

AN INVESTIGATION OF IMAGES OF WOMEN:

The development of an awareness campaign to boost self-esteem
amongst South African women.

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I, Anneli de Beer, hereby declare that, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis represents my own work and has not been submitted previously for examination toward any degree or diploma qualification at any other University. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Durban University of Technology.

Anneli de Beer

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate how images of women in the media that espouse women's empowerment can indeed have the opposite effect and may even contribute to lowered self-esteem in women. To this end, this project is intended to explore issues such as body image and image manufacture in order to find a possible answer to the question of what is 'real beauty' in the South African context.

A semiotic approach seeking to review the ways in which women are seen through visual communicative images was undertaken. This visual research revealed the importance of the 'gendered gaze' at the centre of issues that relate to self-esteem. An in-depth analysis of the literature, pertaining to self-esteem, interrogated the works of Naomi Wolf, John Berger and Susie Orbach, amongst others. This was carried out in order to understand more about how the dictates of consumerism pervade the work of the style industries. These sectors are well supported by the diet, food and cosmetic surgery industries who tend to effectively increase and add to a sense of body related insecurities. In addition, content analysis of selected South African editions of *Cosmopolitan* magazine was conducted. The images described represents a significant development period in the emergence of certain beauty ideals in South Africa.

The British Unilever marketing campaign, *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*, was used as a base model for the applied design component of this study. In addition an action research approach was employed through a series of interviews and questionnaires directed at mostly female participants in South Africa. This method revealed that self-esteem issues have far reaching implications, affecting women of all ages.

As a response to the perceived need for a South African based campaign, this research project informed the development of *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*. In contrast to *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* which was created to promote increased sales of beauty products, *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade's* focus is to interrogate and raise awareness of self-esteem. Underpinning this was an attempt to build confidence, cascade new ways of understanding and to propagate sense making, informed through action research, amongst South African women.

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*Accompanying Disc (Included in back page sleeve) Contains E-book and Website
Offline Examples

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“The sense that biology need no longer be destiny is gaining ground and so it follows that where there is a (perceived) body problem, a body solution can be found. A belief in both the perfectible body and the notion that we should relish or at least accede to improving our own body has not, however, solved the problem. On the contrary, it has exaggerated the problem and contributed to what we observe today – a progressively unstable body, a body which to an alarming degree is becoming a site of serious suffering and disorder” (Orbach 2005:2)

This study set out to explore the portrayal of images of women in the media with particular reference to their impact on South African women relating to self-esteem concerns and notions of beauty. International media images in western culture were used for comparative purposes. The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty is an example of an international advertising campaign and serves as case study in the methodology which informed the applied design component of this project, an awareness campaign to boost self-esteem amongst women in South Africa.

An analysis of the visual representation of women in global print media with particular reference to media in South Africa pin-pointed issues related to the above mentioned research problem. These issues include notions that media images possibly promote low self-esteem in women, which in turn stimulates issues surrounding body image. It could be argued that the wide spread digital enhancement of images, coupled with celebrity culture, blurs the line between ‘real beauty’ and illusion. Supporting these secondary concerns are the related broader issues that are closely integrated with the cognitive effects of media images on women. This includes the possible development of eating disorders as a result of media exposure.

A particular emphasis was to investigate images of women in the media during a period of dramatic change in South Africa that promoted racial and gender equality. However, it could be argued that these media images still conformed to the international trend of “undermining self-esteem” (Wykes and Gunter 2005:53), that often lead to eating

disorders and feelings of low self-esteem. Naomi Wolf states in her text, *The Beauty Myth*, “The youngest victims, from earliest childhood, learn to starve and vomit from the overwhelmingly powerful message of our culture, which I found no amount of parental love and support strong enough to override” (1991:205). These body-related concerns confirm the importance of this study to the health and development of South African women.

The meaning of image in the context of this study relates to photographic material in print media which portrays women. At the core of this definition, lies the work of John Berger affirming that “although every image embodies a way of seeing, our perception or appreciation of an image depends also upon our own way of seeing” (1972:3). The way of viewing images in the South African context is very different from that of the rest of the world, because of the complex interplay between culture, race and language within South African society. With 11 different national languages, women of all races are considered to embody different kinds of beauty ideals based on their cultural heritage.

Chapter One, as the *Literature Review*, explores ideas around the notion of how men see women, how women see themselves, and how women see other women. In addition there is an in-depth discussion around the theoretical background, the ‘thin body ideal’, the ‘thin is good assumption’ and concludes with a debate on the extensive impact of celebrity culture.

Chapter Two is concerned with images of women in the media, and is also positioned to recognise the unique situation of South African women by embracing ideals of beauty within all ethnicities. A description of selected South African editions of *Cosmopolitan* revealed some of the stereotypical ways women are portrayed in the magazine and how it affects the reader on a conscious and sub-conscious level.

Chapter Three explains how I utilised an action research methodology linked with a phenomenological study approach. All research was conducted from Durban, KwaZulu-Natal with the online survey having national reach via email. The online survey investigated the principles behind ‘real beauty’. Numerous individual interviews with ten participants over a period of a year were also conducted. Further to this a case study describing the British based *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* was investigated.

In this campaign images of 'everyday' women, instead of professional models, were used. In preparation for my own campaign, *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*, two photo shoots were also directed, which resulted in visually impactful photographs used in the applied design component of this study. This developmental method provided clear evidence of the link between self-esteem, perceptions, feelings and doubts.

Chapter Four explains how this research evolved into *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*, the applied design component of this study, which focussed directly on relationships between women and other women in their lives. The idea of using 'sisterhood' as a focus for the applied design originated from the research conducted on the 'gendered gaze' as well as data gathered around body image related concerns.

A number of moral and ethical concerns were taken into consideration during the creation of the applied design component of this study. All ethical requirements as set by the ethics committee at The Durban University of Technology were adhered to. The participants of *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* all agreed to the project by giving written consent. All efforts were made to ensure their privacy.

The preliminary research campaign revealed that females of varying ages have issues with self-esteem. In order to address this concern, I developed both a website and an E-book, that are aimed at communicating messages of self-acceptance to women regardless of age, race and body size. These digital motivational tools were also designed to offer ideas and possible solutions around the commercialisation of beauty ideals.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“To live in a culture in which women are routinely naked, where men aren’t is to learn inequality in little ways, all day long. So even if we agree that sexual imagery is in fact a language, it is clearly one that is already heavily edited to protect men’s sexual - and hence social - confidence while undermining that of women”. (Wolf 1991:139)

This *Literature Review* will attempt to discuss five main areas which are each pertinent and intrinsically important in relation to this study. To begin with I offer an insight into the meaning of beauty and what constitutes beauty being considered ‘real’ or natural. This is followed by definitions of image and their relationship to ideals of female beauty in the media. An in-depth investigation is then conducted into the notion of the ‘gendered gaze’ which in turn interrogates how men view women, how women view each other and how women perceive themselves. The review then takes into account the promotion of Morrison’s ‘thin body ideal’ and his ‘thin is good assumption’ (2004). Focussing on addressing Morrison’s research, the review offers details on women and their body image concerns. The extent to which digitally altered images of celebrities can negatively influence the creation of a campaign that seeks to promote an appreciation of ‘real beauty’ is also reflected on. Finally, this *Chapter* takes into account the enormous impact of celebrity culture often promoted in a range of print media.

2.1 NOTIONS OF ‘REAL BEAUTY’

It is important to reflect on notions of both real and natural beauty, and the ideologies that underpin these key terms. Before discussing the notions of ‘real’ or ‘natural’ beauty, it is important to define what beauty is first. Beauty is “the quality of being very pleasing to the senses; an attractive feature” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2007:74). It is commonly said that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder. In the context of this visual communicative study, the statement relates to the idea of ‘seeing’ but Corbett points out that,

“[b]eauty is not just a visual experience; it is a characteristic that provides a perceptual experience to the eye, the ear, the intellect, the aesthetic faculty or the moral sense. It is the qualities that give pleasure, meaning or satisfaction to the senses”. (2008:84)

Zangwill (2001:325) continues to define beauty as “the object of judgement, denoting a personal attribute”. He agrees with Kant who notes that beauty is “a response to pleasure or displeasure” (as cited in Zangwill 2001:326). Within the context of this study, beauty can also be related to positive connotations such as building self-esteem and embracing women of all age, race or body shapes as unique and important. The range of negative connotations may include feelings of low self-esteem, eating disorders and even depression. It is important to note that beauty, as a social construct, is an underlying theme in this study and is supported by the views of Naomi Wolf. She reminds us that,

“[t]he beauty myth of the present is more insidious than any mystique of femininity yet: A century ago, Nora slammed the door of the doll's house; a generation ago, women turned their backs on the consumer heaven of the isolated multi-applianced home; but where women are trapped today, there is no door to slam. The contemporary ravages of the beauty backlash are destroying women physically and depleting us psychologically. If we are to free ourselves from the dead weight that has once again been made out of femaleness, it is not ballots or lobbyists or placards that women will need first; it is a new way to see”. (1991:19)

The commonly held understanding of real or natural beauty and constructed beauty, sold as an aspiration by the media, is that constructed beauty is ‘man-made’. Wolf notes that,

“[i]deal beauty is ideal because it does not exist; the action lies in the gap between desire and gratification. Women are not perfect beauties without distance. That space, in

a consumer culture, is a lucrative one. The beauty myth moves for men as a mirage, its power lies in its ever-receding nature. When the gap is closed, the lover embraces only his own disillusion". (1991:176)

How do we recognise natural beauty then? And what exactly is 'real' or 'natural' beauty? Are these notions of beauty simply terms used to describe an individual being portrayed as themselves, as they were born? With no digital enhancements? Further observations around 'real beauty' are discussed within the case study of the practical component, titled *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*, in *Chapter Four*.

2.2 THE MEANING OF IMAGE

In this section, the meaning of image and its relationship to beauty in the media describes the importance of image. Central to this study is the significance of the image, which Berger describes in his text, *Ways of Seeing*, as "a sight which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved – for a few moments or a few centuries" (1972:2). 'Image' in the context of this study may be described as a myth or "a type of speech" (Barthes 1972:107). All the images analysed in this study convey a communicative message to the viewer on a visual non-verbal level.

As mentioned in the *Introduction* Berger maintains that "every image embodies a way of seeing" (ibid) and that "we never look just at one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves" (1972:9). In this case he refers to the relationship between images of women and their viewers. Lacey continues in his text, *Image and Representation* mentioning that "of our five senses, it is sight that gives us the most detailed information. It is, for most people more important than hearing, taste, smell or touch" (1998:5). The importance of how we perceive images of women becomes clear and important as 'seeing is believing' is such a powerful idea that most accept and believe it as the truth. Berger supports this idea with "[s]eeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak" (1972:7).

Lacey notes that we unconsciously process a multitude of visual information on a

daily basis. Our direct environment is filled with visual media and the brain follows automatically. “If we had to do all this decoding consciously then we would probably go mad from information overload” (1998:13).

I believe it is important that an environment filled with visual stimuli be examined on a visual basis and the understanding of semiotics is thus crucial. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, semiotics is the “study of signs and symbols” (2007: 828) and is used as a tool to analyse images. In semiotics, the signifier is the perception of the sign’s (or image in this case) physical form. “This could be material, acoustic, visual, olfactory or a taste; the signified is the mental concept we learn to associate with that object. The relationship between the signifier and signified is the signification” (Lacey 1998:57).

The information we take in on both a conscious and sub-conscious level can be analysed. While text is seen as verbal language, image can be viewed as visual language or myth as discussed by Barthes: “[g]rammar goes beyond formal rules of correctness; it is a means of representing patterns of experience. It enables human beings to build a mental picture of reality, to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them” (1985:101). The same could be true for visual literacy such as the “linguistic structures that point to particular interpretations of experience and the forms of social interaction” (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996:2). Lacey goes on to note that “non-verbal communications are learned and as a result they change as society changes” (1998:13). In the same way, communications in the media, changed in South Africa after the rise of democracy in 1994 (Wasserman 2009:61).

Within the realm of semiotics an image can be seen as a sign. According to Williamson, “[a] sign is quite simply a thing – whether object, word, or picture-which has a particular meaning to a person or group of people. It is neither the thing nor the meaning alone but the two together” (1978:17). Van Leeuwen states that the two connotators of images are “poses and objects” (2005:38). He goes on to note that there is an unwritten ‘dictionary’ familiar to those exposed to the mass media, and whose ‘entries’ have the broad and ideologically coloured meanings typical of connotation (ibid). Connotations drawn from the images in print media are mostly non-verbal. Analysing these images may be undertaken by looking at “facial expression, gaze, gestures and bodily movements, bodily posture and contacts, spatial behaviour, clothing and tone of voice within copy

or text accompanying the image” (Lacey 1998: 11). This is the approach adopted in the next *Chapter* of this study.

Wykes and Gunter note in their text *The Media and Body Image* that,

“[c]oncerns with the way women are represented are not new and informs theories of representations, identity and behaviour. Since the 1970s, sexualized or trivialising representations of women were and remain seen as not only degrading but likely to incite male oppression and even sexual violence”. (2005:52)

The images of women portrayed within the pages of women’s magazines may be viewed in terms of the characteristics mentioned above. One such a characteristic, ‘the gaze’, is of particular importance to this research.

2.3 THE ‘GENDERED GAZE’

This study is closely and primarily informed by feminist philosophies that discuss the notion of the ‘gendered gaze’. The term ‘male gaze’ coined by Laura Mulvey, in her text *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) is an idea situated in cinema but it is significant to this project even though the content analysis is focussed on print media. In addition Jacques Lacan (1977), uses psychoanalysis within his examination of film theory to define the gaze. In contrast to Mulvey’s male gaze approach, Lacan recognises both male and female viewers, stating that “[t]he gaze represents a point of identification, an ideological operation in which the spectator invests her/himself in the filmic image” (as cited in McGowan 2003:28).

Lacey notes that the term ‘gaze’ is used to describe “the focus of a person’s look. When analysing images we should be particularly interested in the concept of the gaze. Are the people in the image looking directly at the audience, at each other or off the edge of the frame?” (1998:12). The images of women in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* are no different, they are often focussed on the reader, looking directly at her or him, alternatively looking away. Nonetheless the intention is always on what reaction the image will create and the emotion it instills within the reader.

Mulvey notes that the gaze is an active male and passive female view,

“[w]oman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning”. (1975:6)

In support of Mulvey's view above, Kane and Satiani, claim in their text, *Women's Magazines Make it Difficult to Love your Body*, that the male gaze describes “how women are encouraged to perceive themselves through a male lens” (2006:1). In support of this view, Chandler adds that “men do the looking; women are there to be looked at” (1998:33). Significantly, according to Berger “women are taught to survey themselves from a young age. This becomes very important and crucial to the success of her life as how she appears to others, and this will determine how she will be treated by men” (1972:40).

Most magazines aimed at women often include articles about the behaviour of men and how women should respond to this behaviour. These articles may offer advice and support to the readers who interpret the information and make it applicable in their own lives. Whitehorne author of *Cosmo World* notes that,

“[m]en are the main target in the single heterosexual woman's search for happiness. So women's magazines are full of articles by men about men, and by women about men, made for an audience of mainly women who are taught to be interested in men”. (2008:35)

According to MacCannell the gaze informs social relationships, because “[w]e are at heart essentialists -- believing that there is a ‘natural’ us, either masked or unmasked, with which we must face the world” (as cited in Goddard 2000:23) Realistically, people might realise how social roles are constructed, and that societies may conform to media images. “The image is powerful enough for us to believe in its ‘naturalness’ - we believe the myth. Essentialism triggers the double sided facet of the gaze. Every gaze

is a gaze into a mirror-image of ourselves” (ibid). Berger notes that “the surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision – a sight” (1972:46).

While Wolf writes about *The Beauty Myth*, Barthes relates the idea of myth to a semiological system driven by societal values which, in this study, can be related to how beauty ideals are perceived in a post-apartheid South Africa,

“[w]hat allows the reader to consume myth innocently is that he [sic] does not see it as a semiological system but as an inductive one. Where there is only an equivalence, he [sic] sees a kind of causal process: the signifier and the signified have, in his [sic] eyes, a natural relationship. This confusion can be expressed otherwise: any semiological system is a system of values; now the myth-consumer takes the signification for a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system”. (1972:130)

The semiological system noted by Barthes is affected by the gaze as it, in itself becomes a myth for both women and men. Chandler (1998), Kaplan (1983) and Silverman (1980) argue that both male and female subjects could adopt the gaze. The male is not always the controlling subject nor is the female always the passive object. The gaze, within a comparative context can become competitive between women when women are trying to win over not only the approval of other women, but also that of men. When women personally feel like they cannot achieve this, it may lead to feelings of low self-esteem – which is central to this campaign. Goddard agrees with Chandler et al, and notes that,

“[m]asculine identity is inextricably linked, not only to the social image of femaleness, but also to the image of men that femaleness (in all its variety) projects. Men (and women) do not assume roles in gendered isolation, but often play the role they believe women (and men) would like them to play. If, in many cases, their impressions of women's images of men may be unfounded or skewed, the belief

in such an image nevertheless becomes determinative of identity formation". (2000:23)

Dietrich states that many advertisers do not distinguish between women and men when designing visuals. This is because women are thought to look at themselves as men would, therefore there is only need for one kind of visual gaze: the male perspective. She also maintains that the way women's bodies are displayed to men and women are the same. "By using women to advertise to women, they are almost always told to fantasize about the 'control and sexual consumption' of other women" (1998:25). Correspondingly, Tuchman writes in *Women's Depiction by the Mass Media*, "the media encourage both men and women to define women in terms of men (as sex objects) or in the context of the family - as wives and mothers" (1979:11). Lewis and Hames agrees with Dietrich (1998) and Tuchman (1979), stating in South African journal, *Agenda*, that "mainstream media is saturated with masculinist meanings and patriarchal dominance" (2011:3).

Morris claims that, "the dominant ideas about the male gaze emerging from the feminist movement are that any gaze that appropriates the other in its scope is by definition 'masculine' whether by a man or by a woman. That the term 'gaze' is based on a hierarchy of power relations in which the male is always dominant and that the gaze is by its very nature monolithic, since its function is appropriationist" (1994:1). It is important to note that this 'masculine' position was confirmed as a central issue within the applied design component of this study, *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*, which stands in direct contrast to the assumed hierarchy of the male gaze. Yet, it was revealed within this study, that the powerful bonds of sisterhood could be used as a reliable, motivational entry point to create a project that seeks to build self-esteem amongst women, particularly in respect to how they feel about their own bodies.

Feelings and doubts associated with body shape issues as a whole, are highlighted by Dietrich (1996:1) when she suggests that the media promotes and reflects the current mainstream culture's standards for body shape or size, and highlights importance of beauty in his quest. Orbach argues that "bodies in our time have become sites of display. Glamorous, virile, vigorous, sporty and healthy are our commandments, but such injunctions produce volatility and instability; making the quest often unsustainable" (2009:73).

