than "stagnant" or "crystallised" (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:1). Furthermore, this concept is explained by dividing it into sub-themes of digital identity, how identity is presented on Instagram, and also in as far as how identity is performed and reflected on Instagram. This will give a much broader and multifaceted understanding of the conceptualisation of identity.

This section aims to explore how the concept of identity interfaces with an individual's self-understanding, self-perception, gender, and femininity, as portrayed by the research participants on Instagram.

2.6.1 The conceptualisation of identity

Social psychologists and sociologists widely introduced the concept of identity as a social construct during the twentieth century. Identity is not only extensive in meaning, but it also varies depending on its usage and the study discipline (Ogidi 2015:49). The complex and dynamic nature of "identity" has evoked many

discussions, definitions, and questions regarding the role it plays in understanding an individual's personality, characteristics, and lifeworld (Lawler 2014:1-2). George Herbert Mead (1956:227) described it as follows: "[T]he identity, or *self*, as both a subject and an object that expresses and reflects behaviours of the social groups to which the individual belongs." However, still acknowledging that "selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves". Mead further suggests that individuals construct identities within the social context in which they reside. This implies that for women engaging on Instagram, the SNS delineates a primary social context in which identity emergence occurs. Mead also suggests that the individual must explore the cultural context in which certain norms exist, as it will influence how an individual expresses herself and thus these social norms or behaviours are reflected on Instagram. According to Mead (1956:207), "we divide ourselves up in all sorts of different selves with reference to our acquaintances". In terms of position, social interactions, necessitate various identities, or selves, that an individual outwardly projects towards others. The Meadian concept of identity encompasses "social positions and other roles crucial to the conduct of social activities and relationships" (Holland and Lachicotte 2007:103). This notion of identity differs from that of the psychologist, Erik Erikson, who studied "questions of belonging and of locating oneself in society" (ibid.:102). My research study will mainly examine identity as agency, which is defined as the role created by the individual through behavioural choices.

Her behaviour often defines an individual's identity in front of others. According to Goffman (see Section 1.3.4.1 where I deal with this view of Goffman 1956:10), an individual who appears in the presence of others will mobilise her actions to convey an impression to others—mostly an impression that, Goffman refers in this regard to *front stage* and *backstage* in order to explain the identity performance (ibid.). The front stage concerns an individual's performance and the backstage entails suppressed or unperformed facts. Therefore, identity performance often takes place in the front stage and the backstage mainly consists of the facts that are not performed or displayed to others. In the front stage, impressions are conveyed in two ways, namely, *expressions given* and *expressions given-off* (see Section 1.3.4.2). Expressions given entails verbal expressions and expressions given-off encompasses body language and appearance. Theoretically, an individual has full control over expressions given but minimal control over expressions given-off. The phenomenon of identity performance has been the subject of extensive study in face-to-face interactions. The following section will further elaborate on the concept of identity in the virtual realm.

2.6.2 Digital identity portrayed in the online world of Instagram

According to Phillip Windley (2005:8), digital identity refers to “the data that uniquely describes a person or a thing and contains information about the subject’s relationships to other entities”. An Internet user can create her own social identity, known as her *online identity*. The use of social media has a large effect and impact on how people relate to others, and also how they view themselves and others. Other concepts used to refer to online identity, include ‘online persona’, ‘digiSelf’, and ‘virtual identity’. In contemporary times, people are creating online identities for themselves, similarly to how current media are creating a new type of culture.

A digital identity implies that an individual can pretend to be anyone or everyone when she is online. She can be her ‘true’ self, or someone completely different. The significant interaction of digital identity is based on human interaction, or more specifically, online identities interacting with other online identities in a virtual world (Cubitt 1998). Digital identity is the performer who draws in the audience and inspires the passive audience to become more active, interactive, and creative. Online existence in online communities and digital identities are, therefore often merely web-mediated human interactions. This platform of modern-day media creates new cultures, new ways of presenting the self and interacting with others, as well as interacting with a platform such as Instagram itself (ibid.). Sometimes an individual represents herself online in a narrative form and at other times, she uses visual images, videos, audio, and music.

According to Sherry Turkle (1995:9), “being online and taking things and people at interface value differs from face-to-face interactions”. Turkle (1995) presents this view as presented in her work on *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. She claims that “the Internet is linking millions of people in new spaces that are changing the way we think, the nature of our sexuality, the form of our communities, our very own identities”. Mark Meadows studied online identities and found that virtual selves (avatars) have a significant influence on individuals’ ‘real’ lives (Meadows 2008:67). There is almost no limit to how or within what parameters an individual can express or present herself online. The virtual world fulfils social and entertainment needs by providing the Instagram user with a sense of self and a sense of belonging to the Instagram community. However, there is a risk of having an online identity more especially if the user shares personal information publicly. This can be dangerous because the user might be at risk of being catfished or her Instagram account might be hacked (Meadows 2008:69). In his book, *The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace* (1993:108) Michael Heim questioned the changes in personal identity with the progressing use of technological communication. Heim alluded to the danger of technology eliminating *direct human*

interdependence and argued that while technology may give an individual personal autonomy, it also “disrupts the familiar networks of direct association”, and the individual ends up having less to do with others, and her communication with others becoming more “fragile, airy, and ephemeral even as her connections multiply” (ibid.).

From the above, it is, therefore, clear a digital identity is a manifestation of a real-life identity that exists on Instagram but that is not a single identity. A person can have numerous different digital identities which all serve different purposes and needs. Turkle states that due to “computer-mediated worlds, the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections” (Turkle 1995:15).

2.6.2.1 Identity presented on Instagram

Researchers have found that in the online world, people are extremely identity conscious. In a study conducted by Bargh et al. (2002:38), they found that people are more conscious about their identity while engaging in Internet interactions. The cognitive effort requires an individual to accurately present her identity on Instagram in the form of texts and graphics that make her more concerned about whom she believes she is rather than whom she is when interacting in real life. Studies regarding self-presentation on the Instagram have found that an individual tends to present a better version of herself on the SNS. Jensen-Schau and Gilly (2003:388) discovered that an individual often goes to the extent of associating herself with things that she does not manage to acquire in real life in order to express herself on the SNS. Zhao et al. (2008:1823) found that individuals may tend to subtly express a future better version of themselves on Instagram. However, identity performance varies and it is not the ‘same’ all the time. We have different identities in different places, which is mainly due to changes in context and audience. According to Sherman and Cohen (2006:187):

“The self is composed of different domains, which include an individual’s roles, such as being a student or a parent; values such as being religious or having a sense of humour; social identities, such as membership in groups or organisations and in racial, cultural, and gender groups; and beliefs systems, such as political ideologies; and goals, such as being healthy or succeeding in school”.

All these identities are performed in different settings. For example, in school, the individual performs as a student; in a family, the individual performs as a daughter or a mother; in a church, the individual performs as being religious. An individual therefore frequently adjusts her behaviour based on the identity

she wants to display in front of a particular audience (Papacharissi 2012). Instagram is different from face-to-face interactions and complicates identity performance. In a normal face-to-face interaction, the audience is small and the context-specific, which makes it relatively easy to perform an appropriate identity. However, on Instagram it is often difficult for an individual to perform purely based on her audience and contexts, as Instagram connects many audiences and contexts (Boyd 2008). For example, a woman might not want her family to know her the same way her friends do. This could be an explanation for why an individual tends not to share all her information with everyone on Instagram; she monitors her own activity and shares appropriate information to portray the identity of her choice.

2.6.2.2 Identity performance on Instagram

As previously discussed, (see chapter 1, Section 1.3.4) of Goffman's dramaturgical approach has been used in analysing and understanding online behaviour. Donath (1999:56) uses Goffman's concept of *identity performance* as an explanation for how people on the Internet can use multiple identities for deception. In addition, Schroeder (2002:10) uses Goffman's idea of *stages of performance* and compares it to "frames" in the online world in order to explain different and varying interactions. Goffman's concepts have been further developed and tested in relation to social networking sites. Tufekci (2008:558) studied online social networking sites and found that many of the activities on social media can be explained by Goffman's concepts of *presentation of the self* and *impression management*. She concluded that a user of Instagram—as in the case of Goffman's examples—also tends to use the Internet for expressing herself. In a study concerning privacy on Instagram, which was conducted by Lewis et al. (2008:89), they used Goffman's front and backstage of interaction to explain the private (backstage) and public (front stage) profile of the same user.

Performance of identity on Instagram mainly manifests in issues such as the use of an individual's username, images and descriptions, profile photo and bio; all of these contribute to constructing a user's online identity. The user often uploads photos of herself with friends, at events, and "selfies" in order to make her life appear to play itself out in a certain way. Some Instagram users may present their identity candidly and confidently, while others use online identity as an opportunity to shape themselves as more favourable than others. Most of the research regarding how an individual presents herself to others is based on Goffman's (1956) belief that people modify their identity in an attempt to adhere to societal understandings and expectations. It is true that in many of the academic works mentioned above have different foci and raise different questions. However, these studies emphasise the view that users select and share certain content on Instagram. Users post some material publicly and some is kept private. Based

on these findings, we can conclude that Goffman's dramaturgical approach is an effective way to help us to study Instagram use and particularly how identity comes to play.

2.6.3 Gender performed on Instagram

According to Marwick (2013b:4), "gender is the social understanding of how sex should be experienced and how sex manifests in behaviour, personality, preferences, capabilities and so forth". An individual with female sex organs is expected to embody a feminine gender. While sex and gender are presumed to be biologically connected, we can understand gender as a "sociocultural specific set of norms that are mapped onto a category of sex" (ibid.). Gender is created by media and popular culture (Gauntlett, 2008:23). "Gender is taught by family, schools, peers and nation states. It is reinforced through language, songs, fashion and discourse and is deeply ingrained" (Marwick 2013b:4). Judith Butler conceptualised gender as a "performance". She maintained that the normative understandings of gender and sexuality proliferated through discourse and social interactions. She argued that *gender was performative* as it was produced through millions of people's actions and interactions rather than biology; something that comes naturally to men and women (Butler 1990). A woman wearing make-up is performing femininity. Performances that follow the normative understandings of gender and sexuality are approved, while those that do not follow these norms are admonished (e.g., a boy "throwing like a girl") (Lorber, 1994:17).

Women have traditionally been associated with the consumption of media rather than with their production (Kanai and Dobson 2016:1). SNSs such as Instagram, with user-friendly tools, are integrated into smartphones⁸ and widely used in everyday life, for visual creation (taking pictures), editing and distribution (Vivienne and Burgess 2012:373). This research study focuses on gender performed by women who engage with Instagram. A 2019 survey conducted by Statista.com found that 51% of the distribution of Instagram users worldwide are women and 49% are men (Clement 2019). Instagram usage by females is mainly used to socialise and provide opinions while males use the SNS to collect information and pass the time. Both sexes use the SNS to present their daily life to others (Al-Kandari et al. 2016:2). Women not only engage on Instagram for socialising and sharing their daily life to their users but, also use the SNS to stay up to date with brands and promotions, mostly fashion and beauty related brands; they also comment on their favourite brands more than men do (Vermeren 2015). SNSs such as Instagram are

⁸ A smartphone refers to "a mobile telephone with computer features that may enable it to interact with computerised systems, send emails and access the web" (Hanks 2010:5).

primarily social in nature, which is similar to the social construction of females as more women compared to men are social (Al-Kandari et al. 2016:2).

2.7 Conclusion

With the large numbers of pictures celebrities publish on various social network sites, an individual can be easily influenced in her thinking, what she should desire, as well as how to imitate the values popularised by celebrity sanctioned values, norms, and trends (Marwick 2015; Garsbo and Wittberger, 2014; Marwick 2013a cited in Majilang 2017:4). This cultural phenomenon is especially appropriate and relevant to social media and has dangerous side effects for the self and emotions (Marcus 2015:141). Since the arrival of social media, the disparity between celebrities and the general public, as well as fans and followers, are brought to the fore. This is particularly due to increasing social media accessibility in so far as smartphones, tablets, and laptops are concerned (Majilang 2017: 4). This increased accessibility makes the influence and impact more direct and accessible from celebrities to followers (Marwick and Boyd 2011:357).

This chapter reviews the available literature on female beauty and the presentation of the body on the social network site, Instagram. The chapter begins by examining the body as a social construct and how meanings are attached to the female body across different groups of Black women. The body is seen as the primary source of the self and open to social meanings by others. The meanings attributed to the body as well as its various parts are perceived to have led to change conceptions about the female body and the transitions of how it is represented. For many decades the female body has been portrayed on traditional media platforms but the presence of new and powerful media brings about that the virtual world is an extension of how the female body is embodied and represented. The representation of the female body is mostly influenced by Western beauty standards (long and straight hair, a light skin tone, and a thin body frame), which often led to the negative connotations with regards to the Black body or Black women's sexuality. This is further exemplified by how traditional forms of media (television, radio, billboards) become platforms that promote Western beauty standards. The discussion is followed by how beauty is defined in a Black African context and how perceptions of beauty from an African context embraced the voluptuous (full-figured) body. From a South African context, the Black female beauty is understood and constructed in relation to the Western beauty standard of female beauty as evident in the importance of hair and skin tone, but also incorporating the African voluptuous figure with a tiny waistline.

Furthermore, an exploration of how the concept of beauty has changed and how beauty is defined in the 21st century and the influence of social media on female perceptions and ideals are discussed. This includes femininity, desired facial features and body shape, an individual's online presence and application-based popularity. A detailed discussion followed regarding the social network site, Instagram, how it emerged, the role it plays on the user/s and what motivates women to engage and share personal aspects of their sense of self in the virtual world. In addition, the chapter explores the role and influence celebrities hold on an individual's self-perception and how an individual can improve her online identity by creating a brand name for herself. The chapter concludes by explaining the conceptualisation of identity situating identity in the virtual world. This literature review serves as an insight into how the body and self-image are created/presented on Instagram. The chapter, therefore, provides an overview and insight into the specific topic that this research covers. In the data collection phase, the research focuses specifically on the issues covered in the overview of existing literature. This chapter, therefore, provides the context for this research project.

Chapter 3: Methodological overview

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explain the methodological issues applied within this study by providing the chosen methods and techniques that were utilised in order to reach an understanding of this study's research objectives. This study takes a narrative approach to qualitatively explore how young Black African women experience their sense of femininity against socially-sanctioned beauty ideals, norms and trends as expressed via Instagram. A narrative approach allows for flexibility and fluidity in probing, exploring and questioning specific experiences or understandings. Specific focus is given to a group of individuals who engage via the SNS Instagram, their experiences when engaging on Instagram, how they present themselves online and how their beauty and self-image are influenced by their virtual identity.

The purpose of this chapter is also to conceptualise the narrative approach and how it guides the chosen methods used in order to conduct this study. It will also include a discussion of the qualitative research approach. This is followed by a description of the research questions and the research objectives. The discussion of the narrative approach will include an exploration of the research methods used in order to obtain the data in the study. This chapter will conclude with discussions regarding the ethical considerations that were taken prior, during and after data collection, the process of data analysis used to explore the lived experiences of young women who engage on Instagram and a description of how the qualitative research can be assessed in order to ensure the quality in this research study.

3.2 Qualitative research approach

Qualitative research comprises of social research that aims to describe an individual's lived experiences from the perspective of the individual who participates in it. The main objective of the qualitative research approach is to achieve an understanding of social realities by making an introspection of the unknown patterns that run across and between people in society (Flick, von Kardoff and Steinke 2004:3). This is achieved by positioning an individual's experiences in all its complexity in the core and using these experiences as first stages in an attempt to arrive at an understanding of her social reality. The methods utilised in qualitative research differ from those used in quantitative research. While quantitative research is rooted deeply within positivist frameworks in social research, qualitative research methods entail the use of interpretivist frameworks by attempting to understand social phenomena. In addition, a qualitative research approach follows an inductive approach of reasoning, while quantitative research is mainly a

top-down approach with the theory guiding the data collection process. Qualitative research attempts to describe and understand how human behaviour influences social reality, while quantitative research seeks to predict and explain it (Silverman 2000:5).

The use of the qualitative research approach is appropriate in the current research study, as the researcher sought to gain thick in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon in question, namely the presentation of the ideal body by young Black women who engage on Instagram and how they narrate their lived experiences on the SNS (Palinkas 2014:852). Qualitative research aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of existing perceptions. It also attempts to create a clear interpretation of phenomena through the viewpoint of the individual that encounters a phenomenon in her lifeworld (Jacobsen 2009:34, Palinkas 2014:854). Therefore, the phenomenon is studied within the context where it takes place (Silverman 2011:2). In other words, women who engage on Instagram are studied in the context of how they portray their lifeworlds on this SNS. Within this research study, interpretation is used to explain how women who engage on Instagram attach meanings to certain experiences they are exposed to on Instagram. It is significant to realise that there are multiple realities with regards to this specific phenomenon (Neuman 2012:89). Interpretivist thinking allows the researcher to gain access to the way an individual understands her reality (May 2002:43). Fundamentally, the purpose of qualitative research is to unravel, translate and understand the different perspectives of the individuals involved. Qualitative research does have limitations, especially since questions about generalisation and validity are often part of the critique on qualitative research (Flick 2009:90). Despite this, the use of qualitative research allows for a better understanding of the world and finds its strength in the important aspects of the research process that are intertwined (ibid.).

The use of words, quotes and personal descriptions are used in an attempt to represent the findings in qualitative research. Data is interpreted by assigning importance or a coherent meaning to make it understandable. This is done by unpacking and translating what it originally means living within the phenomenon (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2012:8-9, Neuman 2012:90). The young Black women who experience the phenomenon in their everyday lives, provided the researcher with naturally occurring data and the strength of qualitative research lies in its ability to study data that is unavailable elsewhere (Silverman 2011:4).

3.3 Research aims and questions

The aim of this study is to explore how young upwardly mobile Black African women experience beauty and body perfection via the social media platform, Instagram. Emphasis is placed on the individual (subjective), social (lifeworld) and cultural perceptions (inter-subjective) of eight South African women. Within the realities of this context, focus is given to the images and trends posted on Instagram and how these images influence how a young Black African woman experiences her femininity against socially-sanctioned beauty ideals, norms and trends. Attention is also given to how these young South African women in Bloemfontein re-negotiate and adjust these ideals in order to fit their everyday lived experiences and reality.

The formulation of research questions is an ongoing process that provides an outline for what the study aims to explore. These questions guide the data collection and analysis chapter of the research and should not limit the aim of the study, nor cause tunnel vision (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:108, Flick 2009:98 and Maxwell 2012:88). In order to guide this investigation, the following research questions were specifically designed and they evidently formed an integral part of this study:

1. What characteristics (internal and external) promote an idea of African beauty and uniqueness?
This is the study's main research question/objective. The study explores body and beauty from an African perspective, and it also includes a second and third research question. The purpose of the main research question is to explore how beauty is perceived from the perspective of African women and how their experience is unique and different from one another.
2. How do Black African women perceive and adapt to African-American beauty ideals and norms?
The majority of Black African women's perceptions of their beauty is influenced by African-American beauty ideals, such as Beyoncé, Rihanna and Nicki Minaj; these music icons are mostly influenced by Eurocentric beauty ideals compared to actresses, such as Viola Davis, Lupita Nyong'o and Issa Rae (females who embrace, for example, their natural hair). The purpose is thus to understand how African-American beauty ideals and norms influence young Black women in South Africa by how they re-negotiate their beauty trends to fit into the broader spectrum of beauty.
3. What prompts African women to engage on Instagram? A lot of the content to which young women are exposed and which influences their beauty ideals in the 21st century, comes from social networking sites, such as Instagram. This research question primarily introduces what the

research topic is all about (i.e. the narratives of Instagram engagement by young Black women who portray the ideal body on the social network site). It also encompasses different dialogues related to beauty and femininity experienced from Black women's point of view in a South African context.

3.4 Narrative approach

The narrative approach/inquiry is based on the notion that human beings organise and tell their stories as a way of making sense of their lived experiences. According to Robert Atkinson (2002:123), a narrative study is defined as a "method of looking at life as a whole and as a way of carrying out an in-depth study of individual lives". The narrative approach within qualitative research has become a fundamental element of the burgeoning subfield of the *narrative study of lives* due to its interdisciplinary applications in understanding individual's lives and how an individual plays multiple role in society. Furthermore, the stories in this research study are referred to as meanings of the lived experiences of women who engage on Instagram. The narrative approach provides an individual with the opportunity to tell her story the way she knows and experiences it (Mertova and Webster 2007:15). In qualitative research the narrative approach is used by the researcher to further explore the stories of participants in an attempt to understand how these stories are constructed and positioned (Hickson 2016:380). The narrative researcher's concern lies mainly with what individuals do when they engage in storytelling.

It is through communication via an individual narrating her own lived experiences that the meaning of what was experienced by her is conveyed, thus the narrative approach plays an important and integral role in this study. The narrative approach is a method of data collection, which provides insight into the physical, social and psychological situations of women who engage on Instagram, portraying how they present their reality on the SNS, as opposed to their reality when they are not engaging with the SNS. By implementing the narrative approach, the researcher is able to engage in conversations with the research participants on a personal level in order to understand the experiences they are exposed to when engaging on Instagram. The aim is, therefore, to open up the perceptions and narratives of these women who engage on Instagram and to reconstruct their views of reality (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2012:9). These realities are reconstructed and retold in order to provide an understanding of the lifeworlds of women who engage on Instagram.

According to Seale et al. (2007:49), an individual attaches personal meaning to her experiences. Through retelling her stories, the aim is to emphasise certain aspects of her story and to mould them into a more sociological interpretation. Therefore, a woman who engage on Instagram, might explain in detail what her experience on Instagram is all about and what she experiences when engaging on the SNS. For the *narrative study of lives*, the aim is not only to listen to the stories of these women but also to explore their feelings and their individual emotional experiences that they encounter when engaging on Instagram. For the Instagrammers', their narratives assist in constructing their identity, and through presenting narratives, the reader becomes engaged in the experience of what it entails to be an Instagrammer (Riessman 2008:55).

Subjectivity and inter-subjectivity are interrelated concepts of narrative research. When an individual share her life story, she shares her personal feelings and experiences. However, stories can also be inter-subjective, thus involving the sharing of a culture, including the commonalities of experiences (Overgaard and Zahavi 2009:101). Therefore, narrative research does not only strive to document and understand how an individual portrays her experiences, but it also generates insight into the complexities of human life (Seale et al. 2007:50). A story might be told that is known to a lot of people; for example, why a young woman portrays the ideal self/body on Instagram and what influence does Instagram have on her self-perception, thus encouraging the narrative researcher to further explore the reasons behind the portrayals and subsequent influences on her self-perception. These reasons will differ from woman to woman.

As the narrative researcher of this study I am therefore interested in why young women portray their ideal self and body on Instagram and what influence Instagram has in their everyday lives. I follow this notion that narratives are viewed as social products created by people within their specific contexts, whether social, historical or cultural (May 2002:54). Since an individual is active in interpreting her own world, it is necessary to take a qualitative, interpretivist approach in order to gain a deeper understanding of her lifeworld.

This study utilised a narrative approach in order to collect data via semi-structured in-depth interviews. According to McAdams (1995:54), a narrative interview is used "to interpret and expand upon the meaning that participants have assigned to their experiences and identities". Flick (2009:177) views it as something that "allows the researcher to approach the experiential yet structured world in a

comprehensive way". This process thus allows structure and fluidity in probing the thoughts and memories of participants. This view is further expanded by Harry Hermanns (1995 in Flick 2009:177) who stated that:

"...in the narrative interview, the informant is asked to present the history of an area of interest, in which the interviewee participated, in an ex tempore narrative... the interviewer's task is to make the informant tell the story of the area of interest in question as a consistent story of all relevant events from the beginning to its end".

Narratives provide a biographical description of an individual's experiences in her everyday lifeworld and each participant in my research study was encouraged to reflexively portray her lifeworld and provide testimony of a particular period or experience. This exploration revealed many subjective and inter-subjective situations that participants embraced in relation to personal or shared emotional meanings with the research study. By giving the participants a voice, I was able to obtain rich, in-depth, meaningful and unique understandings and views. However, I was fully aware that my presence as the interviewer, the researcher and audience could influence how the narrative is consciously negotiated and verbally told. This led me to question what impact I had on the narrative structure; the construction (choice of words, chronological sequencing of questions, dates, times and places), the expression (what was revealed or kept private and her emotions) and the interpretation (what the interviewee meant and how I interpreted). This revealed that the interview session and the interpretation of narratives were subjective and intricate. However, by actively engaging this intricacy via reflexivity (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2009:9), I aimed to limit any unconcealed or concealed assumptions and biases.

3.5 Data collection and research methods

The research methods utilised in this study's research process were selected based on its alignment with the qualitative methodological design (O'leary 2004:91). The research questions were designed prior to conducting this research study, they used as a guideline in selecting the most appropriate research methods and were used in the data collection process.

Fieldwork for this study took place over a period of five months, ranging from December 2018 to April 2019 at the University of the Free State (UFS), Bloemfontein campus and also at some of the residences of the participants in Bloemfontein, Free State Province. The narrative research technique was employed

using semi-structured in-depth interviews, guided by an interview schedule and the interviews were audio recorded. The in-depth interviews were used to focus on building a trusting relationship and rapport with a participant in one-on-one or face-to-face interactions. Self-disclosure is important during in-depth discussions when sensitive topics are explored. According to Johnson (in Gubrium and Holstein 2001:104), “in-depth interviews develop and build intimacy; in this respect, they resemble the forms of talking one finds among close friends. They resemble friendship...but in-depth interviews are also very different from the kind of talking one finds between friends, mainly because...a researcher...seeks ‘deep’ information and knowledge”.

Although these interviews were guided by an interview schedule, the researcher was aware that verbal dialogue is fluid and flexible and that narrated experiences are reflected in an individual’s choice of words, verbal explanations and emotional expressions. One way of ensuring ease of communication between the researcher and the participant was to ensure that the narrated data were gathered in a comfortable setting; a location chosen by the participant.

In the following section, the reader is offered a brief description of the abovementioned research methods and how they were put together to be effectively used in this research study. The discussion begins with a description of the procedure that was used in order to select the sample population of this study.

