

# THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE REVITALISATION OF FEMINISM AND COLOURED WOMEN'S IDENTITY POLITICS

by

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## DECLARATION

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Charndré Emma Kippie

April 2019

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the movement towards cultivating a democracy since 1994, South Africa is a country which still faces many challenges as a result of political and racial remnants of the Apartheid regime. With Apartheid's segregating classification system etched in the minds of South Africans, a sense of hierarchal and binary thinking is still present. Today, Coloured women remain a marginalised demographic, due to longstanding racial and cultural stereotypes, deprecating visual representations, and media's capacity to perpetuate and normalises these limiting typecasts. This marginalised demographic has recently begun to re-negotiate female Coloured identity norms across contemporary visual platforms of representation, specifically within the social media space.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the postfeminist digital manifestation and reproduction of cultural, racial, sexual, gendered and religious identities within the social media domain, with specific reference to three Coloured South African women, namely Patty Monroe, Aisha Baker and Kim Windvogel. This study is approached from a mixed-methods perspective, employing an interpretive process of gathering and analysing data. This process involved a voluntary electronic survey which circulated online via snowball sampling methods, visual content analyses of social media posts, and structured interviews with case study individuals.

The investigation highlighted themes regarding self-representation and self-presentation, submission and subversion, and agency, sexual responsibility and gender. This exploration of online visual depictions of Coloured South African women is an attempt to ascertain the existence of a postfeminist rhetoric that is a revitalisation (rather than a rejection) of the traditional feminist ethos. Issues surrounding private and public, exposure and concealment, and sexuality and modesty also emerged during the data analysis process.

My findings include that a postfeminist rhetoric, which is an acknowledgement of and expansion upon classic feminist ideals, does exist. Imagery that employs this rhetoric provides a new means of representivity and an affirmative narrative for Coloured South African women; a contemporary way of seeing beyond longstanding, limiting racial and cultural representations. This rhetoric is arguably progressing towards a more intersectional approach to Coloured womanhood. It is further suggested that that an intersectional feminism, which adopts a sense of interdisciplinarity, be the next wave of enquiry when researching the Coloured demographic.

## OPSOMMING

Suid-Afrika poog sedert 1994 om ‘n demokrasie in stand te hou, maar ten spyte hiervan, word die land steeds daaglik met talle kwessies van die verlede gekonfronteer. Hierdie kwessies hou verband met die politiek en rassisme wat gepaardgaan met die Apartheidsregime. Suid-Afrikaners het steeds ‘n sterk geheue van die segregasie-klassifikasiesisteen van Apartheid wat daartoe bydra dat daar steeds in ons hedendaagse samelewing ‘n teenwoordigheid van hiërargiese en binêre sieningswyses is. In die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing word kleurlingvroue as gevolg van jarelange rasse- en kulturele stereotipes steeds as ‘n gemarginaliseerde gemeenskap gesien. Dit word versterk deur verskeie visuele uitbeeldings wat afkeurend van aard is en die media wat die beperkende rolle van kleurlingvroue normaliseer. Ondanks die struikelblokke het hierdie gemarginaliseerde gemeenskap onlangs begin om hierdie identiteitsnorme van kleurlingvroue deur middel van kontemporêre visuele platvorms binne die sosialemedia-ruimte te herskep.

Die doel van hierdie studie is om ondersoek in te stel na die postfeministiese digitale manifestasies en hoe kulturele, rasse, seksuele, geslag en religieuse identiteite binne die sosialemediagemeenskap herskep word. Die drie kleurlingvroue wat die fokus van hierdie studie is, is Patty Monroe, Aisha Baker en Kim Windvogel. Die studie word benader vanuit ‘n gemengde-metode studieperspektief en behels ‘n interpretatiewe proses van dataversameling en –analise. ‘n Vrywillige elektroniese opname wat aanlyn via ‘n sneeubal-streekproef gesirkuleer het, asook visuele inhoudsanalises en gestruktureerde onderhoude met die betrokke individue word by dié proses ingesluit.

Hierdie studie beklemtoon verder verskeie kwessies soos selfuitbeelding en –aanbieding, onderdanigheid en ondermyning, en seksuele verantwoordelikheid en geslag. Die ondersoek na aanlyn visuele uitbeeldings van kleurlingvroue in die Suid-Afrikaanse gemeenskap poog om die bestaan van ‘n postfeministiese retoriek as ‘n herlewing — eerder as ‘n verwerping — van die tradisionele, feministiese etos vas te stel.

Tydens die data-analise proses is verskeie ander kwessies aangeraak wat handel oor privaatheid en publiek, blootstelling en verbloeming, en seksualiteit en diskresie. Die bevindings van hierdie studie is dat ‘n postfeministiese retoriek, wat ‘n erkenning en uitbreiding van klassieke feministiese ideale is, steeds bestaan. Beelde wat hierdie retoriek bewerkstellig bied ‘n nuwe manier van

teenwoordigheid en ‘n regstellende narratief vir Suid-Afrikaanse kleurlingvroue aan — ‘n hedendaagse manier om verby jarelange, beperkende rasse- en kulturele uitbeeldings te kyk. Hierdie retoriek is sistematies besig om te ontwikkel tot ‘n interseksionele benadering van kleurling vroulikheid. Verder word voorgestel dat interseksionele feminisme, wat ‘n gevoel van interdisiplinariteit gee, die volgende groot onderwerpskwessie sal wees wanneer daar navorsing gedoen word oor die demografie van kleurlingvroue in Suid-Afrika.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for their continuous assistance and patience; and my immediate family for their unwavering faith in me and words of encouragement.

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>API</b>	Application Programming Interface
<b>CMS</b>	Content Management System
<b>CPT</b>	Cape Town
<b>CTA</b>	Call to Action
<b>HTML</b>	Hyper Text Markup Language
<b>KPI</b>	Key Performance Indicator
<b>PCC</b>	Public Communication Culture
<b>SEM</b>	Search Engine Marketing
<b>SEO</b>	Search Engine Optimisation
<b>SMI</b>	Social Media Influencer
<b>SMP</b>	Social Media Platform
<b>SNS</b>	Social Network Site
<b>UGC</b>	User Generated Content

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

In the past decade, social media<sup>1</sup> has altered the way in which humans connect with and articulate the world around them. The emergence and profound advancement of the World Wide Web and all its pioneering technologies has significantly reformed the media landscape and has embedded a newly found sense of rapid evolution in society (Wigston 2009:30). Together, the internet and social media platforms (SMPs) and practices facilitate social systems of communication and recognition (Crystal 2011:32), thus, modifying traditional human interaction and identity politics. A critical part of how one interacts is the way in which one is perceived publically. Identity is a fundamental concept in contemporary society (Weedon 2004: 1). This is why the question of identity remains at the core of debates between humanitarians and social scientists. One's identity is not a singular entity; it is multi-layered, complex and ever-changing. Apart from our 'unique' biological make up, cognitive capacities and personalities, our identities are "socially, culturally and institutionally assigned" (Weedon 2004: 6) meaning that we are never left untouched by state institutions, society and social and cultural practices; identity is always constructed. Taking this into consideration, one can be left to question: 'Is my identity my own?' and 'How do I reclaim my identity?'

Social media, being a type of digital 'culture' which has its own discourse, provides new regimes which aid image-making and identity negotiation. The reference to social media as a culture uses Stuart Hall's conception, as a cultural theorist, of culture as a "process" (Stuart Hall in Procter

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<sup>1</sup> This media category is always intertwined with discussions about 'social networking sites' (SNSs), such as Instagram and Facebook, which are essentially digital platforms which are providing access to new avenues for identity formation and negotiation. It is, however, important to recognise that social media and social networks are not synonymous terms. In fact, social media is an 'umbrella term' that includes a cluster of internet-based software applications, which include but are not limited to social networking sites. SNSs are innovative online sites on which individuals, who are internet users, can display themselves publicly and manage their social recognition and relationships. With the rising value of smartphone technologies, internet users are evolving into 'smartphone users' who are increasingly utilising SNS-based communication systems, which in turn provides these users with novel sites that cater for their unique impression management, self-presentation, self-expression and self-disclosure needs (Moon [et al.] 2016: 22-23).



2004:1-6).<sup>2</sup> In other words, culture is not singular or static. It involves many facets and is “a critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled” (Hall in Procter 2004:1). To apply Hall’s notion of culture to social media suggests that social media may be used for such social action and intervention, whether employed as a pedagogical tool for teaching society about marginalised identities or as a mass medium for self-expression and self-representation. For example, social media platforms that encourage mass production and dissemination of user-generated content (UGC) that is photographic, such as Tumblr and Instagram,<sup>3</sup> have allowed women and queer communities to disclose information publically regarding a range of praxes, identities and cultural productions that exist in their respective social groupings. By doing this, SMPs help to dislocate existing malign norms of representation,<sup>4</sup> create and transmit new discourse and equip marginalised groups with the agency to execute their own will as the ‘other’, within the confines of a mainstream, digital space (Fink & Miller 2014:614-615). Such agency allows marginalised communities to obtain power and a sense of belonging<sup>5</sup> through discourses that are symptomatic of their struggle against the strict binaries (which pervade their communities, and overall society, relating to gender and sexuality). Perhaps this is why, in gaining access to these new regimes of identity mediation, electronically-mediated communication has become increasingly popular in the last decade.

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<sup>2</sup> A prominent founding figure of Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall discusses the term ‘culture’ as a political practice and theoretical category. Hall insists that culture can never simply be reduced to mere politics. “Culture is a site of ongoing struggle that can never be guaranteed for one side or the other” (Procter 2004:1-2). Hall suggests that culture is polygonal; an ongoing process “exposing the relations of power that exist within society at any given moment in order to consider how marginal, or subordinate groups might secure or win, however temporarily, cultural space from the dominant group” (Procter 2004:2).

<sup>3</sup> Internet linguist, David Crystal, refers to these social media platforms as digital “outputs” (2011:9-10) which accelerate communication and stand as Internet discourses, such as an email or blog, and can be distinguished by its fundamental stylistics, appearance and sociolinguistics.

<sup>4</sup> Social media allows marginalised groups to create what is known as a concentrated “electronic zone” (Werry 1996:47), which can be defined as an online speech community where individuals of similar interests, who support similar ideals or public figures and exchange information and sentiments, convene for the purpose of sharing knowledge and experiences. There are many online communities that are forming, indicating that people are eager to be part of a collective. These online communities are establishing a demarcated space for the creation or re-articulation of self-identification and reception of public recognition.

<sup>5</sup> Cultural theorist, Chris Weedon, insists that within postmodern, post-colonial societies there is an incessant desire lingering; a yearning to be from somewhere, to have roots and a sense of belonging. These are all significant features of one’s pursuit of obtaining a “positive identity” (2004:85-86).

As these pressing questions of identity and recognition have arisen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and marginalised groups have increasingly sought fair and unbiased representation and recognition, dominant ideologies and theoretical frameworks (which have formed the basis for humanity's very understanding of the world) have come under fire for being too narrow, limiting or contradictory. In particular, this study zooms in on the debate regarding the shift from feminism to 'postfeminism'. Feminism has come under attack and has been demarcated as being an outdated, unfashionable term that no longer has any significance (Gamble 2001:43-44) in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is because many theorists (not all) feel that the objectives of the feminist movement have been obtained and that equality and justice have already been achieved for all. This is, of course, not the case. Today, women are still experiencing inequality regarding gender hierarchies, racism, the gender pay gap in the work place, and sexual inferiority, to name a few longstanding social and political injustices. Thus, theorists such as Tania Modleski and Susan Faludi have maintained the idea that postfeminism is superficial, ironic and a type of "pseudo-intellectual critique" (Gamble 2001:5) on the feminist movement due to our contemporary dynamic times. On the other hand, theorists who are open to the ideas of postfeminism, such as Naomi Wolf, Rene Denfeld and Camille Paglia (Gamble 2001:45-46), believe that contemporary times call for the revision and revitalisation of traditional feminist ideals, rather than completely dismissing feminism as a whole. Postfeminism is tilted in favour of liberal humanism, as it "embraces flexible ideology which can be adapted to suit individual needs and desires" (Gamble 2001:44). Thus, it tends to crystallise heavily around concerns regarding autonomy, responsibility, and victimisation. These ideas are favoured by marginalised groups who seek new narratives and imageries, and new ways of seeing and being seen. Thus, feminism is not 'dead' and traditional feminisms can be both critiqued and celebrated. New strategies are needed for contemporary life and this is why traditionalistic feminisms need to evolve to a certain degree. And it is vital that women, in particular, innovate and "advance their cause into the next millennium" (Gamble 2001:54).

The main theme which emerges in this study is social media's potential link to feminist and/or postfeminist ideals and endeavours. In the past, however, most scholarly postfeminist enquiries explored predominantly Western (particularly American) and White popular culture productions. Postfeminism tends to be best understood through investigating popular cultural discourses. For

example, Susan McKenna (2002) focused on the concept of visibility in the popular network series, *Ally McBeal*. Whereas theorists such as Jane Gerhard (2005) and Angela McRobbie (2004) zoom in on the personalities of White female characters from movies such as *Sex and the City* (also a TV series on HBO) and *Bridget Jones's Diary*. In this case, postfeminism could potentially be problematic, in that it is seemingly only applicable to Western, White women. However, this is not necessarily the case. As a flexible analytical framework, postfeminism can also be applied to any popular cultural artefact regarding any 'womxn', from any background and nationality, for the purpose of rigorously delving into identity politics. This underpins the premise for the present study.

## **Aims of the Study**

This South African study aims to investigate and unpack popular social media platforms as systems of self-representation, self-presentation, the new revolutionary roles which women are currently welcoming online, as well as the practices undertaken in their identity formation and negotiation. Thus, the social media practices employed by Coloured<sup>6</sup> South African women is the primary theme for this thesis in order to provide a new avenue for post feminism's framework. The aim is to focus on three case studies of Coloured South African women, namely, Patty Monroe, Aisha Baker and Kim Windvogel. The racial orientation of these women comes as a supplementary theme, due to the fact that scholarly articles and published books fail to cover the South African social media landscape and characteristically elide the Coloured demographic.<sup>7</sup> The aim is to

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<sup>6</sup>It must be understood that the term 'Coloured' is not being used in the Western sense of the term. In the West, the word 'coloured' is used to identify people of colour, specifically African Americans. In South Africa, however, 'Coloured' is a racial categorization which was formed during Apartheid. This racial category was allocated to people who were not 'white enough' and not 'black enough'. Thus, it was a category of difference and negation. The term has many negative connotations attached to it that still pervades contemporary South Africa. Inferiority has also been ascribed to this 'othered' racial and social identity because during Apartheid the existence of such ethnic hybridity was unsolicited. One's 'colouredness' confines one's options for socio-political action and instills much vexation and hostility within this marginalised group (Adhikari 2006:467-468).

<sup>7</sup> Due to the subjective tone of historical inquisition, and the long-lasting and greatly politicised clashes about the essence of Coloured identity, it's not unexpected that there is still much discordance surrounding Coloured identity within historiography or that particular authors display a certain degree of uncertainty regarding the issue. "Historical writing on the Coloured community also reflects the hegemony of racial thinking with regard to Coloured identity. The idea that Colouredness was the product of miscegenation was so deeply entrenched in South African society that nearly all people, including academics and radical polemicists, accepted this assumption until the latter phases of the apartheid era" (Adhikari 2005:12).

develop an efficacious response to the existing challenges that Coloured women currently face in the South African context due to the existing stereotypes and derogatory visual representations that have been socially and politically normalised.

It is intended that the results of this new media research will contribute to social and cultural development and re-negotiate female Coloured identity norms across contemporary visual platforms of representation, whilst also illuminating the social media and postfeminist stratagems of South African women. This study's specific interest is in how these public figures speak to a new generation of women through social media. In addition, I intend to redress the discourse deficit in libraries, online search engines and journals, as there is a lack of contemporary knowledge surrounding Coloured culture, its community and its women in current society as most published works are based solely on "South African historiography" (Adhikari 2005:5) and economic factors.