2.4 THE 'THIN BODY IDEAL'

According to Morrison et al., the 'thin body ideal' (the representation of women who are thin) is responsible for women being unhappy with the way they look (2004:1). Dittrich writes on the website *About Face*, that "repeated exposure to the thin ideal via the various media can lead to the internalization of this ideal" (1996:1). Kane and Satiani (2006) argue that many women strive to resemble what the media presents as a single standard of beauty. Wolf confirms this view saying that,

"[t]he beauty myth is not about women at all. It is about men and power. The qualities that a given period calls beautiful in women are merely symbols of the female behaviour that period considers desirable: the beauty myth is always actually prescribing behaviour and not appearance". (1991:4)

Wykes and Gunter agree that the standard of the ideal beauty and body shape is based on time. In their text, *Media and Body Image*, they state that: "[t]he ideal self-image may be considered as either an 'internal ideal' or a 'societal ideal' resulting from the dictates of the surrounding cultural and societal environment as to what constitutes the perfect body" (2005:4). They also maintain that "body image is a psychological issue. The body image construct tends to comprise a mixture of self-perceptions, ideas and feelings about one's physical attributes" (ibid). Body-image can be conceptualized as a multi-faceted concept that represents how individuals "think, feel, and behave with regard to their own physical attributes" (Muth and Cash 1997:1438).

Faludi in her text *Backlash the Undeclared War against Women* suggests that,

"[f]emale crisis have their origins not in the actual conditions of women's lives but in a closed system that starts and ends in the media, popular culture and advertising – an endless feedback loop that perpetuates and exaggerates its own false images of womanhood". (1992:8)

Kilbourne supports this idea, saying that the focus on beauty and desirability "effectively destroys any awareness and action that might help to change that climate" (1990:1).

Festinger's social comparison theory suggests that a person's "cognition (his beliefs and opinions) about the situation in which he exists and his appraisals of what he is capable of doing" may affect his/her behaviour (1954:117). It could be argued that this theory demonstrates that the media may play a significant role in influencing women to think about themselves in terms of the commercial beauty ideal they portray via comparison. Festinger goes on to note that "the drive for self-evaluation and the necessity for such evaluation is based on comparison to other persons" (ibid:138). The self-evaluation and comparison to mediated images may lead to concerns such as the 'thin is good assumption'.

2.5 THE 'THIN IS GOOD ASSUMPTION'

The 'thin is good assumption' also relates to lifestyle and consumption. The same way in which being thin is sold to women and men, so are cars, food, clothes and accessories. This consumerist model is recognised by Berger who states, "the publicity system proposes to individuals to transform their lives by buying more. The transformation supposedly makes you richer although financially you are worse off" (1972:125). To be successful an advertised message must "invoke consumer reaction. Advertisers manipulate these fantasies and exploit anxieties, especially those concerning gender identities to sell products" (Dietrich 1998:22). In this process women's bodies become a battlefield.

According to Morrison et al. the 'thin is good assumption' is the idea that "when you are thin, you are rewarded for it. It is about the assumed advantages a woman gets when she is thin" (2004:1). Orbach confirms this view, "[w]hether followers of fashion or health trends or not, we take for granted that looking good for ourselves will make us feel good (2009:2). In South Africa, following fashion and health trends is a growing industry gathering more and more followers. The variety of choice as to what women can wear or eat or how they exercise was certainly not as readily available for all South Africans before the introduction of democracy in 1994.

The 'thin is good assumption' is very much influenced by international celebrities living the so-called 'good life' (Cashmore 2006:70). It could be argued that images of global celebrity figures are influential on South African women who have only recently had access to better education and careers (Chisholm and September 2005:1). While these

women have the right to be as individualistic as they choose, if according to Morrison's theory, they are thin, they may be eligible to added consumer benefits allowing them to lead a life of luxury just like the celebrities in magazines. These women become part of the myth, by adopting the media's beauty ideal as their own ideology.

2.6 THE IMPACT OF CELEBRITY CULTURE

For the purposes of this study, I found it necessary to reflect and observe on notions of celebrity culture in a series of individual interviews (*Chapter Three*). In order to understand more about celebrity and what this refers to, I found the text of Joseph Epstein to be valuable when he said that,

“[f]ame, then, at least as I prefer to think of it, is based on true achievement; celebrity on the broadcasting of that achievement, or the inventing of something that, if not scrutinized too closely, might pass for achievement. Celebrity suggests, while fame has a chance of lasting, a shot at reaching the happy shores of posterity”. (2007:359)

In addition, Berger notes that publicity is the “process of manufacturing glamour” (1972:125). This process creates envy amongst consumers, driving them to follow celebrities as role models. Publicity has also created fascination with fame. Susan Bordo, author of *Bodies* adds to this with her note that “the body - what we eat, how we dress, and the daily rituals through which we attend to the body - is a medium of culture in particular, celebrity culture” (1993:165).

Heinberg and Thompson (1992) recognise the possible negative implications of celebrity culture, by observing that women who compared themselves to celebrities were more likely to develop eating disorders and feelings of low self-worth. These women often have problems with their individual sense of self confidence resulting in defining themselves within a specified proximity to the women they see in the media.

It is well known that celebrities are only accessible through magazines, film and television. The front pages of fashion magazines, in particular, often use celebrities to sell their publications. I concur with Dietrich (1998) as in my lengthy experience

as a graphic designer advertisements are meticulously designed, photographed, airbrushed, computer generated and laid out to convert potential consumers into actual consumers. This approach tends to create a trap for women who often compare themselves to celebrities.

Celebrity culture has become a universal language as Orbach states that “[b]y creating internationally recognisable iconic figures, it appears to be inclusive and democratic. In reality the visual nature of our world sucks out variety and replaces it with a vision that is narrow and limited as far as age, body type and ethnicity are concerned” (2000:145). Cashmore, in his text *Celebrity Culture* notes that consumers are readily willing to pay for this narrow minded vision. He also maintains that you cannot buy a celebrity but you can buy their “representations, their sounds and the products with which they’re associated” (2006:3).

Christopher Lasch writes in *The Culture of Narcissism*:

“[t]he media give substance to and thus intensify narcissistic dreams of fame and glory, encourage the common man to identify himself with the stars and to hate the ‘hers’ and make it more and more difficult for him to accept the banality of everyday existence”. (1980:21)

Jill Neimark agrees with this point, saying: “critics point out that mass-marketed images fit only a few people and stigmatize many, as opposed to homemade stories in which we each learn about ourselves and our own possibilities” (1995:1). Dietrich explains that “images of women in advertisements show females as sexualized bodies, whose status in the world, and position in the advertisements, is dependent on how they look rather than on what they do”. In this process, she also believes that females are turned into sex symbols; ‘sex sells’ and these images are then used to sell products (1998:27).

In her text *The Good Body* Ensler writes “I have bought into the idea that if my stomach were flat, then I would be good, and I would be safe. I would be protected. I would be accepted, admired, important, loved” (2001:x). Dietrich agrees with this by claiming “until women are confronted with their own mirror images they will continue to measure themselves against an inhuman ideal” (1996:1).

Simone de Beauvoir talks about two recurring issues in the culture of femininity. Firstly, she discusses her notion of fashion enslavement, in which women are expected to keep up their appearance, stopping them from participating in daily activities. Fashion can also “disguise the body, deform it or follow its curves” (1997:575), but her point is that the body is always on display.

The result of the body always being on view is often body related issues that directly link to eating disorders and low self-esteem (Morris 1994:1). Once again, this point was confirmed in my study when documenting the range of concerns revealed by my participants with regard to body image. Women weakened and distracted by dieting, cowed by images of flawless fashion models and exhausted by what Wolf calls “the third shift” which she describes as beauty-maintenance squeezed in between career and housework, will have trouble fighting for full equality with men. She maintains that “over and over in the course of women's history, the female ideals that form just happen to be ones that serve what the economy needs at that moment” (1991:18). Wolf continues with “There's no conscious male conspiracy. There doesn't need to be. When a whole economy depends on people being perceived in a certain way, it doesn't take a smoke-filled room to propagate it”. Further to this, she states “[a]n ideology that makes women feel worth less was urgently needed to counteract the way feminism had begun to make us feel worth more” (ibid). This is the ideology that has been seen as a ‘natural state’ and is promoted by the media. It is in this context that publications such as *Cosmopolitan* play an important role.

Cosmopolitan magazine, according to Whitehorne “sees itself as having an educational role. It has a mission to teach about sexuality, health, beauty, lifestyle, travel and the all-important ‘relationship’. It is this mission to teach that sometimes comes across as zealous and evangelic” (2008:51). The enthusiasm to reach this goal of an all-round balanced life is a dominant ideology that talks to the central purpose of this study, which was to understand more about the transition of values, assumptions and ideas regarding body image. According to Barnard, “an ideology is a set of beliefs, ideas and values held by a social class” (2003:37). The perceived global ideal body image and beauty therefore can be viewed as an ideology. Images of beauty in the media may affect all women especially those who are concerned about their body image. King et al. (2000:341) writes “women who are concerned about their bodies will view other women in the media as thinner than they really are”. The literature has shown

that women, who are not overly concerned with their body image may tend to view the mediated images accurately.

Wolf argues that “[w]hat editors are obliged to appear to say is not what men want from women but rather what their advertisers want from women” (1991:73), this is particularly in relationship to thinness, of which she points out is rarely cited by men as an attractive attribute in women. This in turn is supported by Wykes and Gunter, who claim that “[b]ut in the magazines it is always there, thin is the body on which the clothes, make-up, relationships and lifestyle of successful (that is desirable) femininity are hung (2005:83). Wolf’s statement is affirmed in the data collecting process of this study. The individual interviews revealed that men don’t necessarily desire a stick thin woman, as consistently portrayed by the media.

The emergence of body image concerns is important because it is frequently associated with the appearance of disordered eating patterns (Wykes and Gunter 2005:4). There are many factors that influence an individual’s eating pattern and their relationship with food. Wykes and Gunter also claim that both parents and peer groups play a significant role in relation to the onset of body image disturbance and disordered eating (ibid). Parents are particularly powerful in influencing young people to feel body dissatisfaction, because they may reflect their own insecurities onto impressionable minds. Such an environment can “create a psychological climate in which such behaviours are encouraged” (Vincent and McCabe 2000:205). White states that “explorations of eating disorders and related body shape perceptions have indicated that there are biological, psychological, social and cultural factors linked to disordered eating” (1992:351).

Another factor that is of importance to the development of low self-esteem is the manipulation of images in the media; this is often done in order to create flawless and unreal bodies. Wolf (1991:82) notes that “the use of airbrushing is also giving women an unrealistic view of age. Age is becoming a myth in itself. This censorship such as airbrushing away signs of aging extends beyond women’s magazines to any image of an older woman” (ibid). These forms of censorship directly informed my motivation to include older women in the applied design component, which clearly demonstrated that self-esteem issues affect women of all ages. Bob Ciano As art director of *Life* magazine was heard to say that “no picture of a woman goes un-retouched, even a well-known (older) woman who doesn’t want to be retouched, we still persist in trying to make her look like she’s in her fifties” (as cited in Wolf 1991:2).

According to Cashmore, there is nothing that “makes attractiveness fade away, apart from disfigurement, as much as age” (2006:103). Lasch tells us that “People cling to the illusion of youth until it can no longer be maintained, at which point they must either accept their superfluous status or sink into dull despair” (1980:212). Orbach supports Lasch’s statement noting that,

“[t]he supersized, digitally enhanced images of airbrushed and Photoshopped individuals which penetrate into our public and private spaces are reshaping the way we regard bodies. This visual muzak, omnipresent in lifts and queues, projected everywhere to keep our eyes busy, makes us super aware and hyper critical of our own bodies. This has created a cultural climate in which improving the way the body looks and functions are seen as a crucial personal responsibility. The body is both a statement and a site of empowerment”. (2009:136)

Cosmetic surgery has been at the forefront of making youthfulness available, not only to the stars but also to ordinary people. More and more products are being developed to tell young people that “ageing starts very early” (Lasch 2009:86). Of concern is Orbach’s statement that “Plastic surgery has become a consumer item – a treat, like a holiday” (2009:86).

2.7 CONCLUSION

The representation of images of women has become a significant part of daily life across the globe to the degree that it is clearly affecting women’s minds and bodies without a conscious realisation. “Our struggle is to re-corporealise our bodies so that they become a place we live from rather than an aspiration always needing to be achieved” (Orbach 2009:145).

As mentioned earlier, beauty has been defined by Corbett as an experience or characteristic encompassing all senses (2008:84). Kant provides us with an account of beauty which he calls “judgements of aesthetic value” (as cited in Zangwill 2001:326). In accordance to these ideals it could be argued that the media industry takes on a narrow minded view.

Concerningly, Berger has drawn attention to the importance of visual communicative images as playing a key role in the holistic development of young children as they can see before they can speak. This review also provided a deeper understanding of the value of visual language and semiotics, and most especially when exposed to media images. Particularly important is Mulvey's focus on the 'male gaze' which has spread its influence far beyond feminist film critiques and touches into aspects of perception and reflection. This ideology plays an important role in the central research focus of this study.

It is Kane and Satiani who point out that a single standard of beauty is what women aspire to in general. This aspiration is again fuelled by the media which bombards and manipulates images of women on an everyday basis. These ideals lead directly into the 'thin is good assumption' which tend to skew and alter perceptions around the corporealised body form. The impact of celebrity as culture cascaded to us through a variety of media platforms can clearly be seen to be playing a negative role when it comes to issues of low self-esteem, as the aspired perfection is unattainable, either in real terms or naturally.

The next *Chapter* discusses and describes a range of images of women in the global media with reference to South Africa and the impact these have on perceptions around the development of beauty ideals.

CHAPTER 3: IMAGES OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

“This frantic aggregation of imagery is a collective reactionary hallucination willed into being by both men and women stunned and disoriented by the rapidity with which gender relations have been transformed: a bulwark of reassurance against the flood of change. The mass depiction of the modern woman as a ‘beauty’ is a contradiction: Where modern women are growing, moving, and expressing their individuality, as the myth has it, ‘beauty’ is by definition inert, timeless, and generic”. (Wolf 1991:16)

The first section of this *Chapter*, details a brief history of the female form, as well as the notion that size matters in contemporary western society. The role of women as stereotypes is discussed, with their impact on the empowerment of women in South Africa after the introduction of democracy, in 1994. Issues relating to the body beautiful ideal are also described. As discussed in the *Literature Review*, this *Chapter* looks at how the media affects women in relation to self-image and self-esteem. The influence of advertising in exacerbating low self-esteem while the impact of plastic beauty and digital enhancements are also noted. As previously mentioned images of women in the media are embedded with meanings that can be related to the history of the female form as well as the perceived messages that they relay to the viewer. This study is focussed on images of women portrayed in Western culture and not as a global ideal.

According to *The Oxford English Dictionary* an image can take on a variety of meanings, including, “a mental representation or idea”, “the general impression that a person, organization, or product presents to the public”, “a simile or metaphor” (2007:454).

Contemporary life is saturated by images in both electronic and print media, in a technologically enhanced environment which is unprecedented in human history, “yet our intimate familiarity with the media often allows us to take them for granted. They are like the air we breathe, ever present yet rarely considered” (Croteau and Hoynes 2003:3). There is a clear need to raise women’s awareness of how images are socially constructed, in order to understand the implicit meanings of images that can lead to feelings of low self-esteem and body related issues.

Lacey maintains that the main function of an image is to “communicate a message” (1998:5). However, we are so familiar with seeing so many images, that it takes a “leap of imagination to realise that there are problems to be solved” (Gregory 1966:1). As mentioned in the *Literature Review*, semiotics can be a useful tool to analyse the ‘visual language’ of images in order to reveal the constructed nature of these images.

3.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF IMAGES OF WOMEN

Perhaps the earliest and most enduring image of a woman is the Venus of Willendorf (24,000–22,000 BCE), discovered in 1908 by archaeologist Josef Szombathy, in Willendorf, Austria. The statuette (Figure 1) is assumed to be made by the hunter-gatherers who lived there at the time. The bodily form is exaggerated compared to the norm of body image known today. There is no visual emphasis of the arms, and there are no hands and feet present. The large breasts and stomach suggest that this hunter-gatherer society celebrated women who represented fertility. This example provides a very early indicator of how culture and societal values have influenced images of women.

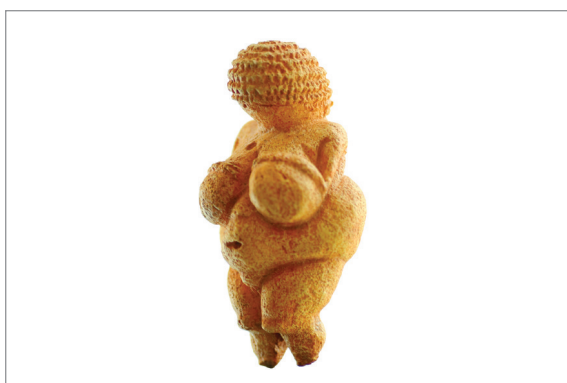


Figure 1: *The Venus of Willendorf*,
C.24 000 BCE – 22 000 BCE. (Height) 11.1cm



Figure 2: *Pin Thin, Leggy Twiggy is Tops*
November 1966. Milwaukee Journal.

Since pre-historic times, images of women have changed through cultural and societal development. Fallon notes that “the beauty ideal of western cultures changed over time in the era prior to mass media and mass consumer culture. Between 1400 and 1700 a fuller body shape was considered sexually appealing and fashionable. “The ideal woman was portrayed as plump, big breasted and maternal” (1990:80). Mazur notes that the “full-figured shape for women continued through the early twentieth century, eventually being replaced by the slender flapper (a fashionable young woman) of the

1920s” (1986:288). Significantly, according to Fallon, women started “restricting their clothing and diets, leading to the earliest concerns amongst the medical profession in the twentieth century about eating disorders” (1990:80).

It could be argued that in many societies the standard of feminine aesthetics could be associated with socio-economic conditions. In economies oriented to subsistence rather than abundance, a plump figure was a sign of wealth, health and youth (Polivy et al.1986:89). During the first part of the twentieth century, the return of the fuller figure was driven primarily by images of celebrities created for movies in Hollywood. This body shape ideal was exemplified by film icons such as Betty Grable and Mae West; images highlighting and accentuating sexuality in the female form. This curvaceous ideal continued through the 1940s and 1950s, typified by women like Marilyn Monroe and Jane Russell (Mazur 1986:293).

During the 1960s, shapely film stars were replaced by skinny fashion models such as Twiggy (Figure 2), as dominant cultural icons. A preference for a body shape that mimicked this thin ideology was increasingly reflected in the body image preferred by a range of women who were surveyed for their opinions about attractiveness (Wykes and Gunter 2005:37).

By the mid-1960s, fashion joined the shift towards the idealisation of slender body shape over the curvaceousness preferred in earlier times. Significantly, the same period witnessed important change in gender roles, technological advances and the beginnings of global capitalism. This period also marks the emergence of the women’s movement. It was Friedan (1997) that tells us that by the beginning of the 1970’s it was clear that this movement was not merely a temporary fad. This was the movement that would establish women’s bodies as a constructed ideal, and by the 1970s Mulvey would develop the notion of the male gaze. Significantly, it was also during this period that the popularity of mass produced women’s magazines took off in the United States.