3.5.1 Sampling technique

The purpose of this study was to interview eight young women at the University of the Free State (UFS), Bloemfontein campus, Free State Province who engage on the SNS, Instagram. A non-probability sampling technique was used in order to obtain information for the core analysis of this study. More specifically, two types of non-probability sampling techniques were employed, namely purposive and snowball sampling. The use of purposive sampling or strategic sampling allowed me to be involved in strategically selecting which research participants would form part of the study’s core group. Along with purposive sampling, snowball sampling was used in order to obtain more research participants. Thus, participants already included in the study, referred me to one or two of their fellow Instagram friends.

In this study, the target population is identified as young upwardly mobile Black African women in Bloemfontein, South Africa between the ages of 18 and 29 who engage on Instagram. The criteria for inclusion in this study were participants that are middle to upper class young African women, using

smartphones as only individuals with smartphones can obtain access to social network sites, such as Instagram.

I contacted the first participant via WhatsApp on 28 November 2018 and scheduled an interview session for 5 December 2018 at my residence in Bloemfontein, Free State Province. The second participant was verbally asked to take part in the research study and an interview was scheduled for 9 December 2018. This interview session was conducted on the main campus at the University of the Free State (UFS), Bloemfontein. The third participant was also selected by purposive sampling, more specifically via Drop by Message (DM) on Instagram. The interview session took place at the natural setting (home) of the participant on 11 December 2018. The fourth participant was selected by means of snowball sampling as one of my colleagues gave me the participant's contact numbers, since she was aware that the participant was an active user on Instagram who would be interested to take part in the research study. I stayed in contact with the participant throughout the month of December and scheduled an interview session for 7 January 2019. However, due to her work commitments and unavailability, the interview was cancelled. Again, I used snowball sampling to approach a potential participant who was reluctant at first but agreed to participate after being assured that her identity will remain anonymous. The interview session took place on 27 February 2019 on the main campus of the University of the Free State (UFS). Participants' number five to eight were also selected by means of snowball sampling, as I approached African female students during my tutorial classes at the University of the Free State (UFS) and asked whether they would be willing to participate in the research study that concerned Instagram engagement. Only a few students responded to my emails and agreed to participate in the research study. The interview session with the fifth participant took place on campus on 4 March 2019, with the sixth participant's interview taking place on 29 March 2019. Participant seven had several study commitments and could only be interviewed on 9 April 2019, which also took place on campus. The last participant's interview took place on 17 April 2019. I obtained a significant amount of data from the interviews, although follow-up interviews were scheduled for questions that needed to be elaborated on and clarified.

After receiving the participants' names and contact details, I introduced myself and asked whether they were comfortable with participating in my research study. The participants unanimously agreed, as the research topic did not seem to deal with very sensitive issues that might create discomfort to them. At the onset of this study, I initially assumed that all the participants would be undergraduate students who

spent most of their time on Instagram. However, half of the participants were postgraduate students who engaged on Instagram only when they had free time.

3.5.2 Interviews

In general, interviews involve a researcher that specifically design questions in an attempt to elicit information on a particular topic or theme from an individual. Usually an interview session is conducted verbally between two people, namely the interviewer and the interviewee, with the purpose of gathering thick and detailed information. When an interviewer and interviewee participate in a structured form of conversation, understandings are re-negotiated. It is in this dialectic process that different viewpoints, which Luff (1999:701) refers to as “fractured subjectivities”, are engaged and shared by both the interviewer and interviewee. Luff (1999:701) further elaborates that “both the researcher and respondents speak to each other not from stable and coherent standpoints but from varied perspectives”.

More specifically, this research study made use of semi-structured interviews. The aim of using semi-structured interviews is to open a dialogue by asking open-ended questions in order to obtain in-depth knowledge or insight into the research topic. In the case of narratives of Instagram engagement by young African women, my aim was to understand each woman’s experience with Instagram and how she re-negotiates her beauty ideals, her identity, her femininity, her self-perception and her feelings related to this SNS and how it has an influence in her everyday lifeworld. In order to acquire these detailed lifeworld experiences, I relied on narrative interviews designed to elicit information in the form of thick descriptions and taking into consideration “not only the immediate behaviours in which people are engaged, but also the contextual and experiential understandings of those behaviours that render the event or action meaningful” (Mills et al. 2010:942).

The interview schedule and questions were specifically designed to guide the face-to-face/one-on-one interactions. By formulating the interview schedule thematically, I aimed to obtain a comprehensive perspective of the participants’ motives behind their Instagram engagement, how they presented their body on Instagram, what impact Instagram has on their self-perception and how the reality on Instagram is, as opposed to the actual reality in the real and perceived world. This unfolding inquiry enabled me to probe deep into the aspects of identity and femininity experienced on the virtual world, what role celebrities play specifically on the individuals’ self-perception and body image presented on Instagram

and what role the media, particularly social media, plays in promoting the virtual identity portrayed on Instagram (negative and positive effects of Instagram; motives behind Instagram engagement).

The interview process commenced with all participants verbally agreeing to participate in the study. Firstly, the participants were contacted via phone texts and drop by messages and negotiated a date, time and place of their convenience to conduct the interview/s. One of the participants arranged to meet, but later failed to arrive at the agreed time and place and continuously postponed the arranged meeting time. She later apologised and informed me that it was due to her busy work schedule.

With regards to the eight participants that formed part of the research study, the interviews were conducted in their natural setting (homes), while others were conducted on the University of the Free State (UFS) campus at the Sociology Department Resource Centre in a private and secure space, ensuring no interruptions from environmental influences or third party individuals. The main purpose of the interviews that was conducted at the homes of the participants and/or researcher was to develop a welcoming and hospitable environment, allowing the participant to feel prioritised and comfortable when reflecting on her lived experiences. With the interview sessions that were scheduled on campus as well as those conducted at other venues the researcher attempted to convey a sense of appreciation for the time each participant took to share her narrative.

I formally introduced myself at the interviews, explained the research topic, communicated my level of academic achievement and showed my appreciation and gratitude for their willingness to talk about their experiences. The consent form was explained in a simple, structured and open manner. Each participant had the opportunity to read the consent form and ask for clarity on any aspects they did not understand or found unclear. It was also verbally stated in the consent forms that I obtained approval from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Free State (UFS) (UFS) and of the Head of the Department at the Sociology Department, the Dean of Faculty of Humanities, the Dean of Student Affairs Research Committee and the Vice-Rector of Research of the University to undertake this research study amongst University of the Free State (UFS) students on the Bloemfontein campus.

All the strict ethical considerations that would be undertaken during and after the interview sessions in order to ensure confidentiality were explained to each participant. Furthermore, permission to audio record the interviews was requested from each participant. This request was further expanded on by

relaying its use: firstly, it allowed me with verbatim access to each interview in order to fully understand each response and also to gain insight into the interview discussion. An audio recording provided me with a more in-depth and holistic understanding when engaging with the analysis phase of the dissertation; secondly, to include direct quotes from narratives in the analysis chapter.

After the signing of the consent forms, the actual interview commenced with a 'general introduction' on the basic/biographical information of the participant— (e.g., tell me more about yourself, who you are, where were you born). These questions were structured as such in order to create an environment of openness aimed at building a trusting relationship. These are important aspects to consider because it forms a fundamental basis of an individual's personal identity, which further has an influence on her other identities, namely her social, cultural and virtual identity. When rapport was established, the focus shifted to the participant's Instagram engagement and was incorporated into topics of 'body and identity', 'femininity: experiencing the body' and 'support'. The interview questions concluded by probing the participant's understanding of how Instagram plays a role in how it re-negotiates her body experiences and beauty ideals and how it has an influence on her self-perception. Furthermore, I explored how dis/similar are the research participants' experiences of reality on Instagram compared to their experiences of reality in the real and actual world.

3.6 Ethical considerations

In academic research, the codes of ethics are important, as it sets the relations that the researcher had to follow with the research participants. It is important that I uphold the acceptable ethical standards in order to ensure good ethical practice and the protection of research participants (Flick 2009:36).

Obtaining ethical clearance prior to conducting the study was an important process, as it ensured that I was able to conduct myself in an appropriate manner and also ensured the support of the University of the Free State (UFS) in case anything unintendedly happened. Applying to the board of the Ethics Committee was a prolonged procedure. This is due to fact that the Ethics Committee required me to elaborate on certain ethical considerations and also requested that I include an approval letter from the Head of the Department at the Department of Sociology, the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities as well as the Dean of Student Affairs Research Committee and the Vice-Rector of Research. Formal ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State (UFS); ethical clearance number—**UFS-HUM-2017/1294**. Further discussion regarding the main

ethical principles that were put into practice when conducting the fieldwork with the research participants, follows.

After participants signed and indicated that they understood the informed consent form, I informed them about the aims of the study, including the research phenomenon that was going to be explored in the scope of the research. In addition, participants were assured that they are free to withdraw from the research study at any point, should they feel uncomfortable or for some reason not want to further participate in the research study.

The participants were also allowed to withdraw any comments made during the interview session/s. The research participants gave permission that I may use an audio-recording device to record the interviews. The reasons for the audio-recording of the interviews were given to the participants. Only I have access to the audio-recordings. The transcripts of the audio-recordings are kept in a secure location in a locked cupboard at the researcher's private residence.

The main ethical principle that was implemented during and after the research study was to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants' identity and safety. The research participants were given the option to provide the researcher with pseudonyms of their choice, if they preferred that their real names should not appear in the study. Some participants' chose this option and the researcher provided them with pseudonyms. While working with the transcripts and informed consent forms, I kept within the ethical boundaries of confidentiality, personal bias and trustworthiness by not divulging any information, such as the collected data, narratives or experiences these issues were not discussed with any individual other than my supervisor. Since the majority of the participants used pseudonyms, they were unable to be identified. I was aware that my own personal bias may have influenced how the collected narratives were interpreted and understood within the analysis chapter and therefore applied conscious reflexivity whilst working with the research findings.

The research participants were requested not to disclose, publish or otherwise make known to unauthorised individuals or to the public any information that was obtained during the process of this research study that could be identified by the individuals who participated in the study.

3.7 Data analysis

The two most important aspects of a research study are *data analysis and interpretation of findings* (Flick, von Kardoff and Steinke 2004:193). The numerous ideas generated by the interviews or which were found in the observational data, need to be described and summarised (Lacey and Luff 2007:6). During the process of data analysis, the researcher prepares and organises the data by reducing it into themes by means of a process called *coding*. These codes are reduced and evidently, the data can be presented in figures, tables or discussions (Creswell 2007:148). The researcher aligns the outlined codes with the main research questions of the research study (Perri 6 and Bellamy 2012:11). The researcher has to arrange the data in such a manner in order to make it easy for her to know what type of information will be useful to include in the research study. In order to perform this task effectively, the researcher has to code all her field notes too. This is done in order to create a personal directory of all the participants that were involved and the topics that were discussed during the fieldwork (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:131).

According to Denzin (1997:127), there are various ways in which narratives can be analysed, which include: semiotic, rhetorical, topological, structural, feminist micro-level and thematic. In qualitative research five broad forms of data are considered, namely physical objects, still images, moving images and written words (Bernard and Ryan 2010:10). In this study, the researcher converted sounds (audio recordings) into words (i.e. in the form of transcripts), from which the codes that developed into themes, emerged. During the analytical process, *thematic analysis* was used in order for the researcher to comprehend and understand the data. According to Willig (2014:147), thematic analysis involves the “process of identifying themes in the data which carry meaning that is relevant to the research question”. Thus, thematic analysis assists the researcher to identify certain patterns or similarities in the data. In analysing the data, I made use of the phenomenological approach. When using the phenomenological approach, one is devoted to staying very close to the phenomenon that is being analysed in order to ensure that it is the participant’s narratives that guide the interpretation of the data (ibid.).

Thus, I attempt to set aside my own personal biases (Creswell 2007:159) and theoretical knowledge in an attempt to direct the attention on the participant’s narratives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000 in Jonny Saldaña 2013:134) assert that qualitative researchers should follow “fluid inquiry” that refers to “a way of thinking in which inquiry is not clearly governed by theories, methodological tactics and strategies”. However, this is not entirely possible to ensure that the researcher’s personal bias and experiences do

not have an influence in how the participants' narratives are analysed. While working with the data, I had to rely on a "priori" approach. Thus, I began by using a "selective approach" (detailed examination of every single sentence), followed by a "holistic approach" (van Manen 1990:106). Using these approaches, allowed me to unpack every single word, including the meanings of the participants' narratives with the purpose of understanding their subsequent meanings. However, not only words alone are able to uncover the meanings of the participants' experiences. The body language expressed by the participants also reveal certain meanings and therefore it is important to take into account the verbal meanings (words) and nonverbal meanings (facial and bodily expressions) that are expressed by the participants during the narrative interview session. Often the unspoken language reveal meanings that can otherwise not be expressed verbally.

In addition to using the phenomenological approach to data analysis, the significance of using an inductive approach which involves an understanding derived from a theoretical perspective as well as the comprehension of the literature reviewed has been adhered to. This approach guided me to generate the main themes, which are included in the presentation of the findings. According to Carla Willig (2014:143), it is impossible for a researcher to enter the field without investigating a theoretical framework on the phenomenon they are exploring. The theoretical frameworks that were employed in this study are therefore important in assisting me with finding a way into the data.

As already explained earlier on in this section, the narratives of the participants were recorded during the interviews and later transcribed. These transcriptions are the exact words that were said by the participants during the interview sessions, thus it reflects the lived experiences as recalled by the participants.

3.8 Ensuring rigour in qualitative research

In all research, including qualitative research, *reliability* and *validity* are important aspects to consider. Demonstrating rigour in qualitative data analysis is especially important given a common criticism that qualitative results are subjective (Lacey and Luff 2007:26). Increasingly, journal editors and funders are using 'checklists' of criteria or questions for assessing the reliability and validity of qualitative research. In the following section, focus will be on the issues of reliability and validity in the context of qualitative data analysis.

3.8.1 Reliability

The term *reliability* is used to refer to the *dependability* of the findings in qualitative research (Mertova and Webster 2007:23-91). Dependability means that the findings should be reproducible and that it is expected to be confirmed at other times by different other researchers (Kvale 2007:81). In qualitative research one of the ways to measure the reliability of the findings is through documenting the data by using a good quality audio recorder of which the recording then later gets transcribed (Creswell 2007:209). During the interview sessions, I used an audio recorder to capture the narratives of the participants and later produced detailed documents in the form of the transcripts. Also, to enhance the dependability of data, the interviewer should undergo interviewing training and the interview schedules should be checked after test interviews or after the first interview (Flick 2009:386). The Postgraduate School at the University of the Free State (UFS) regularly presents workshops in order to equip researchers with the knowledge and skills of how to conduct qualitative interviews. After conducting the interview sessions in this research study, follow-up interviews were held in order to get clarity on questions that were unclear and also to assess the validity of the interview schedule.

3.8.2 Validity

Validity refers to how truthful a research study is. When a study is valid, it creates a bridge between the phenomenon and the findings (Neuman 2000:171). It can also refer to the authenticity of the study, which states that the researcher gives “a fair, honest and balanced account of social life from the viewpoint of someone who lives it every day” (ibid.). Subsequently, qualitative research is not very interested in acquiring empirical data, but rather concerned with giving a sincere presentation of social life that upholds the authentic experiences of the participants (Maxwell 2012:138). For ensuring validity in this research study, three of the five types of validity, as proposed by Joseph A. Maxwell (2012) were employed:

1. *Descriptive validity* refers to the “factual account” of an interviewee’s narratives” (ibid.:134). This was acquired through accurately recording the interviews and by making field notes of what has been seen, heard and felt during each participant’s interview. The gathered narratives were transcribed into written words for the analysis. Apart from ensuring that data was accurately captured, I could not fully assure that the interview session and posed questions resulted in accurate or truthful responses. In an attempt to try to eliminate this limitation, I relied more on a conversational style and used open-ended questions, which encouraged the research participants to provide more detailed narratives about their lived experiences on Instagram.

2. I also employed *internal validity or credibility*, where attention is given to the value and authenticity of descriptions and interpretations of an experience. Credibility to a large extent depends on the relationship built between a researcher and the research participant, including the commonalities found, such as gender, age, how they re-negotiate their femininity by socially-sanctioned beauty ideals, experiences of the body and how they construct identity, for example.
3. Theoretical validity was another type of validity that was employed in the research study. This type of validity encompasses the “theoretical constructs” employed in developing a study (Maxwell 2012:140). Furthermore, it is concerned with the relevance in any other research study, as the theoretical frameworks not only provide a foundational basis to a particular study, but also reveals a concrete and valid platform to contextualise the study’s interview schedule and research findings. This research study was positioned in the theoretical frameworks of Alfred Schütz’s phenomenology, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s social construction of reality, Joseph Kotarba’s existential sociology, Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical approach, post-feminist thoughts by theorists, such as Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, as well as Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality interlinking the standpoint theory by Patricia Hill Collins (refer to chapter 1, Section 1.3.6). The key insights from these theories assisted me with constructing the research questions and are reflected in the interview schedule.

3.9 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a methodological framework on the methods and techniques that were used in order to reach an understanding of this research study. The narrative approach was employed, as it allowed for flexibility and fluidity in probing specific questions/experiences or understandings. In addition, the narrative approach highlights the significance of the stories that individuals tell regarding their experiences and how they tell it. This approach was also useful in obtaining rich data (full descriptions) from the research participants. Such data was obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews guided by an interview schedule. Furthermore, the ethical considerations were also discussed together with the methods that were used in order to ensure that the quality of the research study was of a high standard.

Chapter 4: Instagram engagement: displaying identity in the virtual world

4.1 Introduction

This chapter encompasses a thematic analysis grounded in the narratives gathered during the data collection process within the interpretative phenomenological frameworks of Alfred Schütz's *Lifeworld* (1970:14), Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's (1966:33) *Social construction of reality* and Erving Goffman's *Dramaturgical theory* (1956:10-11). In chapter one of *Front and Backstage performance* and *Impression management*, I dealt with these theoretical frameworks. See in the particular Sections 1.3.1, 1.3.2 and 1.3.3 of this dissertation. These frameworks situate the study's analysis and findings. These analytical frameworks assist with highlighting the participants' perceptions, notions and interpretations regarding Instagram engagement. The findings are demonstrated and augmented with direct quotes from the participants.

The findings are grouped under the broad themes of *engagement* and *identity*. Each theme is expanded on to elaborate the perspectives related to Instagram engagement (e.g., the motives behind Instagram engagement, the differences between Instagram and other social media platforms, the participants' lived experiences with Instagram, and the influence it is perceived to have on the participants' identity, body image and self-perception).

As part of the digital online community, the participants engage in ongoing interactions and relations, which are all real to them. According to the theoretical frameworks relating to the *lifeworld* and the *social construction of reality*, the everyday life presents itself as a reality that is open to interpretation by human beings. It is essentially the lifeworld that is subjectively meaningful to them. Through their engagement on Instagram, the participants communicate meaning relating to how they socially construct their online identities and the subjective experiences and inter-subjective experiences that they share with other Instagram users. The theme of motives behind Instagram usage is supported by the sub-themes of Instagram likes, which include the motive behind self-promotion and approval, and the impact that comments have on Instagrammers' (negative or positive reinforcement). The next theme involves Instagram versus other social media platforms, followed by the theme of lived experiences on Instagram; with the sub-themes being revealing 'self' on Instagram, gendered spaces: shared experiences on Instagram and the influence of Instagram on Instagrammers' everyday lives.

The last theme relating to body and identity entails a discussion about how the body is displayed and how an individual constructs her identity in the virtual world of Instagram. This theme is supported by the sub-

themes of perception of self on Instagram: thus, how an individual perceives and experiences her online self. The second sub-theme concerns the influence of Instagram on self-image while the third sub-theme pertains to the impact of Instagram on body image. The idea behind linking these themes and using these perspectives is to provide an explanation of the analysis of the data on participants' engagement with Instagram and how it influences their everyday lives and shapes their identity.

In Chapter 5 (Femininity, African beauty standards and virtual belonging), the focus is on the relationship between the experiences of the female body and African beauty standards. The emphasis is on how social media influence the re-negotiation of African women's bodies and their conception of beauty, as portrayed on SNSs such as Instagram.

4.2 Introduction of participants

This research relies on the personal experiences of eight young women who regularly engage on Instagram. In this section, I briefly introduce each participant. These descriptions are not intended to breach confidentiality by revealing who the participants are, but rather to provide an understanding of their narratives. I only refer to the participants by using their pseudonyms and share certain aspects of their lifeworld that emphasise or contribute to the analyses of their experiences on Instagram. All the participants are full-time students, with four of the participants being postgraduate students and the other four undergraduate students. Four of the participants are employed part-time, three are unemployed and one is employed on a full-time basis. This section not only provides an outline of who the participants are but also reveals when they started using Instagram and how they learned about this platform. I began the interview session by asking each participant when she started using Instagram. The aim of asking this question was to lead the narrative in order to determine the motives behind Instagram engagement.

The first participant, named Lerato is a single, 25-year-old student who is currently enrolled for her Master's in South African Sign Language and Deaf Studies. Lerato learned about Instagram via Facebook as the two social media platforms have linked accounts. When you post a picture on Instagram, you can simultaneously upload the same picture on Facebook. Instagram became known to her when she saw her Facebook friends posting pictures from their Instagram accounts to their Facebook accounts.

Lerato: I began using Instagram in 2013. [Pause]. I could say 2013.

Researcher: How did you find out about it? (From a friend, the media or other social media platforms?)

Lerato: I found out about it via Facebook; it was another social media platform that was emerging.

The second participant, Palesa is a single, 26-year-old student who is enrolled for her Honours in Social Sciences with specialisation in Sociology. Palesa joined Instagram because of the *Fear of Missing Out* (cf. Section 2.5.3.3). She was curious and wanted to become part of what people talked about and felt as if these people had a language of their own. The main reason why she joined was because of the students she tutors. She realised that in order to be able to engage better with her students, she needed to know what was trending for them; what slang words they used, especially since students are very likely to express themselves in class using a slang word with which she might be unfamiliar. In order to avoid being labelled as arrogant and in an attempt not to isolate herself from her students, she joined Instagram. Palesa felt pressured to become part of this online community in an attempt to feel a sense of belonging with her fellow students. She also joined Instagram because she was curious to learn more about celebrities' lives as they seemed to be living a life more exciting and extraordinary than a normal person such as herself. The curiosity of wanting to know how celebrities live, as it appears that they have the ideal type of lifestyle, could be seen as a positive reinforcement for Palesa, for her engaging on Instagram.

Palesa: I started using Instagram in 2017 because of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) honestly, and I always wanted to be part of the topic of what people knew about. And I always felt like more often than not people had their own language of what was happening and I had never known what was happening. The only way for me to engage on that level was for me actually have Instagram. So, I think on a ... (pause) in a diluted way it was because of peer pressure to know what everybody else was doing and to follow celebrities. Because you want to know what their lives are like; is it as normal as mine, is it as glamorous as it appears on TV, how their everyday life is, so yah. I joined because of the work I want to do. I realised that I need to know what's on trend, what the kids are doing, so I am also in the know of what's happening. And, also to know, you know, how horrible it is when people are discussing something like it's a term that everybody knows and then I'm sitting there: like what does this mean? You know, you look like you are stuck up. You are isolated from everybody. So, I was just like. No! And this is not working out for me. I need to know what the masses are talking about. My cell phone already had the app for me to basically if I

wanted to activate it, I could activate it. But I had a friend to help me with the name and the picture so that you could look more presentable and basically get more followers.

The third participant, Buyelwa is a single, 26-year-old student, currently enrolled for her Master's in Gender Studies. Her study explores feminist theories (where the movement began, how it progresses and also exploring the rights of women and children). Buyelwa could not provide a reason for joining Instagram, as it was too long ago that she started using the platform.

Buyelwa: Kana (it is used to confirm or ask something), when? 2012...2013. Wait I'm trying to think. I think in 2013... 2013 yah. And, I found out about it from other social media platforms (thinking). I can't remember which though?

The fourth participant, Nomthandazo is a single mother and a 29-year-old student who is currently enrolled for her PhD in Sociology. Her study explores community participation in the management of community development trusts. Nomthandazo learned about Instagram the same way Lerato did. She saw friends uploading their pictures from their Instagram account directly on Facebook. They tagged their Facebook page, resulting in their images simultaneously showing on their social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook). Nomthandazo also followed fashion pages on Facebook but could not access the images and were routed to a link on Instagram in order to access the pictures. However, due to her boyfriend joining Instagram, she also opened her account. Nomthandazo is a fashion-conscious person who loves clothes and follows the latest fashion trends. She joined Instagram because there were more fashion pages on Instagram compared to Facebook.

Nomthandazo: I think I opened my Instagram account in 2015, I think. Somewhere around June/July but, then it was in winter. Okay, I think I've always seen it. Okay, when you go to Facebook you are able to tag a picture you uploaded from your Instagram account into your Facebook account. So, that's when I started noticing Instagram and then, I think also it would be there were so many fashion pages that I was following on my Facebook account then. What would happen is that when I would try to look at some of the pictures they wouldn't appear and they would be maybe a link that you should follow this page on Instagram. That's where you would see more of these outfits then.

Okay, that's not when I actually opened the account... I think my boyfriend at that time he opened his Instagram account, then I think I opened mine.

The fifth participant, Zintle is a 22-year-old undergraduate student currently registered for a degree in Social Sciences, majoring in Psychology and Criminology. She is not only an Instagram user but has changed her Instagram account into a business account blog (refer to literature review, cf. Section 2.5.3.3) where she promotes cosmetic products on her Instagram account. Zintle found out about Instagram when she was still in high school. After saving money to buy a new phone, she joined Instagram. Previously, she could only see people posting pictures, but she did not have access to Instagram.

Zintle: I began using Instagram late 2017, like November so. I found out about Instagram a long time ago. I think I was in high school. Since, well, I didn't have money to buy a proper phone because people were taking like nice pictures for Instagram. So, I was like: Oh, I am not interested in Instagram, I'll just stick to Facebook. And then once I saved up because I bought my own phone; so, once I've saved up enough money and then I bought this phone I was able to uhm join Instagram. I found out about Instagram from my friends in high school.

