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Is feminism keeping up with the Kardashians?

Female celebrities' portrayal of beauty and its influence on young
females today.

by

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Abstract

The ultimate objective of this study was to establish whether female celebrities portray the beauty ideal and have influence over young females today. The literature review presents an analysis of feminism, beauty ideals, self-objectification, and the influence of media and celebrities, in an attempt to establish whether celebrity images are of a 'self-made' hypersexual nature and whether these images influence young females' self-concept and role in society.

The literature was further triangulated with a combination of primary and secondary data. Images of females within the famous Kardashian/Jenner family were studied in an attempt to understand how female celebrities portray themselves today. Furthermore, a focus group was conducted in an attempt to understand whether female youths are to some extent influenced by female celebrities. Through the research conducted it was evident that female role stereotypes still prevail in contemporary media. Furthermore, two themes prevailed throughout the study, which was that women can use their bodies for profit and as a means of power, and the conflicting nature of femininity versus feminism today.

Keywords

Celebrity, beauty ideals, feminism, self-objectification, socialisation.

Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Date: 13 December 2013

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The vision of completing my Masters of Business Administration has been a goal of mine since completing my undergraduate studies in Media and Communication. As a young, relatively inexperienced 25 year old, the challenge of completing the MBA has been a long and arduous one, both mentally and physically. When the Gordon Institute of Business Science accepted my fulltime application, I knew the experiences and challenges ahead of me would shape and mould me into the businesswomen I've strived to become. Difficult decisions needed to be made, and most importantly I would need to sacrifice one year without an income and a year of neglecting my family responsibilities. After an arduous first module and realising the journey was not for the faint-hearted, I realised that I would have never made it this far without the loving support of my family.

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In the words of Marianne Williamson, let us be reminded that, “our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure... We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others”.

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research Problem

1.1 Research Topic

Female celebrities' portrayal of beauty, and its influence on young females today.

1.2 Introduction

Fascinations with celebrities are a ubiquitous part of society, and are far from novel. Like previous generations, young women often idolise and admire popular female celebrities for their body image and/or behaviours. According to Hollander (2010, p. 387), "there always used to be famous, widely respected or admired people but celebrities are something new and different; their numbers are huge and fluctuate and their fame is transient; most importantly unlike famous people of the past they achieve their acclaim in different ways and for different reasons". In recent times it appears that female celebrities' sexuality is put on a pedestal, with their talent almost becoming secondary to their success, as the "attraction of large audiences is not necessarily based on exceptional talent; pure fame suffices" (Franck & Nüesch, 2007, p. 212).

The combination of sex and celebrity still attracts attention and underlies storytelling in contemporary times, whether embedded into news reports or broadcast across television screens (Lambiase, 2003). This is evident in the case of controversial pop stars such as Miley Cyrus, whereby disapproving spectators such as Irish singer Sinead O'Connor warn that Cyrus' provocative and sexual behaviour has consequences. O'Connor commented that "you will obscure your talent by allowing yourself to be pimped" and "you have enough talent that you

don't need to let the music business make a prostitute of you" (Huffington Post, 2013). However, as Lambiase (2003) explained, such controversy has been in existence for decades.

Following the Cyrus media coverage, singer Charlotte Church held an hour long Peel lecture discussing the male dominated industry, commenting that "the culture of demeaning women in pop music is so ingrained as to have become routine, from the way we are dealt with by management and labels, to the way we are presented to the public" (Rogers, 2013). Rogers (2013), the columnist and music writer who wrote this article, simply put forward the very relevant questions, "hasn't sex sold records for ever? Aren't you prudish if you say women shouldn't express themselves sexually? Are women being exploited by others or happily exploiting themselves?". Whilst these questions are very much a topic of debate and relevant today, they are by no means easily answered.

In a recent article written by Christian Piatt (2013), stars such as once 'wholesome' Miley Cyrus contribute to feminism today. Piatt (2013) commented that "although in some respects, women and girls have made strides toward gender parity in our culture, there is still a persistent, if sometimes subtle, subtext narrated to our girls, which is that sex is the most efficient and potent means of access to power they have". This indeed seems to be the case with influential female entertainer Miley Cyrus, as her provocative and hypersexual antics have generated much lucrative publicity. The Guardian (2013) reported "Miley Cyrus was delighted to get 306,000 tweets a minute during her notorious

"twerking" performance with Robin Thicke at the 2013 VMAs – and didn't seem to mind that many of them were negative. YouTube views count towards chart placings in America, and influence UK radio playlists these days, so mainstream pop's economy is driven by one thing: hits and clicks". Incidents such as these call into question what is deemed acceptable in society nowadays. Furthermore, it questions the role of women in society today.

Celebrity sexuality has been used in Hollywood for many years in order to promote movies, sell products, gain media coverage and lure audiences to identify with sexual celebrity images (Lambiase, 2003, p. 58). These long-standing, yet still very current, occurrences call into question the current state of society and how young women might be under the influence of celebrity, as provocative images appear to be a visible construct in the media today (Fabrianesi, Jones & Reid, 2008).

As feminism remains paramount to the wellbeing of society, it becomes problematic that the media still features women with often unreachable ideals and questionable morals (Fabrianesi, Jones & Reid, 2008, p. 437). This portrayal, much like in the past, alludes to the notion that women 'need' to look and behave a certain way in order to gain success and/or happiness (Ingham, 1995). Young females as audiences and consumers of media also attempt to attain these questionable ideals through what and how they consume, often emulating the behaviours of popular media figures (Borland & Akram, 2007).

In the early and mid-20th century, the ideal female was depicted in traditional roles as domesticated, feminine and submissive housewives (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009). Women embraced the picture of femininity and domestication, often feeling duty-bound and compelled to live out the expectations set by their male counterparts (Sutton, 2009). This depiction later evolved into portrayals of women as sexy 'equals' to their male counterparts, in pursuit of a career and material success (Sutton, 2009). These visible trends of depicting women in sexual and decorative roles still seem to thrive today (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009). Women fulfilled gender stereotypes and ideals that were perpetuated by the patriarchal society of the time (James, 2008). Even with progressive thinking, patriarchal ideology still seems to dominate societal norms (Maddox, 2013).

In her analysis of tobacco companies 1990 advertising campaigns featuring the 'Dakota Woman' and the 'Marlboro Man', Stern (1993, p. 558) argued that these types of androcentric campaigns depict femininity in a way that disempowers women by portraying them as subservient. According to McRobbie (2009), although women seem to have taken more control over their own images, they are still seen to be under the precept of a 'patriarchal veil'. Furthermore, the notion of the 'patriarchal veil' calls into question just how much control female celebrities have over their own images, or is this concept of 'empowerment' deceptive, as it appears that subservience has been replaced with overt sexuality?

Women are made to feel as if they are empowered by presenting themselves as sexy equals, however this act of self-objectification is arguably misguided and affirmed by patriarchy (McRobbie, 2009). According to Stern (1993, p. 557), “patriarchal culture permits an ideology in which femininity is conceived of from the male point of view”. Gill (2007, p. 149) further disseminated several themes defined as prevailing in contemporary media, one of which is that “women can use their bodies for profit and as a means to power”.

According to Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003, p. 712), the “feminine beauty ideal can be seen as a normative means of social control whereby social control is accomplished through the internalization of values and norms that serve to restrict women’s lives”. These authors further argued that women who comply with these normative controls are psychologically and socially rewarded for their high degree of attractiveness, whilst those who do not comply are somehow punished. Could this be the reason why female celebrities such as Miley Cyrus depict themselves in a hypersexual light; or are these kinds of celebrities marketing geniuses who are fully aware of their actions? Furthermore, could this be the reason why audiences might follow suit as they seek acceptance, admiration and/or financial success?

1.3 Research Problem

According to Gizycki (2009), modern society has progressed toward the acceptance and appreciation of diversity, however, even in this age of increasing tolerance, the way in which females are depicted continue to plague the way in

which society thinks, and more concerning, how acceptable this state has become.

Female role stereotypes are mostly observed through mass media, portraying female celebrities in often provocative and sexual manners deemed 'ideal' (Fabrianesi, Jones & Reid, 2008). Whilst men are depicted as authoritative, strong and emotionally in control, women are depicted as emotionally unstable, ditsy objects of sexual desire. This portrayal through mass media is significant as celebrities, both male and female, have become modern day 'heroes' who have fashioned modern day society as we know it (Hills, 2007). With this said, from an early age audiences mentally and subconsciously 'download' images that perpetuate female stereotypes, and in doing so learn behaviours that are indicative of their socialisation (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 714).

One of the main vehicles for socialisation is the role modelling which takes place through people depicted in the popular press; the most commanding of these is often the celebrity (Hills, 2007; Hauk & Immordino, 2013). Martin (1998, p. 18) stated that audiences frequently feel a kinship with celebrities as involvement is often high. Furthermore, in explaining social cognitive theory, Winham and Hampl (2008, p. 121) stated that the observation of role models such as celebrities, prompt the formation of beliefs that will govern future behaviours. Moreover, celebrities have a direct and overwhelming influence on their admirers and fans (Hills, 2007).

The impression is that celebrities such as Lady Gaga and Rihanna have not only conformed to capitalist patriarchal socialisation by self-objectifying, but also collude when constructing their own image and identity in an effort to gain shock value and monetise their brand image, with total disregard for their impact on societal norms and expectations for young women. With this said, do female celebrities self-objectify to be sexually desired and accepted, or have these modern-day role models been indoctrinated to think that hyper-sexuality is a prerequisite to success?

1.4 Research Motivation

In recent times there has been a lot of discussion on the 're-emergence' of feminism and sexism in the popular press (Piatt, 2013). The researcher points out that it is noteworthy to observe the continuous and evolving rapport on feminism, with the increased portrayal of women as hyper-sexualised objects in mass media. A recent Instagram post from pop star Rihanna criticised the work of the British Daily Mail writer, Elizabeth Ann Jones. The writer wrote a critical article on the Barbadian celebrity entitled, *"Poisonous Pop Princess: Glorifying in drugs, guns and sleaze, Rihanna's toxic role model for her army of young fans"* (Jones, 2013). Rihanna responded by saying that "role model is not a position or title that I have ever campaigned for" (Instagram, 2013). Is this evidence that female celebrities are fully aware of the manner in which they portray themselves and how they are perceived, but choose not to accept responsibility by claiming that they do not want the "role model" title?

Rebuttals such as that by Rihanna not only showcase the level of ‘recklessness’ of some female celebrities, but also shows their ‘cavalier’ attitude with regard to how they can potentially influence young and naïve audiences. Whilst authors such as Halberstam (2012) and James (2008) were of the opinion that pop stars such as Lady Gaga and Rihanna are rebelling against white patriarchy through what is coined “funky forms of anarchy”, the researcher argues that this is a simplistic view.

However, it is important to acknowledge that recent displays of hypersexuality by female celebrities have increased debate surrounding feminism and sexism, and has brought a greater awareness surrounding women not only in the media but also in the workplace (Piatt, 2013). At the same time, cyber-bullying and bullying, suicide, rape and eating disorders have also become a real and devastating problem due to out of home influences being so prevalent (Moore, Huebner, & Hills, 2012). In 2012 Lady Gaga unveiled her ‘Born This Way Foundation’ at Harvard University to fight bullying, suicide and rape against homosexuals - a campaign to love and accept oneself (Giannotta, 2012), however it contradicts the image she portrays. Lady Gaga can be seen as a hypersexual star that seems to have the ‘perfect’ body, yet Heller (2012) reported that Lady Gaga has been suffering with an eating disorder for several years. Is this not a contradiction to what the foundation stands for? Does Lady Gaga and other celebrities not contribute to the beauty ideal and potentially do more harm than good through the images projected on main stream media? And does this not

demonstrate the conflicted nature of femininity and feminism as a prevailing theme in contemporary media today?

1.5 Summary

This study therefore aims to understand the beauty ideals portrayed by female celebrities in the context of self-objectification (and other literature reviewed) and what young females extrapolate from this in terms of influence, roles and empowerment today. Images of females within the famous Kardashian/Jenner family were studied in an attempt to understand how female celebrities portray themselves today. Furthermore, a focus group was conducted in an attempt to understand whether female youths today are to some extent influenced by female celebrities today.