As with the pre-historic image of Venus of Willendorf created over twenty four thousand years ago, the current obsession with women’s body image and body size perceptions can be viewed culturally. According to Prevos,

“[t]he preoccupation with thinness is a recent development

as the perception of women's body shapes has changed significantly over the past decades. In the early 1940s it was found that people with ectomorphic bodies were perceived by others as nervous, submissive and socially withdrawn". (2005:1)

It could be argued that by the late 1980s this perception had changed, and thin women were considered to be the most sexually appealing (Turner et al. 1997). Soon thereafter physical fitness and sexual attraction became intrinsically linked when celebrities such as Jane Fonda created endorsed fitness routines, encouraging physical activity to achieve a slim figure. This particular association could have contributed to the increase in the dissatisfaction women have with their body shape (Cash et al. 2004).

3.2 SIZE MATTERS

It is important to note that satisfaction with one's physicality creates satisfaction with one's self, which in turn may make one happy. Bordo argues that, "[i]ncreasingly, the size and shape of the body has come to operate as a marker of personal, internal order (or disorder) – as a symbol for the state of the soul" (1990:94).

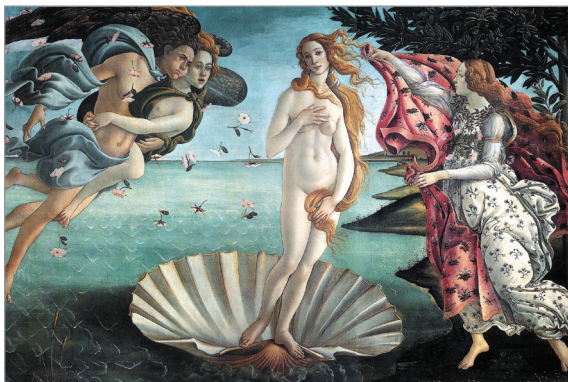


Figure 3: *The Birth of Venus*. Sandro Botticelli. 1486.
172 x 278 cm, Tempera.

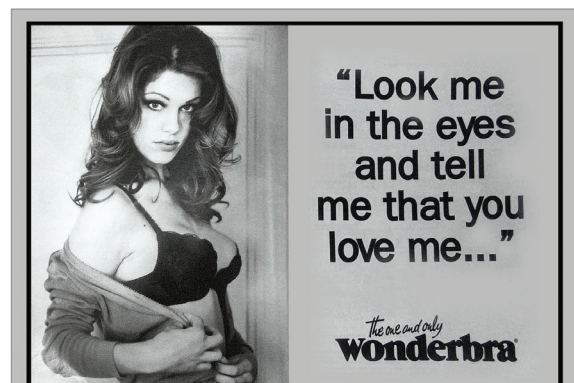


Figure 4: *Look me in the eyes and tell me that you love me*, Wonderbra advertisement. January 1994.
Cosmopolitan, South Africa. Msunduzi Library.

Frost believes that the skill to produce a visual individuality which conforms to media images portrayed to consumers, and the specific demands of sub-groups and localities is dependent on cultural wealth. Young women may experience their own appearance as an important tool in order to blend socially (2005). Featherstone goes on to support this notion that such images have

“[h]elped create a world in which individuals are made to feel emotionally vulnerable, constantly monitoring themselves for bodily imperfections which could no longer be regarded as natural”. (1991: 175)

Images of women in the past, such as Sandro Botticelli's (1486) *The Birth of Venus* (Figure 3) regarded as a paragon of beauty during the Renaissance, would today be regarded as overweight if compared to waif-like models such as Twiggy (Figure 2) and Kate Moss who shot to fame in the 1960s and the 1990s respectively.

In contemporary western society, however, there exists a gap between the idealisation and aspiration of 'thinness' and the social reality of increasing 'fatness'. This discrepancy between apparent thinness and obvious fatness is of concern to the health profession at large, and leaves the clothing industry with a continuing sizing dilemma. It may be argued that appearance is central to self-definition yet Thompson et al. argue that “[w]omen are socialised early into learning that their bodies should be used to attract others” (1999:13). The media reinforces this cultural ideal resulting in a drive for a slender body frame.

Advertisements that invite the male gaze in a playful manner, such as the 1994 *Wonderbra* advert *Look me in the eyes and tell me that you love me*, featured in *Cosmopolitan* South Africa (Figure 4) but not as objectification created by men. Stacey argues that this “work involves the active negotiation and transformation of identities which are not simply reducible to objectification” (as cited in Thornham 2004:45). This objectification separates a woman's spirit from her body, as Baudrillard notes,

“[t]he beautiful woman absorbed by the cares that her beauty demands is immediately infectious because, in her narcissistic excess, she is removed from herself, and because all that is removed from the self is plunged into secrecy and absorbs its surroundings”. (1990:1)

It could be argued that Baudrillard's 'surrounding' in this advertisement is the viewer's gaze and that this woman thus absorbs the viewer. The reflection of a profound reality is itself an empty nostalgia. The image is metaphoric, haunted by a sense of loss and

by the anxieties provoked by the insufficiency of its realization to the real. The fullness of the image to which Baudrillard harks back in his chronology is the fullness and sufficiency of an imaginary masculinity, reflected by a truthful image (ibid).

Despite stating that the 'ideal' images portrayed within magazines are fictitious, they do not seem to credit the general reader with the same ability to deconstruct such images and come to this conclusion themselves. Feminist works routinely revolve around "[concern rather than respect for those who read women's magazine]" (Hermes 1997:1). Images manufactured in magazines like *Cosmopolitan*, are created through strategic photography and printing techniques and are intended to drive women to think that they should become a desirable commodity: "Buy me, buy *Cosmo*, and buy my recipe to individual success" (Winship 1987:122). Significantly, as will be discussed later, international publications such as *Cosmopolitan* were introduced to the South African market with the advent of democracy in 1994. The liberation of women was an important focus of this political movement; just as women were encouraged to develop their careers they found themselves moving into a male dominated world.

Whilst moving into their male worlds and into men's clothing, men did not move into women's worlds and dresses. So although traditional ideas of femininity were challenged by women transgressing their gender, in effect this generally reinforced traditional masculinity as women adopted and endorsed its norms and practices (Johnson and Foster 1990). This is evident in the development of women in South Africa as a result of democratic change. These women moved from one stereotype, traditional wives and mothers, towards the stereotype created by magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, morphing into the media ideal created at that time.

3.3 STEREOTYPES

Women are often influenced by the feminine ideal represented by magazines. McCracken's suggests that when buying a magazine we are "buying into a feminine ideal" (1993:135). A stereotype is defined as a "widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing" (OED 2007:897). In the context of this study, stereotypes are related to social ideals of women in terms of their self-esteem and their role in society. Barnard (2003:72) notes that the dominant beliefs concerning values ascribed to masculinity or femininity is defined as a 'stereotype'.

One such stereotype is described by Buckley as “a relatively constant feature of the sexual division of labour is the delineation of women’s role as housewives and carers for the family” (as cited in Barnard 2003:75).

According to Naomi Wolf “the quality called beauty objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it” (1991:12). Barnard also mentions that femininity in western cultures is characterized by qualities such as “submissive, passive, caring and decorative” (2003:74). In contrast, men are associated with being non-smiling, ordering things about and are shown as being engaged in serious business-related activities. These qualities are also how women and men are portrayed in many advertising images. In her discussion of how these advertising images are viewed, Winship goes on to say that,

“[w]e are never just spectators who gaze at images of women as though they were set apart, differentiated from the ‘real’ us. Within the advertisements are inscribed the images and subject positions of mother, housewife, sexually attractive woman and so on, which as we work to understand the advertisements, embroil us in the process of signification that we complete”. (1980:218)

In comparison to Winship’s claim, Whitehorne interestingly states that women should be depicted as rounded individuals, taking part in all aspects of life. In making this visual statement, magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* have gone as far as to create their own stereotype called the ‘*Cosmo girl*’. Whitehorne goes on to note that “The imagery of women depicted is ‘positive’, ‘exuberant’, ‘young’, ‘tanned’, ‘smart’, ‘in control’, ‘self-confident” (2008:41). This *Cosmo* girl, who follows the magazine’s ideologies religiously, may become obsessed with the idea of ‘the perfect woman’, which could open doors to feelings opposite to those which it tries to invoke.

Fun, fearless, female, *Cosmopolitan* magazine’s slogan, captures the essence and selling point of *Cosmopolitan* as a brand. *Cosmopolitan* magazine, with its familiar cover, has been an icon of feminine sexuality since the 1960s (McMahon 1990:381). The magazine manifestly subscribes to an ideology of competitiveness and individual success and to what Winship calls an “aspirational feminism, ardently committed to women ‘winning’ and with the focus mainly on self-assertion” (1987:106).

It could be argued that the unique situation in South Africa before 1994, meant that many black women led a traditional life less influenced by western culture. The advent of democracy after 1994, gave women of all races in South Africa the chance to be equal, to have independence and to participate in education, social life and to have independence. This also affected the way in which women dressed and presented themselves. Consequently the shift to democracy also opened the door to an exposure of a global beauty ideal (Johnson and Foster 1990)

In both global and South African contexts, Dispenza (1975) suggests that women are primarily used by advertisers to sell products to both women and men on the basis of their sexual appeal to men. In female-oriented advertisements, women are invited to identify with the female product representative, who is offered as the ultimate reward, i.e. an endorsement of success with males as a result of using the product. In male-oriented advertisements, male consumers are promised the portrayed female as the bonus that comes with the product.

Warren (1978) notes that this emphasis on women's physical appearance in advertisements is directed at both male and female consumers. Female-oriented advertisements zone in on women's fear of being rejected by men because of issues such as body odour, bad breath, excessive body hair and dry or oily skin. In contrast to advertisements aimed at women, male-oriented advertisements feature beautiful, sexy women as the ultimate reward for using the advertised product. In exchange for beauty and youth, women are rewarded with security and status, love and romance (Adams and Laurikietis 1976).

“The beautiful woman who is primarily concerned with the effect of her physical appearance on men was the most frequently found female image in a study of advertisements in British women's magazines”. (Millum 1975:1)

According to Orbach the media's tendency to present women who appear “thin, free of unwanted hair, deodorised, perfumed and clothed contributes to this obsession but to blame the media alone has become a popular cliché” (1978:20). Silverstein et al. goes on to note that “even medical opinion has listed the media as a cause for body image problems” (1986:519).

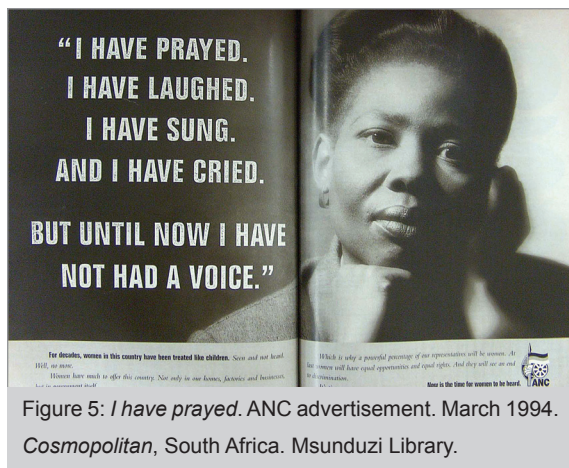
Cosmopolitan was launched as a women's magazine in the United States in 1967. As an international magazine, *Cosmopolitan* relies on a global strategy, which dictates criteria in selection of cover models and editorial focus. The magazine was introduced to South African women in August 1993, when *Cosmopolitan* was launched nationally, a year before the first democratic elections. The magazine offered international trends to women who might not have had exposure to a westernised beauty ideal before.

Even before the advent of democracy, *Cosmopolitan* South Africa was already representing images of multi-cultural women. The magazine has been a supporter of women's rights, naming television personality Connie Ferguson and Miss South Africa 1993, Jacqui Mofokeng, as some of South Africa's most beautiful women in 1994. During the initial stages of democracy and the declaration of women's equality, *Cosmopolitan* represented a stepping stone and was a 'how to' guide to all things international in terms of fashion, beauty, career and relationship advice to all South African women.

3.4 EMPOWERMENT IMAGES OF WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

To further explore the images South African women were exposed to in the media during the first three democratic elections, selected imagery from *Cosmopolitan* magazine is described. These images all featured in the South African edition of the magazine. Before, during and after the 1994 democratic elections in South Africa, images of women appeared in *Cosmopolitan* relating to a wide range of issues including political, social and self-esteem related topics. These images targeted women through emotional advertising, instilling visuals of friendships between different ethnicities as well showcasing fashion and beauty ideals prescribed as a global ideal.

Political campaigns running in South Africa before the first democratic elections targeted advertisements (Figure 5) at the readership of *Cosmopolitan* magazine a month before the elections were held. As an example of this, *The advertisement for The African National Congress (ANC)*, Figure 5, portrays a black woman, pensively thinking accompanied by the copy reading 'until now I have not had a voice'. Her gaze is not directed at the audience, suggesting she is thinking to herself. She could be given the chance to freely express herself through emotion should democracy reign over South Africa. The thought of this possibility is an emotional one as reflected in]



her notion, “I have laughed”, “I have cried”. Her facial expression seems content, as if she is relieved. The dramatic black and white colour of the image could also symbolise apartheid; a separation between White and Black. It is worth noting that the ANC logo appearing at the bottom of the page in full colour, possibly represents the freedom given to women in South Africa after the election to government, and a preview of the so-called ‘Rainbow Nation’ (coined by Desmond Tutu in 1994). The advert seeks to engage women’s emotions in order to possibly sway them towards voting for the ANC.

The portrayal of women assuming positions of power is evidence of the potential of a gender-equal life emerging. Tribal wear became latex swimsuits, denim trousers, dresses and high heels. The Black woman in *Leading the Pack* (Figure 6), is assuming a dominant role, ‘leading the pack’, in front of two men. It could be argued that this image portrays a new found authority for women. She is in control and seems to be unbothered by their presence. The woman is wearing a silver latex swimsuit; the reflection on the material places her in the viewer’s focus. Her gaze, towards the left, is not directed at the viewer; she is looking into the distance, as if she is scouting her route. The swimsuit is high cut and emphasises her hips, exposing her sexuality. The landscape seems barren, placing full focus on her. The role the woman appears to be taking is authoritative, suggesting the uprising of the oppressed black woman as a trailblazer. According to Lewis and Hames (2011), black women were assumed to be “compliant and passive consumers”, before democracy in South Africa (4). The recent attention to gender, sexuality and commodity capitalism, has focused on complex forms of power, resistance and subversion” (ibid).

3.5 THE BODY BEAUTIFUL

The contradiction with publications such as *Cosmopolitan* magazine is that while they aim to promote women's emancipation, they also covertly send out opposite messages in which women become objectified. The objectification of the body was a new issue for women of colour in South Africa as they were exposed to global media imagery (Senekal et al. 2001). These images became very important as black women would aspire to achieving the ideal look to drive forward their personal and professional lives (ibid). The media representation of black women as part of a western society, made South African women vulnerable to issues globally associated with media exposure such as eating disorders.

According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997:173), women react to social objectification by “tying their self-worth to their physical appearance”. When women's self-worth becomes dependent on physical appearance due to objectification, it may lead to eating disturbances as a means to exert control on physical appearance.

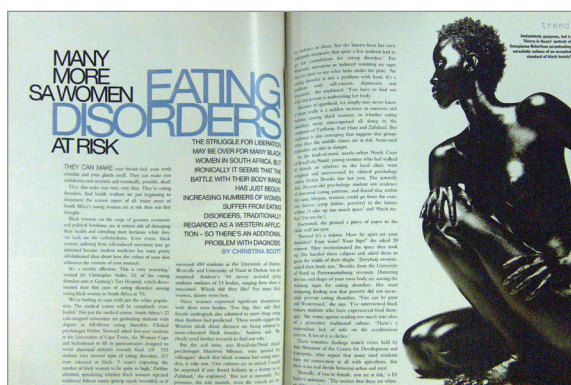


Figure 7: *Eating Disorders* January 1994. *Cosmopolitan*, South Africa. Msunduzi Library



Figure 8: Who said you can't wear *Boots No7* to bed. Clicks advertisement. January 1996. *Cosmopolitan* South Africa. Msunduzi Library.

The image of the woman in *Eating Disorders* (Figure 7) appears shiny and stiff as if she is an African ebony statue or curio. The implied eating disorder has almost drained her of her life force and cast her in stone like an ebony sculpture. She appears naked, exposed and vulnerable in her state of illness, suggested by her slender frame. The slender frame may be typically marked by HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Her eyes are closed and her body cropped as if only a portion of her can still be seen. The woman's gaze is directed away from the viewer, possibly indicating that her eating disorder is a

secret, in contrast to the woman in Figure 4, also gazing to the side, but scoping her route forward. The woman has her hands placed on her leg as if to steady her weak frame. The toll an eating disorder can have is represented in her unnatural appearance, resembling an ornament carved by media influences.

One of the reasons most often cited for this continuing body dissatisfaction among young women is the influence of the media. These feelings of dissatisfaction were often confirmed in my individual interviews discussed in *Chapter 4*. When questioned, the media often reply that they are merely reflecting the ideals of the current generation. Research conducted by Turner et al. (1997) however, has shown that the media indeed plays an important role in shaping, rather than merely reflecting, perceptions of the female body. There seems to be a rotating problem that needs to be broken in order to decrease body dissatisfaction among young women which may reduce the occurrence of eating disorders. The only group that can take the first step in attempting to achieve this is the media and the fashion industry. This issue is applicable internationally as well as locally in South Africa, as global influences filter through the South African economy, particularly with the introduction of democracy.

A widely published example of this which is pertinent to this study is the *Boots No7* campaign. This British beauty brand had as its ambiguous slogan, “*Who said you can’t wear boots to bed?*” (Figure 8). It was claimed that *Boots No7* products are allergen free and safe enough to even wear to bed. It could be argued that these products provide a way for women to enhance their beauty all hours of the day and night, placing emphasis on constantly having to look good, even while going to sleep. The drive to always look good with the help of beauty products such as *Boots No7* may contribute to issues such as ‘the thin body ideal’ and ‘thin is good assumption’ as discussed in the *Literature Review*.

The woman in the advert is smiling with her finger placed playfully on her lips portraying an almost childlike expression. Her head is tilted down slightly possibly indicating shyness or coyness. The woman’s appearance is fresh and without a lot of make-up, suggesting that the products advertised result in a youthful appearance. There is contrast between the childlike expression on her face and the concept of wearing beauty products to bed. The notion of wearing boots to bed suggests the sexualisation of young women. The designers of this campaign were possibly trying to target the newly liberated woman as democracy arrived in South Africa in 1994.

Political issues were not the only topics affected by democracy in South Africa. The goal of a standardised beauty, aiming for perfection, was exposed to South African women as the *Boots No7* advertisement shows. International style icons, became household names; “[t]he slim aesthetic – with pecs for men and ample breasts for women – bedevils those who don’t conform, and even those who happen to fit can carry a sorrowful insecurity about their own bodies” (Orbach 2009:3)

Women are not victims of the media or of themselves, according to Frost (2005:67) “they simply take part in their current social society. Thus inevitably becomes part of representations that form part of their personal identities”. Frost’s statement applies to women located in a South African context, women of all races and ages became part of a democratic society which was focussed on equality, whilst simultaneously dealing with issues of literacy, politics and cultural difference. Lacey (1998) notes that the central core of how we perceive ourselves is called self-image. The central core of self-image consists of name, bodily feelings, body image, sex and age. In addition to this our job, achievements in education, social class, religion and any personal success also form part of our self-image. According to Lacey, feelings can change on a daily basis and depend on the role a woman occupies such as wife, mother, sister or daughter (ibid).