The sixth participant, Lihlumile is an 18-year-old undergraduate student who is currently enrolled for her degree Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Communication Science and Psychology. Similar to Palesa, Lihlumile also joined Instagram because of her curiosity to see what the SNS entails.

Lihlumile: I joined Instagram (pause) in 2015. I found out about it from a friend. Uhm, I saw a post and they were talking about it so I actually wanted to see what it is and yah.

The seventh participant, Nikiwe is a 19-year-old undergraduate student who is currently doing a degree in Arts majoring in Political Science and Communication Science. Nikiwe also found about Instagram from a friend and began using the social media platform in 2017.

Nikiwe: I think I started using Instagram in 2017. I found out about it from a friend.

The eighth participant, Pebbles is a 22-year-old undergraduate student currently registered for her degree in Social Science majoring in Criminology and Psychology. Pebbles joined Instagram in 2011 and learned about it from other SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter.

Pebbles: I began using Instagram in 2011 and I found out about it from SNSs and friends.

Researcher: From which social network site did you found out about it?

Pebbles: Uhm Facebook and Twitter.

The purpose behind introducing the participants above is to provide an idea of who each participant is. They were asked about the reason why they began using Instagram and how they found out about it. The following section will introduce the first theme of the analysis chapter in this dissertation and the reasons why participants engage with Instagram.

4.3 Motives behind Instagram usage

The first theme of engagement focuses on the motives (reasons) behind usage. Social networking sites (SNSs) fulfil many needs and wants via virtual communication. It is a convenient method of communication that provides an individual with the ability to stay connected with friends and family (see chapter 2, Section 2.5). Instagram is a relatively new form of SNS where a user can share her updates to her account by taking photos and tweaking it by using filters. The benefits of engaging on Instagram include the following: to keep in touch with old friends and current friends, to post or look at pictures, to make new friends and to locate old ones, to gain access into celebrities' lives, to gain more knowledge (e.g., politics, social movements, beauty tips, entertainment news, business and travel), to follow social movement pages, fitness and health pages, quotes (e.g., motivational, spiritual, inspirational and entertainment), for music, fashion, art and celebrity gossip. The benefits of engaging on Instagram were dealt with in more detail in literature review in Section 2.5.1. Seeking social acceptance and social comparison, as well as the desire to be perceived as professional, desirable and attractive are some of the reasons for engaging on Instagram (Doherty 2017:24). Women participate more on Instagram than men. The platform provides a social link to the user's favourite celebrities and brands in one easy-to-use application (Wesseldyk 2017:8).

The focus on this sub-theme is looking at the personal motives the participants have for their engagement with Instagram. Instagram caters for different individuals and the motivations behind Instagram engagement for each individual are different based on her personality, interests and her influence from other institutions in her life, such as family, friends, school, church and media. The following narratives illustrate the reasons why the participants joined Instagram.

Lerato joined Instagram because it was a new and trending SNS. Instagram is also picture-orientated and she prefers it more than Facebook. She prefers posting pictures of herself rather than writing about herself, as she does not want to reveal who she is. Posting pictures of herself allows her to have control over her online identity, thus her followers only have access to the pictures she posts. By not revealing herself as an individual to others on Instagram, she is able to protect the real Lerato from her online self.

Lerato: It was the 'in thing'. It was a new 'in thing' on social media. So, I was like: Yeah, let's do this. Yeah, I think it was because it was a new social platform where it's just pictures, not like Facebook. Not like Facebook where you can write about your life or whatever. Instagram was just where people could see who Lerato is from a physical point of view...Yah, not like Facebook where you write about who you are. On Instagram it shows who you are, physically...yah.

For Zintle, like Lerato, Instagram was a new social network site that was trending and she found it fascinating because it gave her an opportunity to see the celebrities' lifestyles but, her main reason for joining Instagram soon shifted when she decided to change her account into a blog and a business account. The main reason behind this shift was to use her Instagram account in an advantageous way, thus creating her own blog. Zintle is an active user on Instagram. Her role as a micro blogger requires her to be active on Instagram by posting images of herself or the brand she is promoting, commenting on followers' questions and also giving advice (see chapter 2, Section 2.5.3.3). Being a micro blogger can be motivated by various reasons and for Zintle it was mainly to influence other people's choices with regard to buying cosmetic products from the cosmetic brand, known as *Wet n Wild* and also for self-promotion in order to be recognised by other potential brands on Instagram. Zintle is the only participant who uses her Instagram account for business purposes. The other participants use their accounts merely for entertainment.

Zintle: Okay, so now there are different stories, neh (right!). So, at first, I joined Instagram because it was just the 'in thing'. I just wanted to join (cheerful voice). I just wanted to see the celebrities and just wanted to see other people. It was not actually about me; it was about seeing other people. But now it has shifted because I've actually started changing uhm, even my Instagram account into like a personal blog: where I am actually like very obsessed with like clear skin; helping people, who have like acne problems because I hate acne. So, I've changed my Instagram account into like a business account where I can advise

people on which products to use depending on their skin types, such things. So, now it's not about other people anymore. It's about me trying to influence other people, you know. So that's how it shifted. Even my pictures: I don't post pictures where I party, such things. Now it's more dignified, it's more like it's a business account; I'm not supposed to do those things.

Palesa's main reason for joining Instagram was for aspirational and role modelling purposes. She draws inspiration from celebrities' lives because she finds their lives more interesting and inspirational than those of ordinary people. She mentions one of the celebrities she follows is Nomzamo Mbatha, a South African actress and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Goodwill Ambassador, Face of Neutrogena, Puma ambassador and Audi ambassador (SA). Nomzamo's life story began with humble beginnings, challenges of hardship and loss of her loved ones (her grandmother, father, older sister and cousin). She emerged victoriously from her hardships and made herself a household name in the South African entertainment industry. She is now known as an international actress starring in the upcoming *Coming to America 2* film. This inspirational story of Nomzamo is living testimony that anything is possible. Thus, Palesa follows celebrities like Nomzamo because she sees her as a role model, someone who looks like her and might share certain similarities with her upbringing. Nomzamo, therefore, asserts that she can aspire to be anything in life. Palesa also made mention of how she admires Nomzamo's work ethic, as well as her travels around the world, as they are not only for leisure or entertainment purposes but for a deeper purpose (making a difference in unprivileged communities in Africa). Based on Palesa's narratives, she aspires to live a luxurious lifestyle but one that has meaning and purpose for people as well.

Palesa: I joined it because I honestly just wanted to know about what other people's lives are like. You know, you, want to have a front row seat to see what people are up to. Is it as interesting as I perceive it to be?

Researcher: And then you refer to what other people's lives are about, what type of people like your ordinary people do?

Palesa: Uhm, more... the majority of the people that I follow are celebrities. So, I follow celebrities but now and then I will accept ordinary people. They don't...their lives do not necessarily fascinate me as much as if I'm watching or

I'm following Nomzamo Mbatha for example, and I see how basically she travels around the world. And I am interested in seeing that, so yah.

Lihlumile, similar to Palesa's main reason for engaging on Instagram, wants to follow the lives of the celebrities. The reason could also be linked to the fact that most celebrities portray an *ideal* type of lifestyle of success and a lavish lifestyle that most ordinary individuals aspire to or are inspired to have; thus being able to gain access into seeing this lifestyle makes an individual want to see more of the lifestyle and what motivated them to attain it. The motivations behind Instagram engagement are positive, especially for young Black women like Lihlumile and Palesa, where they can look for role models (e.g., Nomzamo Mbatha) and where they can look for validation and reasons to exist.

Lihlumile: I was at first very curious about knowing what it is and then until I got to know what it actually is and then, I'm just using it for posting pictures and keeping up with my celebrities.

Pebbles: 'Cos I was a very curious person. I wanted to find out what people are actually talking about; what was the hype around the whole Instagram thing.

Lihlumile and Pebbles' main reason for joining Instagram was for knowledge seeking purposes because when you are curious, you are seeking knowledge; you want to know, you have unanswered questions. They engage on Instagram to see people that are like-minded. Instagram is a validation of beauty and also existential validation. This existential validation relates to the existential sociology in how an individual when interacting with her followers on Instagram communicates meaning, feelings and emotions and how her followers view her inter-subjectively and how, this subjectively also shapes how she perceives herself (see the theoretical frameworks on existential sociology for more detail in chapter 1, Section 1.3.3). Instagram creates a space for different social dynamics.

Nomthandazo joined Instagram as she saw it as an upgrade from Facebook; something different (an 'escape' from Facebook and starting afresh). That meant that she was creating a new digital identity on Instagram. The "upgrade" from Facebook to Instagram that she is referring to pertains to the quality of pictures that Instagram have, such as applying filters, tweaking of pictures, being able to link your Instagram account to your Facebook account and share your photos from Instagram directly to

Facebook—distinct features that the social network site has which appeal to its users. Nomthandazo is fashion-conscious and enjoys looking good in pictures; she emphasises how Instagram has good quality pictures compared to Facebook. Also, she made mention of the type of lifestyle portrayed on Instagram and she was fascinated by the people and type of clothes they wore—all these things caught her attention. She talked about the “exclusivity” of clothing she is exposed to when engaging on Instagram. This shows how Nomthandazo likes being unique. For her, Instagram promotes an *ideal* type of lifestyle that appeals to the users.

Nomthandazo: Haaie (deep sigh)! For me at that time, I think Instagram was like an upgrade of Facebook. I was at that time, I was so tired of seeing the same old thing: people uploading pictures or maybe just writing what’s on their mind but, not only what’s on their mind. It will maybe be people writing lyrics of their favourite songs and everything. But I just wanted to see something new and for me: like Instagram—everything was like better. It was the pictures, the lifestyle on Instagram, and the people. I think more than anything I was fascinated with the people on Instagram. The way they dressed. So that was amongst the reasons. And then what else (thinking)? Oh, I think for me another thing was like: okay at that time, or I felt like it was more private than Facebook or there were certain people that at that time I wanted to remove from my Facebook account. So, for me opening the Instagram account was like an escape in a way. So, starting things afresh.

Nikiwe uses her account differently, as opposed to the other participants, because she does not post pictures of herself. She uses her Instagram account to educate and empower her followers by posting content that is empowering and educational because, according to her, her followers gain nothing from her posting images of herself. The question I asked was what made her use her account differently. She responded that she realised that people portray a “façade” on Instagram without having shown any authenticity. Thus, people mask or conceal certain aspects of their identity and lives for various reasons, such as protecting their private life from their virtual world. However, it results in the individuals never revealing their true self, as they are constantly putting up a façade. She also mentioned that the more exposure she had on Instagram, the more she found Instagram pages that resonate with her character (e.g., things she likes and that have meaning for her). These include black consciousness movements, feminist movements (the fight for equal rights for women and men, protests against violence against

women and children and mental health issues) changed her perception of Instagram and resulted in her account being used as a platform to educate and empower through words (e.g., her quotes) and to create a sense of belonging for other like-minded individuals. Thus, for Nikiwe, deriving self-gratification from posting selfies of herself on Instagram is not important. She rather uses Instagram as a virtual space to educate the self and others, to access information and knowledge, giving a voice to the voiceless individuals. For the other participants, their use of Instagram is for aspiration, motivation and validation of the individual's belonging. However, for Nikiwe, her sense of self is communal and shared with a community of like-minded individuals who may also share similar experiences with her. This does not make other participants seem self-centred, it just indicates that Nikiwe uses Instagram for various other reasons. She uses Instagram as a platform to raise awareness on societal issues, to inform others as some people have limited or no access to educational facilities but the majority of people have smartphones, thus they have access to social network sites such as Instagram. Instagram is easily accessible and a person simply needs a photo, data and knowledge thereof. Nikiwe views Instagram as a learning platform and not merely for self-promotion and entertainment purposes. Nikiwe also mentions how Instagram allows her to differentiate between the real and ideal self. The other participants mentioned the quality of pictures on Instagram and the subsequent features, for example, filters and cropping of photos, allowing users to change how they look in an attempt to appear more appealing. However, Nikiwe is not interested in these features and only focuses on Instagram as a platform where people share knowledge and raise awareness on societal issues.

Nikiwe: In the beginning it was just to see how everyone else "functions", you know yah...trends. Because I saw that what I saw on Instagram was just a façade of what people wanted all of us to see. It wasn't anything real, anything that could actually change our lives... in the beginning. But now I feel like Instagram stands up for something that is actually real. Because, you find pages such as on the black consciousness movement for instance, feminine rights, mental health awareness, violence against women and children. I feel like I can raise awareness on such issues more than just to take seemingly selfies on myself that do not actually help someone out there, educate or empower.

In summary, this particular theme, namely the motivations behind Instagram usage, revealed that the reason that most of the participants use Instagram is because they were curious about the 'hype' surrounding Instagram and wanted to be a part thereof. Also, the new

social network site is mainly used for self-fulfilment, aspiration and entertainment. The main idea behind the motives of the participants' engagement with Instagram is to be able to have access to a world that they do not necessarily engage in their everyday lifeworld. Thus, they live vicariously through viewing other people's lives (celebrities, instacelebrities and ordinary people living their best lives).

4.3.1 Instagram 'likes': the motive behind self-promotion and approval

Instagram has a 'likes' feature, which allows an individual to show her approval for material posted on another individual's online page (see chapter 2, Section 2.5.1). Instagram 'likes' are indicators that a photo is of interest and will attract attention. The notion of 'likes' also serves as a positive reinforcement to other Instagram users and is mainly the reason why some Instagram users post their pictures (Doherty 2017:27). This particular sub-theme addresses the motives behind the likes on Instagram and why the participants post their pictures on this platform.

Lerato stated that she posts her successes or the activities and events she attends on weekends. For her, posting these pictures could be for creating memories. Despite posting to get more likes from her followers, there are other means to create memories for herself. Instagram has created this façade of people portraying their ideal self, showing a side to them that is perfect. She mentions that she posts pictures of herself when she is having fun or when she has accomplished something. She does not post pictures of herself when she is going through difficult times or facing challenges. Also, she does not post pictures of herself on an ordinary day, as it will not draw the attention of the followers on Instagram and she does not want to appear dull and boring. Lerato views Instagram as a 'perfect' world where she can socially construct her online identity as someone living the perfect and ideal lifestyle of success; posting pictures only when she is looking at her best (see also cf. Section 4.4). This relates to the control of virtual identity, where Lerato mentioned that she prefers Instagram over Facebook because you only reveal who you are to the world by posting pictures of yourself without writing anything. Lerato socially constructed her virtual identity to her online world by posting positive aspects of her life and concealing the negative aspects. Thus, she has full control over how she would like to portray herself. However, the same method cannot be applied to the social reality (real world) of an individual, although it can be seen as a motivation behind Instagram usage.

For Lerato, the virtual lifeworld displayed on Instagram becomes a space where she portrays herself as happy, successful, strong, confident and outgoing. This makes her favourable to her followers, especially since some people find positive life stories more interesting and aspirational to view. Whereas, in her

ordinary everyday lifeworld, Lerato may show sides to her that seem dull, boring and not as interesting to display on Instagram. A detailed discussion of the lifeworld can be found in the theoretical frameworks (cf. Section 1.3.1.1). Instagram can also be seen as a platform for healing because this lifeworld shows her strong side while in her everyday lifeworld, she might be vulnerable. Furthermore, this response from Lerato resonates with the theoretical concepts of Goffman of the *front stage performance* and of *impression management* (see chapter 1, Section 1.3.4.1). In the front stage, an individual portrays the self in which she feels comfortable revealing to the public. Most of this side of the individual is altered and controlled by her. Lerato intentionally posts pictures that are appealing to create this beautiful Instagram account for herself, which can be admired by her followers and that will attract more followers.

Lerato: Both, I post both for myself and for 'likes' and when I get 'likes' I feel good. Oh my God! They like my outfit today...yah they think I'm beautiful oh...and the comments...yah I think yah.

Researcher: When you post for yourself, what type of pictures do you post?

Lerato: Maybe my successes or what I did this weekend, which was really fun. I feel like I'd post that for memories. I post when I'm dressed all good, my new clothes. I need people to see this outfit. I need people to approve that they see what I'm seeing or am I just lying to myself: it's not that hot.

Palesa post pictures on Instagram to receive affirmation of how she already feels about herself and also, to seek validation from others; wanting to get approval from others. Palesa mentioned that it serves no purpose to be on SNSs such as Instagram if you are not seeking people to affirm what you already know of yourself. The main reason is to receive affirmation from others through the posting of pictures. This shows that the act of posting pictures on Instagram goes beyond what meets the eye; the concealed motive behind posting pictures is to receive validation from others. Therefore, it is only natural for social network sites to be used as reinforcement to seek appraisal from others, with features such as 'likes' and 'comments'.

Palesa: Look, okay, let's be real here! I post pictures because yes, I like them but also because: look everybody this is amazing. And people are going to like it too. And people... that's the entire premise of why people even have social network sites like your Instagram. You want people to affirm what you internally feel.

Like you know for yourself and the more "likes" you get, the more you feel like, yeah, I know what I know and now everybody, other people, know it too.

Zintle sees Instagram beyond the self because she wants to influence people; viewing Instagram as a business. It appears as though she wants to take the celebrities' status, creating an influencer name for herself. Instead of being a regular Instagram user, she wants to influence others. She, too, was influenced by other Instagram influencers (micro bloggers, vloggers and Instacelebrities). Currently, she is using her Instagram account as a business account. Zintle's journey as a micro blogger began when she started posting pictures of herself using cosmetic products of *Wet n Wild*. She posted several pictures of *Wet n Wild* products and eventually became recognised by a *Wet n Wild* public relations marketing team on Instagram that endorsed her to market their cosmetic products on Instagram. This is when Zintle began shifting her Instagram account into using it to market cosmetic products of *Wet n Wild* and write blogs about skincare.

Zintle: I post pictures to get 'likes'. I do post pictures to get 'likes' but, like I said, now on Instagram I'm shifting from just having an account on Instagram to now being an Instagram influencer. For me Instagram now is more of how I engage with people. So yeah. It's changing still but, I still want those likes as an influencer not just an ordinary Instagram user.

When I had the interview with Lihlumile, questions emerged of why she is so obsessed with receiving 'likes'. She stated that she just posts pictures for herself however, if she was just posting pictures for herself and, happy with the number of 'likes' she is currently receiving, she would not feel the need to change her Instagram account to a public account. Thus, for her, the more people following her, the more 'likes' she obtains. When an Instagram account is public, anyone has viewing access and can like a person's picture, which is a feature that Lihlumile likes about Instagram.

Lihlumile: Uhm...because Instagram is Instagram, you don't really get a lot of 'likes' especially if you don't have a lot of followers. And I'm one of those people who don't really have a lot of followers. So, I just post a picture just to be there like for myself. And if it does get a lot of 'likes', then I'm happy and a lot of 'likes' for me is like 50 'likes'. I even made my account public so that anyone has access to viewing it. The more accessible [public] your account is the more likes you are able to receive from others.

Even though the majority of people post selfies on Instagram, Nikiwe does not post pictures of herself because, in her opinion, it serves no purpose. She rather posts pictures of natural hair, African indigenous herbs or quotes. Nikiwe is a politics student, politically conscious and follows several Afrocentric pages (e.g. Black conscious movement pages, natural hair pages). She is curious about African cultures and history and embraces being a Black woman in society, coming across as a deep and spiritual thinker. The whole purpose behind her not receiving self-fulfilment from posting selfies could be related to her going through a journey of self-discovery as Nikiwe is only 18 years old. Nikiwe is conscious of the systematic oppression of Instagram on its users' self-perception and chooses not to fall victim to that. Nikiwe's validation lies in knowing about her blackness and the pages she follows on Instagram support this statement.

Nikiwe: I don't post pictures of myself on Instagram.

Researcher: Okay, interesting why?

Nikiwe: Because if I am posting pictures about myself, why exactly am I doing it? What's the purpose? What am I gonna gain? Uhm, do I need their validation? You know that's a question that I always ask myself.

Researcher: Okay, so what type of pictures do you post on Instagram?

Nikiwe: I would post pictures of like hair pictures maybe... uhm...pictures of maybe African indigenous herbs or pictures of quotes by Bob Marley [The late Jamaican Reggae singer-songwriter], Lauryn Hill [American singer-songwriter], Mbuyiseni Ndlozi (EFF political party's national spokesperson] uh...yes, things like that.

Pebbles stated that she posts photos on Instagram to receive 'likes' and get approval from others. She wants her Instagram followers to know what she "is doing in life". She also states that in order to remain relevant on Instagram, it is necessary to constantly post in an attempt not to experience *FOMO* (Fear of Missing Out). According to Franchina et al. (2018:1)—dealt with in Section 2.5.3—the feeling *FOMO* reflects a sense of having to connect constantly and taking note of what everyone is doing. In addition, the feeling of *FOMO* means that you do not know what you are missing out on when you are not online. If Pebbles is quiet on Instagram, then nobody knows what is going on in her life and she might experience *FOMO*. Another main driving force for Instagram users to post selfies on their accounts is to obtain 'likes' and the more beautiful the photos an individual posts, the more 'likes'. These 'likes' "act as a compliment,

providing both personal validation and the *gift of beauty* for the users' networks" dealt with in the literature review Section 2.5.3 (Wendt 2014:27). The 'likes' *feature* act as a form of reinforcement to the user, which motivates her to continue taking selfies of herself and sharing them online for her personal validation.

*Pebbles: Approval...approval! Because they must know what I am doing in life.
Hey! I have to be there as well.*

Researcher: Why is it important that they know what you are doing?

Pebbles: Because if you don't post the things that you are doing— then you have FOMO (Fear of Missing Out): that people don't know what's going on in your life. But lately nobody knows what is going on in my life.

In exploring the narratives shared by the participants in the sub-theme of "Instagram 'likes': The motive behind self-promotion and approval" receiving 'likes' from others is an affirmation that others approve of what they are also seeing. Most participants also shared that the reason behind Instagram is to seek validation from others regarding the pictures they post of themselves. However, Nikiwe shared that she seeks validation from others by posting pictures on raising awareness on societal issues and being a voice to the voiceless individuals.

4.3.2 The impact comments have on Instagrammers': negative or positive reinforcement

The other motivating feature that Instagram has is that it provides the Instagram user's followers the option to comment on her picture, which acts as a driving force to how she portrays herself on—Instagram dealt with in the literature review Section 2.5.2 (Nesvadba 2017:14). This sub-theme focuses on the impact of comments on the Instagram user. The following are the narratives of the participants' experiences with their followers' comments on the pictures they post online.

Lerato: My friends [giggles]. It's mostly my friends...yes. When someone besides my friends comment on my pictures...I think it's just like: oh, okay, somebody different noticed today apart from my friend. Oh, okay, so this really looks good type of vibe...yeah. It's an enhancement of what you already know. If you felt like pretty on that day like really pretty, you just feel like: oh, really, everybody sees this that I'm actually really pretty. It's an enhancer.

In exploring the narratives shared by Lerato, it is clear that receiving comments from someone different gives her a good feeling. It's an enhancement and also a confidence booster because the comments are unexpected and therefore, provides affirmation that even people whom she is not closely acquainted with approve of her pictures.

Nomthandazo: Yes, some of them do comment. I think as I have already said like for instance: if someone gives you a compliment of how beautiful you look that day or how you look in that particular picture, obviously it's a nice feeling. Someone giving you a compliment now and then and those compliments they come at a time when you really need them. When you are having a hectic week or a bad day and there is that one person giving you that compliment, it can do wonders for you. So, it makes you feel good and I think also makes you fall in love with yourself. You appreciate yourself, more in the sense that if other people are saying you are beautiful then you must be beautiful. But, as much our perceptions of beauty are subjective. But then, at the end of the day they are also influenced by others.

Nomthandazo shares the same views as Lerato. She also enjoys receiving a compliment from someone she does not know. Both Lerato and Nomthandazo focus on the positive reinforcement that comments have on an individual's self-esteem. Nomthandazo further mentions how beauty is relative to how each individual perceives it. However, most Black women perceive beauty as inter-subjectively shared because a person's perception of her beauty is influenced by others—social media, television, magazines, peers and culture.

Pebbles: Yes, well expect my friends who I have told them to stop commenting because they always say funny things because they are my friends. But yes, people do. I've had a couple that are off but, most of them are like...positive.

Researcher: So, these "couple that were off", these comments that were not positive comments, how did they make you feel about yourself?

Pebbles: A bit insecure...a bit insecure. And I was not even sure about my surrounding anymore. Like am I doing this right?

Researcher: And then, what is your reaction when followers give you negative comments?

Pebbles: I just ignore them and if it continues, I just block the person for my sanity.

Unlike Lerato and Nomthandazo, who referred to the positive reinforcement that comments have on their self-perception and body image, Pebbles made mention of the negative reinforcement that comments have on her self-perception. She feels somewhat insecure when she receives negative comments. This shows that Pebbles seeks validation from others.

Palesa: Yeah friends. I go out of my way to not accept people that I don't know. Where I feel like if you are a celebrity you don't necessarily get to have that option.

Researcher: And then, how do you consider comments about you on Instagram?

Palesa: I have a really high self-esteem so comments from other people don't...Yes, it's nice if it's positive. We [speaking in general] never have a problem with positive comments. It's fine. But even if I do get the negative ones. I never got them but I feel like even if I were to get them, they won't necessarily like impede on my self-esteem.

Palesa does not necessarily feel controlled by her followers' comments about her pictures on Instagram, whether they are positive or negative. She carries herself as someone who is self-assured, which was reinforced by her mom at an early age, who taught her to love her body and self. Therefore, receiving comments on Instagram does not validate how she sees herself; she uses Instagram as a platform for entertainment purposes rather than seeking validation from others.

Nikiwe: Yes, they do comment.

Researcher: Okay, this is going to be interesting because you don't post pictures of yourself on Instagram. So, how do you consider others' comments about you on Instagram?

Nikiwe: I think we shouldn't lie to ourselves. We are creatures of validation. So obviously when a person tells you: oh my gosh, your Instagram page is so cool! You do feel like great about yourself, you know. But, when someone comes and bashes you about it, it's like you do get offended. But I will feel offended but, I

don't think it's a thing of whether I will take it to heart because we all have different opinions.