Correspondingly, ethical considerations surrounding privacy, dissemination, and publication of the images and textual information displayed on these women's public online profiles and feeds, have surfaced as a possible avenue for investigation. However, these points have already been dealt with adequately by critics in other fields, such as Mike Thelwall (2011), Carla Mooney (2014) and Thomas Allmer (2015). The focus, therefore, remains on the online strategies employed by South African women as a form of resistance to existing traditional modes of representation and social communication. The scope of this composition, therefore, concentrates on social media as a new, systematic culture of self-representation and identity mediation and its contemporary relevance as dynamic tool for social change and postfeminist undertakings that can strengthen cultural or national belonging.

## **Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

Even though early engagements with social media studies cover a range of themes relating to economics, communications and popular culture, it is evident that the majority of scholarly articles

explore Western or Americanised perspectives. Thus, South Africa has only been granted a sporadic measure of academic attention. Pieter Fourie, an editor and author of various publications on Communication Studies, and Emeritus Professor and Research Fellow at the University of South Africa (UNISA), has written extensively about media formats and communication systems. In *Media Studies Volume 3: Media Content and Media Audiences* (2009), Fourie takes a ‘semiological’ approach to deciphering the social media landscape in the same way as he does traditional media forms (television and print media) however, he applies his knowledge of semiotics differently (2009:41) to social media as it is not a fixed system in the same way as structuralism usually is. His semiotic content analysis is definitely one way of systematically examining social media productions such as visual content and internet linguistics. However, it is less useful when unpacking social media as a ‘culture’, since cultures can often proliferate sporadic processes in which structuralist methodologies may be too rigid. In *Media Studies Volume 4: Social (New) Media and Mediated Communication Today* (2017), the South African context is investigated more rigorously. Pieter Fourie argues that humankind currently lives in an era where the boundary between the private and the public has been blurred (2017:11). Our postmodern society is witnessing the era of a new hybrid and fragmented public that no longer idealises the ‘coherent’ or ‘normative’; charismatic religious groups, activism, terrorism, increased political and economic instability, and most importantly the influence of the millennial generation are all part of our new “redactional (editing), deconstructive society” (Fourie 2017:11-12) that is saturated by commercialism. It is this shift away from essentialism, universalism, totality and historicity that has affected overall public communication. Our society focuses more on random occurrence, the here and now, relativism, neo-conservative thinking and even the metaphysical (Fourie 2017:11). In his latest writings, Fourie (2017:16-17) characterises this new media landscape of postmodern society as being geared towards a multimedia approach that blurs the lines between:

- private and public media, mainstream, community and personal media;
- an increase in democracy, diversity, choice and niche markets;
- the rise of user generated content;
- the creation of new media genres;
- multi-modality and multi-coded communication strategies;
- interactivity between media makers and media users; and

- interconnectivity.

All these elements, in turn, have initiated the new digital ‘public communication culture’ (PCC) that one may currently observe.

From an international point of view, social media has been approached as a breeding ground for narcissism. Jang Ho Moon, Eunji Lee, Jung-Ah Lee, Tae Rang Choi and Yongjun Sung – public relations and advertising theorists – have conducted studies involving the ubiquitous ‘selfie’.<sup>8</sup> Their argument is that selfie-posting behaviours on social media platforms such as *Instagram* increase women’s propensity for narcissistic behaviour (2016:24). Their frequency statistics suggest that women post and regularly change their online profile pictures to obtain a certain level of online acceptance. Thus, these young women are increasingly concerned about their “physical appearance” (Moon et al. 2016:23-24). On the other hand, scholars from The University of Southern Mississippi (Christopher Barry, Hannah Doucette, Della Loffin, Nicole Rivera-Hudson, and Lacey Herrington) suggest that despite the narcissistic inclination, online self-presentation can also be linked to increasing self-esteem (Barry et al. 2015:1-2), rather than merely encouraging psychological pathologies. However, thus far, this has been difficult to prove empirically due to sampling limitations (Barry et al. 2015:9-11).

In business and economic disciplines, social media is discussed as a lucrative marketing and branding device that encourages new consumer-based communications. Scholars, Rendan Liu and Ayoung Suh, recently conducted quantitative research on female ‘style bloggers’, which concludes that social media platforms serve as highly optimal instruments for ‘self-branding’ and could lead to high levels of creativity and self-expression and create new career paths for women:

There is an increasing trend on social media platforms of users trying to market themselves as brands to gain attention and cultural and monetary value, especially among the

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<sup>8</sup>This new photographic category, ‘the selfie’, is essentially “a self-shot photo” (*A brief history of the selfie* 2013) that is shot using a smartphone camera and disseminated on social media platforms. In recent years, the selfie has become mainstream. Today, it is synonymous with contemporary culture and has been documented in multiple academic resources such as the Oxford Dictionary. These innovative photographic self-portraits have become a most customary, homogenised tool for online self-disclosure.

subculture of personal style bloggers. These bloggers are primarily young women who post pictures of their outfits and their possessions and comment on fashion-related issues and products. Due to their large numbers of followers, some well-known style bloggers are influential and attain fame in both online and offline worlds. They enjoy such popularity because social media platforms have established a public persona, where the individual choice, autonomy, empowerment, and independence of women are emphasised (Liu & Suh 2017:12-13).

Jennifer Lueck, who writes for the *Journal of Marketing Communications*, takes this concept further. Lueck suggests that social media has changed the way in which celebrities interact with their fan groups online. The rise of social media Apps and SNSs has led to an increase in fandoms/clubs and celebrity endorsements, adding to the existing scope of celebrity studies. Lueck (2015:92) argues that the social media landscape has allowed for ‘closer’, explicit bonds to form between a celebrity and their audience because of excessive disclosure and the illusive feeling that one is getting to know the so-called ‘true’ personality of the online celebrity figure. This has made it much easier for audiences who follow celebrity culture to be visually persuaded, and companies and brands are latching on to this trend, employing celebrities to endorse more of their products online. When this occurs, celebrities aid in a company’s Search Engine Marketing (SEM) and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO), by tagging and advertising their products effectively for search engines to immediately pick up the brand name – increasing brand visibility and power.

In terms of qualitative studies, many scholarly articles are geared towards investigating themes of social relevance and postfeminism. Whilst many critics doubt social media’s political power, Melissa Brown, Rashawn Ray, Ed Summers and Neil Fraistat, have taken a look at case studies relating to intersectional social media activism (2017:1831). They argued that by having access to these new social media and social network technologies, society now has a renewed capacity to truly establish and manage real-world action geared towards redressing societal issues. Their results concluded that social media initiatives such as the #SayHerName campaign, which utilised hashtags and retweets on the *Twitter* platform, amplified messages “about injustices against Black women” (Brown et al. 2017:1841). In another academic study, Jessica Mclean and Sophia Maalsen (2013:244) argue that social media platforms are critical tools for “feminist revitalisation”, meaning, they serve as a unifying force for the feminist community and cultivate a culture of social awareness. In contrast to this, Hester Baer argues that social media cannot evade a feminist

critique, however, it is in fact a ‘neoliberal’ space that fosters postfeminist sensibility (Baer 2016:20-21). Elif Kavakci and Camille Kraeplin, researchers at Southern Methodist University in the USA, have also argued for social media’s undeniable ‘liberal’ quality. In a recent case study, the two scholars have taken a look at Muslim women and their intimate relationship with ‘hijabi’ fashion, and how these women negotiate an online guise which in fact simultaneously privileges their religious and “fashionable self” (Kavakci & Kraeplin 2017:850-851). In taking a qualitative approach to “netnography, the ethnographic study of online cultures and communities” (2017:857), Kavakci and Kraeplin investigate the connection between the Islamic culture industry and social media practices. After examining online hijabi culture and how Muslim women use the online realm for affirmative cultural and religious negotiation, it became clear to them that:

[W]hile technology may be seen as a positive move forward toward modernising society, it may present challenges to the core values and belief systems of religiously observant Muslims who choose to become part of the online world (Kavakci & Kraeplin 2017:866).

This study indicates that the relationship between social media and traditional religious practices and beliefs is one which is fragile and complex, which still requires a significant degree of inspection and understanding.

In popular culture, magazines such as *Cosmopolitan SA*,<sup>9</sup> have begun to write extensively about social media’s impact on South African society and women. They have dedicated a section of the publication to social awareness and have recently focused on topics such as ‘hashtag activism’ and the South African queer community (Blouse 2018:52-54) by dedicating the entire February 2018 issue to LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex and so on) appreciation. Thus far, it appears that print media in popular formats are undertaking a variety of South African social media themes more often than scholarly authors. It is also evident that there is a lack of writing relating to the intersection between Queer Studies and Social Media Studies.

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<sup>9</sup> This print publication has been voted “South Africa’ Best Women’s Magazine” (2017) largely due to its diverse engagement with issues relating to women’s positions in various social and cultural groups.



In investigating literature that deals with social media studies, it has become clear that each study is context-specific. Quantitative studies concentrate on posting behaviours and the frequency of audience responses, whilst qualitative studies address particular demographics and singular social media platforms of SNSs, making it difficult to generalise findings. Perhaps when unpacking social media, it is essential to acknowledge that it is an intercultural, multi-layered space that is inclusive of many disciplines. Thus, it could be suggested that a mixed-methods research design is implemented, which will allow qualitative findings to elaborate on and give insight to quantitative data. In this way, a mixed-methods study could provide research that is integrated, cross-validated and of a broader scope. As a consequence of there being a lack of local engagement with social media beyond journalistic assessments, this researcher has relied significantly on free-standing authors who are outside explicit social media studies or that otherwise speak to a largely Western audience to address the intersection between social media and women.

‘Revitalisation’, ‘agency’ and ‘Colouredness’ are key terms used throughout this study. Thus, it is important that I prescribe a working definition for each term and how it is employed within this text. The term revitalisation is a concept associated with the idea of infusing something with new life and vigour; it implies that a revival will take place. For this study, I make use of Jessica Mclean and Sophia Maalsen’s definition from the text *Destroying the Joint and Dying of Shame? A Geography of Revitalised Feminism in Social Media and Beyond* (2013). Mclean and Maalsen suggest that the revitalisation of feminist thought be a renewal and reinvigoration of feminist ideals and discourse so as to create a feminism that is relevant to the 21st century. In this case, revitalisation can be outlined as a kind of resurgence or ‘revival’ of ideals and discourse.

Agency is a complex term that is often used to glibly. Much of the friction found in 21st century theories of human agency is similar to the Enlightenment debate regarding whether “instrumental rationality or moral and norm-based action is the truest expression of human freedom” (Emirbayer & Mische 1998:964). Emirbayer & Mische emphasise the “reconstructive, (self-) transformative potentialities of human agency” (1998:1012). Simply put, agency relates to the claiming of a

freedom to make rational choices for yourself, at your own will. Also imperative to this study, is the idea of ‘religious agency’. Theorist Laura Leming defines religious agency as “as a sociological concept providing a lens that sharpens our understanding of the ways that individuals claim and enact a meaningful religious identity” (2007:73-74). For Leming, having religious agency implies enacting a specific religious identity via “emotional, intellectual, and behavioural strategies, thereby enabling individuals to negotiate overlapping and valued identities. These strategies emerge from specific social contexts and are categorised as strategies of gaining voice, negotiating place and space, and flexible alignment” (Leming 2007:73-74). This working definition is vital when discussing Aisha Baker in Chapter 3.

When discussing ‘colouredness’ throughout the study, what is being referred to is a fixed, stereotypical set of qualities that has been ascribed to the Coloured community as a result of essentialism and “racial and ethnic heterogeneity” (Petrus & Isaacs-Martin 2012:95). According to a study by Theodore Petrus and Wendy Isaacs-Martin, conducted via a ‘symbolological’ perspective, these stereotypical qualities include being “particularly prone to laziness, alcoholism, gangsterism, violence and drug addiction, as well as not having any recognised culture or language of their own” (2012:88). Therefore, when the term ‘colouredness’ is used, it evokes a sense of confinement and negation.

In an effort to delineate and unpack social media as culture of digital communities, this study adopts critical interdisciplinary writings of authors such as Stuart Hall (in Procter 2004), and Chris Weedon (2004) whose ideas on traditionalist conceptions of culture, deconstructing popular culture and identity offer a springboard from which to engage with the social media environment as a space for intercultural gatherings and online social cohesion. Also adopted were the ideas of James Young (2005) and Richard Rogers (2006) regarding cultural appropriation. Although it is hoped to refrain from adhering to an effusively structuralist or Saussurian framing of social media practices, ‘the visual’ will be addressed and therefore the study will delve into semiotics by applying critical concepts such as the ‘sign’, ‘codes’, ‘meaning’ and ‘ideology’ to an analysis of SMP in an attempt to examine and critique emergent visual and linguistic material. In terms of analysing online semantic content, however, the work of linguistic specialist David Crystal (2011)

was absolutely imperative for this study. The contributors who unpacked social media ‘citizenship’ in *DIY citizenship: Critical making and social media* (Ratto & Bollo (eds) 2014), namely, Matt Ratto, Megan Boler, Steve Mann, Red Chidgey, Kate Orton-Johnson, Chris Atton and Graham Meikle – have provided important concepts for analysing online behaviour.

To engage adequately with the aesthetic regime and visual content of social media, it becomes essential to address the photographic discipline. While this study is of quite a contemporary, postmodernist nature, involving the latest technological trends and practices, key works will be referenced on photography and the self by Susan Sontag (1977) and Angela Kelly (2003). Their research is essential for the historical positioning of photography and the significance of the medium itself. Self-portraiture has transformed over the past 20 years in that the notion of mass production and rapid online dissemination has completely changed the human propensity for disclosure. Photography which lives online is an all-new type. This also makes the contemporary writings of photographic theorists such as Martin Lister (ed.) (1995) and Don Slater (ed.) (1995) equally vital to this study.

Another discipline that feeds into social media, particularly with regard to Patty Monroe and Aisha Baker, is that of ‘celebrity studies’. As this is an investigation of three different online positions which women are undertaking, the subsidiary theme of celebrity comes into play. Two important authors, Chris Rojek (2001, 2006, 2012) and Graeme Turner (2004, 2006, 2010)<sup>10</sup> have explored celebrity as a type of constructed identity which humans assume in society. Turner’s ideas on the ever-increasing visibility of the “ordinary person” (2006:153) and the type of empowerment and enfranchisement that comes with his notion of “celebratisation” (2010:2-3), are worthy concepts when dealing with influential online figures that have resorted to employing social media platforms as sites of commodification and consumption. Rojek, however, provides a rather diagnostic perspective of celebrity, in that he foresees the onset of neurotic and obsessive symptoms

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<sup>10</sup> Director of the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies and Professor of Cultural Studies, Graeme Turner is a key contributor to the development of cultural and media studies in Australia. His work contributes to various disciplines, such as communications, history, cultural and media studies, film studies and literary studies. However, Turner’s primary research interests are “Australian media and popular culture” (2006:165).

derivative of celebrity culture (2012:4-5), due to the rising importance of one's public face and recognition (2001:9) in contemporary society. Along with opportunities for new-found celebrity, social media puts a clear emphasis on social capital as well. David Marshall (1977) discusses the level of power that comes with celebrity and the idea that achieving this power is largely dependent on creating a 'spectacle'. This is true for the social media space, as users act as both audience and consumer, committing to platforms and becoming rather demanding when it comes to online content. These authors lend a hand in characterising social media as a 'para-social' setting which welcomes new 'spectacular' positions such as the Social Media Influencer (SMI) (Freberg et al. 2010: 1-4).

To engage with the gender issues and both feminist and postfeminist nuances observed online, the study turned to the distinguished works of Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2000, 2009). Butler thoroughly engages with women's position in society, which is always convoluted and contested. Social media complicates this position even further, as it invents new avenues for women to pursue, almost enraging traditionalists. Butler's ideas on 'double entanglement' (2000) and gender (1990) shed some light on this predicament. Also vital to the study's analysis of the above-mentioned case study individuals were the feminist writings of Susan Bordo (1989), Naomi Wolf (2002,2008), Joy Watson (2018), Haji Mohamed Dawjee (2018a, 2018b), and Camille Paglia (2018). In terms of the argument that social media is a largely postfeminist space which prompts few feminist visibilities, the study further draws on the literature of Angela McRobbie (2004, 2006, 2007), Sarah Banet-Weiser (2007, 2015), Melissa Burkett and Karine Hamilton (2012), and Rosalind Gill (2007, 2016, 2017) who identify contemporary society with a sense of female success, sensibility and individualisation (McRobbie 2004:255-260). All these nuances stand in agreement with the current social media revolution.