In addition to the notion of the male gaze as discussed in the literature review, images of women are also contaminated by male-defined notions of ‘femininity’.

“This is true not only of the negative cultural images of women, prostitute, demon, medusa, but also of positive ones, woman as nature, woman as nurturing mother, or innocent virgin, or heroic amazon. Woman is always a metaphor, dense with sedimented meanings”. (Felski 2000:182)

Bordo (1993) explains that the media have standardised images that are culturally conveyed. The ideal of feminine beauty and the perfect body as promoted and reinforced by the cosmetic industry, weight loss and fashion industries, create a “dark vein of self-hatred, physical obsessions, terror of aging, and dread of lost control” (Wolf 1991:10). Celebrity images and women’s magazines are a key factor influencing the

ideal of feminine beauty and the perfect body in relation to the formation of self. There is evidence to suggest that body image is important to the formation of self, both in terms of gender and as an individual (Wolf 1991; Bordo 1993).

3.6 MEDIA, SELF-IMAGE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Body image may be defined as the perception one has of one's physical form. This perception may significantly affect human interactions as it "actively influences much of our behaviour, self-esteem, and psychopathology" (Garner 1997:30). Wolf points out that body image related issues do not occur within the context where the viewer is always examining the intention of an advertiser (1991). The reaction advertisements instil within the reader may be "emotional, confiding, defensive, and unequal"; It may be argued that "the media are thought to affect women's body dissatisfaction via the process of social comparison (Cash et al.1983).

According to Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison, as mentioned in the *Literature Review*, people have an innate desire to evaluate themselves, and they do so by comparing themselves with others when objective standards are unavailable. These comparisons tend to occur with others who have similar attributes such as age, race, appearance, and along other dimensions that are self-relevant. The so-called ideal woman often portrayed in the media is typically 15% below the weight of average women, representing an unrealistic standard of thinness. This ideal stresses slimness and youth rather than a 'normal' female body. This ideal woman portrayed in the media is biogenetically problematic, if not impossible for the majority of women to achieve (Attie and Brooks-Gunn 1989).

As noted by Morrison et al. (2004) in the *Literature Review*, those who have over-internalized the 'thin body ideal', are convinced that achieving a skinny body is the only way to be popular, lovable, successful and happy. Stice and Shaw argue that the opposite is in fact true stating that,

"[a]s women internalize the thin-ideal media image, they tend to experience heightened body dissatisfaction, set unrealistic body dimension goals, and ultimately engage in disordered behaviours designed to achieve the thin-ideal body image". (1994:836)

It is assumed that some advertising has instructed women to act and look a certain way. The result of these 'instructions' may be increased consumption of products that promise to achieve the prescribed look. Berger noted that "the publicity image steals her love for herself as she is, and offers it back to her for the price of the product" (1972:134).

There is a frightening distinction between the willingness of consumers to purchase products promising them an improved appearance, seen by many as a superficial expenditure as opposed to purchasing products accepted as necessities. Mmabatho Brown, a 29-year old South African Director of Corporate Services and keen blogger remembers that she was spanked as a child if she did not finish all the food her mother provided.

"My mom dished up for us so it wouldn't matter if I was hungry or not. I would force every morsel into my mouth to avoid being punished. Most black children were raised this way and now I find myself doing the same thing to my own kids". (Sogoni 2000:1)

Szabo and Allwood note in their study, *Body Figure Preference in South African Adolescent Females: A Cross Cultural Study*, that there is a difference in the body image perceptions of South African women within an urban environment (2006). Women in a rural environment are less dissatisfied with their body appearance. This suggests that the constant bombardment of media images of women play a dual role in mental conscious and sub-conscious thoughts of self-image (ibid).

In the 1980s, many women were trying to link both their modern and traditional lifestyles. Traditionally, African women had been far less preoccupied with diet and exercise compared to Western women. Keeping slim and exercising was often not the main focus in black communities. But in recent years a growing number of Black women are rejecting the notion that African women are supposed to have high regard for wide hips and big behinds. Evidence has shown that they are becoming more body conscious and making healthier choices, possibly including beauty products as monthly expenses now seen as essential (See for example, Figure 7).

The advertising industry, magazines and television have played an important role in shaping and informing women across all races about body image. Gradually Black women are redefining what it means to be beautiful and for them it's not always about chasing the perfect body but rather about living a healthy lifestyle (Sogoni 2000). It could be argued however, that the vast amount of images projected at women daily, continue to impact their lives resulting in possible low self-esteem related concerns. Wolf supports the notion by penning that "the ideal beauty notion does not reflect the modern women's growth, movement and individuality" Wolf (1991:6).

3.7 ADVERTISING

Faulder explains, that the

"[c]ritical focus on sex-role portrayal in advertising lies in the close relationship which exists between advertising, the consumer goods industry, and the crucial economic role of women as consumers. As a result, a large portion of commercial messages envisage women as their primary target audience". (1977:37)

Weibel continues by stating that "advertising effectiveness largely depends on the manipulation of the consumer's self-image" (1977:142). The two primary vehicles used for advertising is television, magazines and online shopping.

Only a tiny percentage of women can ever realistically hope to achieving the bodies shown in most advertising. "Discontent with their bodies is normative for women encouraging them to diet and manipulate their body shape" (Rodin et al. 1985:267). Thus, it stands to reason that women are very likely to experience "body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem and eating disorders if they internalise and strive for a beauty ideal that is stringently thin and essentially unattainable" (Groesz et al. 2002). This body dissatisfaction is no different in a South African context. Women are primarily stereotyped as wives, sisters or mothers, resulting in the same feelings experienced by women across the globe, all women are exposed to the female gaze (Lacan: 1977).

3.8 THE FEMALE GAZE IN THE MEDIA

As discussed in *Chapter One*, the 'gendered gaze' is defined as "the focus of a person's look" (Lacey 1998:12). The relation between women is vital as it reflects relationships that constitute *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* – friendship or family ties.



Figure 9: The men's club. June 1994. *Cosmopolitan*, South Africa. Msunduzi Library



Figure 10: Spring. Fashion Spread. September 2004. *Cosmopolitan*, South Africa. Msunduzi Library

The women appearing in Figure 9, on the right, are embracing each other and appear to be twins, mirroring each other. This is an interesting notion as they also mirror the viewer in terms of the female gaze; where women compare themselves to other women. It may be argued that they are almost morphing into each other as the same individual in terms of appearance, suggesting that they represent a single beauty ideal. The fashion spread's heading reads *the men's club* in lowercase letters, possibly suggesting that although the women are dressed in a masculine fashion, they retain their femininity on a sub-conscious level. The images also suggest that these women are taking on male roles with particular reference to the work place as they are wearing suits and business like attire. These images appeared in *Cosmopolitan*, two months after the first democratic elections, and may reflect the probable new career possibilities available to women.

Images reflecting the bond between women and the stereotypical roles women took on continued to appear in *Cosmopolitan*. The image on the left of Figure 10 shows a woman with one leg up on a table suggesting a dominant, manly stance. She is however wearing a skirt and a floral accessory on her jacket rendering her inevitably feminine. It is this strong yet feminine characteristic that may have appealed to the newly liberated women in South Africa.

The two women appearing in Figure 10 are standing arm in arm contrasting with the dynamic of the women appearing in Figure 9. Their bodies are turned away from each other with only their arms touching. This could imply that since the implementation of democracy in 1994, women have embraced their individuality and no longer 'cling' onto each other as they do in Figure 9. Their appearance is also softer in terms of the colours and textures portrayed whereas the women in Figure 9 appeared in monotone clothing. This may indicate the transition into a multi-cultural society no longer separated by black and white.

The development of the female gaze during the ten year period is evident in the images described. The bond between women is an on-going subject relating to aspects of status and appearance. It is unavoidable that it would thus affect self-esteem amongst women as appearance directly relates to body image. The female gaze, as a female support group, directly informed the applied design component of this study.

3.9 PLASTIC BEAUTY

Since the development of plastic surgery, the procedures available have given women multiple options to physically and permanently change their appearance. This drastic approach has become argumentatively accepted as a daily occurrence with the rise of numerous international make-over television programmes that can be viewed on DSTV in South Africa, (*10 Years Younger*, *Extreme Make Over*, *Skin Deep*). These reality programmes feature ordinary people, most often women being put through their paces to overcome the body's "alter ego so that the end product recasts standards of what is a normal sort of beauty for all of us" (Orbach 2000: 81). Orbach goes on to note that,

"[c]heekbones, teeth, noses, lips, wrinkles, lines, breasts, pecs, legs, bums, chins, feet, stomachs, midriffs, hairlines, ears, necks, skin coloration, body hair all become putty in the hands of cosmetic surgeons, dentists and dermatologist"
(ibid)

A different kind of gaze, apart from the male and female gaze mentioned in the *Literature Review* appears through a cosmetic surgeon's view when he consults with a patient.

Blum writes in her text *Flesh Wounds* that an aesthetic gaze is also a transformative gaze.

“The surgical gaze is shared by many people in this culture as we microscopically assess the faces and bodies of our favourite celebrities, as we dutifully peer into the mirror every day to check our wrinkle quotient, challenged by Melanie Griffith from her surgically and digitally altered Revlon face: ‘Don’t deny your age. Defy it’”. (2003:23)

It could be argued that as women personalise the images they take in, they create a desire to achieve what the advertisements are teasing them with: unattainable beauty. The lure of plastic surgery is that it offers to transform the body into an image, arguably stopping the natural aging process and rendering the physical form into an almost two-dimensional portrait, mimicking the images seen in printed media in particular. Blum states that plastic surgery creates a fantasy world of ‘moving images’ instead of living people. The images are attractive because “they represent for us both what we are and what (and where) we long to be” (2003:61).

The desire to try and reach perfection is possibly exactly what is stopping any action that might change perceptions of beauty ideals in order to accept natural beauty. The importance of mental and physical health is questionable when it comes to selling advertisements in fashion magazines. It may seem that beauty has become something that requires digital and surgical enhancement. The popularity of the television series *Dr.90210*, which follows the daily consultations of famous Hollywood plastic surgeons, is a reflection of the growing demand for and public fascination with plastic surgery. Of concern is the realisation that the younger generation might grow up thinking that this approach is normal. This distorted sense of body image might not only affect views on the ease of surgical enhancements, but also on other extreme behaviours that lead to achieving a thin body frame, such as eating disorders. Orbach notes that,

“[t]he anorexic’s attempts to change her body are in essence an exaggeration of the activities of all women who must enter a society in which they are told that not only is their role specifically delineated, but success in that role relates in large part to the physical image that they can create and project”. (1993:85)

3.10 DIGITAL ENHANCEMENTS

Airbrushing is a term that has become commonly associated with celebrity and model photographs in the media and may even be viewed as ‘digital plastic surgery’. Increased concern over the pressure girls and women feel to live up to digitally enhanced images has urged lawmakers in Britain and France in trying to force marketers to publish alterations made to images along with advertisements in an attempt to create awareness on a consumer level. In support of this law, a British Member of Parliament, argued that altered images were undermining young women’s ability to control their own destinies. Jo Swinson (as cited in Pfanner 2007) explains that “these photos can lead people to believe in realities that very often do not exist”. Derek Hudson, a photographer based in Britain, supports the views of Bob Ciano mentioned in the *Literature Review*, saying that she has never seen and probably will never see a fashion or beauty picture that hasn’t been retouched (ibid).

Women need a “new way to see” according to Wolf (1991:19). The images of women in the media have created negative feelings regarding their self-image and self-esteem. These images may be reviewed analytically to understand their true meanings and gauge a way of creating awareness, so as to lash back at the assumed adverse effects they create. The Media Institute of South Africa (2003:1), concluded that,

“[t]he Southern African media gives very little space to the views of women, and, when it comes to subjects such as politics, economy, sport or agriculture, their voice is virtually unheard. Women journalists are, however, given more exposure than men in reporting on subjects that have to do with the body, home and beauty”.

These findings were released in 2003, a year before the third democratic elections in South Africa, emphasising the continuing need to address issues concerning women’s rights including a range of self-esteem related topics. In response to this need, as will be discussed in the next *Chapter*, I gathered data using an action research approach to discover if and how an awareness campaign boosting self-esteem amongst South African women, would be relevant and appropriate.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY AND DATA GATHERING PRACTISES

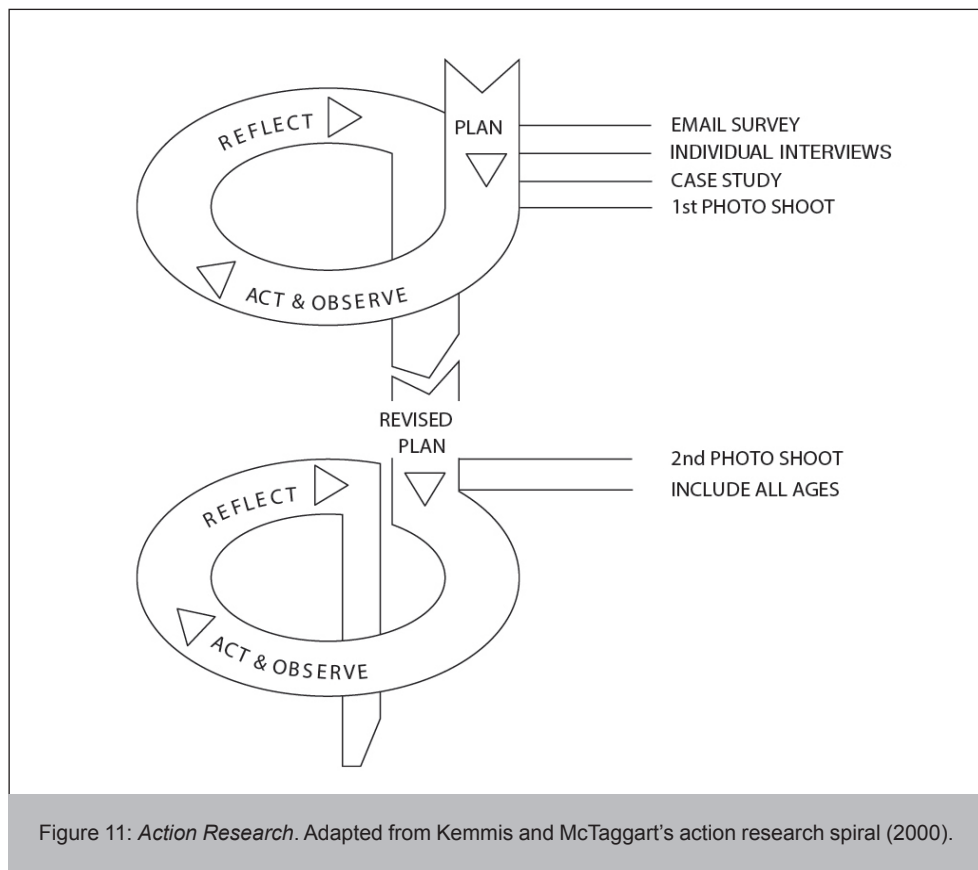
“For me it is really a quest for life, to understand life and to create what I call living knowledge – knowledge which is valid for the people with whom I work and for myself”.
(Swantz et al. 2001 cited in Reason and Bradbury 2008:1)

The above quote is important and bears relevance to this study, but does not include the host of women, grandmothers, mothers, sisters, aunties, cousins and friends with whom I interact with almost on a daily basis. My research aims to show that each of these women is affected by the media in one way or another and this life experience has fuelled my intrigue to understand more about how I could improve and change the situation.

I’ve always been interested in notions of self-esteem. On reflection, I believe that these ideas and feelings emerged from my personal family experience, most especially with my sister who worked as a model, as well as my own sense of body image. I have scoured the literature and consulted with friends over the past few years which has collectively led me to undertake this study as a personal quest to understand more about the media and its potential impact on women’s self-image.

As a graphic designer, my personal experience in the industry in which media images are digitally enhanced on a daily basis, generally and of women in particular, has armed me with an acute realisation of what goes into producing these images. Of particular concern, even babies are digitally enhanced.

For all of these reasons above, I adopted an action research approach, in order to find answers to these concerns. At the outset I had no idea as to what the research process would entail as I quickly developed new leadership skills and the formulation of new approaches and ideas. Action research demanded intense planning and adapting to challenges continually. This method kept me mindful of the unique opportunity offered by the nature and flexibility of action research, it was not a narrow approach at all. In this instance my approach was collaborative, participative and it also developed an interesting space for reflection on behalf of all the participants as well as myself.



The action research conducted, involved a number of steps to conclude. Firstly, an area of focus was selected, which was to gather data about the portrayal of women in the media and feelings surrounding the impact these images have on the participants. Secondly data was collecting via an email survey as well as individual interviews and photo shoots (which formed the visual material of the applied design component). Thirdly, the data was organised for analysis by representing it as tables and clearly written dialogues. In the case of the photo shoot it was necessary to relook the data collection and gather additional material. Lastly, the data as analysed and a conclusion formed.

The in-depth data gathering process took place in four separate stages namely an E-mail survey, individual interviews and a detailed case study of an international campaign, *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*. All of this led to a 'real women's' photo shoot which I conducted and will describe in detail later on.

4.1 SURVEY

As part of the data gathering process, a random E-mail survey (Appendix A) was

conducted which included most of my female contacts and their friends as participants. The survey contained 15 questions as well as an optional comments section. The questions related to the study's primary research problem and focussed on finding out more about how women in South Africa feel about beauty in general, and also queried their views on it. These views were important as the impact of the media could then be detailed.

The survey was deliberately user-friendly to complete and to submit. All of the women were South African and ranged in age from 18 to 56. I received 40 E-mail responses. The majority of responses received were from women I had never met.

One of the survey's aims was to find out how many respondents are aware of the international campaign, *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*, and if they would like to see something similar in South Africa. The results also offered valuable insight into the understanding of beauty ideals in South Africa.

4.2 SURVEY RESULTS

After receiving the responses from the survey, I captured the data and created graphical charts in order to reflect upon the answers easily and accurately (Appendix B). The results described offer an observatory view of the perceptions of those who participated.

Of the participants, 23 do not personally buy magazines on a regular basis due to the expense (Appendix B Table 3) but still have access to magazines at a friend's house or possibly at a doctor's waiting room. For the purpose of this study I have termed this second hand readership.

Half of the participants had heard about *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* but had not seen it (Appendix B Table 5). When introduced to the campaign's aim, which is to boost self-esteem, 34 women said that they think a similar project, specifically aimed at South African women, could be useful and valuable (Appendix B Table 6).