2 Chapter 2: Theory and Literature Review

2.1 Feminism and Feminist Theory

It is paramount that feminist theory is explored in an attempt to understand certain behaviours and occurrences in society. Feminist ideology and the women's movement has evolved throughout the centuries. Although not a new ideology, significant strides toward gender equality came about in the 19th century, bringing political change for women to vote; followed by the abolition of gender discrimination and the promotion of equal rights in the workforce, thereby including women in the public sphere (Mack-Canty, 2004, p. 159).

Second wave feminism progressed as women of colour, lesbians and 'third-world' women argued that their "social locations provided them with different vantage points and different conceptions of themselves other than those being articulated by white, middle-class feminists" (Mack-Canty, 2004, p. 158). This brought about third-wave feminism, which emerged in the late 1980s and contested dualistic thinking (Mack-Canty, 2004, p. 158). However Mack-Canty (2004, p. 159) argued that the third wave is seen as an evolution and not a break from the past. Fourth wave feminism moved into the 21st century as women gravitated toward being spiritual; caring for the planet and the downtrodden (Wrye, 2009, p. 185). Diamond (2009, p. 213) also cited fourth wave feminism as the combination of "politics, psychology, spirituality and simplicity in an overarching vision of change".

With the progress and strides that women have made in society, there is a misconception that points to the death of feminism. Whilst many media articles speculate that feminism has done its job and that there is no place for it in today's world, some authors (Barry, Chandler & Berg, 2007) strongly believed that feminism is ever changing but very much alive. According to McRobbie (2009) and Duncan (2010, p. 498), the 'postfeminist' era may threaten the existence of feminism which is marked by "anti-feminist sentiment", whereby younger generations are not interested or involved in feminism or feminist issues. However Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2011, p. 2) explained that 'post feminism' has different interpretations and lacks consensus amongst scholars, however it is mostly "conceptualised in the academic context of television studies, in the media context of popular culture and within consumer culture".

Adriaens and Van Bauwel (2011, p. 2) explain that the "prefix 'post' in the word 'post feminism' causes much discussion as 'post' is often considered as 'after' or even 'anti' feminism, but 'post' also has a positive connotation for a considerable number of authors, as they see it as 'in relation with' or 'related to' feminism, not 'split from', and use the term to point out the changes in feminist discourse". With this said, as time passes no single feminist perspective dominates; rather, many viewpoints have been developed and exist simultaneously (Bristor & Fischer, 1993, p. 518). Gardyn (2001, p. 44) however argued that young women or the 'postfeminist' generation take for granted the struggles that their predecessors have endured in securing their rights. Aronson (2003, p. 912) and Duncan (2010, p. 498-500) further suggested a negative connotation to the term 'feminism', as

some women embrace 'some' feminist principles yet reject others, failing to classify themselves as either feminist or non-feminist. McRobbie (2009) explored how examples of popular culture use feminist rhetoric to dismantle feminism gains, with the focus on cultural forces that have negated feminism as a social movement by examining the postfeminist cultural environment. Furthermore, McRobbie (2009) added that popular culture uses the rhetoric of feminism to make it appear that young women and institutions no longer need it.

According to Eschle and Maiguashca (2013), feminism is presented in popular culture as a monstrous stereotype, making it deeply unpalatable to young women, while femininity is re-entrenched in highly racialised, sexualised and consumerist ways. Older works from Caterall and Maclaran (2002), Kacen and Nelson (2002), and Coltrane and Messineo (2000), advocated that the way in which women have been represented in the media over decades has not change much, as they are still depicted as young, provocative and available decorative objects. More recent works by McRobbie (2009) and Eschle and Maiguashca (2013) further supported this. Moreover, Barry, Chandler and Berg (2007, p. 352) argued that women's movements go through cycles of controversy, represented by varying repertoires; they are neither abeyant, suspended, dormant, hibernating, nor dead.

2.2 The Beauty Ideal and the Media

A 'beauty ideal' is viewed as a subjective social construct. According to Tuominen, Talja, and Savolainen, (2002, p. 1), "social constructionism focuses on talk, interaction and language use in various contexts, and provides a dialogic viewpoint to study the assumptions and implicit theories that people draw on when they engage in information practices and produce accounts of them". This postulates that 'beauty ideals' as a social construct may vary in different social and cultural contexts. With this said, it is necessary to clarify that the concept of 'beauty' in the context of this research is subjective, and what one deems 'beautiful' or 'ideal' may not be the case for another. 'Beauty ideals' as a social construct will therefore be defined as the stereotypical characteristics, physical and behavioural, that women are expected to conform to in order to be considered beautiful and or desirable (Scrizzi, 2013).

According to Scrizzi (2013, p. 311), the modern women used to be scrubbed, glowing, deodorised, cosmeticised and youthful, however today's Western women is highly sexualised, wrinkle-free, silicone injected, and body conscious (which will be discussed in Chapter 5 with reference to images of Kris Jenner and Kim Kardashian). Scrizzi (2013, p. 311) added that these characteristics seem to make women 'beautiful'. Many cultures define what is 'beautiful'. According to Millard (2009, p. 150), despite saying that some people are born beautiful or that some forms of beauty are universal, it is consensus within a culture and society that determines which features are defined as beautiful and which are not.

Douglas (1998) added that different cultures perceive beauty in different ways. Indigenous African cultures perceive more voluptuous women as 'beautiful' as it is considered an attribute of wealth and childbearing, whilst some Indian cultures consider fair-skinned women as 'beautiful' as it is an indication of class and social standing (Douglas, 1998). According to Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003, p. 712), beauty and the pursuit thereof occupies a central role in women's lives, especially relatively affluent Westernised women who have the financial resources, time and energy to acquire beauty. Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003, p. 712) further stated that acquiring beauty remains an important means by which adolescent girls and women gain social status, power and self-esteem. Perhaps this is the reason why beauty ideals remain so paramount within the media industry and within society today (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009).

With this said, it is imperative to note that the Western media has overwhelming power and control which defines what is 'beautiful' (Herbozo, Tantleff-Dun, Gokee-Laros & Thompson, 2004). In television and movies women are more often than not depicted as young and sexy objects of male desire. These portrayals are not only exclusive to movies and television shows, they can also be seen on animations targeting young children. According to Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003, p. 714), research since the 1970s have shown that children's literature and fairy tales contains "explicit and implicit messages about dominant power structures in society, especially those concerning gender. The classic fairytale stories of 'Cinderella', 'Snow White' and 'Beauty and the Beast', all tell the story of young women seeking affirmation from their 'Prince Charming';

furthermore, they teach girls and young women how to become domesticated, respectable, and attractive to a husband, and teach boys and girls 'appropriate' gendered roles, values and attitudes (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 714).

The media has depicted women in many different ways for decades. The following three categories (as seen in the table below) are adapted from Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009, p. 1417) as a means of explaining female role stereotypes in the media. Media examples are also given in an attempt to contextualise these stereotypes in modern day terms.

Category	Definition	Observations on Television	Character Observation	Description
<i>Women in decorative roles</i>	“Women concerned with physical attractiveness and women as sex objects”.	“Mad Men” which portrays the typical 1950’s model of femininity, “Game of Thrones” which portrays women as sexual conquest for the male ego and “The Big Bang Theory”, which showcases well educated males with the female lead as uneducated, ditsy and desirable.	Prominent celebrities such as pop stars Rihanna and Lady Gaga are synonymous for their provocative, sexual images – possibly portraying a decorative female role stereotype.	“Women in pursuit of beauty and physical attractiveness. Seeking male affirmation”.
<i>Women in traditional roles</i>	“Dependency and housewife”.	“Desperate Housewives” which showcases several depictions of gender stereotypes, especially that of the stereotypical housewife.	Politician’s wives such as Michelle Obama’s image should be carefully monitored as they may also portray the traditional female role stereotype. This is also true when analysing Princess Kate Middleton’s image. Celebrity female chefs such as Ina Garten also tend to portray these traditional roles.	“Dependent on a male’s protection; in need of reassurance; making ‘unimportant’ decisions and taking care of the household”.
<i>Women in non-traditional roles</i>	“Women in non-traditional activities; career-oriented women; voice of authority”.	“Suits” and “Political Animal” which showcase women in positions of political power; ruling with an ‘iron fist’, which is often construed with subtle negative undertones.	Powerful celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey embody the perfect non-traditional female role stereotype as an unmarried, career oriented media mogul. Kris Jenner from the reality “Keeping Up With the Kardashians” also portrays this role as a matriarch and businesswoman.	“Women engaged in activities outside the home; professional occupations; the expert”.

Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009)

These stereotypes place into context that women have not only pursued gender equality for years, but have somewhat felt the need to fulfil many female stereotypical roles (Wrye, 2009, p. 186). With the development of third wave feminism in the 1980s and 1990s, it emphasised the notion of “having it all”, juggling career, sex and motherhood (Wrye, 2009, p. 185). These stereotypical gender roles have been portrayed in the media for decades and still plague society today (Lambiase, 2003, p. 58).

2.3 Self-Objectification and the Media as an Agent of Socialisation

Feminist ideology has thought of men's sexual objectification of women as an ominous problem, and the opposition to it at the heart of feminist politics (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 250). Nussbaum stated that objectification not only surrounds women, but also that women have become such that they derive nourishment and sustenance from it. The notion of 'self-objectification' in the context of this study fits well with the notion of the 'beauty ideal'. If society determines what is ideally beautiful, do women self-objectify in order to be accepted and admired? According to Aubrey, Henceson and Hopper (2009, p. 272), objectification theory proposes that women are socialised to value their physical appearance through the perspective of others and seek to please others, therefore self-objectifying in order to gain approval, admiration and acceptance. The authors (Aubrey, Henceson & Hopper, 2009, p. 272) further added that "sexual objectification of women's bodies teaches women to internalise an outsider's perspective on the self such that they come to see themselves as objects to be evaluated by others". Teunis (2007, p. 266) further argued that objectification can dehumanise individuals by exchanging the whole person for only parts of oneself – breasts, for instance.

Aubrey, Henceson and Hopper (2009, p. 272) contended that the media as an agent of socialisation values women primarily for their appearance, which contributes to the culture of sexual objectification and provides a socialising function for the development of a trait level of self-objectification, while also

encouraging women to self-objectify. The authors further iterated that visual images of women's bodies in the media affect women's own perspectives on their own bodies. Caterall and Maclaran (2002, p. 407) added that various studies have demonstrated that limiting portrayals of women can impact negatively on their self-image.

According to Hauk and Immordino (2013, p. 2), while media platforms such as television have become a primary source of socialisation in many modern societies, its role as an oblique agent of socialisation has been ignored despite existing evidence that television can change cultural traits and beliefs. Hauk and Immordino (2013, p. 3) also claimed that children are affected by the entire system of messages received by television programmes. These messages consist of the amount of coverage of each cultural trait, which determines the probability that the child will adopt this trait conditionally on being socialised by television. Hence while watching television is entertaining, parents are aware that television might infect the child with the 'wrong' cultural values (Hauk & Immordino, 2013, p. 3). The television industry is not interested in the propagation of cultural values per se, rather cultural coverage is chosen strategically to maximise profits since it influences the viewing time and thereby the advertisement revenue of a firm (Hauk & Immordino, 2013, p. 3). Studies of how mass media such as television affects culture were labeled 'Cultivation Theory', because exposure to television over time cultivates viewers' perceptions of reality (Hauk & Immordino, 2013, p. 3).

Ingham (1995) argued that television is widely known to represent and reinforce the mainstream ideology of Western culture, namely patriarchy. Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli and Shanahan (2002), as previously mentioned, also suggested that television and its characters have become the primary source of socialisation in many modern societies. This is due to content and images that are broadcast that portray beauty as the ideal state.

According to Fabrianesi, Jones and Reid (2008, p. 438), portrayals of 'ideal' body shapes influence physical self-perception, as well as the perception of character traits associated with certain body shapes. Celebrities are very well known for their physical features, which are often seen to be their brand image. Celebrities also possess great appeal and often entice young female followership. This enticement and involvement may impact on audiences' identity, how they view themselves and how they behave (Chan, Ng & Luk, 2013). With this said, the media as agents of socialisation, together with celebrities, hold much power and influence over its audiences and contribute greatly to self-objectification.