To add an enriched perspective regarding marginalised groups of women, the text *Women of color and social media multitasking: Blogs, timelines, feeds and community* (2015) edited by Keisha Tassie and Sonja Givens, provides a brief outline of contemporary female social media interactions. Jonathan Weinberg (1996) and Marty Fink and Quinn Miller (2014) give some insight into current online 'Queer' practices from a cultural perspective, making this research study even

more interdisciplinary and inclusive of social minorities. However, Queer Theory will not be discussed in depth, but rather as a layer of Kim Windvogel's identity online. The writings of Mikki Van Zyl (2005) and Juan Nel (2005) were also imperative for discussing the South African queer space. In terms of Islamic religion and popular culture, Valentine Moghadam (2002), Myra Macdonald (2006), Na'eem Jeenah (2006), Nafisa Patel (2013), Fatima Seedat (2013a, 2013b), Jameelah Medina (2014), Mehreen Kasana (2014) and Nuraan Davids (2016) provide an imperative foundation for discussing online Islamic audiences, social media strategies and its discontents. When dealing with various ethnic minorities, it is important to adopt some caution. Even though South African author Mohamed Adhikari and Zimitri Erasmus (2000, 2010, 2013) prove to be a crucial contributors to the theme of Coloured identity politics, the ideas of Jason Rodriguez (2006) about adopting so-called 'colour-blindness' when it comes to racial identity are quite interesting for investigating racial affirmation within the South African context. In terms of understanding 'intersectionality', I also turned to the theories of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1991), Leslie McCall (2005), Stephanie Shields (2008) and Ava Vidal (2014), which was essential to concluding this study.

## **Methodology**

As mentioned in the above theoretical framework, this researcher has attempted to integrate pertinent historical and contextual material and this study marks one of the first 'mixed-methods' enquiries into the South African social media landscape and the leading online identities and social roles being assumed by women. These significant texts, as well as various subtexts, have been essential for positioning social media as a relevant contemporary convention. Mixed-methods research is significant for ensuring a moderate level of quality information will emerge from any study. It proves to be best for disciplines within the social sciences as it calls for a synthetic, dynamic frame of mind that is unguarded in the face of novel and innovative ideas (Perry 2012: 135) rather than purely adhering to deterministic readings of data. This study took both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collecting data for this study in an attempt to enrich all quantified data values with insightful graphical media and thematic analyses. However, this study,

incorporates a ‘multi-phase’ research design (three phases respectively) in which quantitative and qualitative data was collected simultaneously for the three female case studies.

In the first case study, structured interviews with Patty Monroe and Kim Windvogel serve as a qualitative measure to gain insight on their individual visions for their social media platforms and self-branding (unfortunately, Baker was unavailable for an interview). A discussion on the thoughts of Monroe and Windvogel on feminism and femininity in a digital era then contributes to contextualising the South African perspective of this study (a copy of the interview consent form, stipulating the terms and requirements, can be viewed in Appendix A).

Secondly, an online survey provides knowledge about the Capetonian online female audience, their interests and social media habits. This survey (see Appendix B) was created using Google Forms, a subdivision of Google technologies which caters for safe public surveying that can easily be quantified and tabulated, allowing as much access as possible to the target sample group – female internet users between the ages of 18 and 28. In terms of consent to use their responses in this research, all participants had access to a copy of the provisos and stipulations (see Appendix C). It must be stressed that the participation was voluntary and participants could recommend the survey to other potential respondents, by sharing the survey link on social media platforms or forwarding the email invitation (see Appendix D). Respondent names are not to be used for the study as all responses were aggregated and remain anonymous. As an incentive to attain a large enough sample to complete the survey electronically, participants automatically qualified for a prize draw for which their email addresses were collected.

In terms of quantitative data collection and analysis, an attempt was made by the researcher to make use of the most current and relevant Application Programming Interfaces (APIs), which are analytic sites that automatically evaluate public social media feeds and profiles, using the URL page (for instance, they do the job of human counting faster and more effectively by cleaning and reading the social media script in a matter of minutes). Since Monroe, Baker and Windvogel are prominent public figures, their social media content is publically disclosed and easily accessible

for analysis which proved to be convenient in terms of time constraints. Finally, it must be stressed that data collected is based solely on real-time readings.

In the case of Monroe, this study will turn to Twitter analytics to conduct a quantitative data collection of this subject's dominant social media platform. An API by the name of Social Bearing, a free analytics tool which conducts a real-time Twitter search of any public account, provides a comprehensive outline of audience demographics, sentiments and interests, top content and top hashtags and a geographic analysis of keywords used (*Social Bearing*, 2018), which is key to contextualising Patty's celebrity and fandom behaviours. Then this study's focus moves on to a visual analysis of Monroe's popular music video *Reminiscing* (2017), taking careful consideration of elements such as narrative, *mise-en-scene*, body movement and gestures and song lyrics. This qualitative analysis provides valuable insight to her brand of celebrity, femininity image-construction, public performance and development of para-social relationships with her audience.

A systematic approach to sampling was taken to conduct a thematic analysis of Baker's blog, *Baked Online*. This approach was based on Baker's four main content categories used – fashion, health and beauty, lifestyle and family. One blog post was selected for analysis from the following categories:

- a fashion blog from the period of January – April 2017;
- a beauty blog from the period of May – August 2017;
- a lifestyle blog from the period of September – December 2017; and
- a family blog from January – April 2018.

Each blog was analysed based on content, brand affiliation and call to action (CTA). Each analysis was carefully tabulated and inferences were made. In order to conduct a visual and thematic analysis of Baker's dominant social media platform, Instagram, a systematic approach was taken to sampling by following Bornman's (2009:436) method of gathering a systematic sample<sup>11</sup> of

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<sup>11</sup> Also referred to as 'interval sampling', which is a measure put in place to avoid any "human bias" (Bornman 2009: 439-440).

posts. Therefore, from Baker's Instagram account, a time frame of one year was selected (from February 2017 to January 2018) and one post from each month of the year was chosen. This process yielded 12 posts for examination. The posts were then partitioned into the categories based on textual elements, namely captions, and also visual elements of still images and videos. The former includes hashtags (#), affiliated brand(s), season or holiday and a call to action (CTA). The latter involved the type of content and subject matter. The captions were then examined to allocate positive or negative framing. Visual analysis, which employed a semiotic approach, included various categories, such as type of visual, typography, product placement, colour and composition, emotional appeal, human presence, activity and effectiveness.

Social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook provide on-board basic quantitative statistics based on the amount of followers, post 'likes', and content posted on public figures. However, the API by the name of Sociograph.io proved to be quite instrumental in attaining necessary intermediate information in the case of Windgevol's Facebook page, *Blazing Non-Binary*, apart from basic manually collected statistics. In doing a textual analysis of her page, I attempted to pay careful consideration to the celebrity's use of poetry to engage a queer audience, and to examine her captions, audience reactions and comments. Then, to corroborate the textual evidence, a visual analysis was conducted of three individual Instagram feeds which are closely linked to her role as an intersectional feminist, body positivist and social activist, namely the 'FemmeProjects', 'Blazing Non-binary' and 'Kurlykimi' (*Instagram* 2018) accounts. Her choice of having three separated accounts speaks of a construction process of creating a multi-layered queer identity, which proves interesting to dissect for this particular study. The investigation of these three distinct feeds focuses on subject matter, the presence of the nude female body, body posture, composition, colour and use of typography.

## **Chapter Outline**

Owing to the historical, digital, and representational intricacies at work in the social media landscape, this thesis is split into three distinct chapters; each striving to address the significant



roles which South African women are assuming online and the multi-layered nature of emergent identities.

Chapter 2 sketches out the South African celebrity context and elaborates on Monroe's significance in South African popular culture, as a female in a male-dominated industry. This segment zooms in on digital 'celebratisation' and celebrity para-social relationships that are formed online (especially fandoms) by specifically focusing on Twitter, as well as the concept of 'self-presentation'. Here, Monroe's influence on young South African women is defined and illustrated by the manner in which this public figure emanates a version of a postfeminist aesthetic. One theme that underpins this prominently is Monroe's identification with the Coloured community, which directly affects her audience demographics, lyrical choices and sexual self-presentation, and thereby influences the characterisation of the 'Malatjie' fanship and her unique sociocultural identity politics. The influence of this racial identification becomes evident in her music video *Reminiscing* (2017), which is examined thoroughly in this study.

In Chapter 3 the focus becomes a different type of 'celebrity' per se, in the form of a South African SMI who is well-recognised both locally and internationally for both entrepreneurial and fashionable endeavours. Here, the female SMI position is characterised, focusing on symbolic visual material and the emergence of digital photography as a tool for self-branding and affirmative cultural identity negotiation. While Baker is arguably the epitome of a more modest femininity, a key fashion element that comes into play is her choice of Muslim attire and the favoured yet controversial hijabi. The study unpacks Baker's use of social media platforms such as Instagram and her blog to create a 'safe' space for Muslim women to engage in unconventional avenues, in which religious or Islamic feminist ideals are honoured at the same time as attempts to break away from radical restraints. Consequently, this leads to investigating a number of postfeminist nuances which emerge.

Chapter 4 steps away from celebrity glamour and moves towards another standard role occupied by women online – the social media activist. Here, one can discover the latest social media trends,

namely ‘Instavism’ and ‘hashtag activism’, and unapologetic, purposeful nudity of the female body. Windvogel, as an emergent intersectional feminist voice, illustrates the blurred lines between explicit sexuality and the maintenance of a feminist stance, with the use of strong imagery and poetry. What becomes apparent is a luring revitalisation of classic feminist ideas via a currently expanding postfeminist, intersectional channel (social media), that is both transformative and questionable. In this segment, this study also addresses the emergence of the Queer voice on social media, intersectionality and the welcome of marginalised groups into a space that allows them to reclaim and redefine their identities, and so equip them with a newfound sense of agency.

## **Chapter Conclusion**

Infused with South African aspects and unanticipated interpretations, this mixed-methods research study sees that self-presentation and self-disclosure online offers a significant yet greatly uncultivated research area which should be included in the global social and cultural history of communication. This research may redress and create awareness about the ever-growing discursive gap that exists for marginalised groups of women in South Africa and the alternative ways in which they choose to communicate or voice their opinions. Hopefully this study may further assist in re-negotiating these women’s vulnerable position in contemporary society. In this way, this research project aims to be an affirmative catalyst for new knowledge production that is geared towards societal benefit in that it may suggest new cultural and social research processes that are not exclusive or prejudiced, but instead encourage affirmation and social transformation.

## CHAPTER 2: AGENCY, APPROPRIATION & AMBIGUITY: PATTY MONROE'S PURSUIT OF EMPOWERMENT

### 2.1 Introducing Patty Monroe

In this chapter the popular Capetonian rapper Patty Monroe,<sup>12</sup> born Megan Steenkamp, is identified, for her use of specific SMPs that articulate her gender and cultural identity within her celebrity position. This study will provide evidence that she employs a type of postfeminist rhetoric in her online representation, which makes her more relevant and even aspirational to her contemporary millennial South African audience. It is also intended to explore the possible sociological implications regarding Coloured womanhood and the representational empowerment of Coloured women<sup>13</sup> in South Africa. Monroe was chosen as the case study because she is the most acknowledged (by media outlets) Coloured woman in the South African music space at present. Monroe is a 23-year-old female emcee (or MC - Master of Ceremonies) who made her debut in the South African music industry in 2015. What sets Monroe apart from her South African Hip-Hop peers is, firstly, the fact that she is a Coloured woman, operating in a historically Black, male-dominated space, with a charismatic and highly expressive or 'animated' demeanour. Monroe is known for her animated facial expressions, iconic blonde afro hair style, and for being fashionable. She incorporates pro-female lyrics into her music alongside her use of Cape Coloured slang and popular expressions, and produces Hip-Hop/Rap music with Pop and Dance genre nuances, which resonates well with South -African millennials. Thus, it is arguable that Monroe is

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<sup>12</sup> During a personal interview with Monroe, it became evident that the stage name 'Patty Monroe' is derivative of the nickname 'Patty' that was given to Megan Steenkamp in high school and was combined with 'Monroe' later when her career started. It is true that the use of 'Monroe' was inspired by the late icon Marilyn Monroe. However, it is not Steenkamp's intention to emulate or mimic this icon. For Steenkamp, it is 'merely' a lexical symbol of nostalgia for a bygone vintage era, personified by Marilyn Monroe, which resonates with her today (Monroe 2018). This association is relevant to this study as Monroe is an example of a woman who appears to be empowered through her sexuality but is in fact sexualised rather than being simply sexy. This sexualisation is discussed in more detail later on in this chapter.

<sup>13</sup> Social media provides a space for women to assume and exhibit their new social and online roles despite existing ideologies (in terms of established visual tropes) and patriarchal pressures which permeate social groups, specifically subcultures such as celebrity. As a relegated ethnic group, Coloured women explicitly remain an underrepresented South African demographic in most fields of study. Coloured South African celebrities are also a scarce and under-represented commodity. In recent years, many women rappers of colour have come to the forefront in the South African music industry, such as Fifi Copper, Gigi Lamayne and Nadia Nakai. These predominantly Black lyrical artists have positioned themselves in a manner that makes them contemporary influencers, who are attempting to break the historical mould they've fallen into and reinvent the South African music space even though this environment is still largely saturated with dominant Americanisms and Westernised discursive practices (which they sometimes arrogate and sometimes mimic).

of a hybrid artist in that she is frequently called a singer/songwriter, rapper and emcee. Monroe exhibits a musical versatility as she integrates what can be classified as ‘Coloured discourse’ into her music videos, by using implicit Coloured imageries and symbols, such as local and urban areas that are assumed to be Coloured spaces.<sup>14</sup> Chris Weedon, cultural and identity theorist, argues that multiple contemporary discourses, such as subcultures and film, resort to the commodification of “racial and ethnic otherness” (2004:14) which exacerbate the persistence of discrimination so prevalent in contemporary society. Weedon suggests that with the availability of new communication channels (such as SMPs) and modes of expression, marginal factions have begun to seek out modes of salvaging some kind of “positive identity” (2004:17), even if it necessitates the employment of some degree of stereotypical and/or “racialised discourse” (2004:17). This is a habitual exercise that this study intends to highlight below in Monroe’s music video *Reminiscing* (2017).

Monroe was born in Southfield, Cape Town, a predominantly working class area, and is currently signed up with Afterlife Talent (*Patty Monroe Biography* 2017). Aside from featuring in traditional media zones, Monroe has developed a significant social media presence over the last three years. Her habitual use of social media has been the driving force in disseminating and rapidly circulating her work and information regarding public appearances and merchandise. Social media, therefore, plays a critical role in the development and maintenance of her identity as female rapper. Her photographs and music videos, which circulate online, speak of a multi-layered femininity that is heterogeneous, informed by popular culture trends but fused with her own evolving personal style preferences which exude both confidence and body positivity. This can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, which are screenshots of photographs posted on Monroe’s public Twitter account. In these shots it becomes evident that Monroe expresses herself and her identity through style and fashion. In this instance, her identity evolves from feminine florals, sophisticated style

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<sup>14</sup> Evidently, the use of an ‘urban backdrop’ is somewhat of a normative aesthetic in the Hip-hop subculture, both locally and internationally. However, it is arguable that these imageries are used sensibly and positively, in a sense that Monroe’s identity as a female rapper does not depend on the exploitation of stereotypical or racial identifications that are associated with her ethnic affiliation, such as explicit images of gangsterism, poverty, drugs, tattoos and gold teeth, and use of the Cape Flats area as a backdrop, which circulate in the media, documentaries, film and other popular culture discourses. Rather, I hope to show that Monroe makes use of sensible, remodelled narratives that tactfully and amiably refer to her ethnic background, instead of overtly (and with exploitative intent) perpetuating limiting or derogatory racial stereotypes.

and a ladylike demeanour (see Figure 2.1) to sporty athletic-leisure style and an edgy attitude (Figure 2.2). Thus, her personal style choices act as visual expressions of her constantly transforming identity.