One participant writes: "Real beauty is unique and as varied as we are, we should not be brainwashed into accepting the perceptions of people in the media and the fashion industry as gospel". This statement offers us evidence of the need to change

the current commercial mind-set that women have about beauty. A further participant states that,

“[a]s a strong Christian I believe that every person is made in God’s image and even if that is mostly based on soul or personality, everyone is worthy of respect, adoration, love and to believe that their life is to be cherished as unique and special. Unfortunately, this is only realised once woman finally except themselves for who they are. Instead of trying to accomplish the global ideal of a classy and spectacular woman”.

Whether it is for religious or other personal reasons, many participants agreed that not every woman is super model material. Further to this it was generally agreed that women need to accept themselves as all women are beautiful in their own way.

Participants were asked to give a rating according to how beautiful they thought they were. The majority (72%) of the participants rated themselves as average, while 28% where comfortable with defining themselves as beautiful. It is important to note that none of the women rated themselves as being unattractive. In contrast, *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*, revealed that only 2% of women rated themselves as beautiful (Etcoff et al 2004:9), (Appendix B Table 7).

Nonetheless, the majority (70%) had areas of themselves that they would physically change if they had the opportunity (Appendix B table 8). The main physical feature that women were unhappy with was the size of their tummy. This provides an indication that more than half of the women were unhappy about a particular body feature, suggesting underlying insecurities that could be related to feelings of low self-esteem.

More than half of the participants (65%) admitted that images in fashion magazines influence their body ideal perceptions. The majority of women were impacted by the media images in these magazines even though they might not buy magazines on a regular basis (Appendix B Table 9). It is clear that these women could only be influenced by images if they see them on a fairly regular basis. This supports my theory that second hand readership has just as much influence as primary readership or direct purchase of the magazine.

When posed the question to what degree and which media platforms most influenced their self-perceptions, the majority (85%) agreed that the media plays a negative role in influencing perceptions. According to the participants, the biggest media influence other than magazines, were movies (35%), while television series (26%), music videos (27%) and internet sites (12%) also play a role (Appendix A Table 10 & 11).

When posed a question on celebrities, looking like one was significantly deemed a priority for half (55%) of the women in the survey (Appendix B Table 12). This suggests that these women are not completely happy with their physical appearances. On the other hand, slightly less than half (45%) do not want to look like their favourite celebrity. When asked to specify their favourite celebrity, not all of the participants responded. Interestingly, the answers were varied and included celebrities from all over the world and not just Hollywood. The majority of celebrities mentioned were women in their 30's. This shows an interesting point of the age women are perceived to be at their most beautiful. The widespread choices of favourite celebrities might also suggest that individual ideals of beauty are not the same and may include a range of physical appearances. It is encouraging to note that all the participants believed that the super-skinny or the American size zero trend is unobtainable. They all agreed that it is more important to be healthy than to be stick thin (Appendix B Table 14 & 15). This point was touched on again in the individual interviews when discussing the impact of media images in the participants daily lives.

4.3 INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Interviews were conducted with five South African couples amounting to five women and five men. The participants ranged in age from 21 to 32. They came from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Two couples were already married and the other couples were in a partnership with relationships ranging from 2 to 13 years in duration. The tone of the interviews were casual and conversational, with the intention of making the participants feel relaxed enough to share details about their own body related issues.

During the recruitment process, I contacted a group of friends and asked them if they would be willing to partake in the individual interviews. The first stage of interviews were conducted with both participants present and debating their answers as a couple. The second stage of interviews was conducted by prompting questions to the same two

individuals but this time without the presence of their partner. This approach offered a comparative insight into finding out if, as individuals, the participants felt comfortable enough to express their feelings regarding images of women in the media and their body image related concerns. It was my intention to note whether their answers remained the same when they were interviewed individually or as a couple. I reassured my participants at all times that their answers would remain confidential.

One of the main aims of the interviews was to discover how men and women feel about self-esteem issues and how they view each other within the context of their perceived notion of beauty ideals. It was also important to establish the role of the media's impact on the individuals in order to understand pressures to fit the mould of a certain beauty ideal. Very similar results were obtained from all 10 individuals, suggesting that the effect of media exposure is undeniable in South Africa.

4.4 INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW RESULTS

The first observation derived from the individual interviews was that magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* were mainly read as a second hand source of media, with all participants agreeing they would read this magazine if it was available to them either at home or at a friend's house. All the participants agreed that the issue of women's low self-esteem, as a result of media exposure, is an on-going problem.

The magazine provides an informative view for men about women in an accessible way. Some of the male participants noted that "the imagery in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* is often revealing, so as schoolboys, my friends and I used to buy it or borrow it from our sisters to look at the naked women inside", and that they could "pick up tips and find out what was happening in the world of women". It is worth noting that the information these men internalised about women as young boys, is already distorted due to the media images being so dramatically and digitally enhanced. Using such media as learning tools about women possibly encourages the expectations of the singular beauty ideal the media represents.

When asked about their general thoughts about *Cosmopolitan* magazine, all participants agreed that the magazine could either have a positive or negative influence and that this is dependent on the reader's internalisation of the images portrayed. One female

participant stated in her individual interview that she often feels depressed when reading magazines such as *Cosmopolitan*, because she perceives the women in the magazine to be perfect. It is her belief that she could never look that way. She shares her thoughts, saying that “even though I know in reality the women don’t look like that, it makes me worry about my own looks, and whether I am good enough”. Her thoughts are realised as one male participant states that the pressure *Cosmopolitan* puts on women is enormous. It creates the wrong impression, especially in younger men, who think women have to be perfect like the women in the magazine”. As their girlfriends get older they become disappointed and might even leave her for a younger girl. A lot of men believe that when a woman becomes old, she is undesirable”. In light of this, it is evident why women have feelings of low self-esteem, with one participant describing her thoughts about the media as being “the devil”. Such strong feelings towards mediated images of women are undeniable when pin pointing the media as a primary source that creates self-esteem issues.

The female participants all voiced their concerns of the perceived beauty ideal portrayed by the media. One of the participants noted that,

“[t]he images in *Cosmopolitan* don’t represent something that is natural. If I had to do my hair and makeup, like the women who feature in the magazine every day, I would die of exhaustion. I pray the women in the magazines aren’t as beautiful in real life so that my relationship won’t fall apart. I hate the images in *Cosmopolitan*”.

A further participant noted that it is the women appearing in the media’s “job to look good”. She expressed that due to her demanding career, she has little time to exercise or the budget to afford a personal nutritionist, “for the average woman this is just not reality”.

According to the participants, the perfect woman, as represented by the media, is a flawless mannequin, with shiny hair and skinny limbs. In real life however, these images are unobtainable and two dimensional visions that cannot be hugged or touched; they can only be seen. To one female participant, the perfect woman is somebody who can “wake up in the morning, brush her hair and go out the door”. She doesn’t need make-up to feel good about herself. Another participant notes that it is confidence

and a unique personality that make a woman beautiful. The participants had varied views on the effect of the mediated images on their lives. To some it was a motivation of how they could improve their physical appearance but worryingly, to others, it was a confirmation of their own flaws. It is the latter internalisation that may lead to feelings of low self-esteem. One female participant stated that it is important to her to be skinny although she realises it won't necessarily make her happy, "when you are as thin as you would like to be you become more confident". Asking the participants whether or not the images in magazines should be left untouched and without digital enhancements received a mixed reaction. A male participant noted that "I think it's nice to see a beautiful girl in a magazine. If the images aren't touched up, how nice will they be? But if leaving them unedited helps the girls to boost their self-esteem, then I'm all for it". Most agreed that the images should be left original.

When questioned if a digital media enhancement law with enforced grading on all images would help to reassure women of what was real or not, participants reacted positively noting this as both an interesting and positive idea. Practicality, however, enforcing such a law would be difficult to regulate due to the vast amount of media images in circulation.

When introduced to *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*, the female participants were concerned with the images of the women used in the campaign expressing that the women seemed more beautiful than average and must have been digitally enhanced. Interestingly, one male participant suggested that to show women as natural an image portraying them "busy with their daily lives" would be more appropriate. This suggestion, does however, potentially place women in stereotypical roles, which would not be conducive to this study.

Significantly, the answers gathered from the couple interviews, as opposed to the answers from each individual, did differ on certain topics. Physical attributes that each partner would change about the other was a sensitive issue but the majority of the participants said that they were happy with their partners just the way they are. All participants agreed that the most attractive people are the ones who embrace their beauty by being themselves and exuding confidence, thus portraying 'real beauty'.

4.5 CASE STUDY

An in-depth case study was conducted on, *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*, as it targets non-model women appearing more natural. As a working model for *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*, the applied design component of this study, *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* offers insight into a marketable campaign.

The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty was created as an advertising campaign for Unilever's Dove soap brand. In contrast to most advertising material that promotes the use of products by using the faces of celebrities, Dove had chosen to use real, ordinary women with no celebrity status to demonstrate that their product will enhance consumers' natural beauty. Three different studies were commissioned by Dove to gather data to reinforce their advertising campaign: *The Real Truth about Beauty* was the first study conducted in 2004 and formed the basis of *The Campaign for Real Beauty*. With the successful launch of the campaign, a second study was conducted in 2005 called *Beyond Stereotypes: Rebuilding the Foundation of Beauty Beliefs*. The last study to date commissioned by Dove, *Beauty Comes of Age*, was conducted in 2006.

The Campaign For Real Beauty was launched with the first research study, *The Real Truth about Beauty* forming the foundation data. StrategyOne, an applied research company, conducted this study in 2004 with collaboration from Dr. Nancy Etcoff, Massachusetts General Hospital-Harvard University and with consultation from Dr. Susie Orbach of the London School of Economics. Between February 2004 and March 2004 the global study gathered data from 3200 women ranging in age from 18 to 64. Interviews were conducted across ten countries including the United States of America, Canada, Great Britain, Italy, France, Portugal, Netherlands, Brazil, Argentina and Japan. This study demonstrated that women believe in a broader definition of beauty than the narrowly defined ideals most often portrayed in the media.

In addition to changing women's view of their bodies, the campaign also aimed to change the narrow view of the beauty market. Dove distinguished itself by using female models that ranged from size six to fourteen. *The Campaign For Real Beauty* halted portraying so-called 'perfect women' as beauty role models; beauty ideals were being challenged. *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* offered modern feminist perspectives

to women, by suggesting that women could be themselves naturally, without make up and restricting diets, thus positively supporting positive self-esteem boosting feelings towards themselves.

4.6 CASE STUDY RESULTS

The data from *The Real Truth about Beauty* proved that according to women across the world, beauty had become limited and unrealistic. Phillipe Harousseau, Dove marketing director says,

“[w]e want to challenge the definition of beauty. We believe that beauty has become too narrow in definition. We want to defy the stereotype that only the young, blonde and tall are beautiful”. (As cited in ICMR 2006:1)

Dove’s mission, in commissioning *The Real Truth about Beauty* study, was to “explore what beauty means to women today”. Further, Dove wanted the study to “assess whether it was possible to talk and think about female beauty in ways that were more authentic, satisfying and empowering” (Etcoff et al. 2004:2).

Study data from *The Real Truth about Beauty* revealed that ‘beautiful’ is not a word women willingly associate with themselves. In the study, women were given a list consisting only of positive or neutral adjectives to describe their looks (including natural, average, beautiful, sexy and gorgeous) and were asked to choose the one they felt most comfortable with. According to Etcoff et al. an overwhelming majority of women around the world are most comfortable using the words natural (31%) or average (29%) to describe their looks. Analysis reveals that this lack of identification with ‘beautiful’ holds across all age groups, with only 4% of 18 to 29 year-olds choosing ‘beautiful’ as a word to describe their looks (2004:9).

Although it is primarily a commercial enterprise, Unilever stated that they recognise the social concerns of their consumers, and significantly established a self-esteem fund, called *The Dove Self-Esteem Fund*, which was launched to make a change in the lives of women all over the world. The aim of this fund is to give women the tools to learn to understand the concept of beauty so that it can be passed on, and the next generation of women will be free of stereotypes. To date they have reached approximately 1.8

million women. *The Dove Self Esteem Fund* supports a specific charitable organization to help keep self-esteem high in every country they are working in. This aspect of the Unilever campaign has been particularly influential upon the development of *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*, which deals specifically with women's self-esteem issues.

Simple messages were used in adverts associated with *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*. Individuals were used to represent a demographic of women that included all race and age groups, challenging the notion of beauty.



Figure 12: *Oversized? Outstanding?* 2004.
The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty



Figure 13: *Flawed? Flawless?* 2004.
The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty.

Outstanding? Oversized? (Figure 12) focuses the readers gaze to the image of the woman who is suggested to be overweight by these rhetorical questions. The woman appearing in this advertisement is holding her hands behind her head in a playful manner, smiling and appearing happy and comfortable. It could be argued that wearing a black dress is an attempt to make her look slimmer, contradicting a natural appearance and raising the question of whether the woman is 'slim enough' to appear in the advertising campaign. As per the copy, she had to appear 'oversized', but not so overweight as to make the advert unappealing to a commercial market used to a standard 'thin body ideal'. Unilever could possibly also have recognised the importance of not promoting an image of an overweight woman, that could potentially suggest an unhealthy lifestyle.

The second study commissioned by Dove, *Beyond Stereotypes: Rebuilding the Foundation of Beauty Beliefs* indicates the alarming finding that 7 out of 10 girls refrain from many activities of everyday life when they feel bad about how they look. Orbach states that,

“[w]hether 15 or 65, looking good is important to women, and to their feelings about themselves. I believe that this truism is just one of those things we take for granted without much thought”. (2005:7)

The study suggests that women rate qualities such as happiness, kindness, confidence, dignity and humour as powerful components of female beauty, along with the appearance of a woman’s skin, physical and facial appearance and body weight and shape.

“In addition, these women believe that the idea of beauty should be inclusive of a greater variety of physical types, expressing a strong desire to see the media do a better job of portraying women of diverse body weights and shapes, age and ethnic backgrounds. ‘Women recognize the plight they and their daughters are in and they wish to do away with the conditions that give rise to it. Women are on the move. They don’t want to reject beauty. Beauty means a great deal to them. But they don’t want a beauty culture that requires them to conform to the machinations of a style industry whose interests lie elsewhere. They say boldly that they want a beauty that is full of variety: that recognizes their individuality and uniqueness and allows them and their daughters to enjoy it and their lives’”. (Orbach 2005:8)

Beyond Stereotypes notes that when a woman’s appearance is different from the standard portrayed in the media, she is not viewed as beautiful. Dove commissioned advertisements challenging all aspects of beauty. *Freckled? Flawless?* (Figure 13) appeared in England in 2004 and demonstrated that although an individual might not have commercially flawless skin, free of any blemishes, she can still be beautiful.

The woman in Figure 13 represented physical features that are unusual to see in the media, such as freckles, covering her body including her face. It could be argued that Dove is trying to set its products apart from other beauty products aiming to make skin perfect without any discolouration to naturally occurring features. The same

point could however be raised for the opposite argument, as consumers continue to strive for products to make them seem 'perfect'. Using a woman with a freckled face as a representative could allow consumers to perceive the products to not be up to standard. It is interesting to note that the image of the woman in Figure 13 was only used to promote *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* and not as an advertisement to sell products.

The *Beyond Stereotypes* research revealed that the notion of beauty beliefs informs women at an early age. Over half of all women around the world claim they first became aware of the need to be physically attractive between 6 and 17 years of age (Etcoff et al 2005: 3). Noting this, the study also provided important initial data on the hypothesis that what women learn about beauty can have a negative or positive impact on how they feel about themselves and their lives – notably their self-esteem. *Beyond Stereotypes*, concluded that the majority (67%) of the women who participated between the ages of 15 and 64 “withdraw from life-engaging activities due to feeling badly about their looks, among them things like giving an opinion, going to school, going to the doctor” (Etcoff et al. 2005:37-38). Orbach states in *Beyond Stereotypes: Rebuilding the Foundation of Beauty Beliefs*,

“[t]hese omnipresent images shape our personal relationships to our own bodies, engendering feelings of insecurity and body distress whether or not one’s own body conforms to the pictures and images that are intensely and intensively beamed at us”. (2005:7)

The majority of women who took part in Dove’s first study, *The Truth about Real Beauty*, felt that their physical appearance could be classified as average according to society. Half of these women also thought that they were over-weight and agreed that: “When I feel less beautiful, I feel worse about myself in general” (Etcoff et al 2004:18). Ninety percent wanted to change a feature or attribute about their bodies. The study revealed that women see beauty and physical attractiveness as increasingly socially mandated and rewarded. Almost two-thirds strongly agreed that: “Women today are expected to be more physically attractive than their mother’s generation was” and, “society expects women to enhance their physical attractiveness” (ibid).

The third study commissioned by *Dove*, *Beauty Comes of Age*, was conducted in 2006 with women between the ages of 50 and 64 in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, France and Japan. The research focussed on older women and their relationship with natural beauty. Dove's Pro-Age range of products aimed at older women can be seen in the adverts supported by this study.

Beauty has no age limit (Figure 14) promoted the idea that age shouldn't be a deciding factor when it comes to beauty. In conventional anti-ageing advertisements the images of women are always young and flawless, promoting the results the products offer. The woman in Figure 14 is a lot older than those appearing in other anti-ageing product advertisements. She is sitting casually on the floor, suggesting that she is relaxed or in contrast, not standing due to her age. Sitting might be more comfortable for an older person. The woman is smiling suggesting she is at ease with her body. This could have two meanings; firstly, that she has had experience with life and because of this has come to terms with her body or, that the *Dove* products she is now using have improved her beauty, and she can thus accept it.



Figure 14: Beauty has no age limit. 2007.
The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty.

Orbach (2006:6) notes that women today between the ages of 50 and 60 are part of the generation of women who actively shaped the way women are seen and the things they are able to do. These women have had very different experiences to their mothers, who conformed to traditional roles as housewives and mothers. The newer generation of women are able to work and have a family while expressing themselves as individuals. Becoming a mother is a choice instead of an expectation. The anti-ageing adverts created for this audience, had to reflect the women as individuals.

The women surveyed in *Beauty Comes of Age*, believed that there were misconceptions about women age 50 and older in the media based upon “sexuality, productivity and appearance” (Etcoff et al. 2006:14). The participants found that when a woman turns 50 she is seen by society as being past her prime or “over the hill” while men of the same age, are still seen to be active members of their communities. “Nearly 60% of women globally believe that if magazines were reflective of a population, a person would likely believe women over 50 do not exist” (ibid).

According to the same study, women are at their most beautiful when they are in their thirties. This perception corresponds with the views of the South African women who took part in my own online survey as discussed earlier. “Nearly all of the women surveyed agree that society is less accepting of appearance considerations for women over 50 compared to their younger counterparts, especially when focussed on the body – wearing short skirts, wearing revealing clothing, wearing tight clothing” (Etcoff et al. 2006:20). Dr. Robert Butler, contributor to the *Beauty Comes of Age* study, states:

“Dove’s Campaign for Real Beauty is a reflection of a new sensibility and perspective on beauty in advancing age. It is an acknowledgement that people come in all sizes, shapes, colours and ages. The Dove survey and campaign comes at exactly the right time, given the extraordinary revolution in longevity that has been happening over the last hundred years” (2006:3).