2.4 Consumer Behaviour and Identity

Much consumer research focuses on better ways of understanding consumer responses to the language and sexual images used in mass media (Stern, 1993, p. 556). As the term suggests, consumer behaviour is the study of what, why, when, where and how consumers behave and the impact this behaviour has on the consumer and society (Kumar & Varshney, 2012, p. 612). According to Millard (2009, p. 149), audience interpretation of advertising has been studied in many

ways, from marketing angles to gender analysis, textual analysis, social semiotics and audience ethnography, and many of these studies show that audiences are active, that interpreting media texts is complex, and that interpretations vary across individuals. According to Brown (2008, p. 357), works in a cultural sense, as well as popular culture, is replete with references to subliminal persuasion. Brown (2008, p. 357) further stated that media and “marketing is not just the mesmerizer it is the mesmerized as well”.

Celebrities’ overt portrayal of themselves as ‘sex-objects’ is a matter of concern, as younger audiences tend to be more impressionable than older ones (Chan, Ng & Luk, 2013). According to Dalakas and Melancon (2012, p. 51), although “fan identification is traditionally looked on as a desirable characteristic in one’s fan base, recent studies suggest that highly identified fans may often become ‘dysfunctional’ and exhibit behaviours that are inappropriate, dangerous, illegal, and potentially lethal”. Adolescence or the early adulthood phase is fundamental to the development of attitudes, identities, and memories of young audiences and/or fans (Peltola, Milkie, & Presser, 2004, p. 124). Mass media images influence how “we think about sex roles, male and female, what is sexy, and what will be seen as sexy and be desired by others” (Lambiase, 2003, p. 60). Furthermore, audiences are not only susceptible to ‘fan-behaviour’ but also make for parasocial relationships with media personae.

According to Derrick, Gabriel and Tippin (2008, p. 261), these parasocial relationships are one-sided relationships that people establish with media personalities, such as show characters, news anchors, talk show hosts, and celebrities. Chan, Ng and Luk (2013, p. 168) classified “consumers’ relationships with celebrities into two types; ‘entertainment-oriented’ individuals who enjoy learning about celebrities and discussing the information with others casually, and ‘intense-attachment based’ individuals who think continuously and associate parasocially with the celebrities”.

These relationships occur as viewers spend time consuming media content and engaging with media personae, thereby developing an intimacy through “shared” experience and interactions (Derrick, Gabriel & Tippin, 2008, p. 261). This is even more evident now with the emergence of new media and social networking, whereby consumers and audiences can engage in real-time with celebrities. Celebrity figures therefore become a great part of the self-concept as younger people tend to perceive a celebrity as their ideal self-image and strive to develop personality traits, attitudes, values, and physical appearances similar to those of their idols (Chan, Ng & Luk, 2013, p. 169).

2.5 Summary

This chapter endeavoured to extract relevant knowledge from the literature concerning female celebrities’ portrayal of beauty, and its influence on young females today. More specifically the research questions in the next chapter address feminism, beauty ideals, self-objectification and the influence of media

and celebrities, with the objective of establishing whether celebrity images portrayed are of a 'self-made' hypersexual nature and how these images influence young females' self-concept and their role in society.

3 Chapter 3: Research Questions

According to Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 19), a research question (RQ) is a question that the research process aims to address.

This study addressed the following research questions:

RQ1: Are images that endorse the beauty ideal and perpetuate female role stereotypes still portrayed by female celebrities today?

RQ2: Are young females influenced by these images today?

RQ3: Do young females' understanding of feminism influence the way in which they understand the role of females in society today?

In researching the above questions the researcher looked to establish whether female celebrities endorse the beauty ideal, whether young females are influenced by these images, and what this means in terms of roles and empowerment for women in society today.

4 Chapter 4: Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This study was argued from an interpretivist paradigm. This research philosophy advocates the necessity to understand differences between humans in their role as social actors (Saunders & Lewis, 2012, p. 106). Moreover, Prendergast and Choi (2013) explained that interpretivism is inspired by a series of qualitative concepts and approaches, and focuses on understanding what is happening in a given context by using a more personal process to understand reality. Furthermore, Travers (2005) argued that the interpretivist paradigm stresses the dynamic, constructed and evolving nature of social reality. By arguing this research from an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher was able to deduce meaning from a personal perspective in order to approach the research topic from a theoretical perspective. According to DeCuir-Gunby (2008), a theoretical perspective reflects the researcher's personal stance toward the topic they are studying; a stance based on personal history, experience, culture, gender, and class perspectives. Furthermore, according to DeCuir-Gunby (2008), the researcher's theoretical paradigm helps to determine how they see, understand, and interpret the world.

For the purpose of this study a mix method approach was used. Mixed method research suggests that a phenomenon is best understood if it is viewed from various perspectives (DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). For this reason the researcher made

use of content analysis in combination with focus groups in order to understand various perspectives on the topic being researched.

4.2 Research Method: Quantitative Versus Qualitative

The research topic is subjective and requires a method that acknowledges the human side of an issue that is often characterised by “contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationships of individuals” (Mack, Woodsong, McQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005, p. 1). Quantitative research is primarily concerned with coding the research results in numbers, thereby ignoring the interpretation of intersubjective nuances gleaned by the researcher, which are vital in interpreting meaning behind words and images. This study is therefore justifiably grounded in qualitative research, which delves into the human psyche. According to Hyde (2000, p. 82), qualitative methods typically examine data that are narrative. DeCuir–Gunby (2008) further explained that qualitative methods reflect understanding and are useful in exploring in–depth cases. The researcher chose to use a qualitative method as it allowed for an in-depth exploration into the research topic, and helped give perspective into occurrences in society today. These findings are triangulated with, *inter alia*, peer reviewed journals for validity, which necessitates an analysis of secondary versus primary research.

4.3 Secondary Versus Primary Research

Peer reviewed journals, articles and media sources, such as Internet websites, magazines (online or print) and television content, form the backbone of the secondary research methodology for this study, whilst primary research in the

form of a focus group was conducted to validate the results of the aim of this study.

In order to explain the research process the research methodology was divided into two approaches that form part of the mix methodology, each of which is explained in detail below:

- Section A: Secondary Research - Content Analysis of Visual Images;
- Section B: Primary Research - Focus Group.

4.3.1 Section A: Secondary Research - Content Analysis of Visual Images

According to Bell (2004), content analysis is an empirical and objective procedure for quantifying visual representations using defined categories. Content analysis is also a common method for the depiction of women in media (Caterall & Maclaran, 2002). This methodology involves sampling various content over a specified period of time, coding the content according to how females appear (for example decorative roles, traditional roles or non-traditional roles) and counting the number of times each coded portrayal appears (Caterall & Maclaran, 2002, p. 407).

For the purposes of this research, qualitative content analysis of visual images was employed as part of the mixed methods approach, whereby controlled images were analysed in order to derive meaning. Content analysis addressed Research Question 1 (RQ1) in the context of the research topic. According to

Stern (1993) it is important to acknowledge how the 'reader' interacts with the 'text' and/or 'image'. Stern (1993, p. 556, 557) explained that the postmodern revolution in literary theory challenged the traditional assumption that a singular meaning is produced by the author, resides in the text and is received by the reader; and instead "reader-response criticism" expresses a dynamic and transactional relationship between the 'reader' and the 'text' and/or 'image'. In other words, different readers interpret text and/or images in different ways. The content analysis section of this research made use of this "reader-response criticism", with the researcher in the role of the 'reader' giving her interpretation of the chosen controlled images. According to Bell (2004), making generalisations about the relative frequencies of visual representations of women or roles involves implicit or explicit classification of media-circulated content. For this reason, content analysis of visual images is the most basic way of finding out something about the media's meaning and allows for apparently general statements to be made about aspects of representation that all can understand (Bell, 2004).

4.3.2 Section B: Primary Research - Focus Group

The second part of this research involved a qualitative research method in the form of a focus group. According to Schwandt (2007) focus groups interviews or discussions bring together a group of people to discuss a particular topic or range of issues and are commonly found in media and communication studies; and is useful in combination with other methods. Grumbein and Lowe (2010) explained

that questions and answers are not usually exchanged between the group and the researcher in focus groups, instead topics of research interest are discussed by the entire group in hopes of extracting data and self-disclosure that might otherwise be withheld in the traditional researcher-interviewee environment. Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007, p. 70) also explained that “usefulness and validity of focus group data are also affected by the extent to which participants feel comfortable about openly communicating their ideas, views, or opinions”. Due to the fact that the researcher had easy access to participants needed for this study, a focus group proved to be the most logical and convenient method to extract valuable data, as the researcher not only has personal relationships with the participants, but also could create a safe and comfortable environment for the participants ensuring that a free flow of communication was present.

The focus group attempted to address Research Questions 2 and 3 (RQ2 and RQ3). The focus groups allowed participants to answer questions openly and freely, and to explore their opinions about media images. The objective of the focus group was to gain insight into what young women think and how they respond to broadcasted and published media images. Due to the fact that generalisation could be made in the content analysis section, the focus group allowed for the perspectives. This was necessary in order to gain validity and minimise researcher bias. The focus group further explored the youth’s understanding of feminism in today’s context.

4.4 Population and Unit of Analysis

According to Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 132) a population is a complete set from which a sample will be taken and tested.

4.4.1 Section A: Secondary Research - Content Analysis of Visual Images

4.4.1.1 First Population

The first population for this study was all media images of the female characters of the Kardashian/Jenner family. An interpretation of how characters were depicted in the images was made from the perspective of the researcher. Only controlled images were taken as part of this study. The researcher defined controlled images as images that the characters (Kardashians/Jenners) have control over. These are images that the characters have either published themselves or have given permission to publish or broadcast. This is a crucial framework in which the researcher wanted to work from, as these images would give insight into how these female characters seemingly prefer to portray themselves in the media.

4.4.1.2 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis for the first part of this mixed method study was media still frame images.

4.4.2 Section B: Primary Research - Focus Group

4.4.2.1 Second Population

The second population for this study was all young females exposed to media who were familiar with the Kardashian/Jenner family or brand. Due to the nature of this research and the research topic, the researcher's second population for this study only consisted of females. The researcher also only wanted the opinions from the perspective of youth as this age group (16 – 30) is seen to more actively engage with the media (Chan, Ng & Luk, 2013). This age group is also significant as crucial decisions concerning their careers would have to be made around this age (for example which subject to study in high school, tertiary education consideration and career decisions). Only females in Johannesburg, South Africa were sampled due to convenience and time and financial constraints.

4.4.2.2 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for the second part of this mixed method study was the individual young woman.

4.5 Sample Selection

Due to the fact that a mixed method study was done in the form of a content analysis and a focus group, the sample selections were made as follows.

4.5.1 Section A: Secondary Research - Content Analysis of Visual Images

Firstly, purposive sampling was used in order to select the Kardashian/Jenner family as celebrities for this study. According to Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 138), purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher's judgement is used to select the sample in order to answer the research question and meet the objectives. When observing potential female celebrities that qualified for this study, the Kardashian/Jenner females proved to be an ideal sample to analyse when compared to other current female celebrities. Not only are they prominent on popular media platforms, but their family unit and product endorsements make them the ideal female celebrities to analyse. Celebrities such as the Kardashian/Jenner family are often praised for their exotic good looks, sex appeal and matriarchal portrayals. Their success and appeal has been built on their image and physical appearance. Kim Kardashian is described as one of the "hottest women alive" (Huffington Post, 2012) and is known for her very public homemade sex-tape with a former love interest, William Ray Norwood, Junior (better known as 'Ray J'). It is argued that she portrays herself in a hypersexual manner, and together with her very public family, endorses unattainable beauty ideals.

The reality show "Keeping up With the Kardashians" is an American reality television series that premiered on E! Entertainment network in 2007 (Celebuzz). The show follows the exploits of the Kardashian/Jenner family and has gained much success over the past six years (Celebuzz). The success of the

show has resulted in several spin-off shows, as well as numerous business ventures for the Kardashian/Jenner clan (Celebuzz). This family has somewhat become part of the fabric of popular culture today and delivers over 4.8 million total viewers, making it one of the most-watched on the network telecast to date (Celebuzz). Their influence and international followership is prominent and overt. This is not only evident through show ratings, but also through popular social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, where Kim Kardashian as the show's protagonist alone has over 11 million followers (Instagram). For the purpose of this study, images of females in the Kardashian/Jenner family will be analysed.