**Fig 2.1.** @MissPattyMonroe: May. 2018. Screenshot of tweet, Twitter.



Fig 2.2. @MissPattyMonroe: June. 2018. Screenshot of tweet, Twitter.

These two examples (Figures 2.1 & 2.2 above) illustrate Monroe's agency switching between styles and attitudes. In so doing, Monroe is constantly proving that she cannot be 'put into a box' by changing her style as she pleases; she does not conform to one fixed stylistic trope like many celebrities tend to do as a signal of their specific niche or genre. Instead, Monroe embraces her ethnicity by adopting a positivist stance in emitting a sense of "girl power" (Sanasie 2015) in the way that she carries herself. In terms of her public reach, however, Monroe may not fall into the 'renowned' or legendary female rapper bracket that includes Afro-American rappers such as Lil Kim, Missy Elliot and Nicki Minaj (White 2013:607) who each have millions of followers, nevertheless her position and brand in the context of the South African music industry is still significant. Monroe is the only female Coloured South African rapper who has received substantial recognition in the industry<sup>15</sup> with just under 10 000 Twitter followers and 15 000 Instagram followers. As an increasing statistic this reflects quite an accomplishment for a Coloured woman rapper from the South African viewpoint.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2 Celebrating Monroe: Twitter and the Malatjie Fandom

After releasing her debut music album *Malatjie* in January 2017,<sup>17</sup> Monroe achieved much success and recognition, and has since become a household name in South Africa. She has also become an influential public figure and overall cultural icon with her face on local advertorials for 'Happy Socks' apparel brand (Mkhabela 2016) and Sportscene's (a local fashion retailer) 'Redbat' streetstyle, as well as the athletic leisure-inspired range 'Purple Reign' (*Sportscene Blog* 2018). Monroe was also invited to be a part of renowned

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<sup>15</sup> Coloured rappers occupy limited space in the South African music industry. Rappers such as Dope Saint Jude, Linkris, Miss Celaneous and Yoma contribute to the Coloured female emcee space, embracing Cape Coloured slang and often employing the Afrikaans language in their rhymes (Campher 2016). However, these artists are not as 'visible' or well-known as Patty Monroe.

<sup>16</sup> Monroe is somewhat of a pioneer, in terms of establishing a strain of popular culture discourse and representation that is pertinent to Coloured women in South Africa - specifically female Coloured musicians. And social media is, arguably, Monroe's prime vehicle for the mass production, rapid dissemination and circulation, and heightened visibility of this emergent discourse.

<sup>17</sup> Girl power tracks such as her first single *High Fashion* (2015), *Talk* (2015), *Reminiscing* (2017) and *Fighter* (2017) have topped the charts of popular local radio shows such as GoodHope FM and 5FM.

international cosmetic brand ‘MAC’s’ Viva Glam charity campaign in 2016.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, assigning the label of ‘celebrity’ to Monroe’s résumé is a reasonable assertion.

Celebrities<sup>19</sup> are generally considered those individuals who attain high levels of success, recognition and wealth for being talented or extraordinary in their respective fields. However, the debate on what exactly constitutes celebrity status and its significance is one that is yet to be settled due to its varying practices, case studies and are often ephemeral in nature.<sup>20</sup> Despite the scepticism and deterministic examinations that cultural theorists Daniel Boorstin (1961),<sup>21</sup> Theodor Adorno (1991)<sup>22</sup> and Jackie Stacey (1994)<sup>23</sup> provide on celebrity, there are academics who take a more positive, engaging stance when dealing with celebrity culture as a significant part of cultural and social development. A leading figure in media and cultural studies, Graeme Turner, is an Australian theorist who has written extensively on the production and rethinking of celebrity, as

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<sup>18</sup> MAC Cosmetics Viva Glam campaign is a longstanding initiative which involves the celebrity marketing of special Viva Glam lipsticks as an effort to raise funds for the MAC Aids Fund, which assists people all around the world who are affected by HIV and AIDS (Tau 2016). Alongside South African artists Bucie and Chiano Sky, Monroe fixes her spot on the coveted list of internationally recognised influencers who have endorsed and promoted this cause on social media, such as Miley Cyrus, Ariana Grande (Tau 2016), Sia, and even rapper Nicki Minaj.

<sup>19</sup> Celebrity culture has been developing for centuries and has been studied as a phenomenon in multiple fields of enquiry such psychology, philosophy, economics, the arts and even politics. Celebrity functions not only as a discursive category, but also as a commodity for consumption (Turner 2004:4).

<sup>20</sup> Famous singers reach the peak of their career and then decide to take a hiatus or simply disappear from the music industry. Actors and actresses lose their audiences after a badly-reviewed film tanks at the box office or when salacious gossip circulates in the media. Visual artists create socially irrelevant bodies of work and lose their public following. Thus, celebrity can be seen as almost as fleeting as the seasons which come and go, yet quite pervasive at the same time. The domain of celebrity is often treated as irrational (Turner 2004:136) and inconsequential. As a result, celebrities are often referred to by cynics as ‘bad role models’ or overpaid and overrated entertainers.

<sup>21</sup> Historically, theorist and American historian Daniel Boorstin condemned celebrity culture, arguing that celebrity is just an embellished amplification of ‘human greatness’ which has been fabricated by the media. He argues that the media stages and circulates a planned strategy called a “pseudo event” (1961:56-67) which relies on the visibility of the celebrity rather than the things they’ve achieved. It is this extensive media coverage and planned visibility which makes celebrity culture effective and profitable. Thus, the media is a major force in the construction of celebrity identities and appeasing consumer desires.

<sup>22</sup> A German philosopher and sociologist, Adorno is most popularly known for his critical theories on aesthetics and society, as well as his contribution to Western Marxism. On the topic of celebrity, Adorno argued in his text *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (1991) that although celebrities may be charismatic and entertaining for public audiences, their immense influence creates a breeding ground for emerging societal maladies such as model body idealisation and the development of anorexia.

<sup>23</sup> A professor of media and cultural studies at the University of Manchester, Jackie Stacey is a feminist film theorist who has contributed to fields such as ethnography and cultural studies. Stacey’s view on celebrity is that audiences merely place speculative meanings upon celebrity figures and their lifestyles. For Stacey, the significance placed on celebrities by public audiences is somewhat romanticised and purely based on fantasising about a lavish celebrity lifestyle, and a sense of ‘escapism’ (1994:89-93).



well as the media's propensity to be a reinventing space. In terms of defining celebrity, Turner makes the following case:

Celebrity is a genre of representation that provides us with a semiotically rich body of texts and discourses that fuel a dynamic culture of consumption. Secondly, celebrity is also a discursive effect; that is, those who have been subject to the representational regime of celebrity are reprocessed and reinvented by it. To be folded into this representational regime – to be 'celebritised' – changes how you are consumed and what you can mean. The process of celebritisation is widely seen as transformative but with markedly varying political significance (2010:13).<sup>24</sup>

Celebrity culture and its practices are a sign<sup>25</sup> of how 21<sup>st</sup> century Western culture is generating new “meaning, significance, pleasure and desire” (Turner 2004:26), and how society is changing the ways in which humans communicate and form relationships. Therefore, celebrities are essentially pedagogical tools which aid in the discourse of the Self by influencing human interests, personal pursuits, motivations, values and beliefs.<sup>26</sup> From a South African viewpoint, Monroe is generating a new strain of discourse and using specific SMPs to convey it to the public and form meaningful relationships with her audience. After conducting a survey to investigate the use of social media by young women in Cape Town between the ages of 18 and 28, it became clear that celebrity culture is significant for the women residing within this region. The snowball sample accumulated for this survey was collected over a period of one month (from 8 May 2018 to 5 June 2018) and consisted of 100 voluntary participants who discovered the survey through social media and email. In this sample, 50% of the women fell into the 21-24 age bracket, whilst 42% were between the ages of 25 and 28, and 8% fell into the 18-20 age group. In terms of identifying their

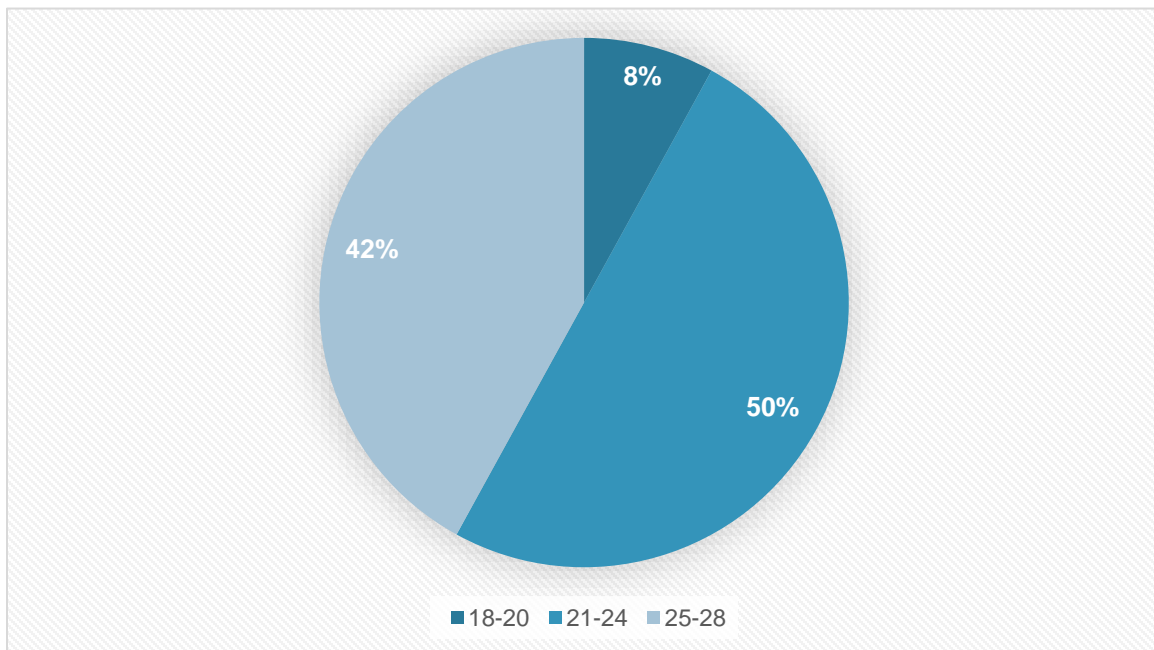
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<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, Turner is highly critical of celebrity. He argues that celebrities do not merely exist and that the entertainment industry constructs, promotes and trades (Turner 2010:14) them and this process is geared towards satisfying a target market. Turner is, thus, wary of the possible exploitative and objectifying avenues which could potentially arise when being celebritised. However, on the other hand Turner also acknowledges the visual potency of celebrity and its effects on contemporary society. Celebrity assumes a large part of contemporary society in that it informs, educates and incites the public; it has social and cultural functions that are complex.

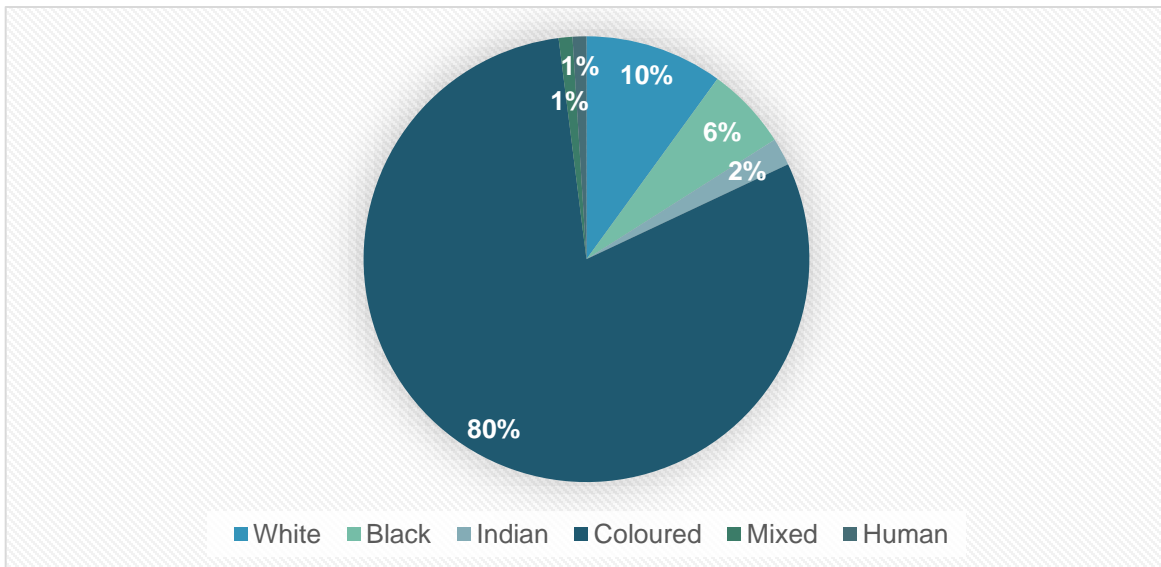
<sup>25</sup> Theorist Richard Dyer argues that stars are actually signs and that 'stardom' or 'celebrity' is a social phenomenon that can only be understood ideologically as it articulates an existing “production-consumption dialectic” (2006a:153). Dyer believes that stars act as images or symbols which are multifarious configurations of visual, aural and verbal signs. These images are the tools in society which expose institutional ideologies and may possibly embody alternative positions (2006a:153), to existing hierarchical and gendered roles, that individuals can contemporarily assume.

<sup>26</sup> For example, women's style choices are directly influenced, today, by famous fashion icons such as Kim Kardashian, Rihanna and Victoria Beckham, much like Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor's influence in the 1950s and Twiggy in the mid-1960s.

ethnic group, 80% of the participants identified themselves as Coloured. This percentage could be a direct result of the regional criteria limits of the sample since Cape Town is the province in which the majority of South Africa's Coloured population resides. Those who identified as White were 10%, while 6% identified themselves as Black, 2% as Indian, 80% as Coloured, and the rest of the sample were identified as 'mixed' or 'human'. The demographics of the sample are illustrated by Figures 2.3 and 2.4 below.



**Figure 2.3:** Pie chart indicating the age range of sample taken from a survey investigating the use of social media by young women in Cape Town between the ages of 18 and 28 (2018).

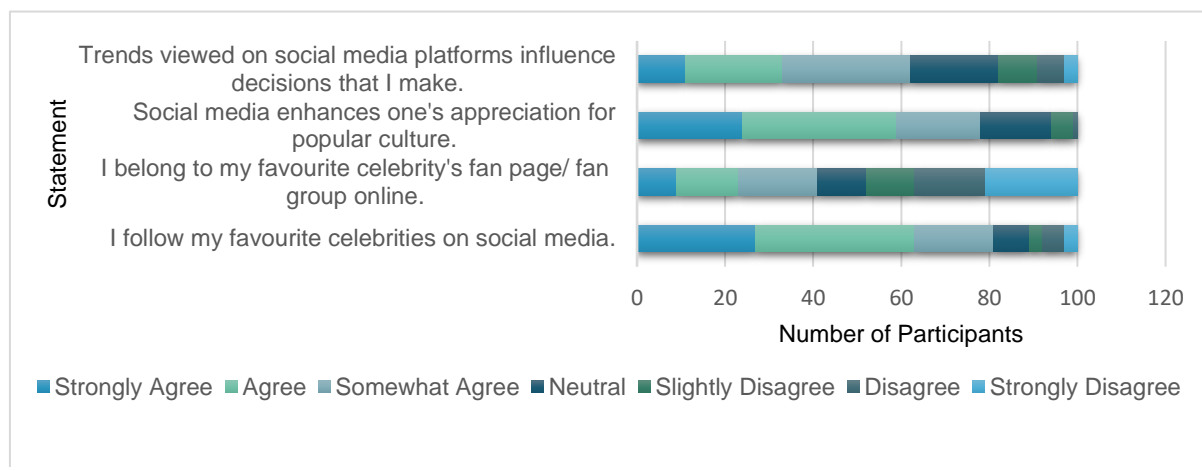


**Figure 2.4:** Pie chart indicating the ethnic demographics of the sample taken from a survey investigating the use of social media by young women in Cape Town between the ages of 18 and 28 (2018).