Authors Fernando and Purkayastha (2007), analysed the campaign in their case study *Unilever’s ‘Real Beauty’ Campaign for Dove*. They felt that this campaign could prove counter-productive as marketing messages in the beauty industry were largely aspirational and *Dove* could be perceived as a brand for ‘fat’ and ‘ugly’ girls. They go on to suggest that *The Campaign for Real Beauty* was contradictory as it strived to sell *Dove* Firming Range of products in the guise of debunking beauty stereotypes (Figure 14). Dangin (as cited in Helm 2008:1), claimed that the images used in the adverts, were not actually as natural as they claimed to be and that they, like all other images used in advertising, were touched up. He continued by saying it was “a challenge, to keep everyone’s skin and faces showing the mileage but not looking unattractive” (ibid). This criticism raised questions on the authenticity of *The Campaign For Real Beauty*.

Despite the critique over the advertisements legitimacy, *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* remains successful across the world as it remains active. Celente (as cited in ICMR 2006) argues that the images of real women,

“[m]ight get the consumer’s attention but only briefly. Using real people in ad campaigns cannot work in the long-term because the job of advertising is to create fantasy images that people will aspire for. People want to escape from reality. I personally think women will want to be more fashionably South Beach than overweight Middle America. Who wants to see a big butt on a billboard? I personally think that these are compensation ads for the country’s ever increasing obesity issue and gives out the message that it is OK if you are fat”. (2005:1)

Some experts felt that *Dove’s* campaign had a significant marketing risk as it had to convince women that they need *Dove* products to become even better (ICMR 2006: 1). *Dove’s* marketing team dismissed some of these criticisms, especially the one that the campaign was contradictory by nature.

All three of the studies conducted suggest evidence that *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* is more than an advertising campaign to sell products. It defines the social issues facing women today, including feelings of low self-esteem but raises doubt regarding the authenticity of the images used in the advertisements. The difference between *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* and *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* is that the latter is a non-profit, non-commercial campaign, not aiming to sell products for revenue but to boost self-esteem through supporting visual messages showing practical examples of real women and showcasing their natural bodies, within a South African context.

4. 7 PHOTO SHOOTS

Two photo shoots were completed in order to acquire uniquely South African visual material to use in the applied design awareness campaign. A particular challenge was finding women who were willing to participate in the underwear photo shoot. I adopted

a very careful and considerate approach and was most especially aware of the ethical considerations. I contacted friends who I thought would be willing to partake and asked them for contact names of women they thought would be interested too. Once I had a list of the contact names and numbers, I phoned each woman and explained what the project was about and what they could expect. I received positive responses from most of the women over the phone but later received messages stating that they could not join in due to their partners' disapproval of appearing in their underwear. A total of 10 women who agreed to join initially decided to withdraw a week before the first photo shoot was to take place. Due to this, I arranged a second photo shoot with the photographer as I did not have a culturally diverse enough selection of imagery to use from the first photo shoot alone.

The females ranged in age from 4 years old to 55 years and came from a variety of cultural backgrounds. I decided as a researcher that when it comes to self-esteem it is very easy to not practice what I preach, so as a promise to my commitment for the cause, I decided to participate in the photo shoot as well. Even though I have my own body image concerns it was more important to me, to boost the morale of the participants investing time in my endeavour, than giving in to my insecurities.

The photographer Caroline Burns was recommended by a friend who suggested that I make use of Burns' studio located inside her apartment. I found this to be the perfect location as it ensured the privacy of the participants and meant the photo shoot could take place without interruption. I had numerous meetings with Burns to discuss the direction and agenda for the photo shoot days. The collaborative effort enhanced the results as I could make use of her knowledge of photography and apply the best lighting and body poses to achieve the most natural look possible.

In order to make the environment more comfortable, I arranged for refreshments and finger snacks for the participants as well as background music to relax and lift their spirits. The brief I gave the women was simple. Unlike *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* all the participants were allowed to wear make-up. The request was simply to arrive as yourself. Portraying an image of a 'natural self' was one of the main themes for the applied design of this study. I believe that natural beauty may be portrayed by letting your personality reveal the characteristics that come easily to you expressed through your appearance.

After an introductory motivational talk prior to the photo shoot, the participants were ready to get started. The first moments whilst taking off our robes were understandably met with awkward silence and a show of nerves, but after the first photos were taken all the participants took to the camera remarkably comfortably. There was excitement and team spirit as the participants encouraged each other whilst having their photographs taken.

Some of the participants voiced concerns about their body appearance, which was soon diminished by the other women encouraging each other and offering positive morale boosting support in spite of their own image-related worries. The bond created by the women who participated was obvious as everybody became protective and sensitive to the feelings of the other participants. This bond of protection was very interesting to experience and take note of as the same connection may not be there while images are produced on a commercial basis.

4.8 PHOTO SHOOT RESULTS

Once the photo shoot was complete, all the participants were talking to each other, discussing ideas about empowerment. There was no judging, no jealousy and everybody was happy to be themselves. The irony was that in a vulnerable state, sitting around in their underwear, all the participants, who did not know each other, were comfortable to talk about their own bodies, actively participating in a 'sisterhood' situation. The photo shoots were an important observational period in which the interaction between participants became a main focus. The importance of keeping notes served as reminder when reporting and reflecting back on the happenings.

This was the evidence I needed to conclude that the environment you are in, on a daily basis, plays a huge role in the mental state of women and that the possibility of feeling confident exists for each individual, especially in South Africa where the development of democracy has propelled women's issues to become more significant than ever before.

The photographs derived from the photo shoots provided the visual material used in my applied design awareness campaign. The collective ambience embedded within the photographs was vital to convey the correct visual messages.

4.9 CONCLUSION

The action research approach taken in order to gather data for this study resulted in an awareness campaign planned and reflected upon through observation and revised action strategies. It was this methodology that informed the technique of data gathering.

The online survey resulted in responses from 40 South African women each conveying their opinions about beauty ideals. The resulting data revealed the need for an awareness campaign aimed at boosting young women's morale.

The individual interviews, conducted with five women and five men, supported this concern that various sources of media have a negative influence on women's self-esteem. The constant bombardment of a standard beauty ideal has led to doubts amongst women who might not fit this perceived mould.

The in-depth case study was conducted on *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*. The British based campaign served as an example of a commercial self-esteem boosting campaign, but raised questions regarding the authenticity of its 'real beauty' claims. The final data gathering process was an observational process involving an underwear photo shoot in which participants freely expressed their personalities with an awareness campaign as visual outcome in mind. *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* resulted from these photo shoots, and aims to boost self-esteem and prompt women to question the media and accept their own unique beauty characteristics.

In the next *Chapter*, I focus on *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*, in detail.

CHAPTER 5: *THE SISTERHOOD SELF-ESTEEM CRUSADE*

“Jealousy among the best of friends is a cruel fact of female love. It is painful for women to talk about beauty because under the myth, one woman’s body is used to hurt another. Our faces and bodies become instruments for punishing other women, often used out of our control and against our will. At present, “beauty” is an economy in which women find the “value” of their faces and bodies impinging, in spite of themselves, on that of other women’s. This constant comparison, in which one woman’s worth fluctuates through the presence of another, divides and conquers. It forces women to be acutely critical of the ‘choices’ other women make about how they look. But that economy that pits women against one another is not inevitable. To get past this divisiveness, women will have to break a lot of taboos against talking about it. From the dozens of women to whom I have listened, it is clear that the amount of pain a given woman experiences through the beauty myth bears no relationship at all to what she looks like relative to a cultural ideal”. (Wolf 1991:284)

The applied design component of this project was informed by the action research data gathering practises explained in the previous *Chapter*. The E-mail survey, individual interviews, in-depth case study and underwear photo shoots all contributed to the development of an awareness campaign called, *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*. This campaign was strategically created within a South African context to portray a motivational message aiming to boost self-esteem amongst women of all ages. At the heart of the campaign motivation, lays the notion of the female gaze. The link between this gaze and ideas of sisterhood is briefly discussed. The design components of this campaign include a logo, a website and an E-book.

5.1 THE FEMALE GAZE AND SISTERHOOD LINK

An important observation resulting from the methodology and *Literature Review* is the

notion of the female gaze. The way in which women see themselves, and see other women, was recognised as an important role-player when it comes to identifying the driving force behind women's insecurities and the constant need for self-improvement through self-analysis and objectification (Berger 1972, Morrison et al. 2004 & Wolf 1991).

In the context of this study, 'sisterhood' refers to a bond between women that may counteract the effects of the female gaze as an analytical one, by instead becoming a support system for women. The word 'crusade' is defined as a series of medieval military expeditions or an energetic organized campaign (*OED* 2007: 213). The bonds between women create protective armour against the exposure of media images that may harm women's self-image. Defining the campaign as a 'crusade' seemed fitting as more than the title of a proposed movement but encourages literal action - to crusade against low self-esteem. It also acknowledges the challenge of the campaign's objective, namely to boost self-esteem, as one that requires almost military like support.

Natalie Angier (2003), author of *Why We're So Nice: We're Wired to Cooperate*, writes that in 2002 a study conducted by researchers at Emory University in Atlanta, concluded that sisterhood is enjoyable to the women who experience such bonds. The study included the use of magnetic resonance to observe neural activity while female participants played games in which they could choose cooperative or competitive strategies. Images of the brain taken during these games, showed the most activity when cooperative methods were chosen. Angier notes her findings on the study by saying that "the small, brave act of cooperating with another person, of choosing trust over cynicism, generosity over selfishness, makes the brain light up with quiet joy" (ibid:1). The relevance of such a collaborative effort pertains directly to this study and may lead to increased positive mental states.

5.2 THE CAMPAIGN LOGO

As an icon of safety, the logo (Figure 15) created for *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* is representative of the female form. The female body deliberately shaped as a shield, conveying strength and protection, while the typographical font is relaxed and flowing. Like the writing, the curves and softness of a woman, associated with a woman's nature and physical feel is reflected by lace detail in the bodice. The logo

stands alone as an icon of development of the female figure over centuries, and the definitive qualities that make each woman undoubtedly feminine. The colours are also deliberately monotone representing contrast. The shield-like design embodies a more traditional looking logo while the inclusion of lace on the bodice suggests playfulness and youth.



Figure 15: *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* logo

The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade logo is an identification symbol that women associate with this campaign. It reflects femininity and strength. The use of the logo on promotional material for the campaign suggests trust in the authenticity of the visuals presented. In order to make the campaign available to a multitude of women, a website was created that these women could interact with. The E-book available from the website could then be read at leisure offline.

5.3 WEBSITE

The use of a website enables women access to *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* at work or home. The website serves as an online community where women can freely and anonymously share their thoughts and feelings regarding body image related issues with other women.

The website provides a background to the campaign and research conducted. The use of a website also enables the content to be updated quickly and on a regular basis.

A website also facilitates a level of content control, keeping readers up to date and accurately informed on current issues relating to self-esteem.

The soft feminine design of the website aims to attract readers and offers a sense of welcome as you enter the site (Figure 16). Soft grey and pink sets an unthreatening presence with soft rounded edges. The single most important aspect of the design is the messages embedded in the visuals portrayed. The photographic images attracts viewers, and also tells a story of how South African women are portrayed within the context of this study. The women appear confident and happy, unphased by political conflict or age difference. The messages being relayed are of strength and positivity. None of the images have been digitally enhanced which unapologetically displays real notions of beauty.



Figure 16: *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* website home page

The website includes sections to explain the background, research and external links that influenced the campaign.

The website features the following sections:

1. The Home Page as an introduction upon entering the site.
2. An 'about' page outlining the project and its cause.
3. A research section explaining how the project originated and which research methods were used.
4. A campaign section with images from the photo shoots (There is also a link to the download page where the E-book is available).
5. A resources section with reading links as well as videos relating to *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*.

The website outlines the key aspects of *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*, aiming to instil positive and motivational feelings within the viewers.

5.4 E-BOOK

The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade E-book is the final applied design element. Its function is to trigger change from strict beauty ideal perceptions to more free spirited and less narrow minded perceptions.

The E-book is obtainable from *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* website and serves as a keepsake while viewers are offline. This also facilitates a promotion of positive messages relating to self-esteem in a South African context. The E-book may be shared with friends and family thus broadening the campaign reach.

“What is good about beauty – the promise of confidence, sexuality, and the self-regard of a healthy individuality – are actually qualities that have nothing to do with ‘beauty’ specifically, but are deserved and available to all women”.
(Wolf 1991:285)

The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade E-book portrays women as natural. They represent not only their roles as wives, mothers, daughters, friends, sisters or cousins which form a mere facet of their lives, but also as individuals who are unique in their own right. The messages displayed with the images from the photo shoots are messages inspired by the results from the online survey and individual interviews discussed in the

previous *Chapter*. The E-book is divided into 5 sections: *The Introduction*, *The Building Blocks: The Foundation of Self-Esteem*, *Beyond the Norm*, *Loving Yourself* and *The Conclusion*.

5.4.1 INTRODUCTION

The campaign E-book introduction is a brief summary of the suggested mind-set needed to understand this campaign. It is important to keep an open mind when paging through it as it should not be viewed as commercialised images of women. The introduction sets the foundation for the rest of the book and vitally impacts the reader's first impression of the campaign.

5.4.2 THE BUILDING BLOCKS: THE FOUNDATION OF SELF-ESTEEM

The Building Blocks: The Foundation of Self-Esteem section is about prompting a change to the current mind set about beauty in South Africa. It proposes a few simple questions to the viewer; questions about perceptions around current beauty ideals and questioning what they stand for. This section is particularly important as recognising the problem triggers opportunity to discuss possible solutions.

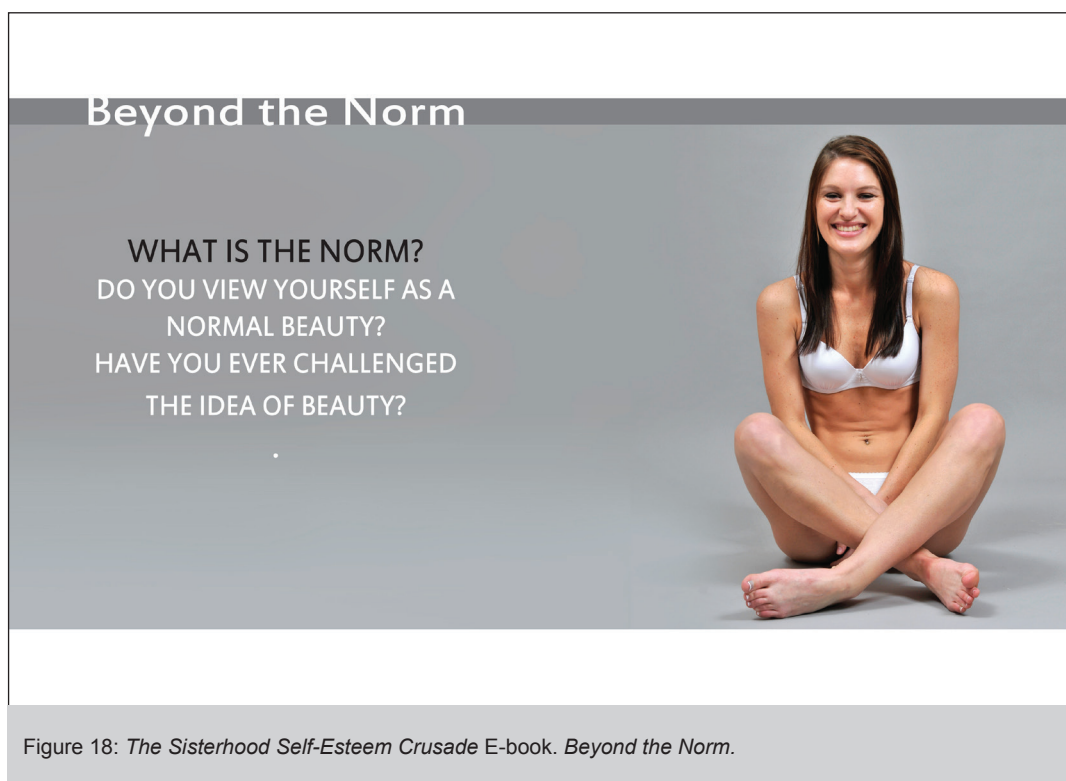


Such solutions are suggested in the next section, *Beyond the Norm. The Building Blocks: The Foundation of Self-Esteem*. This *Chapter* challenges the current ideals and mindsets held by women regarding beauty. It is about redefining what beauty means to women, and possibly changing it to have a positive impact instead of the accepted negative one currently caused by the media.

Understanding *The Building Blocks* (Figure 18) of beauty is crucial in order to open the mind to see *Beyond the Norm*. The importance of media literacy is pertinent in guiding the thoughts of South African women to embrace positive viewpoints regarding their own and peers' self-esteem. For this reason, a simple method of setting specific and measurable goals is suggested in the steps to improving self-esteem. These steps are expanded on in the Love Yourself section.

5.4.3 BEYOND THE NORM

Beyond the Norm (Figure 18) is the second section in *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* E-book. Following from *The Building Blocks* section, this *Chapter's* aim is to trigger a realization within the reader that a standard, single beauty ideal has been established by commercial advertising.



Notions of beauty in South Africa have been affected by international influences as mentioned in *Chapter Two*. The common thread of these influences seems to be the commercial value they hold. The problem with the so-called beauty norm today, is that there is nothing normal about it. It is a manufactured idea that has been around for long enough to make people believe it, because it simple appears to be there all the time. This relates to Berger's (1972) notion of "seeing is believing", discussed in the *Literature Review*.

Breaking through normal beauty ideals found in the media today may lead women to a new found freedom; a new kind of feminism not rooted in suppression but in upliftment, fuelled by the development of women's empowerment in South Africa. This is made clear by the action research results of this research study. Women who were at first scared and reluctant to take part, rose to the challenge, and in doing so helped create a visually striking campaign aimed at boosting their self-esteem with the first step being participation.

The chain reaction continues with their collaborative effort affecting the viewers of this campaign. The bonds of sisterhood established between the participants of the underwear photo shoots, led to an evaluation of self for each women and provides motivation through encouragement from others to invoke acceptance within themselves.

5.4.4 LOVING YOURSELF

Loving yourself (Figure 19) is the final section of the E-book. In this *Chapter*, the readers are encouraged to take all the ideas mentioned in the previous *Chapters* and apply them to their own individual selves. As we have seen in the response from the online survey and individual interviews, it can be easy for women to be unhappy when they compare themselves with other women. Whilst keeping the notion of the female gaze in mind, this campaign aims not to encourage looking at other women from one's own shadow but to accept other women and oneself as standalone entities.