Purposive sampling was also used to sample controlled images on mass media platforms. Controlled images in the sample were identified according to how the female celebrity appears in the image, for example in a decorative role, traditional role or non-traditional role, as explained by Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009). Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of the pictures, contrasts and contradictions was made. Only extreme cases of content portraying the Kardashian/Jenner clan in stereotypical female roles (that supports the beauty ideal) were chosen.

4.5.2 Section B: Primary Research - Focus Groups

In order to address the research topic, a focus group was seen to be a useful method of understanding what young women understand about certain celebrity images and their basic understanding of feminism today. Self-selection sampling

was used in order to choose the participants. According to Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 140), self-selection sampling is a type of non-probability sampling whereby possible participants for the study are asked to identify themselves as willing to take part in the study. It was crucial to the study that the young females who were selected to take part in this study were somewhat familiar with the Kardashian/Jenner family and/or brand. Young females such as these were necessary to select, as the researcher believed that through a focus group in-depth insights surrounding the topic at hand could be extracted. It was also important to select young females for this sample as the study is concerned with female celebrities' influence on other young females. According to Jarvis and Barberena (2007), focus groups offer powerful insights into people's feelings and thoughts and thus a more detailed, nuanced, and richer understanding of their perspectives on ideas, products, and portrayals emerges.

Due to the fact that the target population only included young females that were familiar with the Kardashian/Jenner clan, the researcher identified them as “entertainment-oriented’ individuals who enjoy learning about celebrities and discussing information with others casually” (Chan, Ng & Luk, 2013, p. 168).

4.6 Moderator Guide For Focus Group

According to Stewart, Shamdasani and Rook (2007) an effective moderator is one of the keys to the collection of rich and valid insights from focus groups. The authors added that personal characteristics such as age, sex, and personality; educational background and training; amount of experience as a moderator; as

well as the sensitivity of the topic; the scope and depth of coverage required; the conduciveness of the physical setting; and time constraints all make for an effective moderator. Furthermore, face-to-face interviews allow verbal and non-verbal data to be observed. When in the same room the moderator and participant have access to facial expressions, gestures and other para-verbal communications that enrich the meaning of the spoken word (Carr & Worth, 2001).

Due to the financial and time constraints involved the researcher undertook the role of the moderator in this study. With this said, the researcher strived to show sensitivity and empathy on one hand, and objectivity and detachment on the other. Clear goals and objectives were outlined before the focus group took place, a comfortable environment was created for the participants, and an interview guide was followed (refer to Appendix 1: Focus Group Questions/Interview Guide). The researcher was also careful to ensure that minimal bias was present through the interview stage and participants were debriefed after the focus group session.

For the purpose of the focus group the researcher's intent was to ask unstructured, open-ended questions that opened lines of communication, and to create a safe environment for the participants to respond openly and freely without any ridicule or judgement. These questions were exploratory in nature and meant to induce the participants' truthful opinions and beliefs. All participants were given an equal opportunity to speak freely and express any

opinions and/or concerns. The participants were also not forced to answer any questions if they did not want to.

4.7 Data Collection, Data Analysis and Data Management

Due to the mixed method nature of this research, media content in the form of images from television, the Internet and print media were collected and analysed according to how the above mentioned characters portray themselves, for example, decorative role, traditional role, non-traditional role (Plakoyiannaki & Zotos, 2009, p. 1417). The focus group interview was also transcribed and analysed, but not coded. Instead, an interpretation of the participants' responses will be provided from the viewpoint of the researcher in an attempt to address the research topic.

It is important to note that "reading of text are multiple and will depend on the interpreters of that text who bring their own personal, cultural and gendered perspectives to frame the context from which they make meaning" (Caterall & Maclaran, 2002, p. 408). With this said, all interpretations of visual images and of the focus group came from the theoretical perspective of the researcher, which is governed by personal history, experience, culture, gender, and class perspectives (DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). It is paramount to note that different people respond differently to the same textual stimuli (Caterall & Maclaran, 2002, p. 408); just as perceptions differ from one person to another, it is the researcher's role to unclutter responses and perceptions and interpret them by using a theoretical framework in order to derive meaning. Furthermore, for the purpose of the

content analysis, visual images were analysed in order to contextualise what was happening in the image and the inferred meaning behind the chosen images from the perspective of the researcher.

4.8 Data Validity and Reliability

Qualitative research needs to be well thought out, well researched and executed correctly in order to make sense and convince the reader that the research procedure has been followed correctly (Merriam, 1998). To ensure that the research process was followed accurately and that the study made logical sense, experts in this field of research were consulted in order to avoid ambiguity. According to Smith (2004), a study is considered reliable if other researchers can replicate it. Smith further argued that in order for a study to be judged “good or valid, the observations made in that study must be stable over time, and that different methods, such as interviews and observations, should yield similar results”. The researcher kept this in mind when conducting the research as reliability and validity was crucial to the study, therefore triangulation was deemed necessary for validity and to decrease bias.

The focus group was also necessary for validity reasons in which participants were shown random controlled broadcasted images of the Kardashians/Jenners and asked to give their opinions and responses from the participants that will give great insight into the topic (refer to Appendices 2, 3, 4 and 5). Mathison (2005) stated that triangulation is a strategy for improving the validity of evaluation findings; a strategy that will aid in the elimination of bias and allow

the dismissal of rival alternative explanations. Through this process the intention was not only to provide visuals in an attempt to spark conversations about the aforementioned females celebrities, but to also invoke crucial conversations from a different point of view other than that of the researcher. Triangulation is therefore a popular practice for qualitative researchers, who are required to supply contrasting evidence collected from focus group interviews, observations and other secondary and primary material. The research relied on this method for interpretation purposes by corroborating the evidence gathered from the focus group participants with selected peer reviewed journals, media articles, magazines and other media content.

4.9 Potential Research Limitations

According to Brown and Schulze (1990, p. 88), “even the most informed semiotic, narrative or psychoanalytic ‘readings’ of a text cannot predict the meanings that will be made by audiences in social situations”. The research that will be conducted in this study has, *inter alia*, the following limitations:

- Meaning derived from content analysis and interviews was inferred. The findings of this research are not factual, rather they intend to imply something about what was researched.
- The findings of this research are an interpretation from the perspective of the researcher and the data collected, therefore they might be deemed biased.

- Due to the fact that purposive sampling and self-selection sampling was used, it might be deemed biased.
- Questions asked in the focus group could be deemed biased.
- Selected images might be deemed biased, as only images portraying female stereotypes were used.
- Participants might have felt pressurised by other participants and/or the moderator to answer questions in a certain way; this is typical of smaller groups, as one or two participants tend to dominate discussions.
- Some might deem the researcher/moderator as too emotionally involved with the research topic.
- The selection criteria for the sample might be deemed as arbitrary and subjective, and the narrowness of the research questions can reflect the researcher's stand on the subject.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

According to Daft (2011, p. 395), ethics is “the code of moral principles and values that governs the behavior of a person or group with respect to what is right and what is wrong”. Saunders and Lewis (2012, p. 74) further explained that research ethics is “the appropriateness of the researcher’s behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of a research project, or who is affected by it”. With this said, this research aimed to adhere to research ethics. All media content was legally collected. Due to the fact that this study portrays the Kardashian/Jenner family in an unfavourable light, the researcher

had to be aware of any slander or defamation of character concerns. Furthermore, published images of Kendall and Kylie Jenner were analysed in the focus group. Both teenagers are 16 and older, but their age might raise some ethical concerns.

The participants were fully debriefed and signed permission from participants was required before any interviews began. Parental consent was obtained from participants under the age of 18 years old and an opt-out clause was included in the consent form. A safe environment was also created for the participants. All images, media articles, websites and peer-reviewed journals were fully referenced. Furthermore, this research was written solely by the researcher and reviewed by her supervisor and editor.

5 Chapter 5: Results

This chapter is dedicated to clearly representing the research results. Data and results are clustered and themed around the research questions and adequate interpretation of data is provided. Due to the fact that this research is qualitative in nature, verbatim, quotations or evidence will be cited within the framework of research questions, highlighting any themes or female role stereotypes. It is also common practice to provide pertinent quotes in support of research questions or themes.

Lambiase (2003, p. 60) believed that “meaning is created when a viewer interprets a photograph or graphical icon within a particular cultural or social context”. With this said, due to the fact that this research was argued from an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher interpreted images using her own cultural and social context in order to derive meaning. The success of the research was dependent on the accurate, unbiased analysis of the content. The research conducted also required a significant amount of effort because of the qualitative nature of the study.

Through a methodical analysis these research findings prove that female celebrities such as the Kardashians/Jenners portray beauty ideals and perpetuate female role stereotypes. This research finding further prove that female celebrities also to some degree contribute to the influence on young females audiences today.

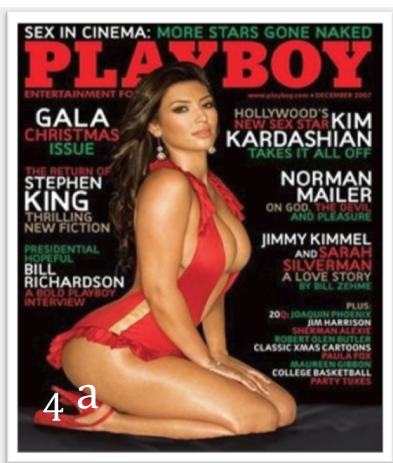
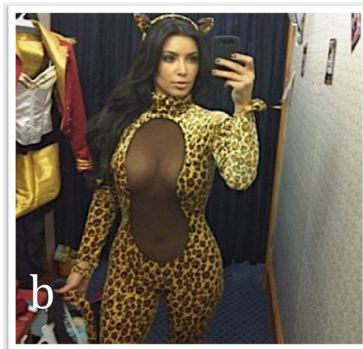
5.1 Section A: Content Analysis of Visual Images Results

5.1.1 Research Question 1: Results

RQ1: *Are images that endorse the beauty ideal and perpetuate female role stereotypes still portrayed by female celebrities today?*

The following are chosen controlled images of each of the above-mentioned female celebrities. These images were analysed and contrasted against each other in order to derive meaning and allude to female role stereotypes. Furthermore, contradictions in terms of how these characters portray themselves are mentioned and meaning is inferred.

5.1.1.1 Analysis of Controlled Images



(1a: Eonline, 2010; 1b: Examiner, 2010; 2a: Celebuzz, 2012; 2b: My Daily UK, 2012; 3a: OK! Magazine USA, 2001; 3b: Celeb Baby Laundry, 2012; 4a: Playboy, 2007; 4b: Hey it's Jenna, 2012).

Images 1 a and b

Image 4a is a controlled still image of Kris Jenner in 2011 undergoing a facelift that was broadcasted on her reality show “Keeping Up with the Kardashians”. The then 55 year old mother of six underwent the cosmetic surgery to ‘rejuvenate’ her look in preparation for her daughter Kim Kardashian’s second marriage to now ex-husband Kris Humphreys. Image 4b is a controlled image of Kim Kardashian being injected with Botox into the upper cheek region. This still image was also broadcasted on her reality show “Keeping Up with the Kardashians”. The researcher is of the opinion that these images are very effective due their graphic nature and intentionally engages their audiences as it adds shock value.

Both images show Kris Jenner and Kim Kardashian in very passive positions, which can imply that both of them are ‘slaves’ to their beauty and the pursuit thereof. Furthermore, it advocates the argument made by Scrizzi (2013) that Western women are highly sexualised, wrinkle-free, silicone injected, and body conscious. Through this they portray the ‘decorative’ female role stereotype. Whilst at first glance Kris Jenner is presented as an older woman in pursuit of beauty by undergoing cosmetic surgery, a more extreme way of attaining beauty, her daughter Kim Kardashian is presented as a seemingly flawless and beautiful woman trying to attain further youth and beauty, or maintain her existing beautiful state. The peaceful expression on Kim Kardashian’s face can be interpreted as her as somewhat ‘subservient’ experience.

It is interesting to observe how mother Kris Jenner has influence on her daughter's behaviours. From the images shown it is evident that Kris Jenner values beauty and youthfulness. It is also necessary to note that the Kardashian brand, with the influence of Kris Jenner as mother and manager, has been built on the idea of beauty and physical attractiveness. It can therefore be said that Kris Jenner not only influences her daughters to strive to be beautiful or attain it artificially, but has socialised her daughters (especially Kim Kardashian) to portray the beauty ideal and perpetuate female role stereotypes through their physical image and behaviours.