The 80% Coloured demographic could be a result of participant referrals mainly within this study's social group; however, the survey was circulated on social media and across all race groups. Therefore, the slanted sample and results could be due to the fact that mainly female Coloured social media users had an interest in completing the survey due to an added incentive of participating in the competition draw. The survey conducted consisted of short questions, including a section which required participants to disclose to which extent they agreed or disagreed with a list of particular statements relating to celebrity culture, social media culture and online 'empowerment'. The results of this section of the survey can be observed in Figure 5. In terms of celebrity culture, 81% of the female participants admitted to following their favourite celebrities on social media, to a certain extent. The remaining 19% either remained neutral on the subject or stated that they did not follow celebrities on SMPs. However, only 41% of these Capetonian women, predominantly between the ages of 21 and 28, stated they belong to their favourite celebrity's fan page or fan group online. This is an interesting insight into Capetonian millennial culture since one usually associates 'fan girl' behaviour with a younger demographic. Therefore, it indicates that young adult women in Cape Town are still intrigued by the discourses of popular culture, specifically its celebrity subculture. Unsurprisingly, then, 62% of the women in this sample disclosed that the trends viewed on social SMPs to a certain extent influence the decisions

that they make on a daily basis. This sample confirms the validity of Turner’s argument, regarding the fact that celebrities part of a complex system that might speak of pedagogical intentions, which may inform and influence society, in a South African context.

In the case of Patty Monroe, therefore, it becomes imperative to investigate which SMPs are critical to increasing her social and cultural capital as an influential popular culture figure, and developing her celebrity image and fan base. Thus, this representational space becomes quite a ‘political’ realm in terms of power relations between celebrity and audience. During a personal interview with Monroe she indicated that Twitter was one of her prime tools for fostering and maintaining engagement with her followers, stating that she values “the fact that it’s so fast paced and straight to the point. It’s also fun to interact with people who enjoy what I do as an artist” (Monroe 2018). For Monroe, Twitter<sup>27</sup> is essential for updating her online audience in real-time, specifically her fan group which she refers to as her “community of Malatjies” (Monroe 2018).



**Fig. 2.5.** Distribution of Capetonian women’s interest in celebrity culture, popular trends and social media (2018).

<sup>27</sup>Twitter has been the most rapidly growing Internet platform for the past eight years (Crystal 2011:36). Created in 2006, Twitter is a ‘microblogging’ digital space which permits its users to post and receive text-based posts called ‘Tweets’ of up to 140 characters (Crystal 2011:36). Today, its users habitually add links to other sites and SMPs, images and video clips to their text-based posts.

In doing a quantitative analysis of Monroe's Twitter profile, using an Application Programming Interface (API) known as *Social Bearing*,<sup>28</sup> it became clear that she is continually posting new visual and audio content, hypertext links to content, as well as 'chatting' to her audience on this particular SMP to stimulate her fans visually, open up channels of conversation with them and keep them updated on her career and upcoming events (Monroe 2018). Monroe uses Twitter as a 'notice board' in that she regularly posts links to her YouTube channel in an effort to increase the visibility of her work. This is demonstrated by Figure 2.6 below which shows Monroe's use of hyper text markup language (HTML) to embed a hypertext link that will direct Monroe's followers to her YouTube channel to view her music videos which opens up a dialogue between her and fans. Multiple red heart emojis (a graphic or 'icon' feature of SMPs used to symbolically communicate in picture form)<sup>29</sup> were placed in the comments section, and one fan even went so far as to call Monroe her 'boo', which is a common term of endearment in popular culture (see Figure 2.6 below).

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<sup>28</sup> A type of analytic site that automatically evaluates public social media feeds and profiles, using the page URL. i.e. It does the job of human counting faster and more effectively by cleaning and reading the social media script in a matter of minutes.

<sup>29</sup>Internet conversation tends to lack facial expressions and physical gestures that are important for expressing opinion and attitudes, and regulating online communication and relationships. Emoticons or 'emoji's' have been employed to act as new visual symbols that "remove attitudinal ambiguity" (Crystal 2011:23-24).

**PATTY MONROE**   
@MissPattyMonroe Following

The video for the song reminiscing is probably my best piece of work yet. I'm so happy I can share it with you

**Patty Monroe - Reminiscing**  
AFTER LIFE TALENT Presents the new Patty Monroe music video for her 2017 Single 'Reminiscing', taken off her 2017 studio album titled "Malatjie" Download /St...  
youtube.com

6:18 AM - 15 Sep 2017

31 Retweets 92 Likes

5 31 92

And we are grateful for it ....  
Can't wait for future songs

**Lakota Silva** @LakotaSilva · 20 Sep 2017  
Replying to @MissPattyMonroe  
Love it boo x

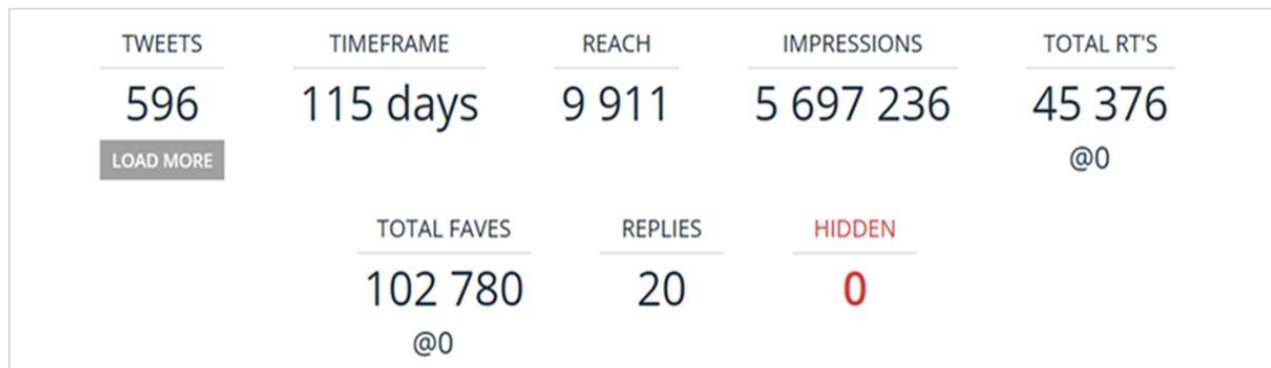
**Nkateko Maluleke** @Ian\_chubs · 8 Nov 2017  
Replying to @MissPattyMonroe  
I've got things to say to you ,to you. #iloveit it's amazing

**More replies**

**Blizzerd Basil Lelo** @Blizzerd · 29 Nov 2017  
Replying to @MissPattyMonroe  
U should've shot a video for Messi aswell

**Fig. 2.6.** @MissPattyMonroe: September. 2017. Screenshot of tweet, Twitter.

In conducting a quantitative analysis, using the API known as *Social Bearing*, I investigated Monroe’s online Twitter behaviour, as well as the behaviour of her fans more closely. Over a time span of 115 days (equivalent to four months to form a cohesive sample) Monroe posted 596 tweets between January and April 2018. In that time, she managed to reach 9 911 individual twitter users and her personal tweets were re-tweeted or ‘shared’ across Twitter 45 376 times, thereby increasing her visibility online. This is indicated by Figure 2.7 below.



**Fig. 2.7.** API brief overview of Patty Monroe’s Twitter account. 2018. Screenshot, Social Bearing.

In terms of aggregating these tweets and re-tweets by their sentiment content (based on positive versus negative lexical content), 50,3% remain neutral or everyday interactions, whilst the rest indicate 40,6% highly positive sentiments. This is illustrated by Figure 2.8. This confirms the existence of “parasocial” (2012:124)<sup>30</sup> communication between Monroe and her Twitter

<sup>30</sup>Chris Rojek defines parasocial relationships as follows: “We live in an era of parasocial relationships [...] That is overlying the primary relationships of family and community, we inescapably enter into webs of intimacy with celebrities that are based on impersonal print, photographic and electronic systems of communication. If the conditions are amenable, we connect with the prominent media figures as people in the know [...] Celebrity icons occupy a pedestal in celebrity parasocial relationships. They symbolize not merely glamour, but sexual assertion, generational difference and the promulgation of much wider rules of social inclusion and exclusion” (2012:124-129). This kind of conversational setting “encourages disclosure and can act as the basis for developing loyal sympathies between the celebrity and audience” (Rojek 2012:164). Thus, there is a supposed and believed intimacy that is critical to this relationship and the celebrity’s status.

followers.<sup>31</sup> Monroe has intensified this symbiotic relationship<sup>32</sup> by naming her collective group of supporters or ‘fandom’, Malatjies.<sup>33</sup> Thus, fans display positive sentiments and identifications with her brand during online engagements with Monroe. This parasocial communication produces new meanings and texts by regarding Monroe for public consumption.

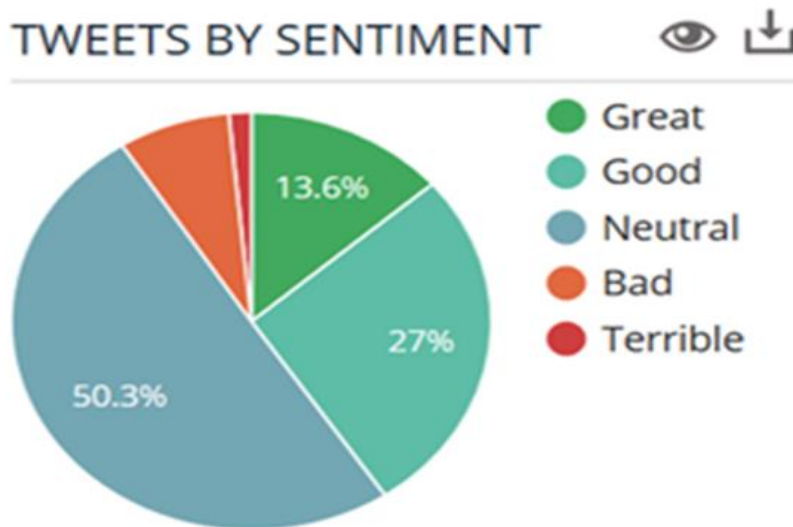
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<sup>31</sup> For Marshall, celebrity elevates specific personalities and identities to public acclamation and recognition (2006:634). The longevity of celebrity depends on an established media system which can disseminate its images, concepts and stories. Traditionally, print has been viewed as the most articulate system of promotion for celebrity as a commodity, which creates highly organised and informed audiences. Marshall suggests that now that we are in a digital public communication culture (PCC), this symbiotic relationship between celebrity and media has been shattered. New media has stretched out the tightly meshed textile of media and celebrity that was once discrete and cautiously controlled (2006:634), making it more flexible. This has changed the structure of celebrity, in that new media and layered texts are increasingly being produced by the user (celebrity) and the audience - a new media subjectivity is emerging. Marshall might argue that Monroe is engaging in what he terms an “intercommunicative” (2010:42) strategy on Twitter, by linking her account to other sites and media, which increase her public recognition and visibility – ensuring the longevity of her career. For Marshall, this strategy consequently develops an intercommunicative identity: “The intercommunicative self identifies that, at least in on-line cultures such as social network sites, we are engaged in a multi-layered form of communication that kneads mediated forms with conversation, that allows photos to be the starting-point for reactions and discussions, and that produces, partly because of expediency and partly for the desire to remain connected to someone or a group of people, very simplistic and phatic forms of communication that invite response. The intercommunicative self provides links to YouTube videos or samples of popular music or interesting articles that are extensions of the ‘self’ that are articulated through friends. The intercommunicative self also acknowledges the necessity of linking one’s own identities into some sort of pattern, from Twitter to Facebook, from YouTube and Flickr to MySpace, from blogs to Digg” (Marshall 2010:42).

<sup>32</sup>Fan groups have the power to directly affect the status of celebrity as they embody this status as a collective, circulating and making the celebrity more visible. These fans also corroborate and endorse the ‘realness’ or human quality of the celebrity, whether it be in tabloids, magazine articles, at concerts or, more recently, online. Thus, celebrities themselves (as ‘superhuman’ as they may be perceived to be) become dependent upon their public audience for their safeguarding and longevity. However, Rojek is weary of this powerful attachment, arguing that such intense unions could lead to what he terms the “fame attack” (2012:4-5). This is a neurotic and fixated type of disorder that originates from celebrity culture, causing celebrity worship, resentment towards celebrities and narcissistic behaviour (Rojek 2010:5). Though this argument brings up critical issues regarding celebrity, the psychological implications and pathology behind it is not the prime focus of this research study. However, this insight does highlight the celebrity’s potential to affect a fan’s subjectivity or sense of self.

<sup>33</sup> What has come to light is the regular appearance of the term ‘malatjie’ in this online communication setting. This term is based on her recent album called *Malatjie* (2017). In South African and Coloured culture, this term is often viewed as slang and a misuse of the Afrikaans word ‘mal’, which means ‘mad’ or ‘deranged’. However, for Monroe, it is a term that is symbolic of her authenticity (Monroe 2018), which she declared during a personal interview conducted with her. Thus, she uses the term subversively. When discussing her fandom during our interview, Monroe stated the following: “I think I embraced the term ‘Malatjie’ – meaning crazy person – because I had this dream that seemed so impossible to some; people would often say I was crazy or that I wouldn’t achieve my dreams. I think we live in a world where people like to label you as crazy if you’re a bit ‘out there’ or different to them and for me, that’s not being crazy, that’s called being unique. It’s my uniqueness that makes me who I am. I wanted to tell people to not be afraid of your uniqueness. I want people to embrace their uniqueness and encourage them to not listen to naysayers” (Monroe 2018).





**Fig. 2.8.** Pie chart indicating the sentiments and type of behaviour occurring between Monroe and her audience on Twitter between January and April. 2018. Screenshot, Social Bearing.

The cultural production of meaning is being democratised under new media (especially SMPs such as Twitter) and personalised by new technologies. According to Turner (2010:13) “We are shifting to a more ‘presentational’ and personal mediation of culture – a culture where user generated content (UGC) is welcomed – and away from a longstanding ‘representational regime’ ” where celebrity content is created through intermediaries<sup>34</sup> and the traditional media industry. This presentational regime now resonates throughout celebrity culture (Marshall 2006:641). Marshall also argues that it is directing society towards a less discretely controlled cultural world whereby the production of identity is now taking precedence, and public presentation is emphasised above all representational regimes. “The internet is creating online communities where diverse means of the self are habitually considered and reviewed by other users and we are witnessing an extensive proliferation of the presentation of the self” (Marshall 2006:639). In addition, Marshall (2006:644) states that “social (new) media has modified the sources of self as we move away from a

<sup>34</sup> Theorist Chris Rojek refers to these celebrity industry workers as “labourers” (2012:14).

representational society that is exemplified by celebrity to a presentational culture in which celebrities are being ‘rewritten’ and remodelled in terms of their value and function by audiences and online users”.<sup>35</sup>

In an attempt to attain or prove her authenticity Monroe, arguably, has begun to adopt Marshall’s ‘presentational’ cultural concept for her identity formation. She employs this regime on Twitter. Monroe personally favours the idea of being able to ‘present’ herself at her own will above the representativeness of conventional celebrity culture (Monroe 2018). In the interviews Monroe, stated:

I always have to be conscious of the fact that people are going to be looking to me or looking at things I do or post through a microscope, but the whole essence of ‘Patty Monroe’ is authenticity and staying true to myself; speaking from the heart and not compromising on my values or who I am. I would never push information just for the sake of publicity. I always try and post [and create] things that speak to me and that inspires me, and hope that whoever sees it will be as inspired as I was on the topic (Monroe 2018).