The key to enticing women to try to take the mental journey to self-acceptance is to give them the tools and the room to do it. This E-book serves as an educational tool supporting the reader in understanding that they do not have to be confined to a singular beauty ideal. Wolf states,

“[a] woman-loving definition of beauty supplants desperation with play, narcissism with self-love, dismemberment with wholeness, absence with presence, stillness with animation. It admits radiance: light coming out of the face and the body, rather than a spotlight on the body, dimming the self. It is sexual, various, and surprising. We will be able to see it in others and not be frightened, and able at last to see it in ourselves”. (1991:291)

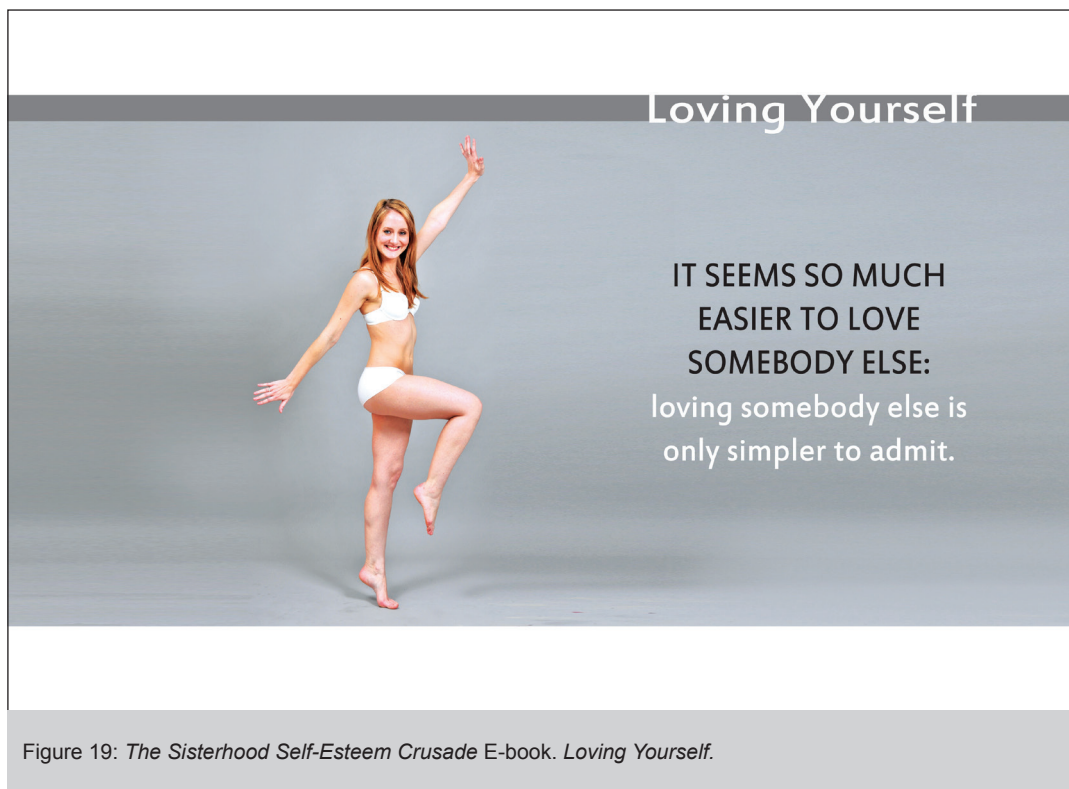


Figure 19: *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade E-book. Loving Yourself.*

Endless influences from the media will always make it difficult to be mentally strong when it comes to beauty (Berger 1972), but with the resources at hand to understand how the advertising industry works, the road to loving one-self becomes a little bit simpler and more accessible. The enormity of self-esteem related concerns may be impossible to eradicate, but a commitment to the cause and persistence in improving healthcare amongst women is certain to make a change as I have seen with my photo shoot participants.

In a global poll conducted by *Gallup*, a web based company in the United States;

the company concluded that Nigerians have an optimism rating of 70% compared to Britons who scored -44%. Fifty three countries were involved in the poll, with Nigeria scoring the highest. Adewunmi, a journalist for *The Guardian* United Kingdom notes,

“[t]here’s a spirit of entrepreneurship – people seem bewildered if you admit a lack of ambition. Nigerians want to go places and believe – rightly or wrongly – that they can. That drive and ambition fuels their optimism; they’re working towards happiness, so they’re happy”. (2011:4)

The relevance of this poll to my study seems ironic in that another African country, known for its troubled past, should be the place where the happiest people reside. With this knowledge at hand it seems evident that the same should be possible for South Africans.

The final word in *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* E-Book is an acknowledgement that overcoming self-esteem certainly is not an easy undertaking. But within the bigger picture of people’s lives, it is certainly a positive endeavor. The only way to change a commercial beauty mind set, is to take action.

In order to take action, a few steps towards a happier self are suggested. Women have adapted well to the beauty industry created by the media. This adaptation may be viewed simply as habit. A habit is “a thing you do regularly and repeatedly” (OED 2007:415). According to Gillian Butler and Tony Hope’s text, *Managing your mind: the mental fitness guide*, there are 6 steps to breaking a habit that correspond to this self-esteem awareness campaign. The 6 steps are as follows:

1. Decide to change (Set measurable, specific goals)
2. Use awareness training
3. Devise strategies to help stop the habit
4. Replace the habit with an alternative one
5. Persist by being consistent and keeping track of progress
6. Learn to manage lapses

Another step that could be added to the above list is to reward oneself for positive

change. Sue Patton Thoele (2001:6) notes in her text *The courage to be yourself: A women's guide to emotional strength and self-esteem*, that “the beauty of finding the courage to face our fears and become ourselves, is that everybody eventually wins”. The notion of everybody winning, relates directly to an action research approach as mentioned previously, it is participative and collaborative.

A campaign to boost self-esteem might seem like a cliché at first. It might be seen as something that's been done before, or something that couldn't have an effect on women. But these criticisms are as easy to believe as the stereotypes that accompany beauty ideals across the world. Simply accepting a problem will not bring forward a solution. The purpose of this study holds value in analysing the position of South African women specifically, as their own struggle to democratic right has affected their beauty realisation as shown in the data gathered from the research methodology.

Wolf (1991) mentioned earlier, beauty is like the gold standard, always changing. If the media were to adapt a campaign, such as *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade*, where they were to encourage women to love themselves, a partial effective solution to feminist ideas around beauty magazines could be achieved. Suggesting the use of a support system including their ‘sisters’ (other women in their lives) would be at the heart of the solution. These women would then become their weapon in attacking low self-esteem issues.

According to Whitehorne (2007), femininity in the media represents a constant change, as a central concept to the magazine, change is encouraged in all aspects of a woman's life including clothes, lifestyle and friends. With this idea in mind, the central foundation of the applied design would make perfect sense as a change for the better, regarding self-esteem issues.

The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade's foundation remains grounded in the idea that natural beauty has no specific shape or form. In the context of this campaign, beauty as a term may be described as a characteristic that comes from nature and may be seen through as unique qualities. No commercial beauty ideals may be compared to such qualities due to their uniqueness, thus rendering commercial beauty ideals as trends.

5.5 CONCLUSION

The overall message *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* presents is that the key to natural beauty lies in the confidence to be oneself. Certain personality characteristics that are expressed naturally by an individual, suggest a defining aspect of a person's spirit, thus making it a natural part of you.

This applied design campaign is a representation of images of women of all age groups and races. It portrays South African women, showing off their individualism and their natural bodies. The images formed a collection of self-esteem building, motivational messages presented as an E-book and a website.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

“A woman-loving definition of beauty supplants desperation with play, narcissism with self-love, dismemberment with wholeness, absence with presence, stillness with animation. It admits radiance: light coming out of the face and the body, rather than a spotlight on the body, dimming the self. It is sexual, various, and surprising. We will be able to see it in others and not be frightened, and able at last to see it in ourselves”. (Wolf 1991:291)

This study set out to explore the representation of beauty ideals of women in the media. Of particular importance was the status of women’s self-esteem in South Africa as images of women developed and changed politically and socially. The empowerment of women made it possible for women to thrive in a work and personal environment. The media played a significant role in educating and informing these women who might not have been exposed to the media so extensively before. In this study the exposure of women to mediated images was shown to have a similar effect on South African women as it has had on women globally, with the emergence of body related issues, such as low-self esteem and eating disorders coming to the forefront.

This study found that ideas surrounding the male and female gaze are central to such body related issues, especially to low self-esteem. Both the female and male gaze play a role in the way men and women see each other and themselves. The result may be negative with men objectifying women and women seeing themselves the way men do (Berger 1972). It became clear that the media fuelled this singular view of women. The bombardment of media images was shown to negatively influence women’s notions of self. The constant exposure to these images and aspiring to celebrity lifestyles, appears to have affected women’s views on acceptable physical appearance, with some even considering plastic surgery. The digital enhancement of media images has distorted the views of notions of ‘real beauty’.

This project has indicated that throughout history, beauty ideals have changed and that the stereotypical roles women have conformed to need to be questioned. Issues such as ‘the thin body ideal’ and ‘the thin is good assumption’ were at the forefront of

women's health concerns. The debate surrounding the impact of the media causing body dissatisfaction that led to eating disorders and even depression continues.

This study investigated the ways in which the newfound gender equality afforded South African women the opportunity to express themselves through their appearance. The undeniable influence of the media in magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* on these women could be seen as imagery as the new democracy evolved. Descriptions of these images provided evidence of the upliftment of women in South Africa, as well as the exposure to health concerns such as eating disorders and feelings of low self-esteem. As noted by Szabo and Allwood (2004), the first occurrences of eating disorders were recorded amongst Black women in 1995, only a year after democracy was introduced (Szabo and Allwood 2004). It is important to be aware of this major health concern that possibly arose due to the impact of mediated images. In just a year, this political shift defined not only an important historic event for the country of South Africa, but also influenced the health of its women.

In order to find out more about the socially constructed ideals of beauty and women's body issues, I adopted an action research approach to point out women's perception of beauty in South Africa. The data gathering process included an online survey, individual interviews, an in-depth case study and a photo shoot. These methods were valuable in discovering the attitudes of both men and women in a South African context. The paradox is that I encountered men who could understand the need to increase women's self-esteem but admitted to enjoying seeing "young, beautiful" women in the media. On reflection, I have learnt that there is a clear need for action to be taken against the rise of body related concerns amongst women of all ages. This study also indicated that it is not only young women who are affected by low self-esteem concerns. Given the overwhelming power of the media, it is difficult to persuade an alternative view on a subject.

It was very important to me to offer a solution to these concerns, even on a small scale, so in answer to this need, *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* was created. This campaign aims to not only create awareness, but to challenge the current notions of beauty in the media and to act as a trigger to shift mind sets regarding acceptable beauty ideals. The images and slogans developed in this campaign were influenced and informed by both the theoretical study and the action research.

It could be argued that the continuing development of women in South Africa, not only opens doors to new lifestyles but also to the dangers associated with media exposure. In a country where education has not been available to many of its citizens, it is pertinent to develop tools that educate young women in order to develop feelings of equality and worthiness. These tools are particularly useful to confront the images that the media bombard women with. Whilst conducting the research mentioned above, I became even more passionate about eradicating women's feelings of doubt regarding their self-worth. I felt that using the naturally occurring bonds between women, a support system could be generated - a sisterhood. Due to the nature of the body shape concerns, the support community would have to be ongoing, and developing to ensure the inclusion of all women. The female form not only changes through history, it changes through a women's life. As her body develops from a young girl, to a teenager, young woman, potential wife and mother, she is affected by her body's appearance and the attention she receives because of it.

With this in mind, it is obvious that the possibility exists to further this study and put it to practical use. As a start, a blog and website where women of all ages may interact with other women, providing a platform to voice their concerns anonymously should they choose. *The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade* functions well as an online campaign, offering accessible information to South African women specifically.

To this end, schools and community centers could become involved in taking initiative to create workshops for women to broaden their understanding of media images. The possibility of introducing media literacy skills during the personality development phase of young girls would be hugely impactful on their lives as women empowered by this knowledge. Instead of bombarding women with mediated images, the opposite would be true for this study's applied design campaign. The need for a support community extends far beyond this masters project, requiring bigger resources to bring practical knowledge about body related concerns to communities on a national level.

As Naomi Wolf started *The Beauty Myth* with a thought from Virginia Wolf, so I end this study keeping in mind that, "[i]t is far more difficult to murder a phantom than a reality" (Cited in Goldman 1998:63).

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APPENDIX A: ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Print Form

Submit by Email

Email Survey: Images of women in South Africa

Hello ladies, my name is Anneli de Beer, I am a Graphic Design Masters student in the Department of Visual Communication Design at the Durban University of Technology. I am currently researching the portrayal of beauty through images of women found in South African magazines. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey so that I might gain an insight into South African women's opinions. The survey will be used for research purposes only. Your privacy will be respected at all times. No names will be mentioned, so please feel free to express your real thoughts. Thank you!

Please answer the questions below by ticking the box:

1) How old are you?

☐ 18-25 ☐ 26-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46-55 ☐ 56 +

2) Do you buy women's magazines on a regular basis?

☐ Yes ☐ No

3) If yes, which ones do you buy?

☐ Cosmopolitan ☐ Elle ☐ Glamour ☐ Other

4) Have you ever heard of Dove Soap's campaign for "Real Beauty"?

☐ Yes ☐ No

For those of you who haven't heard of the campaign: the aim of the campaign is to boost self-esteem of everyday women across the globe by using "real women" with different figure types in advertisements.

5) Do you think there is a need for a campaign like the Dove Campaign For Real Beauty specifically aimed at South African women?

☐ Yes ☐ No

6) If yes, can you say why there is a need for such a campaign?

7) As a South African woman, how would you rate yourself in terms of how you think you look?

☐ Beautiful ☐ Average ☐ Ugly

8) Are there any parts of your body that you would like to change?

☐ Yes ☐ No

9) If yes, which parts?

10) Do you feel that images in fashion magazines influence you?

☐ Yes ☐ No

11a) Do you think the media plays a role in negatively influencing women's perceptions of themselves?

☐ Yes ☐ No

11b) What other media has an influence upon the way you look at yourself?

☐ Movies ☐ TV series ☐ Music Videos ☐ Internet Sites

12) Do you as an individual sometimes wish you could look like your favourite celebrity?

☐ Yes, I'd like to be admired for my looks

☐ No, I am happy with the way I look

13) Which celebrity do you think represents true beauty?

14) Do you think it is necessary to be thin in order to be beautiful?

☐ Yes ☐ No

15) What do you think of the recent trend to be super skinny?

☐ I would like to be part of it

☐ It is ridiculous, I'd rather be healthy

☐ I don't care

Thank You for your participation!

Comments
(optional)

APPENDIX B: ONLINE SURVEY RESULTS

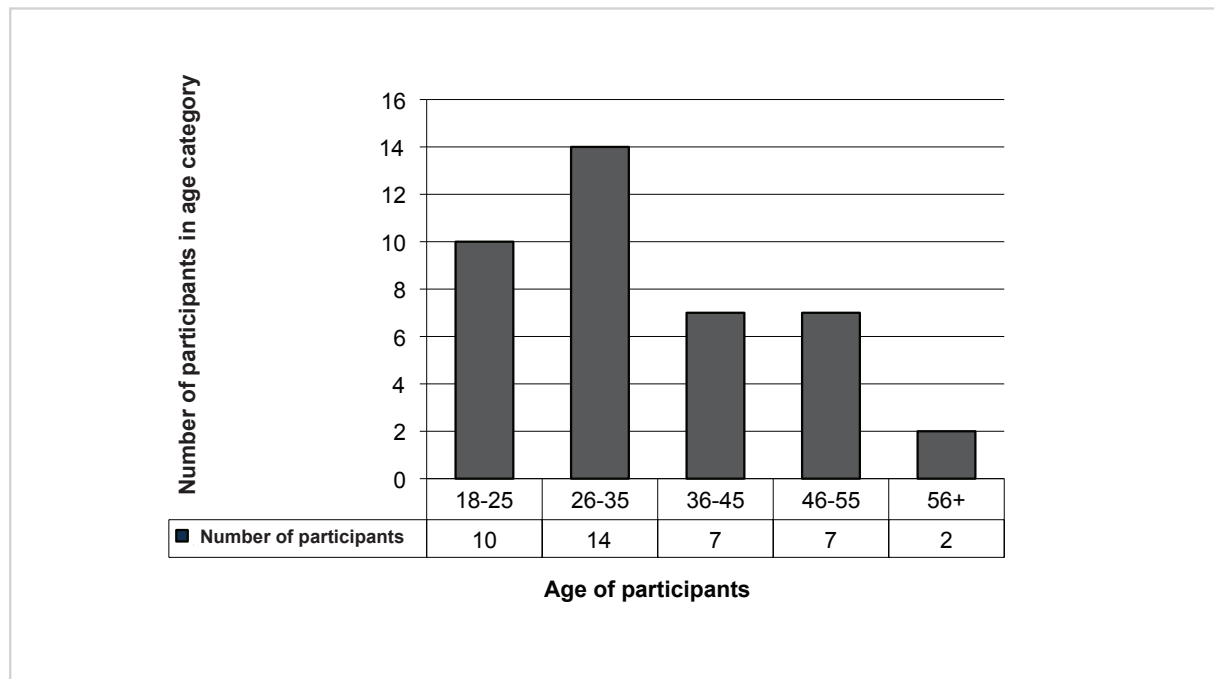


Table 1: Question 1: How old are you?

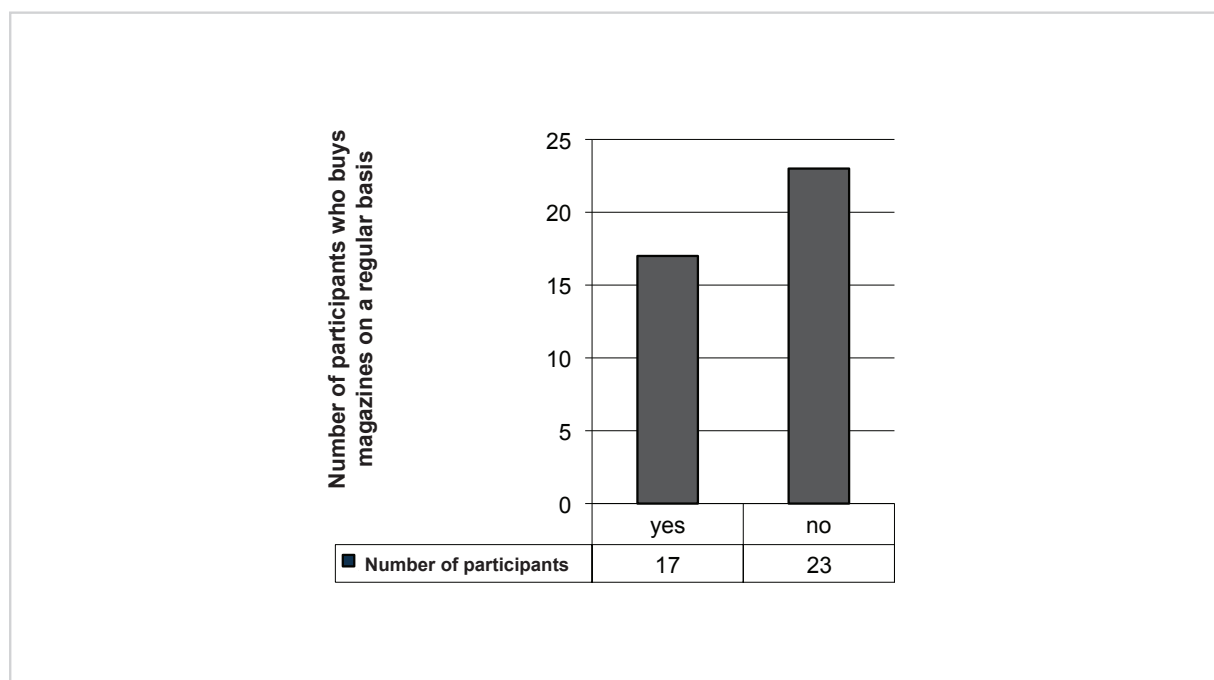


Table 2: Question 2: Do you buy women's magazines on a regular basis?