Like-minded people follow the pages that Nikiwe follows on Instagram, for example, empowering and educating the youth on being Black conscious, raising awareness on issues such as violence against women and child abuse and femicide. The more people that validate her way of thinking, the more knowledge-conscious she becomes. Nikiwe and Palesa share the same mind-set because they do not receive self-validation from posting pictures of themselves. However, Palesa posts pictures of herself and states that she has a high self-esteem, which makes her physically conscious of herself.

Buyelwa: Yes, yah seldomly, so they do comment.

Researcher: How do you consider others' comments about you on Instagram, are they negative or positive?

Buyelwa: People on Instagram always try to sound positive even when the intention is not to be positive. But they always try to sound positive. But, yah for now the comments are very positive. I've never had a problem with someone commenting badly about me on my pictures.

For Buyelwa, people on Instagram always try to sound positive even though their intentions may not necessarily be positive. It is a world of imitation as Goffman (1956:11) alludes to: "as people modify their identity in an attempt to adhere to societal expectations and conducting themselves in a way that society will approve". This notion by Goffman shares the same sentiment with Buyelwa's response as to how people act in a polite manner on Instagram even though the intention truly is not as authentic and merely because everyone is doing it. She stated that she has not yet received any negative comments from her followers.

Zintle: I think it depends on which picture I maybe uhm post. Because you can also like draw people to comment on your pictures; like maybe say like I posted now a picture of...Last week I posted a picture of Wet n Wild products. I love their lipsticks. So, there's a way of maybe drawing people to actually comment on your pictures and be like maybe...okay I wrote this review about their products. What it does maybe. Does it leave my lips feeling dry and I will be like: guys, please tell me about your experiences about the product when you use it.

So, I can't put a picture on Instagram and be like: what do you guys think about this product? No, I first, uhm, maybe try the product on myself. And I'm like: okay I do love it. I love the colour; I love how it suits me and stuff. And I'm like checking now the ingredients that were used for that product. And I check on their page what they say about their product, so that I can make comparisons. I do my research especially about skin care because I don't want people to be using things that I am also not using, just to be viewed by maybe a certain brand. So, I write down my experiences. I write down what they say about the product. And then, how I use the product and I'll be like: okay, so this is the product. Maybe you can ask me questions about my experiences personally, like maybe send me a DM [drop by message] or comment on which one of these products do you actually use. Such questions. Like people can just be like: I use the...the one maybe the hydrating one and stuff. And then, you ask them, nna keya ba botsa [I ask them] personally like: okay, so how long have you been using it? You see?

Zintle sees more value in posting pictures of cosmetics products and receiving reviews on the products. For her, receiving comments is important because she can provide feedback to the *Wet n Wild* public relations marketing team. For example, if her followers are complaining that the lipsticks are dry or if the followers like a particular lipstick, she can inform the distributors accordingly. These reviews from Zintle's followers assist the *Wet n Wild* marketing team in improving the quality of their products. Social media is a marketing strategy for many companies for marketing their goods and services, endorsing Instagram influencers as the middle man to market their products. It not only benefits the company but also assists Zintle to grow her brand by getting more recognition from other endorsements. Furthermore, the more followers she gains, the more recognition she gets from other companies, including working with celebrities on certain brands. The influencer can be referred to as an Instacelebrity because she has a large number of followers, she is recognised by ordinary Instagram users, as well as celebrities and popular brands (see chapter 2, Section 2.5.4). Zintle stated that the type of picture you post might also attract more users to comment. Zintle recommends using persuasive words such as Instagram captions and captions from musicians' lyrics. The use of play on words is a marketing strategy to attract the followers' attention because they are familiar with the quotes or lyrics and this draws people to ask you questions about the product you are selling.

4.4 Instagram versus other social media platforms

Instagram is a SNS that shares photos through an application that allows users to alter their images by applying filters and sharing their photos on a variety of other SNSs (Tyer 2016:30). Photos are changed or altered in order to accumulate 'likes' from one's friends and followers. Instagram, like other social network sites, constitutes a socially constructed reality created by human beings who use this application to pursue their interactions with others. What differentiates Instagram from other social networking sites is that it creates this *ideal* and often lavish lifestyle and portrays predominantly successful individuals. It is purposively created to make it appealing to the users other than just being a picture-orientated social media application. The purpose of including this theme was to find out what distinguishes Instagram from other social media platforms. Here are some of the participants' explanations as to why Instagram is different from other SNSs.

Lerato: Besides it being picture-orientated, it is where people show their physical appearance and where they live. And if they are living a rich life. Or their popularity; or posting their fancy and stuff like that.

Nomthandazo: It's the pictures that grabbed me, the type of pictures that people uploaded on Instagram. The type of lifestyle that people are portraying. Though some people are portraying this lifestyle that: I've made it! So, on.

Both Lerato and Nomthandazo share the same sentiments regarding how people portray this successful and lavish lifestyle on Instagram. The reason behind this portrayal is because Instagram users have socially constructed this social network site in an attempt to appear more appealing. This is done with the features of applying filters (colours hues and lighting) tweaking and cropping of pictures to create the perfect picture. Most of the users are conscious of their surroundings when taking a picture. They look at the background of their surrounding, the angle of the picture, and lighting before taking the photo. Most people take post photos dinning out at expensive restaurants, vacations or at events. Thus, in most instances, it looks like people are living an extravagant lifestyle. This is also one of the motives behind Instagram engagement to attract the user to view and follow these people. Therefore, providing others with the opportunity to vicariously live this lifestyle by viewing it from the people that they are following.

Palesa: Uhm [thinking], I feel like with Facebook for example, people don't give disclose much of who they are. They aren't as open and as very vulnerable as they are on Instagram. On Instagram people will post like their daily situations

and how basically from one...like in a whole day span you can basically track like how a person goes from one moment of being to another. And, they are more expressive in basically allowing you into their own personal life. Because it's very exclusive into how many people you allow. If it's just a normal person, you allow how many people can see your Instagram. But even if you are a celebrity you are more open in basically sharing your life on an Instagram platform, than Facebook, for example. And I don't necessarily think Facebook is as popular as it used to be with the emergence of Instagram.

Lihlumile: Uhm for me, I just feel like Instagram is more private, unlike Facebook, yah. And we have limitations and stuff. On Facebook, uhm, your posts would be public and stuff. But with Instagram you can actually make your account private and restrict people who see your statuses and everything.

Researcher: Doesn't Facebook have limitations as well?

Lihlumile: It does but, I just feel like almost everyone has access to Facebook. There is even free mode Facebook. So, with Instagram you really just need data. So, with Facebook I mean everyone who wants to have Facebook can have Facebook. But Instagram just has a lot of charges. So, I don't think a lot of people would want to have Instagram.

Researcher: What does free mode Facebook mean?

Lihlumile: Uhm, it basically means that even if you don't have data or access to the Internet you can still go onto Facebook and do whatever you want to do, besides checking pictures. You can still have access to Facebook posts uhm...pictures and statuses, stories and view other people's profiles for free.

Palesa and Lihlumile share similar views regarding the exclusivity of Instagram and how many followers an individual can allow viewing her account. Facebook has the same option available to their friends (followers are referred to as friends on Facebook). Palesa further explains how, as a result, people are more vulnerable in sharing their personal lives on Instagram because of the private settings and with the rise of Instagram as a new social media platform, Facebook has become less popular and less appealing because Instagram is more picture-orientated with its features such as filters, tweaking and cropping of pictures.

Buyelwa: Instagram: you just post a picture there. Either you 'like' or 'comment'. But, in most cases it's all about 'likes' neh [right]. Whilst with Facebook that's where, like people tend to comment on one picture in like a continuous conversation.

For Buyelwa, Instagram is more about posting pictures and receiving 'likes' or 'comments', whereas Facebook is where people tend to comment on one picture through a dialogue of comments and opinions that they share regarding that picture.

Pebbles: Uhm, it does not limit you. Like Facebook or Twitter would limit you for content or any other tips that you'd like to know about.

Researcher: Can you just elaborate? What does it offer that these other social media platforms can't offer to its users?

Pebbles: On Facebook: if somebody had to post a post. Maybe they don't usually go into detail about it but, within that 30 seconds that a video on maybe Instagram offers, people can actually tell you a lot on that, yeah.

As reflected in the views of Pebbles, Instagram has become a device that connects, educates and inspires people (see chapter 2, Section 2.5.1). In contrast to social networking sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn, Instagram can be used for corporations, celebrities, public institutions or individuals using an anonymous online identity.

4.5 Lived experiences on Instagram

According to Berger and Luckmann (1966:33) as dealt with in the theoretical frameworks in Section 1.3.2, everyday life presents itself as a reality that is open to interpretation by human beings and is essentially the lifeworld that is subjectively meaningful to them. Images are more subtle than words, and images evidently require an understanding of visual attention in order to form meaning regarding the construction of images in the minds of users. The use of images on Instagram communicates meaning subjectively of the individual posting her pictures via her Instagram account. How others view and interpret the pictures she posts of herself communicates inter-subjective meaning. For this research, the aim was to examine the participants' lived experiences on Instagram. The following are the participants' narratives of the experiences they are exposed to when engaging on Instagram.

Researcher: What experiences are you exposed to when engaging on Instagram?

Lerato: People are living a lie on Instagram. That uhm... I'm living a good life and I don't have problems. Instagram gives you the idea that nobody has problems. Everybody is happy and they are emotionally stable.

Palesa: My view of Instagram is basically that it is just a social media platform site that people use to basically upload their lives from a finished product.

Buyelwa: So, the experiences I've had ever since I had Instagram: I find that most people are very fake when it comes to Instagram. They give people an idea that they are living a certain lifestyle. When you meet them in person, its way different. Like people tend to choose what they want to be posted on Instagram.

Zintle: Some people share their life experiences on Instagram. So, they wanna influence people like maybe advice people on life things and stuff. The negative side of Instagram itself is fake. So actually, they portray this fake image.

Lerato, Palesa, Buyelwa and Zintle share the same views regarding Instagram. They find it as a platform that was created to show 'perfection' of a certain lifestyle. Instagram in its nature is a "filtered reality" and from a literal point of view it is a SNS that has features such as applying filters where a user can edit her pictures in whichever way she wants. This can help attract the attention of her followers to viewing and liking her pictures (see chapter 2, Section 2.5.1). Instagram as a filtered reality from a metaphorical point of view, is a platform that creates this ideal type of 'perfection' and "self" where users portray versions of themselves that are appealing to others: whether it is a successful lifestyle, health and fitness, business and career. Thus, there are many pages that are related to aspects of lifestyle and travel, promotion of businesses, health and fitness. Furthermore, in exploring the narratives of the lived experiences of participants on Instagram, people portray an ideal type of lifestyle on Instagram in an attempt to portray an image that the individual is living a triumphant life. The aim behind portraying this ideal lifestyle is inherent to Instagram itself as it creates the illusion of most people portraying success in every aspect of their lives. Instagram users are equipped to create their profile by sorting pictures of anything from their hobbies to modifying content to highlighting one variation of a possible self—and as often as an individual likes. The internalisation of the ideal self is influenced by a multitude of things such as media, celebrities, symbolic social forces, friends and cultural norms (Apodaca 2017:6).

Nomthandazo: I am exposed to many things on Instagram. I have noticed on Instagram or with most people that I follow: they are into body fitness. The outfits that you see people wearing on Instagram, you wouldn't normally find on local stores like Mr Price or Truworths. So, some of them, it's like they have these exclusive stores—online stores where you can only get these clothes there. So, you need to order it online, then they courier it to you. So, I love the exclusivity of fashion on Instagram.

Although Nomthandazo is exposed to a variety of things on Instagram, she noticed particularly that most people are into body fitness. Living a healthy lifestyle has become a trend nowadays and this is mainly influenced by celebrities when they post their gym workout moves, dietary eating plans and fitness journeys. These things motivate ordinary individuals to also follow similar body and health fitness routines in their lives. She also mentioned her experiences with fashion, where she finds most individuals on Instagram post pictures of themselves wearing exclusive clothing, which can only be found in online stores. The posting of exclusive clothing resulted in people acting as fashion micro bloggers who market themselves to attract brand endorsement deals by wearing exclusive clothing from online boutiques or upcoming fashion designers. Nomthandazo mentioned the exclusivity of clothing on Instagram numerous times, showing how unique and different Nomthandazo likes to be, with Instagram allowing her to do that.

4.5.1 Revealing 'self' on Instagram

The purpose of this sub-theme is to explore the individual revealing the self that she is comfortable to display on her Instagram account. For example, showing pictures of herself without filters and make-up, sharing her personal daily life experiences and sharing personal quotes instead of sharing other people's quotes. The following are the participants' narratives of whether they are comfortable sharing their individual experiences on Instagram or not.

Lerato: I'd like to keep it as private as possible, so I don't post my personal things. So, no, I don't because I don't want the world knowing my full baggage. I only post stuff I want the world to see.

Researcher: What would you like the world to see?

Lerato: What would I want the world to see [thinking]? The outside things, not the internal things. I don't post my problems. I don't post my trials. Maybe my happy stuff, my good stuff, I post, yah.

Lerato stated that she does not reveal who she is or shares her personal life experiences on Instagram. She prefers Instagram rather than Facebook because on Instagram, only pictures of yourself are posted and no description of who you are as an individual is needed. Therefore, the pictures you post about yourself are open for interpretation to your followers regarding the type of person you are and what interests you have. She prefers having control over her virtual identity by revealing parts of herself, which she feels more comfortable to show and concealing those that she feels less comfortable showing. She mentions that she prefers to show herself in a presentable manner. For example, she likes to post pictures of her successes and happier moments in her life because this draws more people in liking her pictures, especially since her followers aspire to success stories rather than struggles and hardships. This self-presentation of Lerato's positive side on Instagram is motivated by being exposed to other users who portray a version of themselves that is appealing, resulting in Lerato also following this trend and portraying an ideal self.

Palesa: Nope, nope. This is why I said that for me more often than not, I feel like social media platforms are like a laminated front cover of what people want you to see of their perfect lives. They don't necessarily... it's easier to post the finished product than it is to post about the process getting to that. Because as people we would like to think that we like a victory lap rather than people being in our business. And, even though sometimes people might actually be supportive and trying to encourage you to basically get to where you want to be but, it is...you are basically: You are becoming an exposed nerve where people must now know about your life and you now comment about your life. And, I don't necessarily like giving people that power if I don't for certain know what their responses are going to be. So, it's easier for me to post a pretty picture of myself with make-up on than for me to post a picture just when I woke up. Because I know what the comments are going to be. In relation to what the finished product looks like, as opposed to when I just woke up like this. We are not all Beyoncé's [giggles].

Palesa and Lerato share similar views on revealing parts of the self online—happy moments, pictures looking good and protecting the offline self from the online world—by not revealing their daily life challenges or problems with which they are faced in their personal lives. Palesa delves deeper by stating that she feels SNSs are like a “laminated front cover”. She uses the metaphor of a “laminated front cover of a book” that is covered with a layer of plastic to protect the book from being damaged. For her, that is how an individual who engages on Instagram portrays herself as this “laminated front cover of a book” that protects or conceals certain aspects of her life and self from Instagram and reveals aspects which she feels are more favourable for others to view.

Palesa also mentioned people wanting others to see their perfect lives. This is because it is how most people who engage on Instagram have socially constructed their lives (i.e., as perfect and an ‘ideal’ type of lifestyle). For her, people are not interested in the ordinary and daily struggles but rather share their success stories, which she refers to as the “finished product” (see Section 4.5 in Palesa’s discussion). It is most of the time motivating and inspirational hearing the success story rather than the process of achieving the goal. For example, viewing someone’s graduation day is more appealing than the process of achieving the degree (e.g. failing, experience anxiety). Despite other people showing support if you are posting the process of obtaining the goal, “you become an exposed nerve”. By this statement, Palesa means that the individual becomes vulnerable to cyberbullying and scrutiny when she reveals certain personal aspects of her life. Kong (2015:8) acknowledges that posting a personal picture and leaving it out there to be judged by others creates an opportunity for feedback, both positive and negative. This proves to be difficult for many users, especially the self-conscious users. Therefore, some Instagram users choose to keep their private lives private and do not post personal pictures on Instagram in order to avoid being susceptible to any negative comments from their followers. Instagram becomes a “laminated front cover” or “façade” (see Section 4.4.1 in Nikiwe’s discussion) where an individual reveals certain aspect of herself to her followers while concealing others. She knows which ones are the favourable ones for her followers to view based on the number of likes she obtains from her followers.

This above echoes Goffman’s notion on the concepts of the “front and backstage performance” dealt with in Section 1.3.4.1. Goffman states that an individual in the front stage is conscious of being observed by her audience and will perform for those watching and observing her behaviour. Instagram becomes the front stage performance platform where an individual is cautious of what types of pictures, she posts of herself based on how her followers will react to them. The backstage performance is private to others—no performance is required. Here an individual can display her real and authentic self.

Buyelwa: No, I feel like that's not the space where people should be: exposing their problems. I think, there are other places that one can seek help instead sharing your problems on social media. Because sometimes they [people] just, uhm, comment based on what their fingers are telling them to type.

Buyelwa further reiterates Palesa's and Lerato's sentiments stating that Instagram is not a platform where an individual should expose her problems because you become vulnerable to any individual's opinions about your life. Also, these individuals feel entitled to commenting about you on Instagram. Thus, concealing her personal life problems on Instagram is a way to protect her online and offline identity from the users. This view of Buyelwa resonates with Goffman's concept of impression management (see chapter 1, Section 1.3.4.2), where an individual control how she presents herself by the social situation in which she finds herself. As for Buyelwa, she feels Instagram is not the platform where people can comfortably share their challenges; there are spaces outside the virtual world where one can seek help when faced with problems.

Nomthandazo: I think with Instagram it's just sharing the moments in my life. For instance: my graduation. Maybe, let's say if I went out then I would share that.

Nomthandazo uses her Instagram page to share achievements and celebratory moments such as her graduation day. This is in contrast with Palesa's views on people using Instagram in an attempt not to make you part of their journeys. Nomthandazo did not share the whole journey of obtaining her degree (things such as working late nights and early mornings, going through mental blocks, receiving constructive criticism from her supervisor on a chapter she wrote and how it discouraged her, experiencing weight loss or weight gain due to stress and loss of sleep). She preferred to show her graduation day pictures. These pictures give her followers the impression that she obtained her qualification without struggle. This can maybe inspire her followers to believe that they can also reach their goals. However, people also can compare their lives with hers, resulting in them feeling inadequate and doubting their abilities. The same applies to Nomthandazo, as others' success could create feelings of doubt in herself. If more women are honest about the consequences of the 'perfection' they create of themselves on Instagram, their followers might have more realistic expectations of Instagram rather than the predominantly idealistic ones to which they are exposed.

Zintle: No, I never share anything personal to me on Instagram. I do not even actually post my family on Instagram. Because, like I said it's like my...my personal blog; it's like a business that I am trying to run for myself by encouraging other people or by influencing other people. So, I do not put my family through that, because, uhm, say once I develop as an individual on Instagram, people can easily, uhm, come for my family. They can make fun of my family and it's not going to be nice. It's gonna actually break you as a person. So, it's more of like: I keep things professional. I do not, uhm, I do not involve my family there.

Zintle also does not share her private life on Instagram (e.g., posting pictures of her family), because it promotes gossip and rumours and as a micro blogger her position makes her more susceptible to cyberbullying from her followers. Haters can use it as a tool to destroy the image that she has built for herself; something that usually happens to celebrities and Instacelebrities as they are more vulnerable to cyberbullying because as a celebrity your life is not yours anymore. People feel entitled to express their opinions about how you live your life because of the personal information they share on Instagram. Zintle is aware of the consequences that come with being an upcoming micro blogger and already protected her family and her self-image from such individuals by keeping everything on her account professional and only posting on the products that she is promoting.

Nikiwe: I think I am comfortable.

Researcher: What type of experiences do you normally share on Instagram?

Nikiwe: Racism, discrimination, maybe body shaming.

Researcher: With these experiences, are you trying to raise awareness of something that has happened to you personally in your life or is it just to raise awareness?

Nikiwe: It's something that has happened to me personally.

Researcher: Do you mind sharing?

Nikiwe: No, I don't. I was raped [quietly sobs].

Researcher: Gives her a tissue...moment of silence. I am very sorry to hear about that and thank you for sharing this very personal experiences with me.

Nikiwe: It's alright.

Researcher: Why do you share your personal experiences on Instagram?

Nikiwe: For me personally, it's to help someone who might be going through the same thing I am going through. However, I try not to make it as subjective as possible to protect myself from being vulnerable to other people's comments. Remember some of my followers are people that know me personally, so there are aspects of myself I choose not to reveal in a subjective way. Because I don't... pause...people look at you differently once they know something that deep like experiencing rape. I hate being seen as a victim. Hence, I choose not to act like one.

Researcher: I hear you and that's very brave of you. And I commend your strength for continuing to be a voice for those voiceless women.

Nikiwe: Thank you [smiles].

After hearing about Nikiwe's ordeal, one can understand why she chooses to use her Instagram account as a platform to raise awareness of issues such as violence against women and children. This can help other individuals who went through similar situations. At the same time, Instagram is a therapeutic space where Nikiwe talks about her rape. She voices her opinion regarding issues such as violence against women and children and uses Instagram as a platform to gain back her power.

4.5.2 Gendered space: shared experiences on Instagram

Women often like to share more of their body and aesthetic experiences as opposed to men. Instagram is known to be a magnet for fashion designs and beauty products that are mostly targeted at women to buy their clothes and products (Seligson 2016). The following are the narratives of the participants on whether they like hearing other women's experiences and thoughts via Instagram.

Lerato: Uhm, I like hearing from. There is a specific girl, I don't know her name. She posts mainly on mental health and her experiences on depression and her weight loss journey. She posts on how she lost weight and why she decided to lose weight. And when she had her depression stage, and how she dealt with

that. It makes you feel like you are not the only one going through those experiences, especially when they share personal things. You feel like you are not the only one going through the bad stuff. There are people out there who are also insecure about their bodies. And they always say if you do not like something about your body, change it or accept it. And she has done that. She has changed the stuff that she doesn't like or accepted the things that she can't change about herself, yah.

For Lerato to hear about other women's experiences, such as mental health issues and body image issues, shows that there is an underlying reason behind her wanting to always portray herself in a favourable manner on Instagram. She mentions in her narratives that she likes hearing about other women's experiences of depression and weight loss journeys. Lerato, like many other women, feels insecure about certain parts of her body (shoulders and back) and she wishes she was a bit bigger (see chapter 5, Section 5.2.2 and 5.2.3 in Lerato's discussion). However, she makes no mention of having mental health issues. Viewing other women on Instagram who have the perfect body type can lead to low self-esteem and negative body image. Also, hearing about other women who are going through similar experiences provides her with a sense of belonging to virtual community.

Nomthandazo: Yeah...sigh, I think I do because at the end of the day it makes you realise that it's like you are not the only person going through that particular problem. It's like you might think that you are the only person who has an issue: let's say who doesn't like the body changes that are taking place after you've had your child. So, with many people sharing those experiences, you actually get to realise: maybe I am not the only one. There are many others out there. It creates a platform where you have a lot of women who are sharing their everyday beauty and body experiences or whether it's about love, it's about life or whatever they are going through at that moment. It's a bit consoling in a way. In a sense that you not the only one. There are many people going through the same thing. So how you move from there then determines whether you would succeed. It would be for instance, if you are struggling with your studies too. Many people are complaining about that. So, what can you do to succeed?

Nomthandazo shares her experience of after-birth body changes that she has experienced and how that has affected her relationship with her body and how she now feels and sees it.

However, when she views women online who are mothers as well and who share similar experiences of their bodily changes after giving birth, it gives her support and a sense of belonging that she is not the only one going through this.

4.5.3 Influence of Instagram on Instagrammers' everyday lives

Women in particular often spend a significant amount of time on SNSs such as Instagram to interact with other people (Nilsson 2016:12). There is seventy-one percent of women who participate SNSs such as Instagram, compared to only sixty-two percent of men, in total women spend three hours more per week on SNSs than men with an average of 8.9 hours across a week (Cretti 2014:1). Most people think that is essential to experience a sense of belonging or being connected to other people at work or at home. An individual often strives to feel connected and appreciated by her online peers (Nilsson 2016:12). The following are some the views of the participants on what influence Instagram has on their everyday lives.

Lerato: I spent, oh my goodness, all my data goes on Instagram: not me posting, but me viewing other people's lives on Instagram. So, half of the time I'm on Instagram viewing other people, not me posting! I think it's entertaining. It's entertaining viewing people's lives.

Instagram is an escape from reality for Lerato. For her, it is much better viewing other people's lives than dealing with herself and her own problems; she might even find her life less interesting. Therefore, she finds it entertaining to view other people's lives. This experience of Lerato using Instagram as an "escape world" relates to Sheldon and Bryant (refer to chapter 2 in Section 2.5.3.3) where they stated that one of the most common motives of social media were "to escape perceived problems for emotional release". This act of viewing other users' profiles can lead to Lerato having a low self-esteem and lack of life satisfaction because she is unaware that she is socially comparing her life to others (Kircaburun and Griffiths 2018:906). A study conducted by Cretti (2014:4) has shown that increased feelings of envy are significantly related to decreased feelings of life satisfaction and self-esteem for women who spend most of their time online.

Palesa follows Bishop T.D. Jakes on Instagram to receive inspirational quotes for her everyday life. It gives meaning to her life and motivates her through the challenges she faces.

Palesa: There are certain things that I follow. So, for example, like I follow Bishop T.D. Jakes. That gives me inspiration every day so that, okay, I need to constantly check that. So that gives me some semblance of being able to motivate myself

to basically go through life every day. From that perspective, namely how it influences my everyday life, I need to be active there. So that it can actually give me some semblance of being able to push forward in life [deep sigh]. But like I said: I am a passive user. I don't use it to that extend, namely where it has innately revolutionised my life.

Lihlumile: Instagram literally takes up most of my time because I spend hours on Instagram; busy stalking someone or one of my celebrities.

Pebbles: A very huge part of my life. Because even when I wake up in the morning, the first thing I do is like go to Instagram and check-up what's happening.

For Lihlumile and Pebbles, Instagram plays a significant role in their everyday lives and a lot of their time is spent on this social media platform. The narratives of the participants reflect how Instagram influences their everyday lives. Lerato, Lihumile and Pebbles use Instagram for entertainment purposes as they view other people's lives as well as celebrities' lives.