By personally posting the happenings of her daily life online (whether these posts are of stage performances and branded photoshoots or, contrarily, of her domestic life, mundane routines and outings with friends) Monroe is committing to her audience in a presentational way; she is providing the public with an alternative image or identity to that of superficial, glamorised and salacious media sources. In spite of this, however, Graeme Turner, would argue that Monroe is hyper-aware of her power as a celebrity, and is possibly exploiting her supposed ‘ordinariness’<sup>36</sup>

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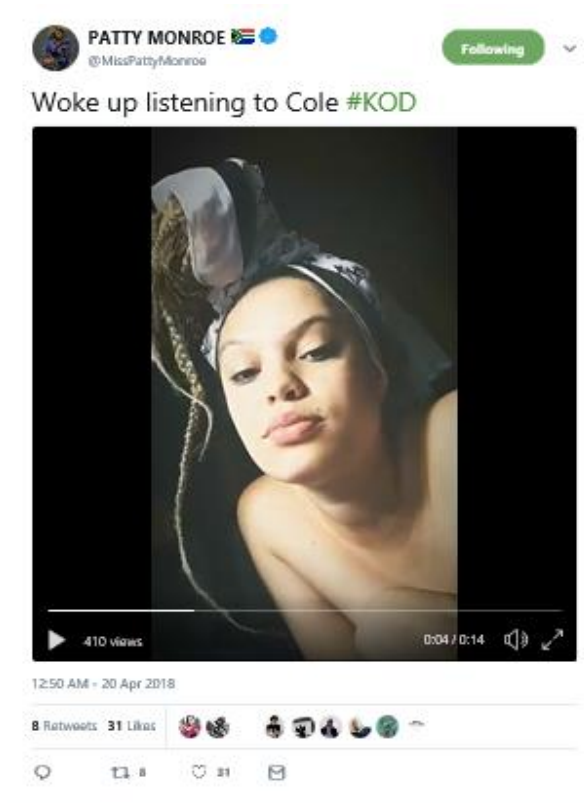
<sup>35</sup> This means that they are not merely staging or performing the self as a fabrication of intermediaries, but actively presenting aspects of themselves and their lives to a public audience. Celebrities are now engaging in very complex and sophisticated practices of social media to generate an alternative presence (or the private self) from what their audience is accustomed (high glamour and wealth) to seeing. This is how they negotiate and maintain their identity online; this is crucial to developing a significant online following, which is contemporarily considered to be important for increasing one’s social capital, which in turn will elevate one’s profitability as a ‘brand’.

<sup>36</sup> Cultural theorist, Richard Dyer, argues that the valuing of ‘ordinariness’ presents a perplexing paradox. Often the extravagant lifestyles and success of these ‘stars’ are perceived as being ordinary rather than exceptional. Therefore, celebrity is an amalgamation of various contradictory elements, for Dyer. He argues that stardom naively unites the extravagant with the mundane, the unique with the ordinary and the expression of fundamental Western values (2006:154). This relationship between the general and the particular is one that is ambivalent and often problematic. Rojek believes that a certain level of glamour (display of wealth, success and specialness) must always be maintained, in celebrity culture, in order for these stars to actually interact with the prominent culture of the working class (2006:154-156), whilst at the same time gaining credibility for living a somewhat conventional lifestyle away from

to maintain her public following. Turner suggests that there is an “intrinsic ordinariness” (Turner 2006:154) that must be exhibited in order for fans to be able to relate to celebrities. It is this ‘ordinary’ essence that has become necessary in today’s “digital public communication culture” (PCC) (Fourie 2017:2-3); as contemporary society values the ‘reality effect’ above the coherent, constructed celebrity. Whilst she acknowledges the representational regime that celebrity culture imposes upon her, Monroe attempts to take back some form of agency and aims to actively present herself in a manner that is more personalised. An example of this is her use of live video clips. In Figure 2.9 below an instance is documented in which Monroe posts a video clip of herself in her bedroom during the early hours of the morning after she has just woken up. This could be considered quite an intimate, private moment as in this live clip Monroe listens to her personal music preferences, wears no make-up with blonde braids wrapped in a scarf, and appears to be wearing minimal attire. In fact, she looks quite naked as she invites her audience into her personal space. By her caption of the video “Woke up listening to Cole #KOD” (see Figure 2.9), she allows her audience to ‘see behind the fame curtain’ as such, and in so doing she begins to shatter the boundary between her private and public worlds. Monroe regularly uploads video clips such as these about her daily activities: behind-the-scenes music snippets, household activities, weekend adventures and inspiring personal thought processes. These are all unplanned and unfiltered clips which depict Monroe as a ‘normal’, everyday kind of woman who is working hard and trying to achieve her goals. These kinds of images and video clips are what make Monroe easy to relate to and believable despite the fact that she is a celebrated public figure.

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the limelight. Paradoxically, celebrities act as idols of high consumption, yet at the same time they are forced to display an opposing level of normalcy. Conclusively, celebrities have, what Dyer deems to be, an undeniable ideological function.



**Fig. 2.9.** @MissPattyMonroe: April. 2018. Screenshot of tweet, Twitter.

By making the executive decision to present personal elements of herself and her life to her online audience, Monroe exhibits an empowered agency in that she wants to share and present herself to her audience in the most uncensored way possible. During the interview, Monroe stated: “Just like in my music [in terms of lyrics and style], I stay true to myself and understand that I am developing and growing mentally everyday”. It is this ongoing process and transformation that Monroe documents on her Twitter account publicly, thereby taking agency over her online self-presentation. She decides what her audience has access to, and in this case these are her private and personal spaces, to a certain extent. Thus, her audience gets to see the celebrity’s public persona as ‘Miss Patty Monroe’ and the real human being that is Megan Steenkamp – a young millennial woman with a versatile talent, iconic style and colourful personality. Monroe recognises that her habitual use of multiple social media platforms and online exchanges act as her extensions

in the production of the self, and these new tools are vital to the maintenance of her identity – not just online in the digital realm, but in the real, corporeal world as well.<sup>37</sup>

### 2.3 Self-Sexualisation Online: A Postfeminist Endeavour?

As part of her identity as a Coloured female rapper, Monroe's public/private persona may attract much criticism from conservative feminist critics who are concerned by sexualised and objectifying heteronormative representations of the female body that may play into the male gaze for the sake of male pleasure. This is because the growing intersections between feminism and contemporary celebrity culture are considerably myriad, convoluted and often paradoxical (Hamad & Taylor 2015:125). As previously discussed in this study, Monroe's brand of celebrity is one which is associated with a self-presentational regime that is democratic and empowering for her, and this may potentially have a knock-on effect on marginalised women who form part of her online audience. On the one hand, she insists that she remains true to herself as an artist and prides herself on being unique (Monroe 2018), yet on the other the local traditional media sphere poses Monroe in a manner that evokes a radical sense of her conquering a male-dominated industry (Sanasie 2015) by the suggestion in her lyrics that speak of domination. However, Monroe argues that this is not her objective as a female rapper in South Africa:

Well, as an artist I've never really put too much focus on the 'male domination' situation. My lyrics have always just come from the heart about things that have inspired me, or feelings that I've felt or things [happening] around me... I focus on positivity, not negativity... The images selected for public viewing [by me] have nothing to do with the industry; It has to do with who I am as a person. I never want to do any shoots that would

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<sup>37</sup>Monroe's position as a woman artist is largely dependent upon the power of the celebrity industry and the proliferation of social media channels. Social media culture, which is built upon multimodality, digitisation and convergence of all media formats, is a potent force in contemporary society. Though it permits access to discursive communities and offers alternative modes of expression of identity, it is built on a type of 'digital ideology' that is permeating and transforming our world and existing image culture. What is meant by 'digital ideology' is that, much like state or religious institutions, social media structures and practices act upon today's society in ideological (life changing) ways. Social media users adopt digital values, beliefs and customs. They adapt their language and communication strategies to assimilate to the convergent online environment; they develop new tastes, preferences and cultural capital that's exclusive to the digital space. As a result, new communication cultures (Fourie 2017:17-18) are emerging, and so celebrity culture and the relationship between celebrity, audience and the media has changed drastically. Monroe submits herself to emergent social media norms – presentational norms – as a way of forming and negotiating her layered identity. This indicates a strong attachment and dependency upon this new 'social media institution' and its participatory codes.

conflict with my beliefs and integrity. . . If I feel comfortable doing something, I don't feel that I should be censored by other's standards of what is right and wrong (Monroe 2018).

Monroe's adamant argument here is a testimony to her personal objective of remaining unique and easy to relate to – rather than domineering. Arguably, her approach to live video streams on social media, posting unplanned video clips and divulging more personal information than most celebrities would, assists in legitimising this self-proclamation.<sup>38</sup> However, certain onlookers may find opposing meanings in her images which undermine Monroe's assertion of her independence from the music and celebrity industries. Now that it has been established that Monroe does not seek to dominate or attack men in her celebrity position as a woman rapper, this study proceeds to investigate whether Monroe presents a feminist representation of herself or not online.

Feminism historically stands as a collective social and political movement. Author Sara Ahmed suggests that individuals are “moved to become feminists” (2017:3) and that evidently there is something particularly sensational which affects or ‘moves’ these individuals to action (Ahmed 2017:3) and to become part of the feminist movement. That which ‘moves’ individuals instils the idea that something is wrong, unstable or incomplete and requires enquiry and resolution. For centuries gender inequality and the oppression of women have been the major points of feminist enquiry with contemporary societies working towards achieving equality across all genders, cultures and domains. Ahmed argues that feminism has been made up of multiple movements and enquiries that have occurred at any point in time, diverging levels and in any given space; the movement of an individual is just as important as a collective movement (2017:4-6). For Ahmed, therefore, feminist practices are still necessary (2017:4-6). Thus, there are still new movements and enquiries that will emerge in the future, at different levels and in new, unexpected spaces. The question that remains is whether or not equality has been achieved and solidified for all as yet and for many, the answer to that question is negative.

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<sup>38</sup> Rachel Dubrofsky and Megan Wood, argue that self-proclamations of celebrities as such often produces an interesting paradox (2014:285). Whilst Monroe claims that she personally chooses and endorses her public image at her own will, she also adopts a critical self-awareness of her position as a celebrity, which supposedly authenticates her behaviours as ‘truthful’ and genuine. Authenticity, here, becomes a slippery slope.

Some South African feminist writers such as Shireen Hassim (1991), Haji Mohammed Dawjee (2018a) and Joy Watson (2018) have written about the state of feminism in the South African context. For Hassim, issues relating to “representation and legitimacy” (1991:77) are the key points of enquiry in the South African women’s movement. According to Hassim (1991:77) the emergence of the concept of a “new South Africa” that is progressive and non-racial has, arguably, induced more trauma in terms of racial conflict struggles amongst South African women. Hassim’s suggestion is that the promise of reconciliation after Apartheid’s racial divisions, without much remedy and clarity, has left women of colour severely angry (1991:77-78). This contradiction and tension has been translated into post-apartheid times, leaving women of colour troubled and still seeking racial equality. Author of *Sorry, not sorry: Experiences of a Brown woman in a White South Africa* (2018b), Haji Mohamed Dawjee, has the perspective that “feminism must be intersectional, and empathetic, or it will leave women behind” (2018a:42). For Dawjee (2018a:42) radical feminists who aim to confront existing patriarchal standards in South Africa are important because they play a profound regulatory role in policing current social circumstances regarding violence, abuse and rape, for instance. However, radical feminists are not empathetic or respectful of **all** women (Dawjee 2018a:42), and their negative criticisms of women’s seemingly “unfeminist actions and attitudes” may push women into a despondent state where they feel like they are not doing enough or asserting their feminist affiliation adequately.

Dawjee (2018a:49) also argues that South Africa “needs feminist allies, not feminist adversaries”. Women need to be more understanding of each other’s pains and struggles rather than being critical of one another and perpetuating the idea that feminism is a one-size-fits-all movement. In addition, Dawjee (2018a:49) also insists that issues relating to archaic gender norms and roles, which were addressed during the first and second waves of feminism, are not “back in the day problems” and she asserts that women in South Africa are still struggling against patriarchal social structures, domestic issues and hetero-normative ideals. She contends further, that although these issues may not seem trendy or present an “on-fleek feminism” (Dawjee 2018a:47) for contemporary times, they are still important and need to be addressed now. Feminist researcher Joy Watson agrees to a certain degree with Dawjee. For Watson (2018:57):

Feminism is about creating a different, more equal kind of world order for us, and for the women who are to come. It is about remembering the women who were ... Feminism is no one thing. It is a movement powered by people, accentuated by different views, understandings and contradictions ... So while we may not always have all the answers, may not always set an example, may love pink, and may even at times dance our asses off to music that is terrible for women, the point is that we feminists – men and women alike – try to make the world a better place for women, and that we let it go when we sometimes get it wrong.

There are multiple forms of feminism and a plethora of issues which these feminists seek to address regarding the sexes. For the purpose of this case study, however, the focus shifts to representational realm and popular culture. These areas of enquiry are counterparts to the ideals of the third wave of feminism, which took off in the 1990s and was led by ‘Generation Z’ (individuals born in the cyber age where media saturation began to pervade society). During this wave, Westernised societies became more actively focussed on the inclusion of women of colour into feminist paradigms and the subsequent subversion of typical or stereotypically sexist, classist and racist images. Nevertheless, with the onset of the third wave, many young women began engaging in actions which appeared to objectify or exploit themselves in pursuit of subverting more conservative gender norms. This was later referred to as ‘postfeminism’, as it stood in conflict with the ‘original’ feminist discourse, which had promoted the image of a collective political activism and social awareness. However, after two decades of debates, there is still no agreement about what postfeminism is. The term is employed differently and paradoxically to “signal a theoretical position, a type of feminism after the second wave, or a regressive political stance” (Gill 2007:147). As a result of these discontents, feminism or the idea thereof, is continually being rewritten and transformed by cultural productions and social transformations. Currently, there are many contradictory arguments about the meaning of postfeminism. In an effort to characterise this dilemma, the study turns to the influential writings of postfeminist theorists Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill. McRobbie (2004:255) defines postfeminism as,

[the] active process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s came to be undermined. It proposes that through an array of machinations, elements of contemporary popular culture are perniciously effective in regard to this undoing of feminism, while simultaneously appearing to be engaging in a well-informed and even well-intended response to feminism ... it suggests that by means of the tropes of freedom and choice which are now inextricably connected with the category of ‘young women’, feminism is



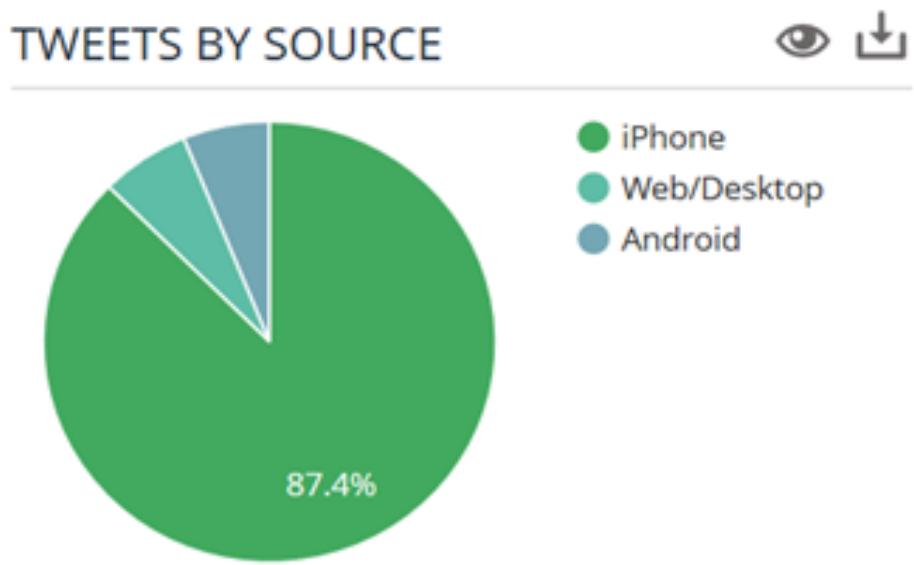
decisively aged and made to seem redundant. Feminism is cast into the shadows, where at best it can expect to have some afterlife, where it might be regarded ambivalently by those young women who must in more public venues stake a distance from it, for the sake of social and sexual recognition.

McRobbie acknowledges that postmodern society requires a ‘newer’, more relevant, non-limiting strain of feminism that resonates with younger generations of women who seek a freedom of choice and individualism evocative of a PCC – a time of convergence, digitisation and radical social transformation. In other words, younger women essentially need a “millennial feminism” (Silva 2016) that is tailored to contemporary culture. Concurrently, Rosalind Gill’s (2007:148) ideas on postfeminism correspond with and expand on McRobbie’s notions. For Gill (2007) postfeminism is not a form of backlash or an ‘epistemological’ assessment of feminism that is indicative of a major historical shift. Rather, postfeminism is a type of analytical perspective that does not necessitate a fixed definition of what feminism is and is not. Instead Gill (2007:147-148) states that:

Arguments about postfeminism are debates about nothing less than the transformations in feminisms and transformations in media culture – and their mutual relationship ... Postfeminism is best thought of as a sensibility that characterises increasing numbers of films, television shows, adverts and other media products.