Images 2 a and b

Image 2a is a controlled image that shows mother, manager and matriarch Kris Jenner wearing a provocative 'Wonder Women' costume that she wore for Halloween, which was published on numerous Internet sites and made available by Kris Jenner herself. Not only does it showcase the older Kris Jenner in a sexy outfit, but it is controversial as it displays obvious exposure of her breasts and nipples. Image 2b is a controlled image (a 'selfie') posted by Kim Kardashian on her social networks. It showcases the reality star in a provocative leopard catsuit that she wore for Halloween. The researcher is of the opinion that these two images are effective as they show Kris Jenner and Kim Kardashian in provocative, eye-catching costumes. These self-published images are also effective as some nudity was involved, adding shock-value and intentionally engaging audiences.

Both images show Kris Jenner and Kim Kardashian in a proud and sexual light,

portraying the 'decorative' female role stereotype. It seems that Kris Jenner presents herself as almost 'superhuman'. Her posture and stance shows that she emulates a powerful, hypersexual superhero. Portraying herself as 'superhuman' also sends out the message that women (no matter their age) should fulfill numerous gender roles, such as sex object, mother, wife and businesswoman. Furthermore, this is the message that she sends out to her audiences; that even as a mother and grandmother it is important to remain sexy and powerful in order to attain wealth and success. It further endorses that women can use their bodies for profit and as a means to power.

The image of Kim Kardashian in a catsuit, very much follows the lead and example set by her mother. She is presented as sexy, provocative and semi-nude. The figure-hugging outfit showcases Kim Kardashian as confident, proud, dominant and sultry, as she takes a 'selfie'. Not only this, a leopard is an animal that represents power, perhaps alluding to the fact that she takes ownership of her image and uses it as a means to 'power'. The leopard could also represent steadfastness ('a leopard never changes its spots'), perhaps further alluding to the fact that Kim Kardashian understands that her image is her 'only' access to power and success.

With this said, it is once again evident that Kris Jenner has influence on her daughter's image and behaviour. It seems that celebrities have been conditioned to enjoy and get self-fulfillment out of self-objectifying, as this seems to have

become the *status quo*. This is especially evident when studying the Kardashians/Jenners.

Images 3 a and b

Image 3a is a controlled image shot by America magazine, 'Ok!'. It showcases Kris Jenner and daughter Khloe Kardashian-Odom in a glamorous kitchen setting, preparing a meal for daughter Kim Kardashian's bridal shower to now ex-husband Kris Humphreys. Khloe Kardashian-Odom seems to be attentively watching her mother prepare a perfectly styled meal. It is necessary to note that Kris Jenner and Khloe Kardashian-Odom are the only married females in the famous family, perhaps alluding to the role wives 'need' to fulfil. Kris Jenner also seems to be setting an example for her daughter as Khloe Kardashian-Odom seems to be 'learning' from her mother. This validates that female roles can be taught, be it through socialisation from family and communities, or media. Image 3b is a controlled image of Kourtney Kardashian giving birth to her second born. This image was shown on an episode of "Keeping Up With the Kardashians", and shows Kourtney Kardashian very involved in her birthing experience as she pulls her baby out of the birth canal (she did the same with her first born).

The two images show clear contrasts and contradictions in the manner in which the Kardashian/Jenner family chooses to portray themselves. Whilst the first image shows Kris Jenner alongside daughter Khloe Kardashian-Odom in a more

submissive feminine light as homemakers, in feminine dresses portraying the 'traditional' female role stereotype; the second image shows Kourtney as alert and involved in her own birthing process which could be seen as a very radical feminist thing to do. She is not drugged-up, passive and submissive, but is rather engaged and has chosen the way she wants to give birth, thereby giving her power and putting her in control. These two images are juxtaposing and as a result confusing to their audiences, as the family sends out mixed messages.

Images 4 a and b

Image 4a is a controlled image of Kim Kardashian on the cover of the December issue of 'Playboy' magazine. The reality star posed nude for the magazine who marketed her as "Hollywood's Sex Star Kim Kardashian Takes it All Off". She is presented as a sexually appealing, provocative and curvaceous young woman posing for the enjoyment of the male-gaze. This image is very effective as its sexual nature lures audiences not only into paying attention to Kim Kardashian, but also into buying magazines. Image 4b is a picture of teenaged sisters Kendall and Kylie Jenner posing in a very provocative way in short, fitted, sexy pink dresses and high heels. The two teenagers also have full faces of makeup and sultry hair.

Kim Kardashian is seen to be portraying a 'decorative' female role stereotype. Not only this, she self-objectifies by posing nude in a pornographic magazine for the enjoyment of males. The image of Kendall and Kylie Jenner sexualises the two

young girls as they play into the 'decorative' stereotype as well. It is evident that just as Kris Jenner holds much influence over her older daughters, her older daughters in turn influence their younger teenage sisters as they try to emulate their elders' behaviours. Furthermore, Kendall and Kylie, just like Miley Cyrus and the like, hold much sway over younger generations. Much emphasis is not given to these teenagers' education, instead, emphasis is placed on their beauty and bodies.

5.2 Section B: Focus Group Interview Results

5.2.1 Contextualisation and Background of the Focus Group Participants

The focus group consisted of young woman aged 16 to 30 years old, from different racial groups, socio-economic backgrounds, education and family backgrounds.

Lerato is a 28 year old teacher and single mother of one. She is the eldest of her siblings and recognises that young women today are very influenced by celebrity and the media. Natasha is a 27 year old Office Manager. She is single and has never been married. She too is the eldest of her siblings and has a Bachelors degree from a private institution. Angelique is a 21 year old student in her final year of her Bachelors degree at a private institution. She is also the eldest of her siblings. Monique is a 16 year old student and the younger sister of Angelique. Through the focus group process it was evident that Angelique has a lot of influence on her younger sister as she tries to set a good example for her. Finally,

Nicole is a 16 year old student who seemed more reserved, shy and composed throughout the focus group process.

It is necessary to note that all participants' parents are still married and live together. Most of the participants' mothers seem to have a prominent voice in their households (much like the Kardashian/Jenner household), however their responses seemed to be filtered which explained their critical responses throughout the focus group process. Furthermore, with the exception of Monique and Nicole, the participants are the eldest of their siblings and acknowledge the influence that they have on their younger siblings, together with celebrities and media.

When talking generally about the Kardashian/Jenner family, participants in the focus group were asked to give their general understanding about what they think about the Kardashian/Jenner family and the message they send out to their audiences. They were shown a series of pictures and asked to give one word that described each picture. These questions were asked in an attempt to address the research questions, and further triangulated with the analysis done on visual images by the researcher and the literature reviewed.

5.2.2 Research Question 2: Results

RQ2: *Are young females influenced by these images today?*

(Refer to Appendix 2 for the full transcript of the focus group)

In an attempt to understand what young females think about the images that are portrayed by the Kardashian/Jenner family, the researcher asked female participants aged 16-29 a series of exploratory questions.

The focus group interview exposed the sentiment that the Kardashian/Jenner family are extremely “beautiful” and publicise it to the world. It was also evident through the discussion that the participants felt that the characters used the show “Keeping Up with the Kardashians” to gain appeal and money. Monique (16) stated, *“I think they’re just in it for the money, the media and publicity”*, while Natasha (27) explained *“I think they’re a little bit ostentatious, but then saying that, I do respect their hustle”*. This statement clearly highlights the prevailing theme in contemporary media that women can use their bodies for profit and as a means to power.

Even though the participants describe the Kardashians and Jenners as portraying themselves as “beautiful” and “superficial” (please refer to Appendices 3, 4 and 5), they have built a strong and successful brand off this; a brand that many fans would be envious of. This is further justified through Lerato’s (28) response: *“when I look at my sister and her friends, for them their brand portrays how you must dress, how you must look, who you need to be, they want to be up-to-date with*

what the Kardashians are wearing all the time. I think it's cute, and they play their brand really well".

This leads to the glaring fact that prominent celebrities such as this have some degree of influence on their audiences, be it through consumption and spending patterns or social interaction and social behaviours. Monique (16) further put this notion into context: *"they're always sending out a message that you should be up-to-date with the latest trends and fashion, that girls should look pretty, they should do certain things. You should always go out and look beautiful, maintain a certain standard. The whole family is in this showbiz thing and they always have this drama thing, it's like does every family have to have that drama going on..."*. Nicole (16) also thinks *"the message that they are sending out is that everything must be perfect. Your looks must always be up there, your personality must be like everyone else, you must fit into a group of looks. Like for me looks go to your head, and some people become conceited. For me they don't have self-respect. So the message they sending out is perfection"*. Natasha (27) concurred and added that *"education and intellect is not high on their list of priorities just by they way they portray themselves and the way they speak and conduct themselves"*. Angelique (21) further stated *"I think they send out a message of sex. It's a very sexual message that goes with the Kardashian family, if you look at how they act with each other, its very sexual. Kim is beautiful but she's also a sex-symbol, and that's how she started her career. It that whole sex thing and beauty, and looks will get you ahead. Its all about their looks nothing else... it was like we're beautiful and that's how we will market ourselves"*.

Through the focus group conducted it is evident that the images that are portrayed by modern day celebrities such as the Kardashians/Jenners are understood to portray an image that is very centred around physical attractiveness and beauty, alluding to it being a way to success. It was also uncovered that celebrities such as this do have some influence on their audiences.

Due to the fact that this research is ingrained in feminist ideology, the researcher thought it was crucial to test whether the average young women understands what feminism means, or whether they have a basic understanding of the terms “feminism” or “feminist”, and whether they can identify with them. This addresses RQ3. The researcher also comments on the significance of feminism today.

5.2.3 Research Question 3: Results

RQ3: *Do young females’ understanding of feminism influence the way in which they understand the role of females in society today?*

(Refer to Appendix 2 for the full transcript of the focus group)

In an attempt to understand what the average young women understands about feminism, the researcher asked the direct question “What is a feminist?”.

The focus group participants thought feminism alluded to “strong” and “powerful” women. Participants such as Lerato (28) commented that “*I think strong women, I think lesbians*”. As ‘cavalier’ as her answer may be, many articles

allude to the fact that many modern women think “lesbians” when they think about feminism. Lerato (28) further added that *“someone who doesn’t want to live in a man’s world... they want to be equal, they want to lead with the man... There are some that want to be men... in the lesbian world... and regular women want to walk into the office like I’m going show the men”*, whilst participants such as Monique (16), Natasha (27), and Angelique (21) thought that feminists strive to “empower” women. Angelique (21) commented *“in the beginning the history was equal economic, social and political rights for women in society... because women were always known to stay at home cook, clean, watch the children... as humans do they evolve... women also wanted to be educated and work... and if you look at men today, women have to equip themselves, you can’t rely on a man... so feminism is independence... but I think there’s women that take it too far like wanting to be the man... there’s a balance... men are not more superior, but men are the head of the household and women should respect that, that’s why there’s so much marital problems... but its respect. No sexual harassment, women aren’t sexual objects... independence and equality”*.

At the same time, participants such as Nicole (16) admitted that *“I’m not sure what it means, but I think lady-like, proper confidence, equality, independence... the mother-figure... it always leads to respect... the main heading is respect”*.

The researcher further put forward the question: *“Today you get female CEOs, you get female celebrities making millions, you get single women who are doing it for themselves... so do you think feminism is still relevant in 2013? Do you think we have got to where we want to get as women or is there more progress to be made?”*

Lerato’s (28) comment was, *“let me see a woman president then we’ll be equal... I don’t think we there yet... sometimes female CEOs is just affirmative action... as women we still need to get there”*. Natasha (27) further commented that *“there’s still a place for feminism today... I mean there was a study done in America where women still get paid less than men that are ranked the same... so there’s still a place... even I respect some ideologies of feminism women need to understand their roles and respect men and let men play their roles”*.

The focus group uncovered that young women do not necessarily have an in-depth understanding of the meaning of feminism or its crux. Some showed a basic understanding, but the predominant sentiment was that feminism is about “being like men” or being “equal”. Moreover, the understanding was that feminism is still needed in 2013, however it has its place. Most of the participants felt that women should allow men to play their role in their household as the head of the family, and that the workplace was where feminist ideologies matter the most. Lastly, the participants did not consider themselves feminist, however did agree with some feminist ideologies. All participants agreed that feminism is still relevant today as women have not reached a point in the workplace where they are complete equals to their male counterparts. The participants’ responses

further reinforced the theme of the conflicted nature between femininity versus feminism. The following chapter is an interpretation and discussion on the results obtained.