4.6 Body and identity

The fourth theme focuses on body and identity as they are intertwined, especially since an individual's view of herself—her self-perception has—an impact on how she feels about her body and the way in which she carries her body. When analysing the narratives, I purposefully explored each participant's lifeworld in relation to how she understands, perceives and accepts her body, as well as her femininity. The theme of body and identity is intended to reveal the uniqueness of each participant's lifeworld experience and to show how Instagram has an influence on how she perceives her body image. The sub-themes include: perception of self on Instagram, the influence of Instagram on self-image and the impact of Instagram on body image. These sub-themes explore similar narratives focusing on the body and identity.

4.6.1 Perception of self on Instagram

Studies have found that in the virtual world, individuals are identity conscious. The online expectations put pressure on an individual to accurately present her identity on Instagram in the form of texts and graphics that make her more concerned about whom she believes she is rather than whom she is when interacting in real life (Bargh et al. 2002:38 refer to the literature review, Section 2.6.2.1). Studies

regarding self-presentation on the Instagram have found that an individual tends to present a better version of herself on the social network site—dealt with in the literature review in Section 2.6.2.1. The features of likes and comments are the main reasons why most individuals who engage on Instagram become identity-conscious because of the exposure of people presenting the best pictures of themselves on Instagram. This sub-theme explores how an individual view herself before engaging on Instagram and after engaging on Instagram and how it has changed her self-perception. The following are the narratives by the participants before and after they started using Instagram.

Researcher: How did you perceive/feel about yourself before you started using Instagram?

Lerato: I really didn't care. When I started, I was just posting pictures of what's happening today or what event I attended this weekend. I really didn't give much thought to what I was posting when it started...yeah.

Lerato was not yet exposed or aware that she can create an online identity through the use of pictures. Thus, she did not pay much attention to how her pictures looked when she began using Instagram because she was not exposed to self-presentation—being able to create a virtual identity on Instagram through creating her profile and posting pictures that she feels are suited to her Instagram account.

Researcher: How do you perceive/see/feel about yourself after starting to use Instagram?

Lerato: I have to be cautious of what I post and how people view me as a person.

However, being able to create her own profile and looking at others' profiles made her more conscious of how she presents herself on her Instagram account. She created an Instagram account that is visually appealing and shows a positive side of her. For example, she mentioned that she prefers showing pictures of herself in happier moments—going out with friends, her achievements and looking good (see Section 4.4.1 in Lerato's discussion). Others' validation of her changed how she sees and presents herself online. This shows how

important seeking validation is on Instagram and how it is the main reason why an Instagram user modifies her identity to be socially accepted by her followers on Instagram, which could have an impact on how she sees herself.

Buyelwa: Back then, I would just post anything and everything uya bona [you see] with myself kena le di [with] pimples and what not. But now I...I'm just a bit conscious of what I take there.

Buyelwa shares the same sentiments as Lerato. Before using Instagram, she would post any picture of herself, but now she has to check her background and lighting when taking a picture and takes time to look for the best picture to post.

Buyelwa: I just don't want to post any picture nowadays. At first when I started using Instagram, I would just take a picture and post it. It didn't matter where I was, what the background of the picture looked like, you know. But now: I mean, I take time before I post certain pictures, yah.

Zintle also did not pay much attention in the beginning when she began using Instagram. However, that changed over the course of time.

Zintle: So that's a thing about Instagram. It changes a person. So, at first, I didn't care how I looked. I was like: ah mxm [sound of annoyance] I don't care, you know. It was just okay. It's me.

Zintle: Sometimes...sometimes it's not always like the real you. But you want to portray an image that you are living: this perfect life. You have these nice things and stuff because you want people to be interested in what you are trying to sell them. Which is wrong, yah, but that's how it is.

Palesa: I am still the same, my perception of self hasn't necessarily been altered that much by being on Instagram... uhm yah.

Nikiwe: I was pretty cool about it. I was normal. No impact.

Nikiwe: I was very conscious of how people were on Instagram. I think I was conscious with myself within my surroundings. Also, again, I think it was also a thing of me just being conscious. Because, I mean, if we always show uhm long hair, straight hair with no curls and whatever. That's what you start falling in love with and that's what you end up loving. And then you start devaluating yourself because of what you see.

According to Goffman's (see chapter 2, Section 2.6.2.2) arguments, people modify their identity in an attempt to adhere to societal understandings and expectations. Some Instagram users may present their identity candidly and confidently, while others use an online identity as an opportunity to shape themselves into somebody different from who they really are. When exploring the narratives of the participants, it is clear that some are cautious of what type of pictures they post. This shows how inherently Instagram has influenced their perception of self. Some participants' perception of self has not been altered much by Instagram. For example, Zintle is a micro blogger on Instagram and feels that some individuals portray an image that is not actually their real/authentic self. This is a sentiment that resonates with her personally, because her Instagram account is used as a business account that promotes cosmetic products for a company called *Wet n Wild*.

4.6.2 Influence of Instagram on self-image

According to Apodaca (2017:5), an individual can use Instagram in order to fulfil a need (e.g. a social acknowledgement), in an attempt to communicate, nurture or maintain social relationships and to meet a beauty ideal or fashionable trend. Some women are unaware of how much they rely on Instagram to express themselves and therefore they do not realise how they re-negotiate their sense of self (Nilsson 2016:17). The following is the research participant narratives on what influence Instagram has on her self-image.

Researcher: Has your view about your identity changed since you have engaged with Instagram?

Palesa: It has. My view of myself has changed because when I do look at Instagram when I started with Instagram, it was with the rise of Black Girl Rocks. For a long time as a light skinned girl, I always had the benefits of everybody in society likes you because of how you look. But now we are confronted with the

fact that Black Girl Rocks is a movement that wants to embody and celebrate darker skinned females. You know, so not to even say that I was never a part of understanding the fact that women are beautiful in any shape, size or colour. But, when I wanted to jump on the bandwagon as well of Black Girl Rocks, I was confronted with the fact that but, I can't necessarily be part of or join part of this movement because my skin colour doesn't. The colour of my fair Blackness is not in relation to "The Wakadants" at that time. And Black Girl Rocks, which is basically the darker melanin skin. So, I felt like, okay, even though...yes, I want to be part of this movement. Other dark skin people were just like: listen! You had your time in the sun, it is our time now! So, can you please just let us shine as well so that we can have a sliver of what you have been enjoying in society? So, it made me aware of the privilege that I've been experiencing as a light skinned person throughout society. Whether or not I wanted to admit it or not, you know. Whether I was passive or engaging in what it gave me. But, now, because of a change, the change in movement, I was able to see: oh...oh okay! This is what society is like! We are dictated by what is currently viewed as 'flavour' of that moment or what's trending at that moment. Whether or not you are part of that. You can feel isolated even though you want to be part of it. But because of what you are like, you are immediately isolated by it. Because you don't understand our demographics, you don't understand our lived experiences. So, it becomes difficult.

Palesa's view of herself has changed. As a light-skinned black girl she experiences that conceptions of the Black women's beauty are shifting. What has been considered as beautiful in the past is now changing. Dark-skinned women are becoming appreciated in the Black women's beauty society. And for her, this experience has made her realise the privilege she had as a light-skinned Black woman in the past because Black women's beauty standards used to be attributed to Western beauty standards. Therefore, in the past, if you were fairer looking, skinnier and had less curly hair and body features, which are dominant in Western beauty standards, the more beautiful you were regarded to be as a Black woman. Presently there is a gradual shift in the re-negotiation of melanin women in society regarding their beauty as movements such as *#Black Girls Rock* and *#Black Girl Magic* are newly founded movements that promote Black beauty, especially for the marginalised representation of melanin women in media (television, movies and music).

Much of how a woman perceives her beauty is influenced by the societal expectations and by what society perceives and regards as beautiful.

4.6.3 Impact of Instagram on body image

In modern society, the body is often conceptualised as a means of communicating or conveying an impression and by displaying the body women are signifying meaning. This interpretation of the body was dealt with in literature review in Section 2.3. The visual representation of an individual's body via Instagram has considerable impact on how that individual communicates with others and how she conveys meaning to others. The purpose is to understand how an individual makes sense of her femininity, her self-perception and body perception through her online interactions with others. When exploring the participants' experiences of the body online, the focus is mainly on how Instagram has an impact on how they experience their bodies. From the narratives it is clear that the role Instagram plays on body image and body dissatisfaction cannot be denied.

For these participants, Instagram is a platform where they can view other people's experiences of their bodies and use that as motivation to change their own perception of their body image. The following are the participants' narratives regarding how Instagram provides an opportunity for them to change their perception of their bodies.

Palesa: It motivates me that, okay, you know where you'd like to be and you see that it's possible. Let's elevate ourselves to basically be able to get that standard [perfect ideal body].

For Palesa, comparing herself to women who have the perfect body on Instagram serves as motivation that she can also attain that body if she works hard. Lihlumile, similar to Palesa, is also exposed to people who have perfect bodies, mostly celebrities. Instagram is a social network site that embraces many trends, such as health and fitness. This is where most people show pictures of themselves before, they attained a healthy and fit body and after attaining it through dietary regimens or exercising. Celebrities are the trendsetters and by starting the trend of body fitness on Instagram it has led many people to follow the trend as well. According to Festinger (1954 in Norton 2017:11), his social comparison theory concerns individuals who tend to compare themselves to those who are "better off" than them, leading to an "upward social comparison". For Palesa, this "upward social comparison" is her comparing herself to those individuals—such as your celebrities' and gym fanatics she follows who have the perfect body and

they give her the motivation that she can also attain that perfect body. Thus, Lihlumile and Palesa may see the pictures of the people they follow as personally achievable to obtain the ideal and perfect body.

Lihlumile: Uhm, watching other people's journeys like, for example, the Herbal Life users. Watching their journeys from back then to now. And most celebrities start off looking unhealthy. But then, they end up so fit, healthy, perfect bodies. So, yah, when I see that, I believe that I can actually do it.

Buyelwa: For instance, like when you have lots and lots of pimples on a picture you can filter it, it can be nicer.

Buyelwa uses virtual beauty applications such as filters because after using this tool, she feels more attractive. This feature allows her to modify her facial features to enhance her desired attributes. She uses this tool to hide her flaws (e.g. pimples) by consciously attempting to influence the perception of her online followers by selectively editing the pictures of herself. She, therefore, can control her looks on Instagram. Rather than posting an authentic picture of her real self, she chooses to present an online self that is 'perfect' and flawless, thus employing beauty aids and digital beauty practices to edit her pictures.

The researcher raised the following question to the participants: In your opinion, does Instagram play a role in negative body image and body dissatisfaction? Lerato mentioned that it depends on how an individual subjectively looks at the role Instagram plays on body image and body dissatisfaction. She highlighted the different blogs—pages that cater to all different shapes and sizes, creating a sense of belonging to a community of women who look like you. For instance, seeing a picture of a similar-looking skinny girl wearing shorts on Instagram gives her the confidence that she can also post pictures of herself wearing shorts without feeling conscious of her body.

Lerato: Not all the time, because there are different blogs as well as different posts from different people. People who are big! Big girls and they are activists regarding that. You do not have to hide your fatty stomach or whatever; your big boobs or your—baldness that you do not have hair. There are petite girls like me that dress nicely and sometimes you feel ashamed. But immediately when you see this girl rocking in her shorts and her bra, whatever. Then you feel like: okay I can also do that. So, it is not always negative.

Palesa shares the same views with Lerato regarding feeling a sense of belonging to a community of women who look similar. However, she feels that one needs to stick to the same community of similar-looking women, as those looking different do not share the same experiences regarding body issues. It is, for example, difficult for plus-size women to understand that she, with her petite figure, also experiences body issues as she is seen as having the body that appeals to most women.

Palesa: Subjectively, like I said I am a skinny person. Although I also need to highlight the fact that one of my friends was thicker and now, she started working out because of watching an Instagram video that was on: eating plans that she got from there. And now her body, she is banging [looks good]! Her body is amazing! And we were having a conversation that okay, like you are busy posting all of your beautiful pictures. I'm also going to post pictures and I wanted to engage on my weight struggles. And I was met: with what weight struggle? You can't be part of this conversation of telling me of struggles you might have, you know. Because you don't understand our perspective and our struggles. In addition, it relates to what I was talking about when it comes to the skin colour issue even though you fall under Black. The criteria of Black differ even with body weight issues: that if our community is of thicker or more plus size people, as a person who does not necessarily fall under that criteria, you are not allowed to have an opinion. So, Instagram subjectively for me did not give me a negative body image of myself. But it did make me feel like: basically, it is a social media platform of "cliques" and you stick to those "cliques". You can't mingle in between them and basically have your own thought process of saying: yes, I might be from this clique. But I also see and I understand and I acknowledge the importance of what the movement is trying to do. Everybody stays in her own clique and you can't engage in something that is not from your own lived experiences, which I felt is very problematic. Because if you are going, if we are talking about females, we should be able to support each other irrespective of what the challenge is. And I felt like it was very restrictive in allowing for that to happen.

Nomthandazo and Zintle are of the same view that they are exposed to women with the ideal type of body image on Instagram. This creates the idea that all women have toned, slim bodies. This results in an individual comparing herself with other women, which could result in a lack of self-esteem. Instagram is a social media platform where individuals show the best versions of themselves. Therefore, it is expected that the participants will be exposed to seeing women with the perfectly shaped bodies.

Nomthandazo: Instagram is where you get all these nice toned women with small figures: this hourly glass body shape, women with flat tummies, women with nice round bums. So, let's say someone who doesn't have a nice body shape or is overweight: it will have an impact on how you perceive yourself. It will make you feel like, okay, you too are fat, you are unattractive.

Zintle: I've experienced it, yes. It does happen because before Instagram I didn't care about such things. I couldn't care if I'm fat or if I'm thin like...but once you go on Instagram you just like to be: I also wanna be this body type, I wanna have curves like this and such things, yes.

Lihlumile is exposed to girls who have the 'ideal' type of body—the small waist, small bust and bracketed legs. That make her feel self-conscious and insecure about her body because she does not fit the criteria of the bodies that are presented on Instagram. She also adds that women go out of their way to impress others on Instagram by presenting an artificial self on Instagram. She describes the artificial self as result of some women posting photoshopped images of themselves to look more beautiful and enhanced to gain more likes.

Lihlumile: Definitely! Uhm...it definitely does have an impact on myself... because I don't see myself as "tha girl" (small waist, small bust and bracketed legs) because most of the girls have a certain body type. So, now, when you don't actually like meet those requirements. I wouldn't say requirements but, I mean we are exposed to these things and we accept them as requirements of how to look a certain way. So then, it really has a negative impact on how a person perceives herself. And all these models and celebrities on Instagram put make-up [coughs] and all these other artificial stuffs. People who are just naturally themselves uhm don't see themselves

as beautiful. Because, I mean, there is quite a difference between an artificial self and a natural self.

Researcher: What is the artificial self that you are referring to?

Lihlumile: Uh! The artificial self is basically according to me uhm... it's the face that you use to impress other people. The self that actually isn't you. But like you just put it out there to impress other people or to get likes or for popularity. For example, obviously a lot of girls have insecurities and for them to be liked they would for example, Photoshop their pictures to get more likes to get more viewers to gain popularity. Because they are not happy with actually who they are. So, then they put on this artificial self for them to feel secured.

4.7 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to provide a thematic analysis of the narratives shared by the participants by looking at the themes of Instagram engagement and identity. In choosing these themes as part of the analysis, I focused on the topic of Instagram and unwrapping the broad theme into sub-themes of the motivations, the influence and the lived experiences it has on the particular individual who engages on this social media platform. Identity is one of the broad themes that was analysed. In this chapter, identity is explained from the digital platform of Instagram—how identity is created and portrayed on the social media platform and how this has an impact on an individual's self-perception. The discussion explores the body and identity which cannot be separated from each other. Furthermore, how an individual feel about herself is interconnected with her body. She thus engages on Instagram and creates an online identity by displaying the interconnected relationship it has with her body.

Chapter 5: Femininity, African beauty standards and virtual belonging

5. 1 Introduction

This chapter encompasses the second part of the data analysis section of this dissertation and explores how femininity is understood and lived. It also includes a discussion about the participants' sense of belonging and support structures. Globally, beauty is negotiated and re-negotiated, especially within African societies. This is due to Eurocentric beauty standards being embedded by colonialism; the main lens through which beauty is perceived. However, African women are constantly fighting against this deeply entrenched vision of beauty standards. There are various movements on Instagram which encourage African women to embrace their natural beauty. These include, for example, refraining from using chemicals to straighten their hair, encouraging the use of make-up that matches their darker complexion and being proud of their bodies as they are. These movements are also supported by both South African and international celebrities, including local musicians (e.g., Lira and Judith Septhuma), who advocate that they are proud of their melanin skin complexions and embrace wearing their natural hair at all times. Every woman's experience of her body differs and when it comes to the concept of beauty, every individual has her own definition of what she regards as beautiful. For many years, women of colour have based the concept of beauty on predominantly Western beauty ideals. However, over time, Black women have come to embrace and re-negotiate beauty from their perspective.

The chapter explores the relationship between the experiences of the female body and how it has an influence on an individual's self-perception and body image. Institutions like the family, society, and the media also contribute to shaping how a woman perceives her femininity. In addition, the chapter explores social media, specifically Instagram, and how young women negotiate their beauty as a result of their exposure to the beauty standards that Instagram portrays. For example, the fact that it perpetuates certain aspects of Eurocentric beauty (e.g., weaves and wigs, skin bleaching and obtaining the slimmer body but with the African buttocks). It also analyses how this might lead to pressure on women to have an ideal body. This might lead to negative body image and to the experience of dissatisfaction among research participants who engage online. Furthermore, the chapter reviews the kind of support women receive on this social media platform, both in terms of body and beauty. It also focuses on their daily life challenges which create a sense of virtual belonging to women engaging on Instagram.

5.2 Perceptions of femininity

The first theme explores the participants' narratives of femininity. In this section, their understanding of what femininity is highlighted and their stories provided. The concept of feminism is complex to define. In most feminist theories feminism is defined as a situation where both men and women are granted equal opportunity in society. The conceptualisation of feminism was dealt with in more detail in the discussion of "Feminist thinking" in Section 1.3.5. It is of importance to explore feminist theories in this study because of its focus on women—in particular, the intersectionally marginalised women; Black women. However, the focus is not entirely restricted to feminist theories. It also focuses on how the young women who participate in this research study engage on Instagram in order to experience their femininity. The perception of femininity differs with regards to every woman. How an individual describes femininity is based on her personal experience. While feminism is about equal rights granted to both men and women, femininity is about how a woman embraces her inner and outer qualities as a woman. This theme therefore, includes a discussion about the participants' descriptions of what it means to be feminine and what inner qualities they regard as criteria for being feminine. Exploring femininity will provide us with a base to assess how women experience their femininity by looking at aspects such as experiences of her body as well as to the role beauty plays in how she feels about her femininity. Some of these young women echo the complexities and difficulty in defining femininity. However, they also provide narratives in attempting to define the concept of femininity.

Lerato explained how she understood femininity as equal rights for men and women in the workplace. She explains that it means for both men and women to be treated fairly and equally in the workplace:

Lerato: I think its equal rights for men and women. Uh mainly, if I were to say I am a feminist which I am not, but, if I were to say I am a feminist or what I believe is that both women and men should receive equal pay in the workplace, like economically. Both men and women should be paid equally or should be seen as equal people. Uhm. You should be paid according to your hard work and not mainly of who you are or because I am a man I get this much or I am a woman I get this much. Yeah... its equal rights... feminism. You don't have to be a man to be a feminist and you don't have to be a woman to be a feminist.

For Buyelwa, the concept of femininity is someone who is for females and fights against a patriarchal system in a society that seeks fairness and equality amongst men and women.

Buyelwa: It's a person who is for female. So basically, uhm, it's a person who fights for...for the rights of women. A person who is against patriarchy or the patriarchal system. Uhm. And also, a person who seeks for equality between every individual: between men and women. Like we are just seeking equality. You can be a feminist being a man and you can also be a feminist being a woman. So, it doesn't really matter who you are.

Nikiwe: Uhm...I think femininity. Pause. It would be standing up for women's rights and femininity doesn't necessarily end with female. But it can also be advocated by males, where we try to make the society aware of the importance of a woman's position in society.

Nikiwe shares similar sentiments as Lerato and Buyelwa. For her, femininity is standing up for women's rights and giving equal importance to a woman's standpoint in society, thus not only acknowledging a man's opinion.

Lerato, Buyelwa and Nikiwe described femininity according to their definition of feminism and therefore define it as equal rights for both men and women in society. Most of the participants describe femininity as something in juxtaposition to masculinity. They want men and women to be treated equally and fairly in society. They ignore the fact that we are not the same and they do not recognise that in some instances the other gender might feel marginalised. For instance, if men and women were given the same treatment in society a man who is about to be a father would be given the same months of paternity leave as is the case for the wife or partner who is granted maternity leave. In South Africa maternity leave is usually about three to four months. In addition, some research participants tend to argue that in some careers a woman does not earn the same as her male colleague. It is possible that the participants' conceptualisation of feminism may have been influenced by events that took place in 2018 in South Africa—the period of interviewing. One of the events of that year was the passing of the late Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (former wife of the late president Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela). Her passing was accompanied by widespread calls for unity and empowerment for women. It also coincided with the movement #I am Winnie Mandela where women felt a sense of empowerment to continue her legacy in fighting for women's rights in society.

Zintle is not really interested in issues regarding feminism and similar to Lerato, Buyelwa and Nikiwe, described femininity as fighting for equal rights for women and recognising women in society. Nikiwe also

mentioned the importance of a woman's recognition in society. However, recognition for her was pertaining to the workplace. Zintle views a woman's recognition in society holistically. She refers to women's basic human rights (e.g., the right to life), emphasising instances that were occurring in South Africa in 2019, such as the high rate of femicide and how women are the marginalised group in society, compared to their male counterparts.

Zintle: It means, uhm, fighting for equal rights for women; to be recognised as a woman in society. For instance, the women's march that took place on the 9th of August in 1956 in South Africa where women protested for human rights as well as workers' rights and tolerance and so forth. I feel like as much as they fought for women's rights there are still inequalities that exist amongst males and females today. Even now you will find careers that are still male-dominated. However, I had a conversation with my boyfriend the other day. He works in the field of mechanical engineering and he told me that in the company he works for more women are being employed than men. Because, they are trying to create a balance of male and female workers in their workplace. So, there are changes. However, women are still the marginalised group and also victims of many unfortunate instances such as femicide, especially; which is a huge phenomenon in South Africa.

Zintle and Lihlumile share the same views with Lerato, Buyelwa and Nikiwe. However, these two were interviewed during 2019. They feel that women are still the marginalised group and also the victims of violence. The difference in views between those interviewed in 2018 as compared to those interviewed in 2019 shows a feeling of fear and disempowerment. There is also some despair because of the treatment of women by men—mainly because of the scale of gender-based violence taking place in South Africa.

Lihlumile: Uhm... I can't explain this. I can't put it into words. I would say that it's being for female, everything female: uplifting female and empowering females. But we cannot take away the fact that femicide is a huge phenomenon taking place in our country and we feel scared for ourselves as women. There are a lot of women who are victims of physical abuse and femicide in our country.

Palesa views femininity as how an individual perceives her own “sense of self”. A person’s “sense of self” for her is defined as one’s perception of oneself and an awareness of who you truly are. Each person’s sense of self is directly related to how she feels about herself, her level of self-esteem, and her confidence or lack thereof. When referring to her femininity she implies how conscious she is of herself as a woman in society and how she constructs being female according to her standards and what makes her comfortable. She makes reference using the clothes a woman chooses to dress amidst the traditional ways as set by society. If a woman feels comfortable wearing tomboyish clothing, she can wear it. An individual can decide for herself how she wants to express her femininity as a woman, in a way that is comfortable for and suitable to her. Experiences of femininity are unique to every woman and how she expresses her femininity is influenced by how she perceives herself.

Palesa: Femininity to me is how you perceive your own sense of self, how you make sense of society and the things around you, and how it makes you feel about yourself. So, that might include you wearing clothes that specifically scream female in the orthodox way, you know. Like: how social media have portrayed how a female should look like, but I also believe that femininity can be something that is subtle. I can wear tomboy clothes, but very much stick to my guns of saying: but I am feminist. So, it’s open to interpretation from my viewpoint. It’s not something that can be inculcated into one definition because it speaks to a broader sense of what a person can take from it.

Palesa and Nomthandazo have similar perceptions of femininity. Whereas Palesa views femininity as one’s sense of self, Nomthandazo views femininity as how an individual carries herself. They both refer to how a woman dresses, how comfortable a woman is with herself and the way she carries herself in society. Now coming to Nomthandazo, she further explains how her understanding of femininity has been broadened and that it is not only based on the Western ideal of femininity.

Nomthandazo: My understanding of femininity is about the way you are, how you carry yourself, the way you dress as a woman. The way you maintain yourself: so, it would be how you dress, how you portray yourself. I think... I think. [Pause]. Femininity... my understanding of femininity is broader in the sense that it’s not only based on the Western ideal of femininity or what femininity is.

Researcher: And how has it changed? What is the Western ideal of femininity based on?

Nomthandazo: What I mean by broader is that I have also learned to love and celebrate the African female body and its features, which were once hypersexualised in a way that the Black female body was not considered as feminine enough and soft when compared to the White female body. For example, take Serena Williams's [an American professional tennis player] body. Throughout her career people have made fun of her body and how it looks and even going as far as saying she looks like a man. So, because our [Black females] features have always tended to be more visible and our bodies thicker, Black bodies have never fitted into the normal standards of femininity and beauty. And I can relate due to my own childhood experiences. For the longest time I also didn't think my body was feminine enough. Because, my cousins used to tease me about having a big bum to a point where I thought maybe there was something wrong with having a big bum. Then I tried to wear clothes that I thought maybe would make it seem smaller.