This is where celebrity culture comes into the picture. Various modes of contemporary feminist celebrity assist in shaping the types of feminism that emerge for public circulation and that, to varying extents, come to obtain cultural legitimation (Hamad & Taylor 2015:126). What this entails is that the new narratives created by celebrities, via the new channels such as social media and the images circulated by them online, have the ability to delimit and push feminism in a new direction. Specifically, female celebrity figures play a major role in the revitalisation or, contrarily, the deprecating definition and characteristics of feminism. In the case of Patty Monroe, one can observe that she is a rapper whose celebrity status in South Africa is rapidly rising. As quantified by the statistical research of her Twitter account (see Figure 2.10), Monroe’s following consists mainly of people who have access to mobile technologies – Apple technology specifically – and cellular networks. In today’s postmodern society, this particular demographic includes millennials (see Monroe’s Twitter fan base of millennials quantified in Table 2.1), and more importantly,

young women in South Africa. Thus, Monroe stands as a layered text which young women are keenly observing online to gain cultural and social information. This implies that Monroe, to a certain extent, has a sociological influence on how a generation of young South African women with access to the Internet and mobile technologies perceive celebrity, femininity and themselves, and how these women cultivate and propagate their own identities. However, upon closer inspection of Monroe's Twitter account, it appears that her male following outweighs her female audience by 20% (see Table 2.1). This is an intriguing development as Monroe stands as a leading lady within a patriarchal subculture that is male-dominated. Furthermore, her male following includes the likes of top local Hip-Hop artists such as Cassper Nyovest and Youngsta CPT. Perhaps their online following of her is an expression of camaraderie and acceptance into the South African Hip-Hop community, and one could, therefore, argue that she has potentially achieved a level playing field in the industry by being seen as an equal to her male peers. However, that deduction could be undermining, as it would give the sense that she sought out male approval (putting male influence and power upon a pedestal), which is not the case (Monroe 2018). The large male following also indicates an existing male audience for her Twitter account is due to the fact that men see her as an attractive woman and source of entertainment. This can be seen in the comments on Figures 2.1 and 2.2 above, in which multiple male Twitter users leave suggestive comments regarding Monroe's beauty, sexiness and admirable style.



**Fig. 2.10.** Pie chart indicating which devices are being used by Monroe and her audience to post tweets and retweets. 2018. Screenshot, Social Bearing.

Generation	Estimate (%)	Gender	Estimate (%)	Geo Location	Estimate (%)
Millennial	65	Male	60	Cape Town	68
Generation X	23	Female	40	Johannesburg	28
Generation Z	7			Other (Rest of SA)	4
Baby Boomers	5				
<b>Total Twitter Followers: 9911</b>					

**Table 2.1.** Estimated demographics of Patty Monroe’s Twitter account based on cumulative sample of API Social Bearing, collected between January and April (2018).

Monroe (2018) identified herself as a feminist during her interview and on the topic of feminism by stating:

The definition of feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality of the sexes. For me, I feel like we are living in an age where my everyday life is an example of the empowerment of women, being a woman myself. I think that we live in a time where women are more heard and seen and [are now] in positions of power and that, for me, is wonderful. I feel like men mistake our wanting equal rights and equal pay for wanting to be like men, but that is far from the truth. I love being a woman! I think that we [women] were created different because we each bring different qualities [to the table], but I think men shouldn't get higher paid positions or taken more seriously or get jobs over women just because they are 'men'. It should be based on our work ethic; our strengths (Monroe 2018).

For Monroe, a woman can celebrate her womanhood and still be feminist. This corresponds with what Watson (2018) suggests regarding the fact that feminism cannot be pinned onto one singular ideal or quality and is characterised by diverging views and challenges. Surprisingly, however, Monroe has yet to disclose unambiguously her feminist affiliation online.<sup>39</sup> She does, however, allude to a feminist affiliation in her Tweets regarding her support of events such as the 'State of the Labia' live stream panel talk (hosted by The Eye Radio), Netflix SA's Women's Day events and, most recently, the Hip-hop Herstory event held by 'Castle Lite' in an effort to support women in Hip-Hop in South Africa (@MissPattyMonroe Twitter 2018). Monroe acknowledges that the music industry is typically male-dominated (Monroe 2018), but is not phased or disgruntled by this. She is using her position as a female rapper to set a level of equality, rather than using this particular platform to address male-dominance in an aggressive, overtly political manner. Thus, celebrity culture is a form of enfranchisement for Monroe. She embraces her gender and sees herself as equal to her male counterparts. This stands in line with the ideals of the second wave of feminism, in that Monroe endorses the fight for equal career opportunities and pay scales.

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<sup>39</sup>This is potentially due to the fact that this style of public proclamation may intimidate her male audience.



**Fig. 2.11.** @MissPattyMonroe: January. 2018. Screenshot of tweet, Twitter.

When closely observing Monroe's Twitter account, a few alarms might be raised for the conventional feminist viewer. In Figure 2.11 above, one is presented with a studio shot of Monroe as professionally photographed by a local celebrity photographer and videographer who goes by the online identity of @IndexFinger88. Monroe posted this photograph on 1 January 2018, ahead of her first public appearance for the year in which she promoted her new album called *Malatjie*. The photograph was tweeted with text stating "2018 #StiekUit" (@MissPattyMonroe, Twitter

2018). Monroe also tagged the photographer, providing her Twitter followers with an instant link to their twitter account. In this instance, Monroe makes use of Cape Coloured slang in the form of a hashtag.<sup>40</sup> The phrase ‘stiek uit’ is a call to action (CTA) directed at her audience. Loosely translated this phrase means ‘stab out’ or ‘show up’. It implies that her followers, particularly fans or *Malatjies*, should come and support her and her music.

In this photograph, Monroe poses on an ottoman with her legs spread apart and her arms and hands hanging between them. She is dressed in black lace-up heels, a black and white two-piece athleisure bra and shorts set, a sheer black mini-dress or kaftan and yellow sunglasses. She is centred in the frame of the full-body, low-angled photograph, and her head is raised upwards and is slightly tilted. Monroe also appears to be wearing a nude make-up look on her face and the photographer has made use of artificial lighting and high digital contrast. At first glance, one observes a deliberate call for attention to Monroe’s spread out legs and excessive visibility of skin through the sheer black dress. Her facial expression suggests that she is confident and self-assured, as her lips are slightly pouted. She sits in a manner that is synonymous with male rappers who attempt to overly assert a powerful, masculine appearance. For men in Hip-Hop, this is seen as a ‘jingoism’. However, in Monroe’s case, it conveys a sense of confidence. Overall, therefore, one observes a sexually suggestive visual.<sup>41</sup>

Prosex feminist theorist Camille Paglia might think of this image as empowering. Paglia is known as a “dissident” (2018:10) feminist, who resists stifling representational conformism, in terms of depicting women as cleansed symbols of domesticity and “saccharine femininity” (Paglia 2018:10-12). Paglia might also argue that Monroe’s black high heels (Figure 2.11) are a “most lethal social weapon” (2018:233) in asserting her presence as a female rapper and that Monroe could attempt to be even more fervent in presenting her sexiness online. Many female rappers, especially Nicki Minaj (White 2013:618), have been noted to employ even more explicit hypersexualised images

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<sup>40</sup> This electronic marker is an indication of a particular set of symbols and codes, specifically lexical codes, which are exclusive to members of the *Malatjie* fandom – a specific discourse community formed by Monroe.

<sup>41</sup> Postmodern “image junkies” (Sontag 1977:24) have become somewhat desensitised to the presentation of sexualised femininity due to mass production of digital photography and social media’s rapid dissemination of image culture.

in the pursuit of “self-definition” (White 2013:622). One might constantly see such imagery on MTV and celebrity gossip shows. Thus, it may be seen as a sexually suggestive visual that has become normalised in postmodern popular culture. Monroe’s employment of this visual strategy may very well be her own idea as she expresses herself through fashion and, therefore, she may enjoy expressing her femininity in a sexy, but not overtly sexual manner that is now (in postmodern times) commercially acceptable. This, according to some feminists, is because women “experience their bodies as vehicles for enacting their desires or reaching out in the world” (Davis 2006:572). Perhaps it is Monroe’s desire to pose suggestively because she is aware that it will attract more public attention and positive appraisal from her male audience specifically (but notably, she feels empowered and powerful rather than victimised by the male gaze). This could be increasing her social and cultural capital as a celebrity, and at the same time she might be embracing a kind of self-sexualisation that gives her ‘sexual freedom’ (Paglia 2018:17) and power.

In her writings ‘The body and the reproduction of femininity: A feminist appropriation of Foucault’ (1989), theorist Susan Bordo concurrently argues that the female beauty cannot be understood without taking both gender and power into consideration. Bordo (1989:16) sees the female body as a ‘text’ which can be “read as a cultural statement, a statement about gender”, and Monroe is making a visual statement about her position as a female Coloured rapper in South Africa – strong, confident and proud of her sexuality. For Bordo, society and feminists are so engrossed by the female appearance because of a plethora of circumventing cultural discourses which teach us to accept certain beauty standards and reject others.<sup>42</sup> Whilst Monroe may face diverging opinions of different women from different backgrounds, many contemporary women may celebrate this photograph as an attempt to exercise control over her body, femininity and the pervading male gaze. Specifically, those who identify as postfeminists may view this image as a newfound “female success” (McRobbie 2004:257) and self-monitored agency (McRobbie 2004: 261). For Angela McRobbie, postfeminism is founded by a “language of personal choice” (2004: 262) which is dedicated to re-inventing women’s genres. Monroe, arguably, finds political empowerment in having the choice of representing herself as a self-sexualising subject rather than

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<sup>42</sup>“Feminism must end its sex war” (2018:28), is a statement that Camille Paglia is famous for. Paglia argues that eroticism and sexuality are positioned at the junction of the culture and nature binary, and that feminists oversimplify the issue of sex when reducing it to a subject of social standard (2018: 31).

a sexualised object that is a product of hetero-normativity and the male gaze because she chooses to be sexy for her own sake.

While some see postfeminism as a dismantling of traditionalist feminist ideals McRobbie, however, argues that postfeminism is a form of “double entanglement” (2004:255) – a term she coined after reading Judith Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim* (2000).

This [postfeminism] comprises the co-existence of neo-conservative values in relation to gender, sexuality and family life ... with processes of liberalisation in regard to choice and diversity in domestic, sexual and kinship relations ... It also encompasses the co-existence of feminism as at some level transformed into a form of Gramscian common sense, while also fiercely repudiated, indeed almost hated. The taken into accountness permits all the more thorough dismantling of feminist politics and the discrediting of the occasionally voiced need for its renewal (McRobbie 2004:255-256).

Thus, by exerting control over her own body and femininity Monroe is arguably reclaiming her “power-as-self-mastery” (Bordo in Davis 2006:569). Therefore, she may feel emboldened or liberated through self-sexualising, for which she wholly takes responsibility.<sup>43</sup> Conclusively, Monroe experiences the ‘double entanglement’ which McRobbie characterises. This means that whilst she is a Coloured woman who is constantly threatened by the danger of being re-absorbed into repressive discourses of beauty and femininity, she asserts her power, self-monitored agency and freedom of choice, as a woman who is proud of her body and in touch with her sexuality. Consequently, Monroe’s beauty profile and body type is not given the conventional praise. In this sense, when she presents her curvaceous, Coloured body online, she is directly making a statement against body-shaming and body fascism. Therefore, Figure 2.11 is a testament to the fact that Monroe has overcome conventional standards of feminine beauty and arguably, this is what positions Monroe as a postfeminist rather than a conventional feminist.

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<sup>43</sup>Paglia might argue that this is a sign of a strong, empowered woman because she seeks equal treatment within a male-dominated industry and takes personal responsibility (2018:227-228) for her sexual freedom within this celebratised domain.



It is also as a local pop culture icon and contemporary influencer that Monroe articulates herself as ‘a millennial feminist’, someone who believes in the “pursuit of personal freedom” (Silva 2016), which is a more inclusive stance when compared to the classical feminist ethos of fighting for a collective, plainly political cause. Nor is Monroe’s self-sexualisation an overtly politicised act; it is a personal choice. However, the personal is always political in postmodern culture and, in another sense, she embodies a “Do-It-Yourself feminism” (Chidgey 2014:101-102), where she is mindful of and supports the notion of achieving equality across all genders (in her stated efforts to achieve equality in a male-dominated space) and body types (she embraces her atypical body type). At the same time, she articulates an image representative of a postfeminist visual rhetoric that welcomes new feminist images, to illustrate a personal choice and an embodied sexual freedom. Thus, Monroe stands as a postfeminist text in the South African context which her online followers may or may not use as a pedagogical tool in their own identity construction and articulation. In this way, she is potentially acting as a poster child for the avocation of women’s rights for personal choice, agency and sexual freedom.

These elements are indicative of a changing South African feminism that is conceivably more inclusive of unapologetic women and also more empathetic towards women who celebrate their bodies and womanhood whilst still identifying as feminists. Consequently, it is the fast-paced, innovative and technological Twitter medium that allows Monroe to representatively assert a more ‘woke’ or “on-fleek feminism” (Dawjee 2018a:47) that resonates with millennials (see Table 2.1) in South Africa. In addition, Monroe stands as a pedagogical tool for teaching young women online about taking agency over and responsibility for their own bodies and ironically to take back power from the penetrative male gaze. This is quite relevant to the South African landscape, where many women are still struggling against violence, abuse and rape in a still largely patriarchal space that evokes the sense that women need to cover up their bodies to avoid sexual violence. In this sense, therefore, Monroe’s Twitter post (Figure 2.11) is a form of representational resistance to this sexist evocation. The message she conveys is that women can be sexy and confident in public spaces, and still maintain feminist values regarding gender equality for all.

## 2.4 Appropriation and the YouTube Culture Industry

In terms of honing a postfeminist visual trope, Monroe is not the first female celebrity to do so. In fact, her behaviour and image is reminiscent of the discursive practices of the American music industry, specifically the work of Beyoncé Knowles. Beyoncé is a cultural icon known for her curvaceous body and a body of work that traverses several culture industries (Durham 2012:35). In studying Beyoncé's identity, writer Aisha Durham argues that Beyoncé can be considered as the contemporary Marilyn Monroe (2012:36) in that the celebration and acceptance of her curvaceous figure has increasingly reformed beauty industries that formerly favoured the petite (2012:36), light-weight, waif-like body types that Susan Bordo (1990, 2004) describes in her writings on the female body. The image of real women with alternate body types has been proliferated by public figures with large cultural capital, especially Beyoncé. Beyoncé's brand is also one that is constantly associated with narratives of female empowerment. This is why Durham argues that:

Beyoncé successfully performs a range of Black femininities, speaking at once to Black working and middle class sensibilities while fulfilling her dynamic roles as both a hip hop belle and a US exotic other globally. The music video emerges as the celebrity-making medium by which the form and function of the spectacular Black female body is rearticulated. It is the medium that thrusts Beyoncé from a girl group member to a supreme solo Diana Ross-like diva (2012:35).