6 Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

The following chapter is dedicated to discussing the results of this research, which are discussed in terms of the research questions, literature, and primary and secondary data collected. Through the obtained results this study addresses the research topic. Depth and insight is provided, correlations are drawn where necessary, and results are triangulated. Indications of whether the research questions have been adequately addressed are discussed, as are any limitations of this study.

Along with female role stereotypes that are evident in the content analysis of visual images, there are two prevailing themes that stand out in the results of this study, namely:

1. That women can use their bodies for profit and as a means to power, and
2. The conflicted nature between femininity versus feminism today.

Based on the research conducted it is concerning that women in media, more specifically female celebrities, portray beauty ideals in their personal and professional capacities. The idea of self-objectification and the speculation that female celebrities willing objectify themselves for whatever reason, be it fame, relevance and/or money, has become increasingly pronounced and overt today, bringing into question the current 'place' of women in society and questioning the pertinence of feminism today. On a daily basis, women both ordinary and celebrity, behave in ways that are deemed sexy, harmless, playful and frivolous,

however these questionable behaviours are indeed indicative of the current state of society and reflects the prevailing attitudes and stereotypes held by society. This is discussed at length in terms of the three research questions.

The following diagram explains how the research questions will be discussed in the context of the theory reviewed, and further triangulated with the secondary and primary data collected:



6.1 Research Question 1: Female role stereotypes

RQ1: *Are images that endorse the beauty ideal and perpetuate female role stereotypes still portrayed by female celebrities today?*

RQ1 was addressed through conducting a content analysis of visual images, whereby controlled images of the Kardashians/Jenners were analysed and interpreted from the point of view of the researcher. Furthermore, each image was coded into Plakoyiannaki and Zotos' (2009) female role stereotypes in order to answer RQ1. The response to this research question is centred on the

Kardashian/Jenner family and therefore can be said to be a generalisation of all prominent female celebrities. The researchers intent is not to generalise, but to highlight that prominent celebrities such as the ones observed, portray beauty as acceptable and admired. The following is the discussion of the results obtained.

6.1.1 The Beauty Ideal

When referring to the chosen controlled images of Kris Jenner and Kim Kardashian, the following observations, analysis and interpretations of images were made in order to address RQ1.

It is speculated that the Kardashian/Jenner family portray themselves in a hyper-sexualised manner in order to monetise their brand. This includes the Kardashian's promoting the reality show 'Keeping Up with the Kardashians', endorsing weight loss products such as 'Quick Trim', promoting their own line of beauty product "Kardashian Beauty", as well as their Sears clothing line, 'Kardashian Kollektion', to name a few.

Out of the eight images selected to analyse for this study, a total of six out of the eight were classified as portraying the 'decorative' role stereotype, with one classified as portraying the 'traditional' role and another as radically feminist. Through this the researcher extrapolated that these celebrities are predominantly concerned with the image of beauty.

According to the literature reviewed and more specifically Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009, p. 1417), a 'decorative' role deals with women that are in pursuit of

physical attractiveness and beauty. It is for this reason that the Kardashians/Jenners are said to predominantly portray an image of beauty. Whilst it is acknowledged that celebrities such as these are entitled to change their appearances, the researcher is of the opinion that openly broadcasting content that promotes beauty ideals can have negative consequences, especially when concerning young females who are more impressionable. When looking at images such as these, the message sent out is that of superficiality and unattainability. It promotes that women should look a certain way in order to be accepted, admired, praised, successful and happy (Ingham, 1995). Furthermore, the impression is that female celebrities seem to be sending out mixed messages to their audiences. Not only do celebrities ascribe to the 'traditional' female role stereotype as homemakers and wives, but also seem to be putting out images in favour of the beauty ideal, juxtaposed with other role stereotypes, such as 'non-traditional' roles. Moreover, the impression is that beauty is the necessary ingredient in order to find a husband and become famous.

These types of images send out a message that women need to conform to these behaviours in order to be considered beautiful, which coincides with the works of Scrizzi (2013). There is a pressure for women to fulfil more than one female role stereotype; they expected to be facially beautiful and young, slender or curvaceous, a mother, housewife and career woman. When celebrities such as the aforementioned broadcast images that portray them as perfect, the research argues that it does to some extent influence and pressurise young women to conform to these perpetuated stereotypes. These pressures not only impact on

women's lives, but as Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) argued, occupy a central role in women's lives. This is concerning as it seems that there is a shift in emphasis of what is deemed important with regards to women in society. Less emphasis is placed on women empowering themselves through education and knowledge, and more emphasis is placed on women's beauty and sexuality in order to attain success. Furthermore, when triangulated with responses from younger women in the focus group, words such as "sexy", "beautiful", and "gorgeous" dominated the discussion, which further perpetuated the idea that beauty plays a central role in media and society.

Whilst this study observed a particular famous family, it argues that what is observed through the behaviours and portrayals of this family have become the norm when observing other popular female celebrities. While it can only be speculated as to why female celebrities endorse beauty, from the research conducted and the data collected it is evident that images that are portrayed of female celebrities prevailing in contemporary media today are predominantly centred around the theme of beauty, one of which is that women can use their beauty and bodies for profit and as a means to power (Gill, 2007).

6.2 Research Question 2: Women can use their bodies for profit and as a means of power.

RQ2: *Are young females influenced by these images today?*

Within consumer socialisation research, Chan, Ng and Luk (2013) stated that vicarious role models including favourite entertainers have conclusively been shown to influence consumption intentions and behaviours. According to Choi and Rifon (2012), consumers' perceptions of a celebrity with respect to their own self-concept postulates that consumers purchase and consume products congruent with their self-concept, either actual or ideal.

6.2.1 The Media as an Agent of Socialisation and Self-Objectification

If what Chan, Ng and Luk (2013) argued is true, then it makes sense that women are socialised from a young age to think in ways that are not only aligned to patriarchal norms in society, but also support the hyper-consumerist society we have become. The media moulds its audiences from a young age to think and behave in a certain way. Furthermore, the media values women primarily for their appearances, which contributes to the culture of sexual objectification. Moreover, the fact that the media so prominently and willingly broadcasts images of women in hypersexual ways affects women's own perspectives of their own bodies (Aubrey, Henceson & Hopper, 2009).

These limiting portrayals of women in the media can impact negatively on their self-image and self-esteem (Caterall & Maclaran, 2002). This is further

triangulated with evidence collected in the focus group conducted, whereby participants admitted that the media plays a role in the way they view themselves and the way in which they consume products. With this said, young women feel obligated to live out what is seen on television in order to fit into the norms of society.

6.2.2 Consumer Behaviour and Identity

The youth is seen as more impressionable and avid consumers of media today. Young women's understanding of these media images is that what is broadcasted is the ideal state. If beautiful women are only shown on television, then it is a clear indication that to be beautiful is ideal. According to Natasha (27), a participant in the focus group (refer to Appendix 2: Focus Group Transcript), the way you look gets you ahead in life. This is her understanding of what she sees in the media. Angelique (21) further commented that many of her friends do not value themselves, and their worth is ingrained in the way they look and the men they date. When asked if the participants feel attractive, for the most part they answered that they do feel attractive but only on 'good days', however, it was the researcher's impression that they felt compelled to answer the question in this fashion in fear of being judged as having a negative self-esteem or self-image.

With this said, the media impacts on young people's self-image by portraying beauty as an ideal state, and through doing so young women's perception of these images is that they feel the need to look the same out of fear of being an outcast or rejected, or as Nicole (16) stated, perhaps if you looked more like the

Kardashians the boy you like will start liking you back. Women are also seen to self-objectify in order to gain admiration and success. Women have become such that they derive nourishment and sustenance from objectifying (Nussbaum, 1995). Focus group participants commented that they have friends that consume products shown in the media because they feel it's the popular thing to do or to be perceived as being in the 'in-group'. Not only this, but audiences wish to identify with celebrities in the media and often feel a strong connection to them, forming parasocial relationships with them and behaving in the same manner (Derrick, Gabriel & Tippin, 2008; Dalakas & Melancon, 2012). The truth behind why media content portrays hypersexuality can only be speculated upon, but for the most part it exists in order to promote movies and television programmes, sell products and gain media coverage – the crux behind it is driven by money (Lambiase, 2003). As Hauk and Immordino (2013) stated, the television industry is not interested in the propagation of cultural values *per se*, rather cultural coverage is chosen strategically to maximise profits since it influences the viewing time and thereby the advertising revenue of a firm.

The unfortunate part of the media industry being run like a business for profit, is that it does have an influence on young women and purposely plays on its audiences' insecurity in order to make a profit. With eating disorders and cyber-bullying on the rise, whether the media industry in collaboration with celebrities has any interest in the well-being of individuals in societies' mental and physical well-being is uncertain. Moreover, the most potent message that is being

broadcast is that women can and should use their bodies for profit and as a means of power.

6.3 Research Question 3: The conflicted nature of femininity versus feminism

RQ3: *Do young females' understanding of feminism influence the way in which they understand the role of females in society today?*

6.3.1 Feminism Today

There is a glaring theme evident which outlines the conflicted nature of femininity and feminism as prevailing in contemporary media today. There are contradictions in the images and how this speaks to the contrary feelings that women have towards feminism. Feminism today is presented in popular culture as a monstrous stereotype, making it deeply unpalatable to young women (Eschle & Maiguashca, 2013). These authors' interpretation of feminism in the 'post-feminist' era is closely related to the evidence collected from the focus group. The researcher agrees with Gardyn (2001), who argued that young women or the 'post-feminist' generation take for granted the struggles that their predecessors have endured in securing their rights. This is evident through what young people's impression about what feminism is. The sentiment amongst young women is that feminism is about wanting to 'be like a man', striving for 'equality' and being 'strong'. Just as the literature suggests, popular culture has indeed made feminism unpalatable by portraying feminism and feminist

movements as radical and unnecessary. Just like the birth of Kourtney Kardashian's child, which was seen as 'weird' and 'abnormal' by her own family.

There seems to be a link between the negative veil that is placed upon feminism in popular culture and the overt hypersexuality portrayed by female celebrities in the media. Just as Rogers (2013) suggested, one must be a prude to think that women cannot express themselves sexually. It is concerning that as ideologies within feminist discourse seem to be dwindling amongst younger generations, younger women (the 'post' feminism generation) seem to be losing their self-worth. As Piatt (2013) suggested, there is a subtle subtext narrated to girls, which is that sex is the most efficient and potent means of access to power they have. Could the implication that society is living under a 'patriarchal veil' as alluded to by McRobbie (2009) be true? To some extent this makes sense; the notion of women empowering themselves through acts of hypersexuality while making their predominantly male executives millions of dollars seems quite ironic, and as focus group participants put it, "you're nothing without looks".

Whilst the meaning of feminism seems to be 'lost in translation' amongst young women, it is understood to have its place in 2013, and remains the cornerstone, foundation and building blocks for maintaining and striving toward gender parity. With this said, it was interesting to observe the negative feelings that participants within the focus group had toward hypersexual images shown in the media, with their covert desire to look like celebrities. Furthermore, there are overlapping contradictions in the images shown to the focus group participants

and how this speaks to the contrary feelings these young women have towards feminism, which highlights the conflicted nature between femininity and feminism today. Which Coy (2009) argues narrows girls' 'space for action', their aspirations and achievements, by re-defining femininity and beauty as of most importance.

7 Chapter 7: Conclusion

This chapter highlights the main findings of the research, pulling the results together into a cohesive set of findings. It also includes the limitations of the study and discusses opportunities for future research.

Women and young girls are portrayed in the media as promiscuous, scantily clad, botoxed, bitchy and manipulative rivals, who value men and their money. Moreover, regular people whose lives have been documented on reality television have become prominent, famous and well-paid 'stars' due to their scandalous, attention-grabbing behaviours on this engaging media platform. This is true when observing television reality stars such as those on the reality show "Keeping Up with the Kardashians".

Society is bombarded with images of women portrayed from the viewpoint of patriarchy. It is clear from the research conducted that female celebrities do in fact have some degree of influence on how young women view themselves and the world today. Just like this observation of celebrities, one can see how the media has become an integral part of popular culture and socialisation of young women. This leads one to ask; what came first, the questionable manner in which modern day women behave, or the portrayal of these behaviours in the media in order to boost ratings? This is a saga that is very much under debate today - is art imitating reality or is it shaping our reality?