The next question I asked Nomthandazo was: what led to the change in her perception in how she views femininity as a Black woman? The reason why I asked Nomthandazo this question was to know what influenced this change in her view of femininity. For Nomthandazo, femininity is all about how a woman carries herself, how she dresses and how she takes care of herself. She further explains her understanding of femininity has been broadened and is no longer only based on historical Western beauty ideals. Black femininity or the portrayal of Black females' bodies as hypersexualised was common during the periods of slavery. Within the South African context, Sarah Baartman's body was used to portray Black women's voluptuous bodies as a sexual commodity. This is explored in more detail in Section 2.3.1 under the section on "The representation of Black women's sexuality".

Perceiving Black female bodies as a sexual commodity impacted on how Black women are seen in society, especially since the media also contribute to this portrayal. Most Black women who in the past used media such as television, magazines and movies as platform to portray Black women's beauty used to support features of Western beauty ideals such as fair skin, being skinny and wearing their hair straight or with added extensions (weaves or wigs). This made women of colour who do not fit these criteria feel less beautiful and less confident about their bodies. Nomthandazo, for example, related these experiences to

her childhood days. She was teased by her cousins for having a big buttock and this made her feel insecure about her body and made her conscious of how she dressed. Her perception of Black women's femininity changed when she became exposed to the changes in media, especially in popular culture where the Black iconic musician Beyoncé released her song called *Bootylicious* in 2003. In the song she talks about embracing her curves and buttocks with a Black female body and her experience drastically changed the perception of Black females' bodies in the entertainment industry where Western women began embracing Black female features. Nomthandazo also highlighted how different cultures perceive beauty differently and what the Western culture regards as beautiful (e.g., slim body, slinky and straight hair). African cultures, on the other hand, regard a more curvaceous woman as beautiful, with more African women starting to embrace their African looks (e.g., hair, body shapes). This discussion was dealt with in more detail in the literature review section ("Beauty from a Black African perspective" in Section 2.3.2.1).

There is diversity in beauty across different races and cultures and the exposure of popular culture through traditional forms of media (television, movies, magazines, advertisements) and social media made Nomthandazo conscious of the variations in beauty. It showed her that it could have a negative and positive impact on how one perceives beauty, as it is based on what she is exposed to through the traditional forms of media and social media.

Nomthandazo: What led to the change was the changing media perceptions in how the Black female body was perceived. After Beyoncé [an American singer, songwriter, actress, dancer and businesswoman] released her first solo album in 2003, there was this new obsession with people where everyone wanted to have Beyoncé's bootylicious body. She suddenly became the new obsession as she had the perfect hips and bum to go with it. There were also people like Jennifer Lopez [a Latin American singer, actress, dancer, fashion designer, producer and businesswoman] who also had a bootylicious body that was the envy of most women—regardless of their skin colour. And then a few years later we had women like Nicki Minaj [an American female rapper] who paid a lot of money just to have the body that I did not want to have and would trade with anyone willing to trade with me. I think that just made me realise that there was nothing wrong with my body. If anything, I should love it more if there are people who are willing to pay thousands of US dollars just to have the features that I didn't like and think they are beautiful. It was also an eye-opener that there was no

one-dimensional ideal perception of beauty, but it varies across different cultures and also with time. Popular culture also plays a huge role in how we [women] have come to perceive ourselves.

5.2.1 The inner qualities that make a woman feminine

As mentioned in the theme on the perception of femininity (cf. Section 5.2) above, femininity is mostly about how a woman embraces her qualities as a woman and how she feels about herself. This is relative to each woman. The following are the participants' narratives on what they think the inner qualities are that make a woman feminine.

Palesa: The inner qualities that make a woman feminine is what innately makes you comfortable. It doesn't necessarily have to culminate in your outer appearance to the outside world meaning, what clothes you wear, whether or not you indulge in make-up; you use accessories. Now that is the normative standard of society of being able to distinguish being male and female. Because, we are moving into a society where a lot of things are gender-neutral. I think the inner qualities of what makes a woman feminine is what you decide and what you want it to be specifically to you—being able to have qualities that are suited to you.

Palesa's view regarding femininity differed from a normative explanation as she ascribed it to the innate comfortability an individual feel about herself. She made reference to society transitioning into a gender-neutral world where there is no defined standard of beauty in society according to one's sex. A woman that wants to express her sexuality through male-like features, has the freedom of choice in doing so. She is not limited in how she expresses herself as a female. Thus, Palesa's take on the inner qualities that make a woman feminine are not based on the clichéd qualities that are known to women in society (e.g., of being the nurturer, mother and home-maker). An individual has the freedom to create the inner qualities that are suitable for her.

Nomthandazo: Okay, there are many qualities that make a woman feminine. But, most Black women like myself would have resilience. Black women are very resilient which something that I've also noticed with myself. I've seen that in life; I've gone through so many things like hardships, challenges in life. But, then: somehow, I always get a way to get back up whether I am motivated by the

people in my life—my family, my daughter. But, then it's just that resilience of never giving up despite life's challenges. Another one would be: the kind of love that I've seen from my mother who showed it to us as her children, right! Which is something that I apply to my daughter too—like learning to love unconditionally. And then, supporting your child or even your children regardless of what life choices they make; which is something I want to apply to my own daughter and which is something that I've been thinking about a lot as of lately. You know I've been thinking a lot about let's say: as a parent, because I am a parent, let's say if my daughter comes to me one day when she is old enough and she tells me that she is gay [lesbian]. I think from what I've experienced or what I have went through as well as from the obstacles of being a single parent. I think it would be a matter of, it would come naturally to me to support my daughter despite her sexual orientation. I think for the fact that I've raised her on my own and I've seen her at my worst and she's seen me at my worst. I think for me it would be then loving her unconditionally whether she chooses a lifestyle which is different from my own. But then, at the end of the day she's still my daughter. So, I would love her regardless. And, I will show her support in her life whether it's the lifestyle she is living. I would show interest in that. Another inner quality that most women have is forgiveness. We tend to forgive even things that are unforgivable. People do a lot of things to us. But somehow, we find a way to forgive.

According to Nomthandazo, most Black women possess the quality of resilience. Similar to most Black women that are faced with the challenges of being single-parents and having to raise their children alone, she too is a single-parent. However, despite the challenges they face, they still manage to remain resilient and strong, which shows a lot of character. The other inner quality a woman possesses is the unconditional love she gives to her children. For Nomthandazo, unconditional love is synonymous with acceptance. For example, when her child grows up and decides which sexual orientation she prefers, she will support her daughter's choice. Often mothers show unconditional love to their children regardless of the choices they make in life. Another inner quality that most women have according to Nomthandazo is forgiveness. She feels women tend to forgive even when it comes to unforgivable things that mostly men put women through. However, this innate ability for women to forgive even those things that are unforgivable, reflects on how some women also encourage a patriarchal system—to influence how they are treated. It

all goes back to the influence of institutions like the family, church, society and media in how socialisation through these institutions plays a big role in how a woman perceives her femininity. This was also dealt with in Section 5.2 under “Perceptions of femininity”.

Zintle: I think we are more emotional. But I think we are much stronger than men. I think we can handle pain more than them. But they feel that we are more emotional, which we are because we have to have the soft side. And also. [Pause]. So, my mom...my mom is a single parent, right! I feel like she is strong for a single parent. My mom never had like a stable job. But she managed to take her kids to school, she managed, uhm to take me to varsity. So, I feel like the strength she has and the drive she has because even though I cry to her and tell her I do not have this thing. She always makes a plan to me getting what I want. And, that's what I've taken from my mom: that, you know, that through every struggle, if you believe in God. [Pause]. [Quietly sobs].

Zintle: [Continues speaking after a while but, chokes while speaking because of the crying] ...You become strong because you can actually do anything you want. Because... [Heavy breathing...chokes while speaking because of the crying]. She raised us from nothing. Literally! That's why when I came to university I was like: God, can you please just keep my mom so that she can see me graduate and be successful in life. Because without her. That's why, when I see women, I see her. Because I feel like women go through a lot just to raise their kids, just to be stable in life. So, she has done so much for me that I feel like this is the woman that I want to become. Because of the characteristics she has, my mom never cried in front of me—even when we are going through the most. She would just be strong for us, for me and my sister. So, she is just an amazing woman.

Zintle feels that women are generally more emotional than men. But they are also stronger because they can handle pain better. She shared an emotional, yet very personal, narrative about her mom who is a single parent raising her and her little sister. She emphasised the strength her mom has despite the adversities she is faced with in life, such as not having a stable job. But she still manages to look after them. Also, her mother does not allow herself to cry in front of her children even when she is going through challenges in her life. Zintle admires the strength of her mother and would like to possess the qualities her mother has. Researchers have reported that children raised by single-mother families are

economically disadvantaged compared to children who live in single-father or intact families (Hilton et al. 2001:32). The role pressure for the single-mother also accompanies the economic strain.

Lihlumile: Uhm...Because, women are powerhouses. Women generally have better hearts than men according to me. Because, I mean they have so much more sympathy than men and they are more loving, yah that's. They have a... a warm nature.

Lihlumile states that women are powerhouses and generally show more affection than men do as they are sympathetic, loving and naturally warm towards others.

Nikiwe: Mhmm...I think it's the amount of confidence that she has. Her confidence and obviously her strength and the love that she projects.

Nikiwe shares the same sentiments as Zintle, as she feels the inner qualities that make a woman feminine is her strength. Similar to Lihlumile, she feels that the love that a woman projects to others is also an inner quality that makes her feminine. She adds that the confidence she exudes is another inner quality that a woman possesses.

The aim of this sub-theme was to introduce how each participant perceives the concept of femininity in her own words by also adding the inner qualities that make a woman feminine. Very often, the concept of femininity is integrated with the body, although the body (physical appearance) is not only a key feature that makes a woman feminine. Femininity also entails how a woman feels about herself. All these aspects (physical appearance and personal attributes) shape how she feels about and experiences her femininity. It is of significance to begin this chapter by exploring the description of femininity in order for the reader to understand the themes that follow and how they connect with the concept of femininity.

5.2.2 Experiencing the body

The purpose of this sub-theme is to gain insight into the individual and the unique experiences of women and how they feel about their bodies. The body is an integral part of the self-concept and body image plays an important role in modern society as it is “a means for constructing, symbolising and expressing one's self” (Fisher 1986; Schouten, 1991). These ideas are being dealt with in more detail in the literature review in Section 2.3. How a woman feels about her body has intrinsic effects on how she perceives and accepts herself in society. This was dealt with in detail in Section 2.2 under “Social theory and the body”. Instagram is a social network site where the body is displayed. And, usually the body that is regarded as the ‘ideal’ type of body for most young Black women who engage on this SNS is: flat stomach, round

buttocks, firm thighs and curvaceous waist size. There has not been research done on these specific criteria of Black women portrayed on Instagram. There is, however, literature available on the Western body ideal of women with a 36-inch bust, 24-inch waist and 36-inch hips (Wise 2018:7). The mentioned criteria of Black women are most portrayed on Instagram and Sbahle Mpisane's figure (see Figure 1, page 128) is a demonstration of the "ideal body type" that most Black women are exposed to on Instagram. The display of this type of model of body is a combination of the Western ideal body (flat stomach and firm thighs) and the African 'ideal' body (round buttocks and curvaceous waist). It's an 'ideal' body type because it is usually difficult to attain it and the body itself is always in a "tug of war" with itself: it needs to look a certain way but in reality, there is no ideal type of body. However, because of the pressure that Instagram creates on young women who engage with this social media platform, this 'ideal' or 'perfect' body becomes real and a desirable goal for most young Black women. The following are the participants' physical descriptions to give the reader an idea of how each woman's body looks. And also, the participants' narratives on how they feel about their bodies, including their thoughts when they look at themselves: albeit being satisfied or whether they would want to change certain things about their bodies.

Lerato is a petite woman who is a waist size 28 in South African measurements (she wears extra small—approximately a size 4 in US measurements) and has a flat stomach. She is coffee colour, has black eyes, oblong face, long dark brown dyed dreadlocks, v-shaped shoulders and a slightly hollow back posture with moderately wide curves and small round buttocks. Although Lerato wishes that she had a bigger body, she has a love-hate relationship with her body. She states that "sometimes skinny girls like [her] get away with a lot like being able to wear bikini's, shorts and tight clothing" without revealing too much. Lerato's obsession with being a size 32 goes back to the criteria of the ideal body type that most young Black women are exposed to when engaging on Instagram—which leads to an individual never feeling satisfied with the current body she has.

Lerato: I wish I was bigger. I really wish I was bigger. But yeah, I really wish I was bigger! It's both negative and positive sometimes. Yes, sometimes skinny girls get away with a lot. Yah! [Giggles]. Like wearing bikinis, tight clothing and shorts. Because...you feel more confident that you are not showing anything. Yah. We actually get away with a lot. So, it's both negative and positive in how I feel about my body. I am not satisfied with my body. If I could just be a size 32, I wouldn't change anything. I just want to add a little fat but overall, I wouldn't change anything.

Palesa is also a petite woman who wears size 28-30 and has a flat stomach. She has long legs, light complexion, dark hair, hazel brown eyes, triangle face, small buttocks, bust and waist. Palesa starts telling her narrative on how she feels about her body, speaking about herself in second person. By speaking in second person it helps her to cope better with the changes she has experienced with her body. That's why she removes herself from describing the certain parts of her body that she would like to change. She is comfortable in her own body and likes being nude when she is at home. This is because of a positive reinforcement that was instilled by her mother at a young age. It illustrates how much the primary socialisation (parents, siblings, extended family) influences how an individual perceives and feels about her body. It is not only the media that have an influence in how an individual feel about her body, but also institutions like the family, peers, and the church play an important role.

Palesa further on explains how she does "corrective measures" in order to maintain her body. It goes back to a kind of obsession to attaining the 'ideal' body. Instagram is one of the influences that puts pressure on young women to have the perfect body type. And, in order to attain this body type some, go on dietary regimens which are often risky to their health: excessive exercising, starvation and so on forth.

Palesa: Deep sigh...your boobs are bigger now [talking about herself in second person]; I'm always naked. I need also point that out and it all stems from because if you talking about how I view my body it stems from the fact that my mom from a really young age she instilled a positive reinforcement view of how to look at your body. So, I'm always naked when I get home and whenever and I do take time to look at myself in the mirror. Okay, so these are the changes my body is experiencing and I won't lie: sometimes you feel bloated and you don't like what age has done. That you know, once upon a time my arms were really... really fit and when I waved nothing waved back but now things are "lil jiggly". But, it's not anything that I am going to say: it depresses me to a point where I don't like my body. If I feel like okay, we have a little bit of cellulite I can work out. If I feel like things are a bit jiggly. I do corrective measures in order to ensure the fact that it isn't going to be something that I want to stay for a long time. Because, I know that if I leave it like that, I'm going to have a negative view of myself. So, whatever I can change if it needs changing, then I... I'm proactive about it. And also, I feel like everybody would like to change something about

their body: have rock hard abs [acrylonitrile butadiene styrene]. But, still eat chips. But right now, it needs lil bit of work to tone it but overall, I'm satisfied.

Nomthandazo is a petite woman who wears size 30. She has a nutmeg skin complexion, long black dreadlocks, round face, small black eyes, and has tribal marks on her face which indicates she is from the Mpondo clan in the Xhosa ethnic group. She has an hour glass figure and has belly fat which was caused by her pregnancy. Nomthandazo on the whole feels fairly satisfied and happy with her body. However, there are some days that she does feel dissatisfaction with her body. Overall, she is satisfied with her body but occasionally she aims to have the body of a fitness Instacelebrity, such as Sbahle Mpisane (See page 128). Women like Sbahle Mpisane often match the criteria of the ideal black woman's body portrayed on Instagram. They are the reasons why so many ordinary women like Nomthandazo feel dissatisfaction with their body. Nomthandazo admires Sbahle's body and made mention of her during the interview. This admiration can be seen as both negative and positive reinforcement to attaining a perfect body. Thus, exposure to the 'perfect' body shapes on Instagram depends on how an individual perceives herself and how she feels about her body.

Nomthandazo: I think to be 100 percent honest, as much as I am happy with myself and my body, but then, there are those days when you feel like: Okay! You feel less sexy or less beautiful. But then there are those days when you wake up and then you have this glow. And then, you feel like: Okay! Now I'm so sexy and everything. Yes, I am satisfied with my body. But as I've said I do not think there is any person who can be 100 percent satisfied with her body. So, the first thing that I would want to change, I think is, I need to have that Sbahle Mpisane, flat tummy with a six pack. I need to have that! Its like: I want a flat tummy like really...really flat tummy! And what else? What body change? Oh my goodness! If I could just get something to remove my stretch marks on my belly as well as my waist; that I would love to change. My feet, maybe, like make them a bit bigger; like wear a size 4 or 5 instead of a size 3 [chuckles]. And then, I feel like they are also too fat. It's like too fat and too short and thin. Also make them a bit skinny and a bit longer. So, those would be some of the things I would like to change. But, other than that, I am okay. Maybe, my breasts like go up a cup or two cups bigger than my normal bra size; I would love to change. Because, at times there are those outfits that you look at and then, when you look at that

outfit you like: hmm...that's a nice outfit! But then, when you looking at yourself. But, as much as that outfit is nice, right, because you have a flat chest it wouldn't look that nice. Because, there are tops that I believe are made for people who've breasts. They look nice on people who've breasts. The person would maybe be exposing their cleavage area. And then, there are those types of outfits that look nice on people who have a flat chest. Not an entirely flat... flat chest. But then, not too much boobs: so, go up a cup.



⁹ “Sbahle Mpisane in action” (Mlambo 2018).

Lihlumile is a tall young woman who wears a size 34-36, has a bottom hourglass figure, wide hips, long legs, diamond face, cat-eyed shaped eyes, and square shaped shoulders with a caramel complexion. For Lihlumile, body weight gain is self-induced, especially when an individual chooses not to be healthy. Lihlumile is not entirely happy with her body and wishes she had a smaller waist. For her, the “ideal girl” is the girl that she is exposed to on Instagram and that has her desired body shape. A lot of how an individual feel about her body is influenced by the types of bodies of other women she is exposed to on Instagram. Furthermore, the relationship she has with her body has an impact on how she sees and feels about herself.

Lihlumile: First thought is actually, first question is: when are you going to do something about your body? [Talking to herself in second person] in terms of losing weight and toning? Because, I mean, like, yes, our bodies are gifts. But I

⁹Figure 1: Sbahle Mpisane is an Instagram celebrity aka Instacebrity who represents the criteria of the “ideal body” that most young Black women are exposed to when engaging with Instagram (Mlambo 2018).

mean somethings are just self-induced, like gaining weight and choosing not to be healthy. That's self-induced. Uhm. I am not entirely satisfied. And yes, I would want to change a few things about it.

Researcher: What are those things that you'd like to change about your body?

Lihlumile: I would really just like to have a smaller waist. Because, I just feel like it's bigger than the average girl like—the "ideal girl".

Researcher: Okay, what's an "ideal girl" in your opinion?

Lihlumile: An "ideal girl" is a girl with a small bust, small waist, normal-sized thighs [chuckles], straight legs or bracketed legs.

I extended the sub-theme of "Experiencing the body" by adding sub-themes because of the continuation of the theme on "Experiencing the body". That led me to asking questions relating to the relationship the participants have with features they love and least love about their bodies. It was of importance asking these questions because, it explains how each participant experiences her body. The first theme under this sub-theme of "Experiencing the body" starts with questions on the features the participants most love and least love about their bodies. Then, follows a different angle looking particularly at two participants—Palesa and Nikiwe. In this subsection on features of their body I explore the features they most love. I also focus on the privileges that come with having a certain beauty.

5.2.3 "I stand in awe of my body"

"I stand in awe of my body" is a quote by Henry David Thoreau. It simply means being happy with your body as it is embracing the perfections and imperfections of your body. We live in a society that focuses on a lot on praising for those who are "beautiful" and we forget to acknowledge the more important aspects of the vital role the body plays in the functioning of human beings (Hayden 2014). In reality we often are conditioned by society to believe and appreciate beauty and attractiveness. The purpose of using this quote from Thoreau is to demonstrate that when an individual loves her body it has an effect on her self-perception. It was of importance to ask the question about the body features that the participant loves because it's all part of their views on experiencing their body.

Researcher: What are the features of your body you most love?

Lerato: Uhm... that I love? Oh My Goodness! My bum and my curves... [giggles].

Researcher: And, why do you love these features so much?

Lerato: Because, I mean it's an African thing. It's a Black thing, if you don't have those OMG [Oh My Goodness]! You are not pretty enough. Yah.

Researcher: And, why these features particularly? How do you accentuate them when posting pictures on Instagram?

Lerato: You post in such a way that your viewers [followers] can see your bum [giggles].

According to Lerato, her biggest assets are her bum and curves. Her face lights up when she talks about her bum and curves and she giggles, showing her excitement. Lerato desires to have the 'ideal' African body. She feels that if you are an African woman without these features, you are not "pretty enough". This view relates to the African perspective on beauty: African women are considered beautiful if they have a curvaceous figure and this discussion was dealt with in more detail in Section 2.3.2.1 under "Beauty from a Black African perspective". Now that Lerato has mentioned what the features of her body are that she loves most, the follow-on question to ask was: what are the feature of her body she least loves about herself.

Lerato feels that her shoulders are her worst asset and she hides them when taking pictures of herself for Instagram. She is very cautious about how she takes her pictures and always avoids showing her back when taking pictures.

Lerato: My back. Oh My Goodness! And my shoulders. I have a hash back and my shoulders show my bones.

Researcher: When taking pictures on Instagram do you hide your shoulders?

Lerato: I'm cautious of that [chuckles]. Very much cautious.

Researcher: How cautious are you?

Lerato: If I'm taking a picture and after the picture has been taken. I'd view like: Okay, are my bones showing? And I definitely don't give the camera my back all the time. So, my back never shows in my pictures and also not my shoulders. I

am always wearing tops that hide them or when standing, I pose in a certain way that they don't show. So, I am very cautious of that.

Buyelwa also gave her responses to the features of her body she loves the most and the least about herself.

Buyelwa: Uhm. It's my face [giggles].

Researcher: And, what about your face?

Buyelwa: [Laughs out loud] Yoh! I don't know. Yah, my smile obviously. Uhm. I love my smile. I love my eyes. Yah, I love my lips. I love my...my hair [giggles] Whoa man! I just love myself, man, basically! But, the one feature I love most about my body is my face. Because, that's the one that's forever on Instagram. I always like taking selfies. So, uhm... with selfies you know mos [right?]: the face is the one that yes, yeah [makes a sound].

Buyelwa views her face as her best asset. This results in her posting selfies on Instagram regularly. Now here is the feature that Buyelwa least loves about her body. For Buyelwa, her toes are her least favourite body feature and she does not show her toes when taking pictures of herself for Instagram. She emphasises how she will never post pictures of her toes because they make her feel uncomfortable. It is clear that for her Instagram is a social network site where people post positive pictures of themselves.

Buyelwa: My...my toes.

Researcher: Okay, and why your toes?

Buyelwa: Because, di na le di corns [they have corns] ... [giggles, and moves her body posture down while laughing]. Because most people, especially guys, the first thing that they look at when they talk to a girl, they look at the toes and that's very uncomfortable for me. Because, okay, nna [I] at first used to have very nice toes and then I wore a lot of sneakers which uhm led to me having di cornso [these corns]. I started working at Country Road. I wore lots and lots of heels. So, they also contributed to me having more corns. So, you know they are very uncomfortable. I don't even like showing them. You know other girls snap their feet or their toes and post them on Instagram. I'll never do that, even on

WhatsApp I'll never—wherever on social network sites. I will never! Chuckles, because I don't find them very nice.

Lihlumile also shares the features she most loves and least likes about herself. Like Buyelwa, Lihlumile also loves her face because her eyes have a unique shape.

Lihlumile: Chuckles, it will probably be my face.

Researcher: And, what about your face?

Lihlumile: My eyes, they have a unique shape and that's it.

Lihlumile does not like her long legs and big body structure. She wishes to be short.

Lihlumile: Probably it will be legs [chuckles]. They are long. If I had a choice, I'd choose to be short. I have a big body structure and that's just in my genes.

For Nomthandazo, her best features are her buttocks and legs. She is used to receiving compliments about her legs, especially when wearing shorts and short dresses. However, she initially did not admire her buttocks when she was younger because she was teased about their size. Fortunately, with her exposure to pop culture (music videos, television, magazines) of Black American artists such as Beyoncé and Nicki Minaj, her confidence grew and she accepted her body. Thus, the media's (social media, television, magazine, billboards) influence on an individual's self-perception and body image cannot be underestimated.

Nomthandazo: [Chuckles] Oooho! I think. I think obviously the first one would be my bum. It's like my bum. And yes, my bum is the first one. Oh, my legs. Like I love my legs and so many people would be giving me compliments on my legs. My legs are one of my best features. Like that's one of my best assets. It's like even when I am wearing shorts or short dresses or even a dress. I know that I will be getting a lot of compliments on that day just based on my legs: how nice they look. And then, it's also my bums. How they fit into my dresses when I am wearing them.

And now, to the features Nomthandazo least loves about herself. After giving birth, most women go through bodily changes. Nomthandazo experienced many changes in her body after giving birth to her daughter. Her stomach is no longer as tight as it was and it is a bit saggy. This resulted in a lot of stretch

marks on her stomach, which is the one area she feels uncomfortable revealing. This is also her least favourite body feature.

Nomthandazo: And then, what [thinking]... my figure as well but then, not as much. I think before I had my daughter, yes, I used to love it a lot. But, then now because my body went through a lot of changes and then some of the changes was because of pregnancy. Before I had my child, I didn't have stretch marks. Now, my body and stomach are no longer as tight as they used to be. It's like, it's a bit saggy there and there—all because of the stretching. I no longer wear clothes that are much revealing within the waist area. But then I still love my waist. But, just not to expose the flesh, especially around the area where I have stretch marks; or to even wear crop tops.

For Zintle the features she most loves and least loves about her body are similar to Nomthandazo, loves her legs, especially when she is wearing a dress. Furthermore, her melanin skin colour and her eyes are other features she views positively. Zintle mentioned that she loves her melanin complexion and because she is a young Black woman (aged 22) who is upwardly mobile and exposed to movements such as #BlackGirlRocks, #BlackGirlMagic and #PrettyPeriod have made more dark skin women to love and embrace their black beauty.