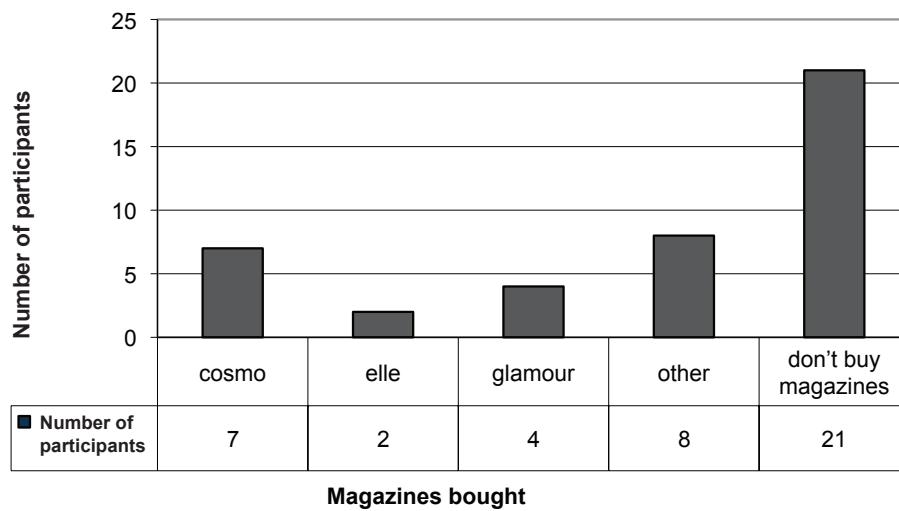


Table 3: Question 3: If yes, which ones do you buy?

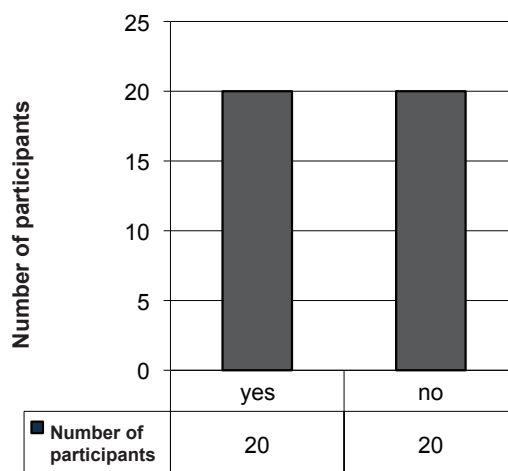


Table 4: Question 4: Have you ever heard of *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty*?

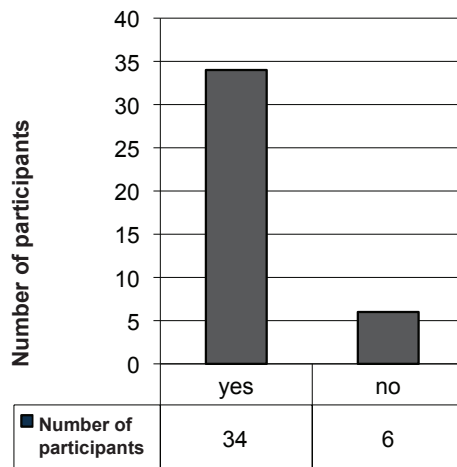


Table 5: Question 5: Do you think there is a need for a campaign like *The Dove Campaign For Real Beauty* specifically aimed at South African women?

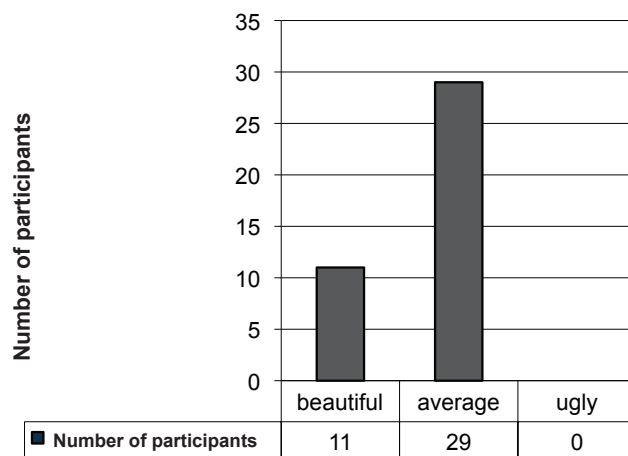


Table 6: Question 7: As a South African woman, how would you rate yourself in terms of how you think you look?

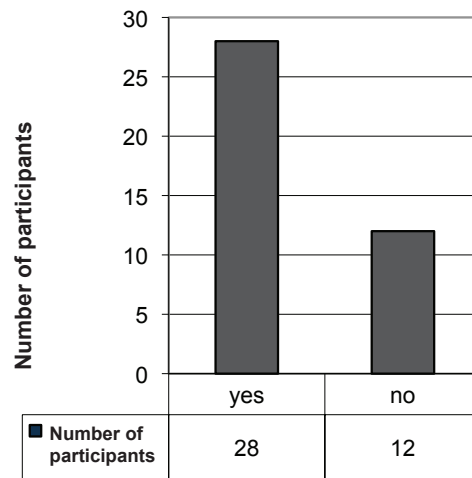


Table 7: Question 8: Are there any parts of your body that you would like to change?

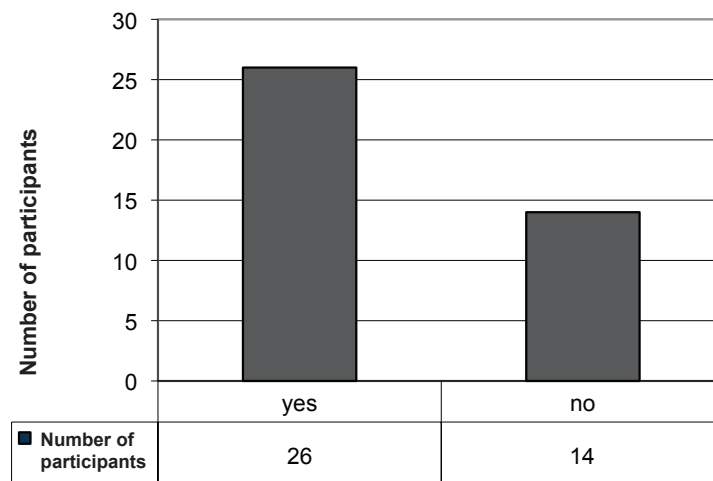


Table 8: Question 10: Do you feel that images in fashion magazines influence you?

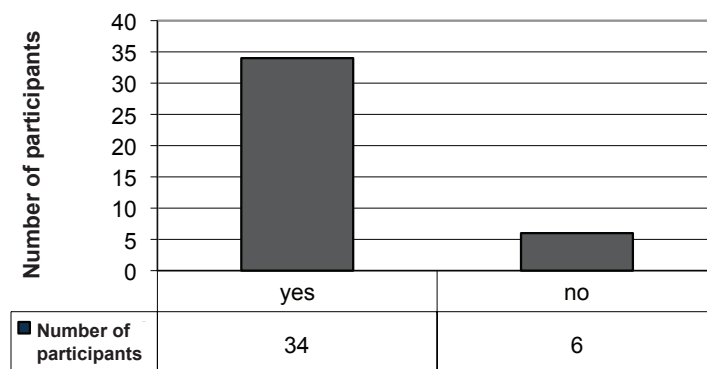


Table 9: Question 11a: Do you think the media plays a role in negatively influencing women's perceptions of themselves?

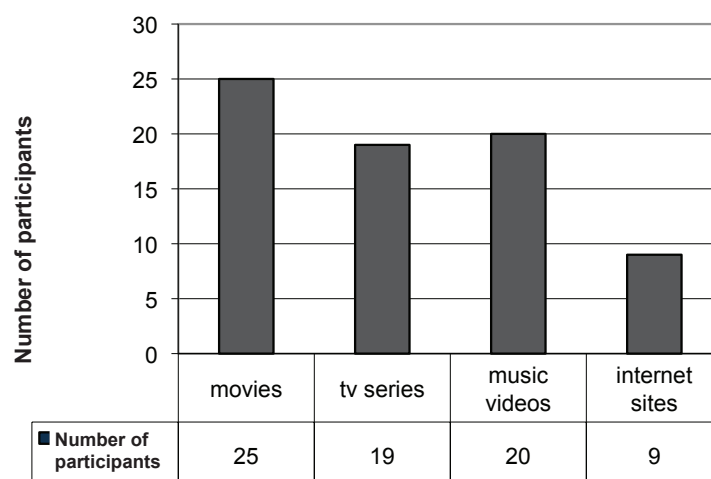


Table 10: Question 11b: What other media has an influence upon the way you look at yourself?

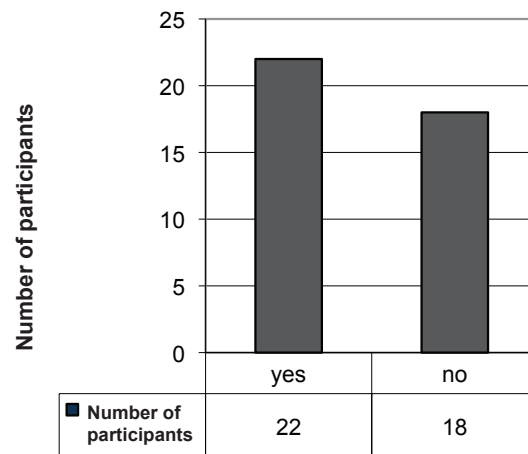


Table 11: Question12: Do you as an individual sometimes wish you could look like your favourite celebrity?

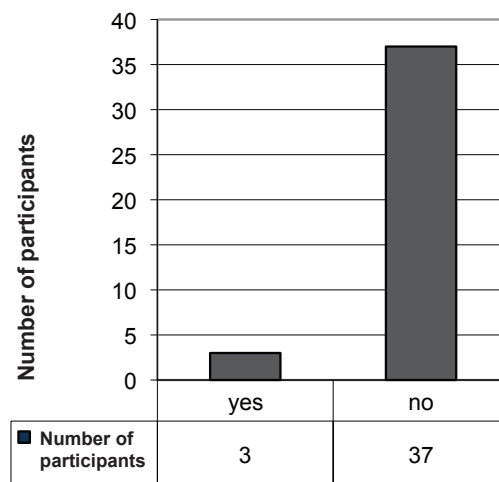


Table 12: Question 14: Do you think it is necessary to be thin in order to be beautiful?

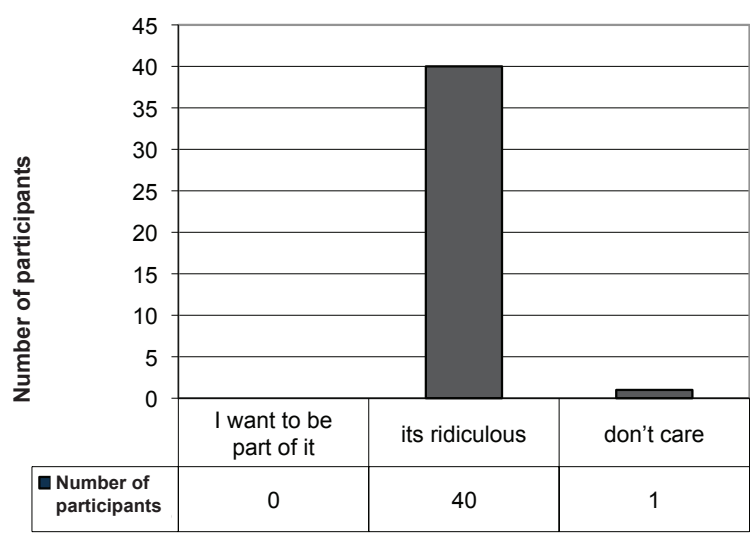


Table 13: Question 15: What do you think of the recent trend to be super skinny?

APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

COUPLES

- 1) Age of both individuals
- 2) Duration of relationship
- 3) Do you read magazines? Which magazines do you read?
- 4) Do you both read women's magazines? Do you read *Cosmopolitan*?
- 5) What are your thoughts surrounding the way *Cosmopolitan* represents women?
- 6) What do you think a perfect woman looks like?
- 7) Do you think magazines play a role in making women want to be perfect?
- 8) Do you think the constant bombarding of images of young, successful and beautiful women affect your relationship in any way?
- 9) Is there any physical trait about each other that you would like to change?
- 10) Show images of celebrities and non celebrities. Ask participants: Who do you think would make a good couple? (If celebrities are paired with celebrities, this could indicate that the race for men and women to look good in order to keep each other's attention is ranked according to their social status).

INDIVIDUALS - WOMEN

- 1) Do you think that women in general have a problem with self-esteem?
- 2) Do you think you would benefit from an awareness campaign to boost self-esteem among women in South Africa?
- 3) If you could change something about yourself that would result in higher self-confidence, what would it be?

- 4) If you think about how *Cosmopolitan* portray women, would you say the magazine is a positive influence?
- 5) Do you compare yourself to the images of the women in magazines?
- 6) Would you suggest to your partner that you want to change yourself to look like magazine images of women?
- 7) Should magazines, in your opinion, feature untouched photos of women?
(without digital enhancement)
- 8) Do you think there should be laws set in place that state the degree to which photos should be re-touched in magazines, to protect women's health?
- 9) What in your opinion makes a woman beautiful?
- 10) Does your partner tell you that you are beautiful?

INDIVIDUALS - MEN

- 1) Do you think that women in general have a problem with self-esteem?
- 2) Do you think your partner would benefit from an awareness campaign to boost self-esteem among women in South Africa?
- 3) If you could change something about your partner that would result in a higher self-confidence what would it be?
- 4) If your partner follows or was to follow *Cosmopolitan* every month, do you think that the way in which women are portrayed in the magazine is a positive influence?
- 5) Do you compare your partner to the images of the women in magazines?
- 6) Would you suggest that your partner make changes to their physical appearance to fit in with magazine images of women?

- 7) Should magazines, in your opinion, feature untouched photos of women?
(without digital enhancement)
- 8) Do you think there should be laws set in place that state the degree to which
photos should be re-touched in magazines, to protect women's health?
- 9) What in your opinion makes a woman beautiful?
- 10) Do you tell your partner that she is beautiful?

APPENDIX D

E-Book Script

THE SISTERHOOD SELF-ESTEEM CRUSADE

EVERYTHING YOU KNOW ABOUT BEAUTY SHOULD BE CHALLENGED:
L'Oreal had this one right: You are worth it, and so are the people you love...

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION
THE BUILDING BLOCKS
BEYOND THE NORM
LOVING YOURSELF
CONCLUSION

INTRODUCTION

The Sisterhood Self-Esteem Crusade is an awareness campaign aimed at promoting feel good feelings among South African women. None of the images used in this E-book, have been digitally enhanced. The women portrayed in this artwork are all 100% natural.

These women prove that you don't need to be a so called 'size zero' (South African size 28) to be beautiful. Such narrow-minded perceptions, lead to unhealthy minds and bodies and may have a negative effect on women. The women bravely show that all body shapes can be attractive.

You might be used to thinking negative thoughts about yourself, sometimes you probably don't even realise that you are doing it. Keep an open mind, and join these 10 ladies on their journey to embracing their natural bodies.

P.S. None of these women are models, and comparisons are not part of this exercise.

KEEP AN OPEN MIND:

To see yourself as an individual is to see yourself as a whole, separate from others.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS

TO CHANGE IDEAS ABOUT BEAUTY, YOU HAVE TO CHANGE WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW, CONSCIOUSLY AND SUB-CONSCIOUSLY.

THINK OF YOURSELF AS AN INDIVIDUAL SOUL

not as:

* a wife

* a mother

* a sister

who are you?

ACCEPTING YOURSELF SHOULDN'T BE TORTURE:

Do you compare yourself to other women? STOP. Who says you aren't as beautiful? You don't have to conform to societal rules.

TO REALLY BE HAPPY, YOU HAVE TO BE YOURSELF:

You will never experience joy while trying to be somebody else. Embrace your own happiness!

BEYOND THE NORM

WHAT IS THE NORM?

DO YOU VIEW YOURSELF AS A NORMAL BEAUTY?

HAVE YOU EVER CHALLENGED THE IDEA OF BEAUTY?

.

YOUR EMOTIONAL STATE SHOULD BE BALANCED:

To remain in harmony with yourself, learn to accept all aspects that define you as an individual.

THERE ARE NO RULES ABOUT BEAUTY:

Your perception of beauty won't be the same as anybody else's, your view is unique. and that is OK!

SHIFT YOUR FOCUS:

if you keep thinking negatively, it will filter through all aspects of your life.

*Stay positive! *Use the law of attraction to draw good things to your life.

UNIFY:

Keeps friends and family structures close as supportive cushions when you need some help - Build a sisterhood.

LOVING YOURSELF

IT SEEMS SO MUCH EASIER TO LOVE SOMEBODY ELSE:

Loving somebody else is only simpler to admit.

EVERYBODY HAS AN INNER SCREEN SIREN:

It's ok to let your eccentric side show.

BREAK THE SELF-HATE HABIT:

Adapt your thoughts to reflect self-love. Adopt these as your mantra.

AGE IS SIMPLY A REFLECTION OF YOUR LIFE EXPERIENCE:

Use your hard earned wisdom to your advantage by portraying your beauty through your life knowledge.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF BEING DIFFERENT:

at different times of live, your beauty ideals will be different, don't try to stay the same forever, it's just not natural.

CONCLUSION

Creating awareness about self-esteem is no easy task, nor is it a walk in a park to pay attention to it when you know yours is not particularly healthy. The leap forward is so important, because at the end of the day, it will affect your mental, emotional and physical self-assessment, leading in turn to either a healthy happy life or to issues related to depression, eating disorders, constant dieting and all round miserable feelings of self worth.

This E-book doesn't justify being obese and doesn't judge being anorexic. It simply strives to increase the happiness of South African women proportional to their self-esteem.

All women deserve to be happy, as you cannot change who you are - this makes you unique. Who wants to be a cookie cut out of somebody else?! Even if you have plastic surgery to look like a celebrity, your life won't change. You won't have the same job, friends, family or individualism, so is it really worth becoming a clone? Don't settle for second best when it comes to your own personal wellbeing.

Some Advice...

BEING YOURSELF SHOULD BE FUN!

Beauty should be a source of inner strength, Allow yourself to let go of all your worries now and then.

THE KEY TO NATURAL BEAUTY, IS TO BE YOURSELF:

Whether natural to you, is to be dressed up or down. Those unique characteristics that come naturally to you, make you beautiful.

ALWAYS STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF.

BE YOURSELF,

YOU ARE NATURALLY BEAUTIFUL

JUST THE WAY YOU ARE.