There is no question that every human being has the right to freedom of speech and self-expression, however it becomes an issue when young females have

access to media content that they are not emotionally or mentally prepared to handle. The media often showcases women in pursuit of beauty and vying for the affection of men. In the case of the Kardashians/Jenners, it is seen how much emphasis is placed on their appearance and how they have subsequently built a multi-million dollar empire based on this notion of beauty. These are the ideals that are fed to young women today; ideals that play down women's ability to compete in the business world, which magnifies beauty and belittles intellect.

Women are misled into thinking that by portraying themselves as sexy objects of desire and taking ownership of constructing their own identities it is empowering. This pretence, according to the researcher, is highly misinformed, as it not only plays into the hands of patriarchy, but also leaves women in disempowered positions. A compelling documentary entitled "Miss Representation", directed by Jennifer Siebel Newsom (2011), exposed how women are grossly underrepresented in positions of power and influence in mainstream media. Women in powerful positions are often portrayed negatively and often given the worst aspects of power. This is especially seen with regards to female politicians around the world. Female politicians such as Hilary Clinton, Sarah Palin, Helen Zille and Condoleezza Rice have all been ostracised for challenging the male *status quo*. They are considered as 'bitchy ballbusters' in fulfilling their roles as leaders. Moreover, they are often degraded based on their physical appearances. It is as if those who do not agree with their political views do not know how to engage with them in a formal debate, therefore they take

'tacky shots' at trivialising and discrediting them by fixating on their physical appearances.

Additionally, the media minimises important news to cover celebrity news (Feeley, 2012), which has dire consequences and brings to call the direction society is heading and its implication for political efficacy. Women's movements have also been truncated in the media, which raises the question of how relevant is feminism today? With absent parents and education that is failing so many young people in South Africa, out-of-home influences and the media as an agent of socialisation has become an integral part in the socialisation of our society.

The research that has been conducted has answered the research questions and addressed the research topic that is ingrained in feminist discourse. The results show that female celebrities do perpetuate the beauty ideal and have some influence on their younger audiences. It is also evident that young women are of the understanding that media images portray beauty as an ideal state. Furthermore, the impression today is that only active feminists are obligated to maintain and progress the feminist movement, striving for equality in the home and the workplace. From the research results it is also evident that the average young female does not have an accurate understanding of what feminism is. It is almost the impression that young people in contemporary society have been socialised to have an understanding that feminism is a movement geared by man-hating humourless feminists. Evelyn Puga Aguirre-sulem (2010) put forward the question "is feminism redundant or too aggressive for contemporary society?".

Capitalism and the promotion of materialism seem to be eroding the feminism ideology of promoting equality of genders. The notion that sex sells still dominates mainstream popular culture through media platforms that prove to be a prime agent of socialisation. Coy (2009) put forward the idea of how sexualisation narrows girls' 'space for action', their aspirations and achievements, by re-defining femininity and beauty as of most importance.

It is the researcher's opinion that female celebrities have conformed (intentionally or unintentionally) to capitalist patriarchal socialisation by self-objectifying, but also collude when constructing their own image and identity in an effort to gain shock value and monetise their brand image, with total disregard for their impact on societal norms and expectations for young women. It is further understood that the media does not come unmediated, as families, communities and society in general contextualise what is seen in the media. "The celebrity is not a real person, but merely a commodity, an image without substance, used to control the consciousnesses of a malleable public. While these arguments certainly highlight the power of the celebrity image as a cultural meaning maker, I contend their negative view of the audience as passive dupes misses an essential component of the negotiation of the celebrity image" (Meyers, 2009, p. 891). In 1985, Lysonski argued that beauty ideals and gender stereotypes were often the undertone of many media sources, portraying women in an often unattainable and sexual light. Today the researcher further disseminates Lysonski's (1985) argument, and through the research conducted it is evident that beauty ideals and gender stereotypes still reflect the prevailing

attitudes and stereotypes held by society today.

7.1 Limitations to the Research

The main body of research was based on the findings gleaned from the content analysis of visual images and the focus group. Superficially, therefore, one could surmise that the research is grounded in the opinions of the researcher and focus group participants. Focus group participants have to some extent been conditioned to think a certain way by their families, which could have altered their responses. Perhaps a better way of collecting primary data would be one-on-one interviews or observations of younger women in their own environments (for example, getting permission from a school and parents to observe young girls at a school social event). In doing so, biases would be limited. Furthermore, with regard to this study, bias could have been present as all research was conducted from the female point of view.

7.2 Opportunities for Future Research

Extensive literature on feminism, advertising, celebrity and its impact on society already exists. Due to the fact that this research is so strongly ingrained in feminism, the researcher is of the opinion that there are many opportunities for future research in the context of feminism, the media, and celebrity. Some opportunities are as follows:

- New waves of feminism and feminism's longevity.
- Socialisation theory: How youths are socialised and the effects of out-of-

home influences, new media and family.

- Universal beauty: Is the beauty ideal changing?
- How materialism is impacting society and changing the way in which we consume, spend and identify with brands.

7.3 Study Summary

The ultimate objective of this study was to establish whether female celebrities portray the beauty ideal and have influence over young females today. This was dissected through a review of literature and a combination of primary and secondary data collection. Images of females within the famous Kardashian/Jenner family were studied in an attempt to understand how female celebrities portray themselves today. Furthermore, a focus group was conducted in an attempt to understand whether female youths today are still to some extent influenced by female celebrities such as the Kardashians/Jenners. Through the research conducted it was evident that female role stereotypes still prevail in contemporary media today. Furthermore, two themes prevailed throughout the study, which was that women can use their bodies for profit and as a means of power, and the conflicting nature of femininity versus feminism today.

Through the results of the study it was evident that female celebrities do endorse the beauty ideal through images portrayed in the media, that young females are still somewhat influenced by these images, and that young females'

understanding of feminism is skewed and impacts on their understanding of women's roles in society, at home and in the workplace.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Focus Group Questions/Interview Guide

The following were a guide of open-ended questions asked in the interviews:

1. What do you think in general of the Kardashians?
2. What message do you think celebrities such as the Kardashians portray?
3. What three words would you use to describe the Kardashian's brand image?
4. Do you think that the Kardashians are good role models?
5. Do you think that the Kardashians are influential? If yes, why? If no, why?
6. Do you admire Kim Kardashian in any way? If yes, why? If no, why?
7. What in your own opinion makes a woman attractive? Why do you say this?
8. How can women achieve financial success?
9. Do you think that men play a role in women's success? If yes, why? If no, why?
10. Do you feel attractive? If yes, why? If no, why?
11. Do you feel a pressure to look a certain way?
12. What does feminism mean to you?
13. Do you think that feminism has a place in 2013?
14. What do you think it means to be a feminist?
15. Do you think women are treated as equal to men? Why?
16. Where do you see yourself in 10 years?
17. What is next for women in society?

Appendix 2: Focus Group Transcript

Date on focus group: 24 August 24, 2013

Location of focus group: 56 Nicholas Crescent Stratford Gardens, Broadacres, Johannesburg.

Contact number of researcher: 082 336 4783

Email of researcher: nadiamichael1987@gmail.com

Participants Present:

1. Monique, age 16, student
2. Nicole, age 16, student
3. Angelique, age 21, student
4. Natasha, age 27, Office Manager
5. Lerato, age 28, Teacher

Researcher and Moderator: Nadia Michael (present)

RESEARCHER (INTRO):

Thank you for your time and participating in this focus group. We are just going to have an informal discussion about females in the media and for this particular research we will be focusing on the Kardashian's, which is my case study. To start off can we just go around the group and share your name, your age and what you do.

LERATO:

I'm Lerato in 28 years old and I'm a teacher.

MONIQUE:

I'm Monique and I'm a student, and I'm 16 years old.

NATASHA:

I'm Natasha I'm 27 years old and I'm an Office Manager.

NICOLE:

I'm Nicole, I'm 16 years old and I'm a student.

ANGELIQUE:

I'm Angelique, I'm 21 years old and I'm a student.

RESEARCHER:

Are you guys all familiar with the Kardashians?

ALL PARTICIPANTS:

Yes.

RESEARCHER:

So all of you are familiar with them, have seen promos of them, or have watched at least one episode of their reality show, or know somewhat what they do and what they are about?

ALL PARTICIPANTS:

Yes.

RESEARCHER:

Ok, so to begin with, I'm just going to go around the group and ask you guys, what do you think about the Kardashians?

LERATO:

I think they are unnecessary, and a waste of time to be honest.

MONIQUE:

I think they just in it for the money, the media and publicity.

RESEARCHER:

Would you like to elaborate on what you think of their look as well?

LERATO:

They gorgeous, beautiful!

MONIQUE:

I think they beautiful...

NATASHA:

I think they a little bit ostentatious, but then saying that also, I do respect their hustle.

NICOLE:

Ok, I think they superficial, they fake, they are pretty but they have on too much makeup...

ANGELIQUE:

I like the two sisters, Kourtney and Khloe, I really don't like Kim... Kim is really beautiful though and I think they have a good brand image though and yeah, I think they a bit over-played now.

RESEARCHER:

Ok, so if you guys had to assume that they send out a certain message to their audiences, what do you think their message is? Or what do you think their brand portrays?

LERATO:

Well, when I look at my sister and her friends, for them their brand portrays how you must dress, how you must look, who you need to be, they want to be up to date with what the Kardashians are wearing all the time. I think its cute, but they play their brand really well.

MONIQUE:

They always sending out a message that you should be up to date with the latest trends and fashion, that girls should look pretty, they should do certain things...

RESEARCHER:

Certain things like what?

MONIQUE:

Should always go out and look beautiful, maintain a certain standard. The whole family is in this showbiz thing and they always have this drama thing, its like does every family have to have that drama going on.

RESEARCHER:

So do you think they are what they name of their reality show is "Keeping Up with the Kardashians", just like the saying 'keeping up with the Jones'?

MONIQUE:

Yes...

NATASHA:

I think they sell beauty, obviously you beauty and your look gets you ahead in life and I think that is the message they putting out. What I also get from them is that education and intellect is not high on their list of priorities... just by the way they portray themselves and the way they speak and conduct themselves

NICOLE:

Ok, I think the message that they are sending out is that everything must be perfect. Your looks must always be up there, your personality must be like everyone else, you must fit into a group of

looks. Like for me looks goes to your head, and some people become conceited. For me they don't have self-respect. So the message they sending out is perfection.

ANGELIQUE:

I think they send out a message of sex. It's a very sexual message that goes with the Kardashian family, if you look at how they act with each other, its very sexual. Kim is beautiful but she's also a sex-symbol, and that's how she started her career. It that whole sex thing and beauty, and looks will get you ahead. Its all about their looks nothing else... it was like we beautiful and that's how we will market ourselves.

RESEARCHER:

Building on that are your guys all aware of the term "objectification" or "self-objectification", where basically you as a women or man are objectified or reduced to being just an object. So if you take Rihanna for example, some may feel that is objectified or self-objectifies because is portrayed as nothing but her look, she is an sex-object... her breast, her behind... so do you think that the Kardashian's do the same?

LERATO:

I remember one episode I watched, Kim was saying she's so embarrassed because she feels that she's not living up to Kanye's standard. I know it's not the objectification thing- but it goes back to the notion that we always have to be living up to other people's standards. But with her I feel that that's what men have fallen in love with- she created herself as an object and that what men want... you know the big bum, because that is what she is known for. But now she trying to make herself his (Kanye's) object and she wants to look good for him... they pressurise us as normal women because now if my boyfriend sees that he's going to expect the same from me... you especially see that in their audience- especially younger women... they tend to be more influenced.

RESEACHER:

What do you think Monique? Do you think that they have control over their own image? Do you think they choose what to wear or how to look or do you think there are people behind the scenes who control their who tell them, if you sexy you will make money?

MONIQUE:

I think it's a bit of both. We act a certain way because people tell us to. We put into a box, like women should act like this, guys should be a man, you can do this, you can do that. So with the Kardashian's I think that they had it drilled into them that they should look this way in order to be successful. Even if you look at Paris Hilton and Madonna, they just like them, they just a new fresher version of them... even with Kim getting pregnant I feel that she knew she wasn't talked about as much anymore, so she was probably like maybe I should have a baby or maybe I should do something so that she's the new talked about thing. She's only doing thins so that people can notice her, to be on magazine covers, she's doing this so that she can feel wanted, and important. She wants people to think she's amazing but all she is, is this sex-symbol.