Zintle: From head to toe neh [right!]. I love my... [Chuckles]; I love my legs. I have like nice legs, especially when I'm like wearing a dress. I do have nice legs and then, what else...I love my skin colour...I love...love my skin colour [melanin complexion]. Like I wouldn't change it for the world. I love my eyes.

Zintle like Buyelwa least likes her toes. It's the one feature of her body she is not particularly fond of.

Zintle: Gosh! I hate my toes...mmmh [grins]. I just hate them!

Pebbles admires her dimples, fingers and nails, and also adds that she loves her eyelashes and natural hair. There has been a lot of Black women on television advertisements, Black actresses, models, video vixens and Instagram bloggers who embrace and wear their natural hair. This influences other Black women to do the same.

Pebbles: My dimple and my fingers and my nails [smiling] and my eyelashes and my hair. I love my natural hair!

Pebbles also mentioned what her least favourite part of her body and it's her legs.

Pebbles: My legs. I don't like my legs [voice dampens and face saddens]. I wish they would've been a bit longer.

The narratives on features of the body that participants most love and least love about themselves continue in the sub-theme in Section 5.2.4. This section deals with the different standpoints of Palesa and Nikiwe—who share similar interests regarding their body features. The narratives by these two participants provide an interesting take on the way some women are being treated and, on the emphasis, based on their physical appearance.

5.2.4 “Tswang, Tswang, Le mmone Ngwana o tshwana le Coloured”

Tswang, Tswang, Le mmone Ngwana o tshwana le Coloured”. Translated into English, the refrain means: “Come out and see a child who looks like a Coloured”¹⁰ (Song by Vusi Mahlasela 2000).

This phrase comes from a Sotho wedding song in South Africa that's usually sung by the family of the bride to complement their beautiful child getting married. According to the Apartheid pecking order, Coloured people were above Africans. This made it economically attractive for Africans to pass themselves off as Coloured—especially the ones with a lighter skin complexion (Mda 2000). Now, coming to Palesa: she mentions that one of the features that she most loves about herself is her skin colour (see Palesa's views as expressed in section 5.2 under “Experiencing the body”). Palesa is a woman of light complexion. Among South African Black women beauty is often associated with light skin complexion. The root of this has to do with the history of Apartheid and how Black people were also segregated in terms of skin colour. For Palesa, her skin colour and eyes are her best features. As a light-skinned woman with hazel brown eyes, there is a certain level of ‘privilege’ that she receives in society. This ‘privilege’ is based on how she looks. She is sometimes mistaken for being Coloured; a “good change” for her from being Black. This is indicative of how a person's physical appearance still plays a role in how she is treated in South Africa where there is a certain level of prestige and preference given to light-skinned women. They are also popularly known

¹⁰ Coloured, “formerly referred to as Cape Coloured, is a person of mixed European (White) and African (Black) or Asian ancestry as officially defined by the South African government from 1950 to 1991” (Prine-Pauls 2019).

as “yellow bones”¹¹. According to South African beauty standards, a woman’s beauty is often based on her complexion, with light-skinned women being perceived as more beautiful. I dealt with this in Section 2.3.2.2 under “Beauty defined from a South African perspective”. This view of embracing light-skinned women in society is still a historically, deep-ingrained situation. This is reinforced by the long history of colonisation and the epitome of Western beauty standards often propagated in the media. These factors often influence how women of colour perceive beauty.

Palesa: [Deep sigh]. Okay, then I love my eyes [blushes] and I love my skin.

Researcher: And, why these particular features of yourself?

Palesa: I like my eyes. Because, they are not the norm. And I like my skin because I just like my skin. That’s just how it came. You have to love what you are given... yeah!

Researcher: You refer to your eyes not being the norm, could you just elaborate on that?

Palesa: Okay, they are very... very light. More often than not I’m mistaken as Coloured. Uuuh...So, it sometimes is a good change from being Black. I can play whichever card I feel like. It’s a hybrid of sorts.

Researcher: And you are referring to: “It’s a good change from being Black”? So uhm, what do you mean by that?

Palesa: I would like to elaborate on that, not even elaborate, take it back. I’m not necessarily saying that being Black is a bad thing. Uhm. But, from my own experiences in society you get social capital for what you look like. And in certain instances, looking a certain way will give you more privilege in being able to be assisted quicker. So, sometimes playing the skin colour card works in my favour.

Researcher: Okay, that means that even though you say that you try as hard as possible to separate yourself from what you have internalised, from what society identifies you to be in as far as being in a certain box, in a way it sort of influences

¹¹ A yellow bone is the lightest type of light skinned Black female. The term is used to suggest that light skin black people are beautiful. But it also means that they derive their beauty from the fact that they have light skin (Scott 2014).

how you see yourself—going back to the whole identity. How you perceive your identity?

Palesa: Yeah, how I see myself and how society sees me differs. And, sometimes you need to, well, need to wear the cost of, yes, as much as I want to be sensitive about this issue. If I have the option of getting better service quicker, quicker service I am going to take the cheque of being able to play the card that will ensure that I get better service—the quicker service.

Palesa states that despite how she sees herself, society has a stereotypical view of her based on her looks and they treat her according to how she looks. Thus, she uses the privilege of her social capital as a yellow bone woman in society to play (wear) the colour card, if it will enable her to receive quicker service from people because they assume, she is Coloured.

Nikiwe, similar to Palesa, also embraces not having the same eyes as most Black people have.

Nikiwe: My eyes are big and they are hazel brown, so not everyone has such eyes. And then my nails are naturally long and strong. I don't put on artificial nails.

Researcher: By everyone...who are you referring to?

Nikiwe: Uhm... my fellow Black people.

Nikiwe: I would say my toes [giggles]. My toes. And I think my height also, I think above average everybody's shortness mhm.

Nikiwe feels the same as Buyelwa about her toes. She also does not enjoy being short. The experiences shared by the participants regarding their love and hate relationships with their bodies show how many women are dissatisfied with their physical appearance. Despite loving some areas of their bodies, there are areas that they are not happy with. The following section explores the importance of looking good, especially on Instagram.

5.3 The importance of appearance on Instagram

For most women, appearance matters. Therefore, the majority of women spend time and money perfecting their facial and body appearance. Focusing on beauty is important as it is the driving force for most women who engage on Instagram (Carbone 2019). When engaging on Instagram users will receive

tips on how to enhance their beauty. The theme on “The importance of appearance on Instagram” relates to the topic on beauty and how it is of importance to what women believe constitutes aspects of femininity. The following are the participants’ narratives on whether or not looking good is important to them.

Lerato: Not on an everyday basis. Sometimes I just feel like looking ugly [chuckles] and being comfortable in my own skin. But, around people I don’t know, I really want to look good. First impressions count. But, around people I know and they see me ugly—I feel like whatever...yah, I can be myself. On Instagram, definitely! You can’t just post an ugly picture [chuckles], unless if you wanna address maybe your flaws. For instance, posting a picture of their scars.

Zintle: No, but on Instagram, yes.

Researcher: And, why is it important to you?

Zintle: I feel like: As much as we don’t want to admit it. But, that’s how you attracted people. Because, if you post a picture that is not nice, not a lot of people are like going to view your picture or want to listen to what you are saying. I am not saying you have to be like the most beautiful girl. But what I know: like you don’t have to be the most beautiful girl on Instagram. But, just be there, exist; show people that you do exist. Even, if you are not wearing make-up, take nice pictures, good quality pictures. Find your lighting—such things. So that’s what I actually pay attention to. And your background, your angles, what you are wearing. You can’t come there with your pajamas, and then, you like taking pictures.

Lerato and Zintle shared the same views that looking good on a daily basis is not an essential part of their everyday life. However, they deemed it important to always look good on Instagram, as it will leave a lasting impression and draw the attention of more followers to their Instagram account. They need to look good on Instagram. Wanting to look good is a way of complying with the motivation behind the establishment of Instagram. And also, because people who engage on Instagram use the social network site to portray an *ideal* and *perfected* self: The self that is always looking her best, especially for those individuals (followers) who are not personally acquainted with the individual using Instagram. Instagram also heightens the perfect self with features like various kinds of filters which allow the user to tweak

pictures in a way that enhances her beauty more on Instagram. This links to the findings from the literature on Instagram dealt with in Section 2.5.1 under “Instagram”.

Nomthandazo: Oh it is. I think looking good is very important. Because, it's like when you look good, you feel good. And just imagine the, “Like”: the things that you can just achieve in that one day—where you feel good you look good. It's like you are at your best. Your energy, you've been recharged. It's like there is something about feeling good. You're more confident, I would say. You are more positive about things. The outcome of things: even if you get bad news that specific day it doesn't really matter. Because, you are on that high for the day. You look good, you feel good. People are complimenting you so that just makes you feel good.

According to Nomthandazo, looking good is important because if “you look good, you feel good” and that will transpire into achieving and accomplishing things as you feel confident and energised.

Lihlumile: I mean... uhm. I believe that the way you look says a lot about yourself. And for me looking good is not just: uhm, keeping up with trends, wearing the latest, uhm, fashion and make-up and all of those things. Looking good is feeling good. For example: your personal hygiene. For me, that's part of looking good.

For Lihumile looking good is not only about your physical appearance but also about your personal hygiene. Most of the participants are just ordinary women who do take pride in their looks. But, as mentioned it is not something, they focus much attention on—especially when they are offline and in the real world. But, when engaging on Instagram, Lerato and Zintle noted the importance of looking good all the time. This supports Goffman's notions of the *front* and *back stage performance* (Goffman 1956:10). The *front* stage in this case will be presenting the online self that looks good all the time on Instagram and the *back stage* performance will be the offline self that was dealt with in the theoretical frameworks in Section 1.3.4.1 under “Front and back stage performances”.

5.3.1 Make-up magnifies the beauty that already exists

This sub-theme elaborates further on the theme on the importance of appearance (theme 5.3). It deals with the use of make-up as an enhancer for beauty—and also to conceal the imperfections that an individual has. The participants gave in their narrative's information on their use of make-up and the role that make-up plays in beautifying their looks.

Lerato: Yes, I do. Uhm... I think why? Oh my goodness! I wouldn't say to hide my pimples because half of the time I don't have make-up on. I only use make-up when I go out. And, why? Because, you want to look prettier than every other day.

Lerato mentioned that she uses make-up to hide her pimples, but only on occasions when she goes out. The use of make-up is not only to look beautiful but also a “reflexive agent that paradoxically provides women with both a source of identity formation and self-confidence and a means of feeling ready to engage the world, and yet fosters judgement of beauty against them” (McCabe et al. 2017:2). As a woman interacts with the outside world, she applies, adds and refreshes her make-up throughout the day in the anticipation of the different social contexts in which she will interact with others. The act of wearing make-up in itself is a form of self-presentation because it communicates a woman’s control in how she wants to be seen in public. Physical appearance is also part of social behaviour that an individual performs and non-verbally communicates information about the self; an individual takes pride in her outer appearance. Thus, Lerato applies make-up when she is going out, which is a deliberate and strategic attempt to create a “presentable self” that fits a particular situational context. In her case, she uses make-up to hide her imperfections (pimples); using make-up gives her the confidence to appear in public spaces without feeling self-conscious about her pimples (Brdar et al. 1996:45).

Nomthandazo: Ooh, I use make-up. Okay, why do I use make-up? Okay, I use make-up, right? And, most of the make-up techniques that I've learned—obviously most of them I've learned from Instagram and some I've learned from YouTube. I think there are various reasons why I use make-up. But more than anything I do not think it's because I'm not satisfied with who I am. But then, there are those: days, if let's say I am going to a special event, then I would wear make-up. If for instance, it's your graduation. Obviously, you want to look your best and wear your make-up. Not to say you won't look your best without makeup. But, make-up kind of enhances whatever beauty is already there. So, yes, I do wear make-up. But I do not wear make-up on a daily basis. I wear it now and then.

Nomthandazo and Lerato share the same feelings regarding the use of make-up. They use it on special occasions to enhance their beauty. Most of the make-up techniques she learned on Instagram, and with the rise of social media, the use of social influencers has become a

popular trend in brand marketing for the beauty industry. More and more young women are starting their own make-up and beauty tutorial pages; those following their pages wanting to learn how to do their own make-up. Nomthandazo is a follower of these make-up blogs on Instagram. Instagram also serves as a platform to learn more about beauty techniques.

After receiving the participants' responses about their use of make-up, the researcher raised the question: *Does applying make-up make you feel beautiful?*

Lerato: I wouldn't say necessarily. It's not a definite yes. It enhances my beauty, yes. But, without it I don't feel insecure. I don't feel like: Oh my goodness! People are going to see me ugly or whatever. I just feel like: okay, it enhances my beauty. But I could still survive without it.

Palesa: Sigh...applying make-up enhances what I already have and it's not me trying to be diplomatic. But, more often than not, when I have make-up on, I am really tired just like I am—talking about basic make-up.

Lerato and Palesa feel that make-up enhances their beauty and not necessarily change how they already look.

Buyelwa: I feel like, yah: it does make one to feel beautiful. 'Cos, I mean it can hide those imperfections one has on their skin, neh [right!]. If you have dark spots when you apply your foundation, it hides those things, you know. For other women, they don't have eyebrows. So, they just put on an eyebrow pencil and it just fills in everything so perfectly. So, I think it... it makes people look beautiful. It does make us [women] feel beautiful.

For Buyelwa, make-up makes her feel beautiful and it conceals the imperfections she has on her face. According to her, make-up is the answer to many problems' women face regarding their beauty imperfections. The use of make-up also conceals the real version of the individual. It is not only used as an enhancer to magnify the beauty that already exists. And, it goes back to presenting the ideal self to the world because as the participants made mention of, only wearing make-up when going out. They want to show the best version of the self to the real world and this supports Goffman's (1956) conception of "mask": where he mentions an individual while interacting in the *front stage performance*—the outside world she strives to conceal certain parts of herself which are kept for the back stage performance—her private world. These issues were dealt with in the theoretical frameworks in Section 1.3.4.2. The metaphor

of the “mask” in this sub-theme can be used to describe make-up (as a “mask” used for the woman applying make-up to conceal certain parts of her face she feels uncomfortable displaying to others).

The role of applying make-up is not only to enhance a woman’s beauty. Buyelwa states that it “makes us feel beautiful”. So, there is a certain level of confidence and self-love that a woman feels when she has applied make-up. She not only looks her best self but, feels her best self too. Make-up is also seen as an instrument of beauty and beauty is one of the important aspects of femininity—and how a woman feels and experiences her femininity.

Nomthandazo: Yes, it does make me feel beautiful. Even when I’m looking at myself in the mirror. It’s like...oh, you look gorgeous! It’s like a different version of yourself—more enhanced. And it would be compliments that you would be getting from other people that make you feel good about yourself.

Nomthandazo feels that wearing make-up makes her look like a different version of herself as it enhances her facial features. Receiving compliments from others also makes her feel good about herself.

Zintle: Not really, it’s just. [Pause]. Even, when I apply make-up, I don’t apply that intense make-up—like put lashes on. It’s just light make-up. Just to make you look good on pictures. For instances, when you are standing with other people on a wedding picture. But it really doesn’t change. I could come bare face on campus or whatever and I’d still feel like I’m beautiful and I do not care.

Lihlumile: No, it doesn’t make me feel beautiful. It makes me look beautiful. Like I don’t feel any more beautiful than I already was, I just look beautiful.

For Zintle and Lihlumile wearing make-up does not necessarily make them feel good about themselves. Lihlumile stated that it only makes her look beautiful and she does not feel any more beautiful than she already was without wearing it.

5.3.2 Beauty in the virtual world

Beauty in the virtual world, means the beauty trends that participants are exposed to when engaging mostly with Instagram. The beauty trends and pages that the participants follow, offer them guidance on how to perfect their facial beauty and hair. The following are the participants’ narratives on the beauty trends that they follow on Instagram.

Researcher: Do you follow beauty trends? What kinds of beauty trends attract you?

Lerato: I actually do. Yah! To learn how to do your eyebrows. Yeah, you follow those people, how to apply eye shadow. Because, make-up trends change all the time. So, you follow make-up artists. Because, you want to see the trends yah...get with the programme.

Lerato follows make-up artists on Instagram in order to see what is trending when it comes to make-up.

Buyelwa: Yah. I follow @ Make-up Goals. And, the only reason I follow this blog is because, I don't know how to do my eyebrows. So, I like watching them you know. Just so I can take some lessons here and there [sniffles], yah.

Researcher: Any other beauty trends besides @Make-up Goals? Like your fashion trends stuff?

Buyelwa: No, otherwise it's just pop ups here on my Instagram. I don't like following fashion trends because, uhm, if there is one thing that my mom taught neh [right!] a while ago, and I always tell people about it. My mom told me: Never to...to follow fashion trends. Because, you know something is in fashion now. Three months later it's not in fashion. What are you going to do with those things that you bought, you know, during that trend? So, I'm not a fashion person. I just dress up according to...to what I see fit for my body. You know? Yah. So, it's not necessarily it about being for fashion. Actually, I don't like anything that is in fashion, I don't. You will never see me, uhm, wearing it. It's just me.

Buyelwa follows a make-up blog called @Make-up Goals because the one area she struggles with is applying make-up to her eyes. She enjoys watching videos in order to get tips on how to perfect her eyebrows. She also stated that she is not into fashion trends, therefore, does not follow any fashion blogs.

Palesa: I follow a hair blog called @Ethnic Black Hair. I love natural hair. That is why I follow black hair blogs to see how I can take care of my natural hair as well as to look up different hairstyles for it.

For many Black women and girls, their identity is inextricably linked to how they feel about their hair. Hair is also an important part of many cultures and its meaning and symbolism vary depending on social and cultural contexts (Johnson and Bankhead 2014:86). For African women, “hair is deeply symbolic, and its meaning extends to multiple dimensions of Black culture and life” (ibid.). The elders emphasised throughout that “your hair is your crown and glory” (ibid.:87). The concept of “getting” one’s hair “done” holds paramount value for most African women. Hair is a distinctive marker for femininity, gender and identity (Johnson and Bankhead 2014:91). Therefore, for Palesa the following of hair blogs on Instagram is not only for viewing and entertainment purposes but also to find out how to take better care of her natural hair as “her hair is her crown” and as a Black woman, it is also a marker of her identity.

Nomthandazo: Hair and fashion blogs. For hair I follow @Lock Nation. Because, I have dreadlocks. I also follow celebrities who embrace their natural hair as they are the reason why I even wear my natural hair all the time. The likes of Viola Davis. She has natural hair even though some of her screen characters would wear weaves on set. But, then now and then she talks about her beauty experiences—growing up being a dark-skinned woman; having to love yourself despite everything and what everyone is all about; light skinned; long straight hair; and how more than anything she wants to protect her daughter from that. And, she doesn’t want her to be under pressure to chemically relax her hair. She wants her daughter to grow up loving who she is. Whether it’s her dark skin, her huge lips or flat nose—everything of which is something that I actually want for my daughter. More than anything, I want my daughter to grow up loving her natural hair the way it is. Whether, okay I know not everyone would think black hair is pretty. But I want her to grow up thinking that it is pretty. But, one way in which I would have to ensure that: it’s just maybe surrounding her around a lot of people that actually embrace the natural hair look. And then, looking for media models or just idols—people that she can relate to that have the natural hair. And then, maybe when she is old enough then she will decide on her own whether she wants to chemically relax her hair or stay natural. So that’s one thing I love about Viola Davis and which is something she wants to pass on to her daughter as well as I would like to do that for my daughter.

Nomthandazo follows @ Lock Nation, a blog that mainly caters for people with dreadlocks. She also added that she follows celebrities who embrace their natural hair, such as Viola Davis (an American actress). Because Davis allows her daughter to wear her natural curly hair, Nomthandazo does the same with her daughter in an attempt that she grows up to love and accept her natural hair.

Lihlumile: Make-up pages, like tutorials [make-up and hair tutorials] and [pauses] celebrity pages—they are forever posting their make-up tutorials and what kind of make-up they use and why, and yah, the skin products. These are the beauty pages I follow on Instagram @My Natural Hair Loves, @Natural Hair and @ African Melanin.

Lihlumile stated that she follows make-up and hair pages, especially those of celebrities. She follows them as they showcase their make-up—what type of make-up they use and why, as well as share their skin products.

Nikiwe: I think the beauty trends that I think that are there and are attractive to me are the ones where like maybe they give you formulas on how to keep your skin not as oily, or whatever. I think those ones are the ones I follow [beauty trends on skincare]. And also, natural hair blogs like @Natural Hair and @Beautiful Black Flower Child. With natural hair blogs I am venturing into starting my own salon. Because, where I stay it is a suburban area and there aren't any black ethnic hair salons and there are a lot of people who are black. However, they travel very far just to get their hair done; so, I saw this as a gap in the market to start a business venture. I use these blogs for learning and research purposes. What can I bring that is different? Because, you know: once you start a business everyone follows suite. So, I am already thinking about my competition and how will my service offer something unique to my future clients [smiles]. I am currently busy doing my business proposal and research on ethnic hair. So, if all goes well, I'll have my own business soon at age 19 [blushes and crosses fingers].

Nikiwe aspires to venture into the aesthetic business by opening a salon of her own within the near future. She follows beauty trends for research purposes. She explores the different trends in search of a unique feature for her business.

Pebbles: Fashion, yes, as well as the nail blogs called 'nails by @Keneilwe' and 'nails by Eskay' and the only other thing I follow is this one I don't know if it's a blog it's just a page. But, it's about sunglasses.

Researcher: What type of fashion?

Pebbles: I like traditional African attire, uhm.

Researcher: Do you know that specific blog that you follow?

Pebbles: @Ntozinhle accessories and clothes, uhm and then, the other one I recently started following is @Rich Factory. I actually bought a dress from them.

Pebbles follows fashion blogs and loves traditional African attires. She also follows nail blogs and an accessory and sunglass blog.

5.4 Views about virtual belonging

The theme of views about virtual belonging is mainly about participants' views as to whether Instagram forms a support structure for the women who engage on it. As a result, these women feel a sense of belonging, sharing their life stories with other women who might share similar experiences with them. A sense of belonging in the virtual community can be described as: feeling a connectedness to a group of individuals who share the same views as, and similar experience to you (Carpiano and Hystad 2011:603). The following are the narratives expressed by the participants on what a support structure includes and whether or not does Instagram form a support structure for women that engage on the SNS.

Lerato: I'd like to believe that... yah. Because, maybe let's say: it's a previous question you asked. And I said that the positive side of Instagram is if: you are feeling insecure about you being chubby or skinny. There is an activist or a gym fanatic who basically posts about your insecurities [refer to Section 4.6.2]. And they always just keep letting you know that you are not the only one. And its okay being who you are, type of vibe. And there are motivational posts as well, blogs, yes. So, they support people that are insecure in whatever field that they are in.

According to Lerato, Instagram is some form of support structure for young women who engage on it. If a woman feels insecure about how chubby or skinny, she is, there is always someone on Instagram that shares their own experiences regarding her body issues. These shared online experiences create a sense

of belonging for the women engaging on Instagram. Furthermore, Lerato stated that it could offer support in a positive way: albeit a motivational post or blogs, depending on what the individual's preferences and/or needs are.

Palesa: Uhm, I would like to think so. I know of a person who was trying to lose weight and she was on these multiple groups—one for food and one for working out. And, they encouraged her to basically keep track of her journey. So, for her specifically, it was like another community that was encouraging her. Like if she basically had a cheat day and she basically fumbled on her journey. They were able to tell: No, don't be too hard on yourself. Like you are going to be okay. Like it happens to the best of us. So, if it's for positive things like that. And it creates positive reinforcement where a female is able to feel empowered, as uhm, response after all of that. Then of course it can serve as uhm... place where a female can get positive reinforcement. And also, by seeing other females doing exceptional things. You know, one of the other people that I mentioned was Connie Ferguson [South African actress and film producer]. You know, you look at her journey from where she started to where she is now. And you think that: you know, that it's possible that you are able to be a phenomenal boss woman and still hold on to a marriage and still hold onto a family. Who's to say you can't have it all?

Palesa had a friend that wanted to lose weight. She joined multiple groups on Instagram; one for dietary regimens and the others for exercises. Palesa makes mention of the online “community” that her friend experienced and which encouraged her weight loss journey. This “community” enabled her to keep track of her weight loss journey. These “groups” became a source of support and motivation. According to Palesa, Instagram can serve as a positive motivational platform—whether it is to lose weight, start your own business or simply for personal growth purposes.

Buyelwa: I think for most people it does. Some people seek attention on social media. Uhm, I mean some people don't even talk in their households. They would be here on their phones seeking for...for support, instead of talking to their, like you know, like their families who are there with them at that particular time. They would rather take their phones and then seek for the support somewhere else on social media, yah, for that matter.

Researcher: So, what kind of support do these individuals receive on social media?

Buyelwa: I...I think it offers emotional support to them...yah.

Researcher: In what sense?

Buyelwa: In what sense? For example: most people when they are abused, they'd rather, uhm, tell the world that they were abused on social media on Instagram. Before, uhm, talking about it with their families. And then obviously the Instagram: other Instagrammers' would offer that emotional support. They would tell them. That's where people share their stories, you know. They would just share their stories. I don't know how to put it but... yah.

Buyelwa feels that people share too much of their personal lives on Instagram. Buyelwa feels strongly about people not revealing their personal lives and problems on Instagram. For her, Instagram is not a platform for an individual to be vulnerable and to share personal experiences of her life, especially the most private ones (see her narratives on “Revealing ‘self’ on Instagram” in Section 4.6.1). However, Instagram does offer emotional support to people in need thereof, although Buyelwa feels not everything should be shared online.

Studies conducted by Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar (2010 in Lupinetti 2015:3) supported this view and found that the expectation convinces people of “instant gratification” that social network sites offer. Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar (2010) further stated that sharing one’s everyday life experiences with other Instagram users “holds different personal meaning than sharing with family and friends; sharing may invoke a sense of belonging and connectedness to a wider community”. Buyelwa’s feelings towards people seeking social acceptance online as being the reason why people share their personal experiences relate to the motivations of engaging on Instagram, which was explored in Section 2.5.3.

Nomthandazo: I think it would depend. It depends on how we accept the messages that we get from these media pages like Instagram. For instance, it's like some of them would promote a certain type of ideal. So, that can also lead to a negative body image for another person. So, as much as there might be maybe celebrating Black beauty, black features and so on. However, for another person who doesn't have that nice round bum. Another person who doesn't have, let's say melanin complexion. Let's say you have albinism. So, it's like it

makes you feel like you are less African. Because, maybe somehow someone is attaching being Black with you having dark skin. So, or maybe it would be if too many people are now saying that Black beauty is all about having natural hair. In summary, some people are able to choose which messages to block from their accounts if they regard them as negative. But then, let's say you choose which messages to take in and which messages to kind of reject. But some people I think they are not even matured enough—especially, people who are not even 25 yet, anyone under 25. So, those people I think they are more vulnerable to the social media perceptions. Even on Instagram. So how you perceive it, it depends on your level of maturity. But, not only maturity, I think. But I also think the foundation that you get from home. But, not only home, maybe within your cultural group or ethnic group. So, that also has an influence.

For Nomthandazo, it depends on how an individual accepts the messages she receives on Instagram, as it depends on her age. However, she also mentioned the role socialisation plays in how an individual chooses to react or respond to the messages that she is exposed to when engaging on Instagram. How an individual was raised shapes her identity and perspective on life—and how things around her affect her. If a person comes from a grounded and secure upbringing, she is less likely to be affected by how others think of or see her. In relation to her engagement on Instagram, the comments that she received from her followers depend on her level of self-perception (Genner and Süß 2017:3-4).

Zintle: No.

Researcher: And, why do you say no?

Zintle: If you are not—I am not going to say—even smart enough. Because, I would probably be dumb myself. Because, when I started Instagram, it didn't work as a support structure at all. Actually, it breaks you as person. Because, you just like, you want things that you are not, you don't need. So, it doesn't form a support structure. You won't get support on Instagram—never! It's more of a: [pause]...because, now it's even shifting. Instagram itself is not just about social media, it's about business now. Because, people are like making business out of Instagram. So, you won't get support out of a business. You just have to

know that this is my business and I'm not going to get any maybe sympathy from this. I am going to maybe get backlashes from the person and be like: you know what you said this maybe the case. You see, such things? You are not always going to get support. And people can easily shift on Instagram. They can support you today; tomorrow they are not even supporting you anymore.

Zintle does not view Instagram as a support structure for young women who engage on the social media platform. People on Instagram constantly change in terms of their needs. She based this statement on her experience as a micro blogger.

Lihlumile: Yes, Instagram does act as a support structure for women who engage on the social media platform. For instance, with the rise of femicide in South Africa, violence against women and children... uhm, depression. It's a space where women feel safe to share their stories regarding the struggles they are faced with in their everyday lives.

Researcher: Does it only form support on issues related to abuse and mental health?

Lihlumile: Not necessarily, it is also raised on issues such as body shaming, body dissatisfaction. It's just that with the rise of femicide in South Africa much attention is being given to that. Because, most women are going through such experiences and they don't have a voice to speak of the pain that they are going through.

Nikiwe: It advocates for body shaming and violence against women and children, femicide. And personally, I've been abused and raped. So, seeing other people come out and share their stories on Instagram: it is a form of social support. Because, you feel connected and have this sense of belonging to a group of people who are going through the same thing that you are going through. So, yah.

Lihlumile and Nikiwe have the same views regarding Instagram. They feel that it provides support for young women, especially regarding issues such as body shaming and violence against women and children in South Africa. Instagram creates a safe space for victims of abuse or those who know victims of abuse. It is a platform where people can share their stories in the hope of raising awareness and providing other

women with the courage and support to share their experiences. Also, as a platform it can raise issues such as the high rate of femicide and rape in South Africa that has been experienced by several women in 2019 (the second year of this research).

Pebbles: Yes, uhm, academic support, health support, like your beauty or whatever kind of food that you eat. Uhm, people that's in entertainment. It can actually give you, uhm, people that can connect you to other people.

For Pebbles, Instagram even offers academic support. She was looking to enrol for a programme at a university and came across the UFS UPP (Universal Procedure Pointer) programme page on Instagram. She also came across a page regarding health support (e.g. creating healthy and nutritious meal plans). She added that it is a social network site that “connects” you to other people. If one wants to increase her network for business and professional opportunities: it is the more accessible platform to reach the people whom an individual would like to network with.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided the reader with the narratives shared by the participants regarding the themes of the experiences of femininity, African beauty standards and virtual belonging. In selecting these themes as part of this analysis, I focused on the broad theme of femininity and how these young women experienced their femininity individually by unwrapping the theme into subthemes of perception of femininity, the importance of appearance on Instagram and the participants' views on virtual belonging. These themes were further divided and explored the experiences of the body and how beauty is portrayed (i.e., how African beauty standards are negotiated and re-negotiated by these young women who engage on Instagram). It also included a discussion about the influence and support Instagram offers to these young Black women.

Concluding remarks

This dissertation focused on eight upwardly mobile Black female students from the University of the Free State (Bloemfontein campus) and how they perceive and experience beauty ideals and socialised trends on Instagram, both subjectively and inter-subjectively. The study followed a phenomenological approach. In general, the phenomenological approach seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the everyday lifeworld of research participants through their subjective interpretations. Therefore, this dissertation aimed to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of each research participant on Instagram. Also, how it subjectively influences her body and self-perception of herself. The interpretivist and phenomenological frameworks proved valuable in the study, especially in conducting and engaging with young upwardly mobile Black women who shared their online experiences on Instagram.

In the literature review, the presentation of Black women's beauty ideals on Instagram are explored. Historically, the Black female body was hypersexualised because of the voluptuous features and the subsequent negative sexual connotations. The discussion further elaborated on the social construction of beauty—how beauty has evolved over time and how beauty is socially constructed in the twenty-first century. It also explored how beauty is perceived in an African and South African context. The literature review provided insight into the emergence of social media in the broader spectrum, followed by an overview of Instagram as a social networking site, as well as what influence Instagram has on a woman's body perception and agency. Instagram is a social network site that is picture-orientated; it allows the user to share photos of herself and to alter her images by applying filters.

Instagram also has the 'like' and 'comment' section where the user's followers can like or comment on her photos. The notion of 'likes' on Instagram is socially known as positive reinforcement from followers. By receiving 'likes' from followers is an indication that a photo(s) is socially desirable and attractive. Instagram is not merely a social platform where a user actively presents herself, but it is a space for receiving feedback from her followers via comments. The act of receiving comments from her followers goes beyond being simply looked at and being exposed to other's opinions about her images. It has a powerful influence on the user's perception of herself. Also, Instagram is a gendered space as more women than men participate in the SNS, as women seem to show more interest in posting images and viewing other women, celebrities, brands and beauty pages. The visual representation is influenced by what is socially accepted and seen as beautiful both in facial and bodily appearance. Instagram can also be seen as a space for seeking validation and social acceptance from others. Identity performed in the virtual world of Instagram was another aspect that was explored in this dissertation. This refers to a user

creating an online identity that is candidly and confident and favourable to her followers. People are more identity-conscious of how they present and interact with others on Instagram and this may lead to a negative self-perception and self-esteem (Bargh et al. 2002:38). This dissertation also aimed to investigate why individuals present the best version of the self (the 'ideal' self) on Instagram. By using in-depth interviews, the narratives of participants shed light on their lived experiences. From the narratives of participants who engage with Instagram, seven themes emerged. These themes illuminate what it means to be an Instagrammer and why Instagram plays an important part in their lifeworld and what influence it has on their body image and self-perception.

The first theme explored the motives behind Instagram usage, how participants became involved with Instagram and what their reasons were for joining the SNS. In most cases, participants expressed that they joined Instagram because it was a new trending SNS at that time and it gave them access to view celebrity lifestyles. Some participants stated that they joined Instagram because of curiosity as they wanted to find out what Instagram is all about. One of the participants found Instagram as a platform where she can empower and educate others on societal issues such as rape and violence against women and children.

The 'likes' and 'comments' section are also the motives behind Instagram usage by the research participants. The participants' motives behind Instagram engagement differ amongst each other; one participant expressed that she only posts pictures of her successes or the activities she attends on weekends. For her posting her pictures is to create memories and to receive likes from others because positive content draws more attention to the followers and subsequently receives more likes. She expressed that the reason why she does not post pictures of her challenges and things that might be deemed as negative is that Instagram is the 'perfect' world to her where she can socially construct her identity and have control over how others view her.

The 'perfect' self is socially constructed and depends largely on the individual and on how she wants to portray her online identity. This act of the participant portraying the positive side of herself is also influenced by the exposure of others—celebrities, Instagram influencers, ordinary followers presenting the self in an ideal and perfect way. The other participants expressed that they post pictures to receive approval and validation from others on how they look. The act of self-presentation is influenced by how participants would like their followers to see them and, in most cases, it is in a favourable manner. The 'likes' and 'comments' act as positive reinforcement and approval of what the user's followers are seeing. However, comments shared by the followers can either be positive or negative and the impact of how the user receives them depends on her agency and self-perception.

Most participants shared that the comments they receive are usually positive and acts as an enhancement and affirmation that people are also seeing what they are seeing which are the beautiful pictures they are posting. One of the participants mentioned that when she receives negative comments, it impacts her self-perception, resulting in feeling insecure about herself. This shows how much control others have on how she sees herself.

The second theme pertained to what makes Instagram different from other SNSs. One of the participants shared that the emergence of Instagram made Facebook less popular because Instagram is not only picture-orientated, but it also has features that provide the user with the opportunity to alter and change her photos by applying filters (e.g., different lighting, colour hues), as well as tweaking and cropping of pictures. Furthermore, Instagram differs from other SNSs as it makes it possible for an individual to stimulate an ideal and often a lavish lifestyle that is predominantly portrayed by successful individuals such as celebrities. It is also a platform where people show off their lavish lifestyles, as the participants highlighted. Most of the users are conscious of what type of content they post on Instagram as opposed to other SNSs. Furthermore, most of the users post images that are appealing such as going on an exotic vacation or dining out at an expensive restaurant.

The third theme that was explored concerned the participants' lived experiences on Instagram and most of the participants' narratives are similar to those related to the second theme (Instagram versus other social media platforms). The participants stated that the users socially create Instagram in an attempt to present versions of themselves that are appealing to others; a successful lifestyle, looking healthy and fit, thriving in their business or career or personal pictures of their loved ones, spouse or offspring. The whole idea of people portraying an ideal type of lifestyle is because it also provides the followers (viewers) inspiration and motivation to work hard at achieving their goals and to share their success on Instagram. This internalisation of portraying the ideal self is influenced by a multitude of factors such as exposure to celebrities' lifestyles, friends' lives and media (Apodaca 2017:6). A lot of the pressure of portraying an ideal type of lifestyle creates the illusion that the individual faces no challenges in her lived reality, therefore, most of the participants opine that people portray a fake lifestyle—they deceive people into thinking that their lives are perfect and they do not experience any challenges or hardships in their everyday life. This may be misleading to the viewer who will think that others have the perfect and ideal life. Some participants shared that people prefer showing the end results or the finished product after obtaining the goal. They do not show the process of achieving a certain goal because it is more appealing and inspirational to show the achieved goal than the process of how it was obtained. The theme of lived

experiences on Instagram was expanded with the individual revealing the self on Instagram and their level of feeling comfortable with showing the self. Most participants also shared that they feel less comfortable revealing parts of their personal lives on Instagram because they do not want to be seen looking vulnerable or be possible victims of cyberbullying. Most people on Instagram feel a sense of entitlement in giving unsolicited advice or sharing their opinions about other people's lives (Hosseinmardi et al. 2015:2).

Furthermore, they feel comfortable showing the self that looks good and picture-perfect because it will result in more positive reviews with followers either liking or commenting on the picture as it is visually appealing to view. It is also the Instagram 'culture' to present beautiful pictures and portraying the self-actualised as it can be seen as stimulation for others. One participant used the metaphor of a "laminated front cover" of a book to describe her lived experiences on Instagram; its purpose is to protect the book from being damaged. People protect and conceal certain parts of their lives that they feel less comfortable portraying on Instagram and only show those that they feel are favourable for others to view. Another participant similarly described her lived experiences on Instagram as people portraying a 'façade' of the self. This indicates that the self portrayed on Instagram is often not the authentic and actual self, but the constructed and controlled self by the user.

The fourth theme identified in this study explored the body and identity that focused on the perception of the self on Instagram and the influence Instagram has on the self and body image. The online pressure of others posting perfect pictures makes an individual identity-conscious when engaging on Instagram, thus wanting to look her best all the time. Participants shared their narratives before and after engaging on Instagram. Most participants shared that before engaging on Instagram they did not pay much attention to how they look when taking a picture. However, that changed after they engaged on Instagram; they became more cautious of their appearance when taking a picture, focusing on technical things such as the angle, lighting and background of their pictures. They learned this behaviour and trends from following other users. Participants also shared that they created a virtual identity that suited their Instagram account. One of the participants shared how her engagement on Instagram has changed how she sees herself. For example, her experiences of being a light-skinned Black woman with many years of skin colour privilege in the Black community has changed with the gradual shift in how currently Black women's beauty is perceived. Today, more movements are emerging on social media that embrace women with a darker skin tone. This makes her feel somewhat left out in the renegotiation of Black women's beauty ideals.

The fifth theme entailed an exploration of the perceptions of femininity and how each participant understands what femininity means to her. Most participants attempted to define the concept of femininity as being for females and fighting for the equal rights of men and women in society. Some participants shared that an individual's perception of her femininity is how she perceives herself and how she carries herself, which is unique to every woman. This theme also concerned the inner qualities that make a woman feminine. One participant expressed that a woman has the freedom to create the inner qualities that are suitable for her, thus not the cliché qualities that are known to women in society, such as being a nurturer, mother and home-maker. Others stated that it is a woman's strength that makes her feminine as women go through many challenges—childbirth, caring for their families and also having to work. However, women remain resilient and deal with each task and situation with a lot of 'ease'.

This theme also focused on the experiences of the body where participants shared sensitive experiences of their bodies—how they feel about their bodies and what they would change if they were given the opportunity to do so. Most of the participants expressed that they are not fully satisfied with their bodies and wanted changes such as having a smaller waist, flat stomach, firm thighs and round buttocks. This is a criterion of the "ideal body" to which most Black women are exposed when engaging on Instagram, which makes them feel dissatisfied with how they look because they do not meet that criterion. By describing this "ideal body," some participants gave descriptions of the "ideal girl," namely Sbahle Mpisane's body. They used this as a reference as to how an ideal body should look. However, there is no academic research to date that has been conducted on this criterion of the ideal body as portrayed on social media for Black women. Most of the existing research concerns Western body ideals. The theme also focused on the parts of their body that the participants like and least like about themselves. The answers to this related to experiences of the body.

The sixth theme investigated the importance of appearance on Instagram; why is it important to look good on Instagram. Participants shared that looking good on Instagram is important because more people will 'like' and 'comment' on the picture(s) that the individual posts. Two of the participants stated that some of their followers are not people they are closely acquainted with, thus, for them, it is imperative always to look their best. Some participants also shared that looking good is not only for Instagram but something they do daily. Furthermore, the theme focused on the role of makeup and beauty displays in the virtual world of Instagram. Most of the participants used make-up to enhance their beauty and stated that makeup does not necessarily make them feel more beautiful than they already feel about themselves. One of the participants emphasised that make-up conceals her imperfections and that she wears makeup

on special occasions. Wearing make-up is, therefore, not only for looking good, but it is also a form of self-presentation as it communicates how a woman wants to appear in public (i.e., be viewed as attractive). For many of the participants, the beauty trends that they follow on Instagram provides them with tips and guidance on how to apply their make-up and encourages them to try new hairstyles. Most of the participants shared that they follow hair blogs because most Black women's identity is inextricably linked to their hair. One of the participants shared her experience with her natural hair (dreadlocks) and mentioned how some of the celebrities she follows had influenced her to embrace her natural hair; something that she would like to pass down to her daughter as most Black women were taught not to love and embrace their natural hair because of how curly and nappy it looks. Moreover, the silky and straight hair of Western women were deemed as beautiful. However, with Black women renegotiating their beauty standards, more Black women are embracing their natural hair.

The last theme explored views about virtual belonging and whether or not Instagram forms a support structure for women who engage in the SNS. There were mixed narratives expressed by the participants; some felt when a woman shares her stories about, for example, her insecurities about her body, the women who go through similar issues and that share their experiences, instil a sense of belonging. Thus, she is not the only one going through that specific situation, but that other women are also experiencing similar issues. Other participants feel that Instagram should not be a platform for women to share their personal experiences and subsequent vulnerabilities. However, they still share their stories regardless of the type of scrutiny they will be exposed to; sharing personal life experiences on Instagram may evoke a sense of belonging and connectedness to a wider online community (Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar 2010).

The seven themes of this dissertation aim to illuminate the lived experiences of young women who engage on Instagram. It offers exploration and understanding about how these women perceive and experience their femininity subjectively and inter-subjectively when engaging on Instagram. Together, the analysis chapters provide a more constructive understanding of the reasons why these women engage on Instagram and present the ideal body. Narratives by these participants provide insight into the life stories of their experiences on Instagram engagement, identity, femininity and socialised beauty trends that they subjectively and inter-subjectively share. However, there still needs to be a further exploration into the lived experiences of Black African/South African women's beauty and body perception experiences as presented on Instagram. Much of the literature found on Black women's beauty, body perception and experiences that they are exposed to on Instagram and other SNSs, relate to the African-American

perspective. This dissertation serves as a foundation for understanding the narratives of Instagram engagement by South African women and their presentation of the ideal body on Instagram.

Further research is required to expand on the literature about the presentation of the ideal Black women's body on Instagram, beauty from a South African perspective and experiences of the female body from a Black woman's perspective in South Africa, especially when engaging on social networking sites. Firstly, a more diverse sample on the criteria of the ideal body portrayed in media and social media applications is required. The participants recruited for this dissertation consisted of Black female students. These participants were selected because I, as the researcher, share similar experiences as they do because I am also a Black woman. Secondly, there is not much literature that focuses on Black women's experiences on Instagram. Thus, it was necessary to explore how Black women's experiences are when engaging on Instagram. Throughout the narratives, participants shared some different insights into the world of Instagram. Much of the literature on Instagram engagement focuses on the exposure of the perfect body on Instagram, which can lead to a negative body image and an overall dissatisfaction with their body. However, participants also shared that exposure to the perfect body on Instagram positively influences them, making corrective measures in how to attain that perfect body either by exercising or by dieting. Lastly, participants expressed that Instagram is an SNS with multifaceted pages that cater to the needs and wants of the individual and it is one of the few social network sites that educate, empower and embrace Black women's standpoint in society.

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Appendix A: Ethical clearance form



Faculty of the Humanities

17-Apr-2018

Dear Miss Thinane

Ethics Clearance: **Presenting the ideal body: narratives of Instagram engagement by a group of African Black women.**

Principal Investigator: **Miss Tsalaemang Thinane**

Department: **Sociology (Bloemfontein Campus)**

APPLICATION APPROVED

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2017/1294**

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted from 17-Apr-2018 to 17-Apr-2019.

Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Dr. Asta Rau

Chair: Research Ethics Committee

Faculty of the Humanities

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Appendix B: Informed consent sheet

Information consent sheet:

Thank you for considering participating in this research project titled: *Presenting the ideal body: narratives of Instagram engagement by a group of African Black women*.

The aim of this qualitative study is to explore narratives that will enhance understandings of women's embodied experience of Instagram engagement and their lifeworld. This project researches embodiment, shared perceptions, understandings, experiences and dis/empowerment. The aim of this study is to broaden the understanding in the field of sociology and in particular the frameworks of feminism and phenomenology from within a South African context.

Your participation in this study will serve to provide a better understanding of the embodied experience of female beauty within the phenomenon of Instagram. Through my research, I aim to explore the following research questions:

1. What characteristics (internal and external) promote an idea of African beauty and uniqueness?
2. How do Black African women perceive and adapt to African-American beauty ideals and norms?
3. What prompts African women to engage with Instagram?

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and all information will be held in the utmost confidence. You have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time, as a result of feeling emotionally vulnerable or uncomfortable in talking about the experience. The results of the information collected will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality. Although I will have very few participants, your information is unlikely to be identifiable (e.g. friend) in the thesis or any articles. Also, before my thesis is released to examiners, I will give you my transcripts and analyses to read so that you can see if I have represented you and your story accurately and if you are satisfied that the confidentiality of your information has been upheld.

The benefit of partaking in the study, you will be helping me in completing my Masters as well as contributing to existing knowledge of the social network site Instagram, self-presentation, embodiment, inter-subjectivity (shared meanings) and feminist phenomenology.

The only risk to you that is anticipated is feelings of emotional vulnerability through the exploring of unpleasant experiences of your perception of your body image.

As previously stated, participation is entirely voluntary and should you feel the need, you may withdraw from this study at any time with no further repercussions.

For any further inquiries regarding the research, please feel free to contact:

- The Researcher, Tsalaemang Thinane: 078 503 8748/tsalaemang19@gmail.com
- The Supervisor, Prof Jan K. Coetzee :(051) 401 2881/coetzeeJK@ufs.ac.za
- The Clinical Psychologist, Thato Ramabele:(051) 430 6636/083 539 4673 or ramabelethato977@gmail.com
- Research Ethics Committee Secretary, Charné Vercueil: (051) 401 7083/vercueilcc@ufs.ac.za

Yours Sincerely,

This study has the support and backing of the University of the Free State's Department of Sociology and formal ethical clearance from the Faculty of Humanities Ethics Committee (Clearance number _____ dated _____ 2017).

Participant Consent Form:

Please fill in and **keep** this page. Keep the letter above for future reference

Study: **Presenting the ideal body: narratives of Instagram engagement by a group of African Black women.**

Researcher: **Tsalaemang Thinane**

Name: _____ Surname: _____

Contact number: _____ Email: _____

- I understand what the study is about, why I am participating and what risks and benefits are.
- I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned research study.
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my participation for her Master's thesis, for publication in journals, and conference presentations.

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the researcher: _____

For any further inquiries regarding the research, please feel free to contact:

- The Researcher, Tsalaemang Thinane: 078 503 8748 / tsalaemang19@gmail.com
- The Supervisor, Prof Jan K. Coetzee : (051) 401 2881/ CoetzeeJK@ufs.ac.za
- The Clinical Psychologist, Thato Ramabele: (051) 430 6636/ 083 539 4673 or ramabelethato977@gmail.com
- Research Ethics Committee Secretary, Charné Vercueil: (051) 401 7083/vercueilcc@ufs.ac.za

Please fill in and **return** this page. Keep the letter above for future reference

Study: **Presenting the idea body: narratives of Instagram engagement by a group of African Black women.**

Researcher: **Tsalaemang Thinane**

Name: _____ Surname: _____

Contact number: _____ Email: _____

- I understand what the study is about, why participating and what risks and benefits are.
- I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned research study.
- I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my participation for her Master's thesis, for publication in journals, and conference presentations.

Signature of Participant: _____

Date: _____

Signature of the researcher: _____

For any further inquiries regarding the research, please feel free to contact:

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- Research Ethics Committee Secretary, Charné Vercueil: (051) 401 7083/vercueilcc@ufs.ac.za

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule:

Basic Information (confidential):

1. Name and Surname
2. Age of participant
3. Marital status: are you single, in a relationship or married?
4. Study and work:
 - a. Are you working whilst studying? If so, are you permanently or part-time employed?
 - b. Unemployed? If so, are you looking for a job?
 - c. How do you regard your status as a student? Are you part-time or full-time student?
5. Religious affiliation

Instagram engagement:

1. When did you start using Instagram?
2. How did you find out about it? (From a friend, the media or other social media platforms?)
3. Why did you join Instagram?
Probe the purpose/reason behind joining Instagram.
4. How is Instagram different from other social media platforms?
5. How did you perceive/see/feel about yourself before you started using Instagram?
6. How do you perceive/see/feel about yourself after starting to use Instagram?
7. What influence does Instagram have on your everyday life?

Body and identity:

1. How would you define identity (who you are) in your own words?
2. How do you perceive identity?
3. Has your view about your identity changed since you have engaged with Instagram?
 - a. If yes, how so? What are the changes that you have experienced?
 - b. If no, please explain?
4. What are the blogs (beauty, health and fitness, food and fashion) you enjoy interacting with on Instagram?
5. What experiences are you exposed to when engaging on Instagram?

6. Are these experiences related to body issues?
 - a. If yes, what sort of body issues?
 - b. If no, are there any other issues you may experience...Like what?
7. In your opinion, does Instagram play a role in negative body image and body dissatisfaction?
8. What are the features of your body that you most love about yourself?
9. What are the features of your body that you least love about yourself?

Femininity: experiencing the body

1. How would you describe femininity?
2. What inner qualities make a woman feminine?
3. How do you feel about your body?
 - a. What are the thoughts that come to you, when you look at yourself in the mirror?
 - b. Are you satisfied with your body or do you want to change certain things about it?
 - c. To what extent does Instagram provide an opportunity to you to change your perception on your body?
4. The role of make-up and Instagram engagement.
 - a. Do you use make-up? Why and when?
 - b. Does applying make-up make you feel beautiful?
If so, how?
5. The role of beauty trends and Instagram engagement.
 - a. Do you follow beauty trends?
 - b. If yes, what kinds of beauty trends attract you?
 - c. If no, why don't you follow beauty trends?
6. Looking good and Instagram engagement.
 - a. Is looking good important to you?
 - b. If yes, why?
 - c. If no, why?
7. Do you compare your appearance with other women?
 - a. If yes, why?

How does comparing yourself to other women make you feel about yourself?
 - b. If no, why?

8. Do you post pictures on Instagram for yourself or to get 'likes' approval from others?
9. Do people comment on your pictures?
 - a. If yes, how do you consider others comments about you on Instagram?
If no, why do you think others don't comment on your pictures?

Support:

1. In your view, what does a support structure include?
2. Does Instagram form as a support structure for young women who engage on the social media platform?
 - a. If yes, what kinds of support does it offer?
3. Do you feel comfortable sharing your experiences on Instagram?
4. Do you like hearing other women's experiences and thoughts via Instagram?
5. Besides Instagram, do you get any support from other sources?
 - a. If yes, can you name which ones?
 - b. What influence do they have on you?