NATASHA:

I think that it's a bit of both in terms of who controls their image. The matriarch of their family, Kris Jenner is a lot to blame for the image their portray and the image that they putting out their. If you take it back to early episodes when Kim did Playboy, she basically forced Kim to do the Playboy spread. Even when it comes to Khloe and her image, Kris is always telling her to lose weight because she's diluting the image of the Kardashian's. Even Kendall and Kylie, the image that they are putting out their for teenagers is a bit too sexualised, and Kris Jenner steers the way they are projected in the media.

ANGELIQUE:

Building on what Natasha said, the mother is a bad role model in their lives. When she was married to their father she cheated on the father and as a child you always pick up on these things and then the mother just wants to be their friend she hasn't been the enforcer in their lives, like she doesn't say you cant do that... so Kim and them basically have a lot of freedom. I mean Khloe broke her virginity when she was 12 and that was then when sex wasn't as publicised. They're such bad role models for their younger sisters as well. I mean they are 16 and

19 and they sex-symbols at that age already. I feel like the Kardashian's don't really care about 'we should be better role model', because for them its just all about beauty and looks and a superficial aspect that comes with that whole families image. They strive to be beautiful and sex-symbols. And if they not sex-symbols they have to do something drastic to get themselves back onto the market. If you look at what Kris Humphreys said to Kim "by the time you have children you will be played-out", so she had to get somebody better on another level, she had to get somebody like Kanye to keep her on. Kim Kardashian was dying, then she went with Kanye, now she has his child, and now she's always going to stay on because we all know Kanye will stay on.

RESEARCHER:

Do you think people like the Kardashian conduct themselves the way they do because they have been socialised this way, do you think the media plays a role in it?

LERATO:

Coming to the sex tape thing- she (Kim) wasn't as angry as a normal person would be cause she got a lot of money out of it, and it kept her relevant. So for her it worked to her advantage. People are idolising her now, now she has to keep up with that because that is what people are idolising. Men want that women and women want to be that women on the sex tape. She has to stay sexy. Even going for botox etc., she does it because she has to stay sexy and beautiful. Instead of keeping up with the Kardashian's, the Kardashians have to keep up with themselves now. I love Khloe and Kourtney, but Kim I think the pressure is on her...

RESEARCHER:

For some audiences, especially older audiences we have filters and we don't necessary think that the way celebrities portray themselves is right, but for younger girls or intensely-attached fans are not necessarily the same. What do you think the implications is for audiences like this?

ANGELIQUE:

Well from what I see in my friends, the implication is that they don't value themselves as much. The Kardashian's especially Kim, plays to the guys she is dating and their personality changes to who she's dating... and that shows women, be beautiful and just get this guy and try to please him all the time and conform to him and they kind of devalue themselves. I think that the Kardashian's don't have strong personalities - that's why they change so easy and young girls look at this and think that how I'm going to get a good rich guy. I just need to be beautiful, buy makeup and look good all the time and forget about education.

RESEARCHER:

So do you guys think that they have a bigger influence on younger girls?

ALL:

Yes...

RESEARCHER:

Why do you think that girls buy their products?

NATASHA:

Because they want to look like them, they want to portray the image that they have. They want to live the lifestyle that they live. Basically they putting out there that their lives are perfect.

RESEARCHER:

What do you think girls get out of buying these products? How does it make them feel?

NICOLE:

Confident, like if a girl has low self esteem, it will boost their self-esteem. I might not look exactly like her but I'll get the image of her. Like maybe if you like this boy and you dull, then you try Kim Kardashian style then the boy will start liking you...

LERATO:

I think when we watch TV we visualise ourselves as that person. Like when I watch TV I visualise myself with Will Smith as a couple... so its like if I buy that same purse as the Kardashian's I will feel like them... like a friend of mine bought a purse and I was like I like your purse, and the first

thing she said is that it's the Kardashian purse! For her it was a little bit of them that I'm taking with me. TV has a huge influence on us, I don't care how old you are, from the Disney cartoons to the rated R movies and this has a huge influence on young women. The Kardashians are playing it well!

RESEARCHER:

I'm going to show you guys a couple of images and I want you to share what you think about the image. (Image 0: First season of KUWTK, please refer to Appendix 3)

LERATO:

You could tell this was the beginning, the dresses the outfits... they not monied up yet. They don't have the bling yet.

MONIQUE:

All the women are wearing dresses so it says to me that women should wear fancy dresses and show their legs and I can see Kris Jenner's bra so its like she did that deliberately... they look like a normal sort of family just a little blinged...

NATASHA:

Back here they were normal... it was a normal house, here people could relate to them ... they weren't as ostentation. All the girls were sexified though

NICOLE:

They don't look as materialistic... money hasn't got to their head yet...its like they want attention but not too much attention... here they are portraying look good- but have a little bit more self-respect...

ANGELIQUE:

Kim isn't right in the middle like later episodes... they still beautiful but back then people like them cause you could relate... pretty normal.

RESEARCHER:

I'm going to show you image 10- tell me what you think of them (please refer to Appendix 4).

LERATO:

High-fashion, money, look at the kids... everybody looks older... the girls don't look like teenagers... why because the money has come in and they have to look accordingly... and Kim in that white dress... she's really standing out here... it's the first thing you see.

MONIQUE:

I see fancy, suits, professionalism, Kim's dress stands out and its sexy and out there... they look cold... they look like those olden day pictures that you would find in those houses of a family that died... there's nothing family about it...

RESEARCHER:

Do you think they look unattainable like the regular person cant relate to that?

LERATO AND MONIQUE:

Yes...

NATASHA:

Kim is popping out as usual... they look very unattainable... money has come in now-you cant relate... its nice to watch but cant relate on any level.

NICOLE:

They look really materialistic, they look like cartoon images and untouchable...

ANGELIQUE:

First image was like lets all stand together, now its like you stand there, you stand there, don't touch don't touch stand in this angle... they look like models... like they look like they don't know each other... very cold

RESEARCHER:

Do you think men play a role in women's success?

ALL:

No, I don't think so...

RESEARCHER:

Why do you think so?

LERATO:

No... cause they don't play a role in anything ... I think you play the main role in your own success in your own life. You create your own destiny... men don't make you... it all boils down to your own insecurities...

RESEARCHER:

Women that are labelled "Gold Diggers" what do you think about them and their purpose of getting rich men... why do you think they want rich men?

NICOLE:

Because they not independent, maybe they don't have education... maybe the education level isn't high...

RESEARCHER:

Do you think women are socialised to think that men are supposed to be the head of their household and main bread-winners, so we lean on men as a crutch for financial support?

ALL:

Yes...

ANGELIQUE:

But, I think that with gold-diggers it's a whole different think, cause I think that they sell beauty... its basically you buying men for my beauty... beauty and time.

RESEARCHER:

In one word, sum up these 2 pictures (image 3 and 4, please refer to Appendix 5).

LERATO:

Fake

MONIQUE:

Fake...

NATASHA:

Vanity...

NICOLE:

Fake...

ANGELIQUE:

Plastic...

RESEARCHER:

One last picture (image 8, please refer to Appendix 6)... it is of Kendall and Kylie, how do you think their sisters have influenced them as a 16 and 19 year old?

LERATO:

You would never say they are that age... this is what their sister do... they are emulating their sisters. in your face sexy... I see Kim here... as an older sister you want your younger sister to look up to you in a positive way ...

RESEARCHER:

Why do you think their mother condones this behaviour?

MONIQUE:

She thinks its good for them... if you act like this you will be like your sisters...

RESEARCHER:

What do you think it says about the mother that has pushed them into a industry such as modelling that is seen as superficial? What message is the mother sending?

MONIQUE:

The mother is saying you must be superficial... the mother is probably the superficial one... so she wants them to be like she is ...

NATASHA:

They stunning girls, no lie... with Kris Jenner its like she knows that time is running out for Kim... now she's banking on these two to be the next big things...so she over sexifies them because she knows that sex sells.

NICOLE:

This doesn't look like teenagers... but what they portraying is that at that age you can do as you please... looks sells, sex sells... its disrespectful/inappropriate...

ANGELIQUE:

I see keeping up with Kendall and Kylie... there's no boundaries...

RESEARCHER:

Do you feel attractive? And if so why do you feel attractive?

LERATO:

Hell ya... my personality and smile- I've just always been a confident person. I get it from my mom... I don't need anyone to tell me...

MONIQUE:

Sometimes I do... sometimes I don't... I have my days... it also come with people you see- at school people judge you a lot... I can be whoever I want to be...

NATASHA:

I have my days... it plays into my own insecurities I want to lose weight and look better... my looks is just a secondary aspect.

NICOLE:

I have my days too... media does play a big part though... like at school you have the wannabe's and they put you down... I am insecure at times... I think I'm an average looking person

ANGELIQUE:

With me, No... it stem from having to lose weight and if you don't love yourself you don't feel attractive... I feel stuck...I'm not comfortable...

LERATO:

But I think that it's a South African men thing- the men here expect you to be a certain way... women feel pressured to fit into that mould. But it boils down to confidence... you should care what anybody thinks...

RESEARCHER:

What is your understanding of feminism?

LERATO:

I think strong women, I think lesbians.

RESEARCHER:

What is a feminist?

LERATO:

Someone who doesn't want to live in a mans world... they want to be equal, they want to lead with the man...

RESEARCHER:

Do you consider yourself feminist, or do you agree with some of the ideologies within feminism?

LERATO:

mhhh... you see I don't think that we should try to be men, as much as men shouldn't try to be women...

RESEARCHER:

Do you think that feminist want to be men?

LERATO:

There are some that want to be men... in the lesbian world... and regular women want to walk into the office like I'm going show the men...

RESEARCHER:

Monique, what is your understanding of feminism?

MONIQUE:

I think its strong women, women who want to be themselves, not live up to certain standards... women who are happen with who they are... I'm not sure... but it for empowering women...

NATASHA:

Feminism means women in power, equal rights, having all the rights that men have... and paving your own way as a women... I don't agree with everything in feminism... but there are some good things...

RESEARCHER:

Are you guys feminist?

MONIQUE:

I don't thinks so...

NATASHA:

I would call myself feminist, but I do stand for certain thing they stand for..

NICOLE:

I'm not sure what it means, but I think lady-like- proper confidence, equality, independence... the mother-figure... it always leads to respect... the main heading is respect...

ANGELIQUE:

In the beginning the history was equal economic, social and political rights for women in society... because women were always known to stay at home cook, clean, watch the children... as humans do they evolve... women also wanted to be educated and work... and if you look at men today women have to equip themselves you cant rely on a man... so feminism is independence... but I think there's women that take it too far like wanting to be the man... there's a balance... men are not more superior, but men are the head of the household and women should respect that that's why there's so much marital problems... but its respect. No sexual harassment, women aren't sexual objects... independence and equality...

RESEARCHER:

Today you get female CEO'S, you get celebrities making millions, you get single women who are doing it for themselves... so do you think feminism is still relevant in 2013? Do you think we have got to where we want to get or is there more progress to be made?

LERATO:

Let me see a women's president then we'll be equal... I don't think we there yet... sometimes female CEO'S is just affirmative action... as women we still need to get there...

NATASHA:

There's still a place for feminism today... I mean there was a study done in America where women still get paid less than men that are ranked the same... so there's still a place... even I respect some ideologies of feminism women need to understand their roles and respect men and let men play there roles...

RESEARCHER:

So what I hear is that women need to portray themselves a certain way and play there roles so that men can love and respect them the way they deserve?

ALL:

Yes...

RESEARCH:

OK...THANK YOU FOR EVERYBODY FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION. OUR TIMES IS UP... ALL INFORMATION THAT HAS BEEN COLLECTED IS CONFIDENTIAL. THANKS AGAIN.

(PARTICIPANTS DEBRIEFED AFTER SESSION).

Appendix 3: Image “Zero” Shown to Focus Group



Appendix 4: Image “Ten” Shown to Focus Group



Appendix 5: Images “Three” and “Four” Shown Simultaneously to Focus Group



Appendix 6: Image “Eight” Shown to Focus Group