In the same way that Beyoncé re-articulates Black femininities<sup>44</sup> in music videos to seemingly empower women across the world as representatives, especially Black African American women, Monroe also re-articulates what can be considered as Coloured femininities in her own music video narratives. Durham (2012:40) suggests that music videos featuring Beyoncé work through existing class and gender issues by representing Black femininities through style, language choice, and dance. Specifically, her hair and curvaceous body shape stand as signifiers of a classed femininity that resonates with Black women in America. Furthermore, Beyoncé's music videos present

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<sup>44</sup>People have diverging opinions regarding Beyoncé's identity as a feminist celebrity. In a study conducted by Ebony Utley (2017: 9), young girls were questioned on the topic of Beyoncé's brand of feminism. Some participants strongly felt that Beyoncé might be perceived as a feminist because she endorses female empowerment and gender equality, but is not a role model (2017:1-3) because she perpetuates stereotypes in her videos. Viewing Beyoncé's video content also induced a strong sense of vulnerability which certain participants countered with "sexual respectability politics" (2017:9-10) that caused an ambivalence towards her. They felt that her sexuality undermined her feminist endeavors.

competing versions of Black womanhood (Durham 2012:41-42). For example, in the video *Check on It* (2005) Beyoncé represents a character that juxtaposes a ladylike, modest femininity and with a noticeable “ghetto girl” (Durham 2012:41) aesthetic and attitude. Then in *Run the World (Girls)* (2011) and *Sorry* (2016) she presents images of Black girl gangs and armies of women marching, dancing and even gyrating together to convey an ironic message of strength and women empowerment. Most of the videos mentioned contain messages about empowered womanhood, the affirmation of multiple femininities, and resisting antiquated “sexual respectability politics” (Utley 2017:9) that favour sexual chastity for the sake of social responsibility. Monroe appropriates<sup>45</sup> Beyoncé’s approach to dealing with Black femininities and class issues. What is meant by ‘appropriate’ is that there is an exchange of ideas and narratives between two cultures, namely, Black African American music video culture and Coloured South African music video culture. Theorist Richard Rogers (2006:474) suggests that cultural appropriation is inevitable when cultures come into representational and virtual contact. Rogers (2006: 474-475) also asserts that cultural appropriation involves the assimilation and misuse of marginalised cultures, the survival mechanisms of subordinated ethnic groups, and their resistance to dominant cultural practices. In this particular case study, it is arguable that Monroe’s appropriation of Beyoncé’s modus operandi is a non-malicious exchange of motifs, symbols, genres and representational rituals between two cultures with an equivalent level of social and political power (Rodgers 2006:477-481). Potentially, Monroe adopts Beyoncé’s already successful and familiar formula to empower herself as a representation of a Coloured woman rapper in a male dominated industry, which is fixed in a patriarchal landscape. In Beyoncé’s case, however, the MTV channel has functioned as a mechanism within the global marketplace that upholds her visibility (Durham 2012:45). In Monroe’s case, YouTube has been the main interconnecting SMP (rather than television) that has ushered in the echoes and style of youth culture in the South African context.<sup>46</sup> YouTube equips Monroe with fast-paced communication tools and immediacy. This fortifies the parasocial relationship between herself and her fans, closing the gap and making her more able to relate to

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<sup>45</sup> “Because of its associations with power, the term appropriation had a negative charge when it was first popularised within cultural studies. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of social discourse as a system of regulation, theorists analysed the production of cultural meanings that occurred through the appropriation of an “Other” (Ashley & Plesch 2002:3).

<sup>46</sup> YouTube allows its users to not only publish user generated content (UGC) in the form of video online, but its users become part of an online community that allows for sharing content and engaging in dialogue with other users. As stated previously, Monroe uses Twitter in conjunction with YouTube to foster parasocial relationships with her fans. By embedding YouTube links on her Twitter account, her audience has immediate access to her music video content, which plays a significant role in her identity formation and assertion.

millennials who favour technological advancement. YouTube also allows fans even more access to Monroe and her content, as they are able to connect with her (in real time) in the comments section, giving fans a sense of technological empowerment within the online landscape that they may not feel when watching schedule television broadcasts (in their lived offline experience). Thus, by using YouTube and Twitter, Monroe not only empowers herself in a postfeminist sense, but gives her audience a democratic platform where they too may have freedom of choice and a sense of agency.



**Fig. 2.12.** *Reminiscing: Intro*. 2017. [Video Still]. Directed by Blake Steenkamp. South Africa: Stanley John Agency & Afterlife Talent.

In *Reminiscing* (2017), one of Monroe's most successful music videos directed by Blake Steenkamp, the audience is presented with a more glamorous, graceful Monroe who sits at her vanity desk and perfectly applies make-up to her face (see Figure 2.12) before she leaves to visit a significant other who is facing jail time (see Figure 2.13) and who only gets a glimpse of her new, famous life from newspaper articles and magazine clippings pasted on the walls of his jail cell. This particular song has lyrics which explain the memory of a past relationship that failed but which changed her in the end. It is a 'rags to riches' story, in that she is depicted as once having to hustle on the streets and then leaving a life of crime behind (as well as the male companion) to live a better life. It is also indicative of the classic 'come up' narrative that plays out in Hip-Hop music videos. Hence, the title of the song *Reminiscing*, which implies that she is pondering or recalling

past events. Further on in the video, this glamorous image is juxtaposed with a notorious, scandalous image. One observes a street-smart Monroe, only this time she is represented as a menace with large guns and masks; a gangster who is committing a criminal act with her sidekick. Figure 2.14 illustrates this part of the narrative whereby Monroe and the jailed individual successfully rob a bank, before he is caught and sent to prison. The stylistic code used in this video could potentially be seen as stereotypical because Coloured men in South Africa are prominently represented in the media in terms of criminality and disempowerment, and also as notorious ‘gangsters’ in South African films. For example, award-winning films *Noem my skollie* (2016) and *Four corners* (2013) were criticised heavily by the media for perpetuating existing racial stereotypes that further disempower and exploit the Coloured community.<sup>47</sup> As a Coloured woman, however, Monroe is represented in this video as a symbol of the ‘glamorous’ and aspirational criminality that is empowering, rather than a subversion of the conventional criminal role assigned to Coloured men or the aggressive, dominating label ascribed to female rappers in the music industry.



**Fig. 2.13:** *Reminiscing: Prison Scene*. 2017. [Video Still]. Directed by Blake Steenkamp. South Africa: Stanley John Agency & Afterlife Talent.

<sup>47</sup> Cultural theorist, Richard Dyer, has written comprehensively on stereotyping. For Dyer, being ‘stereotypical’, entails the utilisation of a dysfunctional logic which serves a purpose that is linked to conflict and discrimination, and to strategically “exclude” (2006b:354-355) those who are historically othered.

Possibly, Monroe deliberately employed this narrative to evoke a sense that crime is not gendered or race specific and that Coloured women could just as easily indulge in the criminality that Coloured men are often depicted as doing in films. This is seen in Figure 15 where Monroe and her romantic partner celebrate the success of their robbery and have a rather intimate moment with each other and the stolen cash. Here, instead of perpetuating an archaic South African narrative of vindictive, scary Coloured male criminals, that victimises and negates the Coloured community, Monroe creates a ‘new’ narrative that completely dismisses victimhood. She presents the public with an image of power rather than negation, sexualising and idealising criminality so as to empower herself and her Coloured audience – she offers new imaginaries that may eventually cause illicit social and political change – despite seeming to perpetuate the existing stereotype to a certain degree. Perhaps, in this sense, the music video could be considered as subversive. In addition, Monroe’s music video representation taps into American stereotypes, much like Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s *Bonnie and Clyde* (2002) music video narrative in which they also steal money (see Figure 2.16); however, Monroe’s *Reminiscing* (2017) is somewhat unique to the South African context in that the jail background alludes to Polsmoor Prison in Cape Town in terms of the orange and black jail attire (see Figure 2.13), with features of Monroe’s *Malatjie* apparel merchandise. In addition, the general backdrop of the video is in a clearly Capetonian setting. Furthermore, as Monroe alludes to her Capetonian background in this music video, she indicates that she embraces her Coloured ethnicity.



**Fig. 2.14.** *Reminiscing: Robbery Scene* (2017). [Video Still]. Directed by Blake Steenkamp. South Africa: Stanley John Agency & Afterlife Talent.



**Fig. 2.15.** *Reminiscing: Love Scene*. 2017. [Video Still]. Directed by Blake Steenkamp. South Africa: Stanley John Agency & Afterlife Talent.



**Fig. 2.16:** *Bonnie & Clyde* Jay Z feat. Beyoncé. 2002. [Video Still]. Directed by Chris Robinson. USA: Def Jam & Roc-A-Fella.

## 2.5 Coloured Identity Politics

In this section it must be understood that the term ‘Coloured’, as used in Westernised societies can refer to both Black or mixed-race people; however, in the South African context, it is a term for a racial category implemented during the Apartheid era to categorise only people of mixed ancestry. Coloured individuals are historically said to be of Khoisan and Bantu descent. The Khoisan are indigenous people of South Africa who have been defined as “yesterday’s missing link” (Erasmus 2013: 39). There are an estimated 3,5 million Coloured people in South Africa today who constitute only 9% of the country’s population. As an ethnic community they lack significant political or economic power and have always formed a marginal group in South African society (Adhikari 2005:2-3). However, in Cape Town, this minority group accounts for 42,4% of the city’s population, of which half are Coloured women. Unfortunately, as a marginal group they have yet



to fully recover from the effects of racial segregation and forced removals from their ancestral homes which were policies imposed during the apartheid era. Zimitri Erasmus discusses this lack of recovery as follows:

Uncertainty and discomfort about the place of ‘colouredness’ persists in the current South African context. Part of this discomfort is embedded in the historical definition of coloured identities in terms of ‘lack’. This legacy is manifested in understandings of coloured identities as neither black nor white; non-existent; without culture and definitely not African, understood in essentialist terms. In addition, coloured identities are commonly understood as an apartheid relic best forgotten. This view denies the subjective experiences of those historically classified coloured.

Not much socio-economic redress has occurred in post-apartheid South Africa. Mohamed Adhikari (2005, 2006, and 2009) has written significantly about existing Coloured self-consciousness, and suggests that popular opinion surrounding “the racially-hybrid origins of the Coloured community”<sup>48</sup> (in Lee 2006:204-205) is something that complicates and mystifies the group’s identity. This is especially with regard to Coloured women as society is yet to have access to sufficient knowledge regarding Coloured culture, femininity and feminism. The term Coloured is also conflicting for its community. In many cases, contemporary Coloured individuals even choose not to associate with the racial category due to its haunting apartheid origins. For many, the term evokes a sense of shame or a feeling of anger and confusion, as the label was previously used to group together those who were apparently neither White nor Black. However, the Coloured community is far from being a homogenous group of mixed-race people. Despite a hegemonic history, the ethnic classification serves only to facilitate the stereotypical depictions of this South African community, both locally and internationally. Consequently, with her newfound celebrity influence, Monroe stands as a culturally and racially layered text from which audiences can create a new meaning regarding Coloured women.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The concept of the ‘hybrid’ or hybridity is one that has the power to challenge the roles of the existence of segregated bonded cultures and ethnic communities. Such amalgamation has the propensity to change pre-given or pre-mediated meanings and narratives. These changed meanings and narratives have the potential to confront and defy robust ideological materialisations which pervade contemporary society (Baaz 2001:2014).

<sup>49</sup> Although there are a few other Coloured female musicians in South Africa, such as Dope Saint Jude, Linkris and singer Janice Now, Monroe currently stands as the most publicly recognised and celebrated of the lot. This puts her in a position that allows for the proliferation new representations of Coloured women in the media, and especially online on SMPs. Previously, ethnic minorities such as Coloured women did not receive much media attention. Social media, being a democratic space for self-presentation, has increasingly proliferated the circulation and mass dissemination of Coloured imageries and narratives. Thus, it is arguably that this is the very reason why Monroe remains very conscious of her public surveillance and self-aware of her online identity.

Monroe's online 'hypervisibility' (Dubrofsky & Wood 2014:283) depicts female Coloured identity that is quite sexualised, as can be seen in Figure 2.13. Thus, one can argue that the self-presentation she is employing is a sexualisation of her Coloured otherness since Monroe breaks away from existing stereotypical depictions of Coloured women in South Africa. Typically, these women are portrayed as impoverished, lacking ambition and political assertiveness, and wearing a cultural fashion symbol, the 'swirlkous' (seen in popular South African film and television shows) as a hair garment to cover or keep ethnic hair in place.<sup>50</sup> It is also a symbol of the economic position of Coloured women in South Africa and their ranking amongst other ethnic groups. Monroe has never presented herself online wearing this particular head piece, instead she takes pride in her ethnic hair:

I come from a mixed-raced home so I've never viewed race as such an intricate part of things. I've just embraced myself and I guess, in that sense, that could be [considered as] my femininity as a Coloured [woman] because I've got my curly fro, but that's just me embracing myself, my hair, my curvy body; all of me (Monroe 2018).

Monroe does not feel compelled to assert her racial identity online explicitly—she would rather avoid essentialism. In an online YouTube docu-series episode, published by a local organisation known as 'Coloured mentality', Monroe was documented stating that she does not see Cape Town as racially 'cliquey' (Coloured Mentality 2018) in terms of the supposed structural racism that still exists in the post-apartheid era. Further Monroe does not 'see race' or feel affected by any sort of structural racism, and she feels that perhaps it is because of the lighter colour (not tanned or brown) of her skin (Coloured Mentality 2018) which makes it hard for the public to distinguish whether or not she is Coloured. Consequently, Monroe embraces this racial ambiguity and adapts a sort of "colour-blind ideology" (Rodriquez 2006:645) whereby the salience of race is denied as a way of removing racially coded meanings from popular culture discourses (Rodriquez 2006: 646-647). While it is true that Monroe publicly accepts the racial category as part of her identity as a woman (particularly in the way in which she uses Cape Coloured slang and the dialect in her music), it is not a layer of her identity that she needs to exploit. Thus, her femininity as a Cape Coloured woman is characterised by the normalisation of symbolically Coloured traits which otherwise could be

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<sup>50</sup> Cultural and race theorist Fatimah Tobing Rony refers to this as an "iconography of a race" (1996:71).

seen as stereotypical by intra-group members<sup>51</sup> And while her celebrity does embrace a “Coloured factor” (Lee 2006:201-202) recognisable to the community, she does not negate this factor. Rather, she affirms ‘Colouredness’ in her ‘natural’ approach to race.<sup>52</sup> Many critics would still argue that this could be considered as a form of cultural appropriation for commercial consumption. This is an inescapable battle that celebrity culture has yet to win. Author Chris Weedon has also suggested that postmodern media tend to commodify “racial and ethnic otherness” (2004:14) which intensifies the discrimination in contemporary society; however, he also states that, through popular channels such as social media platforms (SMPs), marginal groups may well seek out ways of salvaging some sort of “positive identity”. This is exactly what Monroe attempts by making Coloured identity less strange via her appropriation of American music video styles<sup>53</sup> (especially those of Beyoncé) for her own celebrity position - even if this means making conscious use of a “racialised discourse” (Weedon 2004:17). Therefore, Monroe’s approach to her gender and race could be in accord with Weedon’s suggestions about subjectivity and identity.

## 2.6 Concluding Remarks

Through self-sexualisation, in the form of tweeted photographs and video content, Monroe has positioned herself as a confident and empowered Coloured woman who does not necessarily subscribe to genteel, conformist representations of femininity. In this sense, she deviates from the conventional feminist ethos of the second wave, where the female image must be scrutinised and kept under close self-surveillance to avoid perpetuating longstanding gender stereotypes. Monroe, by contrast, exhibits a postfeminist sensibility that McRobbie and Gill characterise in their writings; freedom of choice, agency, and taking responsibility for her own body attest to this.

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<sup>51</sup> “[If] we expect anyone to classify themselves by the categories of apartheid’s Population Registration Act of 1950 [then] we confirm apartheid’s objective to have these categories permanently established even as we use them in a racial project for redress. This repetitive process of race classification entrenches the normalisation of these categories” (Erasmus 2010:247).

<sup>52</sup> Weedon argues that “The cultural narratives of minorities – historical and fictional – are one place to begin to acquire the knowledge needed to dislodge both hegemonic narratives and the oppressive binaries that they perpetuate. This is crucial to the development of plural societies that are accepting of difference, and that even celebrate it” (2004:159). Social media is the site of this struggle for Monroe.

<sup>53</sup>This is a form of “content appropriation” (Young 2005:136) that is a positive “cultural exchange” (Rogers 2006:477) in the hopes of utilising the content to construct an affirmative identity.

Monroe's self-presentation online is conceivably a liberating and empowering experience, especially for Coloured women who are struggling to articulate their identities. However, she does respectfully and tactfully piggyback upon American popular culture styles to create a Coloured discourse that is affirmative as an alternative to the archaic, disempowering South African representations that victimise and obscure the Coloured community and its "member types" (Dyer 2006b:363). As the author of her own visual identity on Twitter, therefore, Monroe embraces her body and ethnicity via photography and film, although her image does not imitate established body standards in that she presents herself as a powerful fictional criminal character in *Reminiscing* (2017) who escapes incarceration, and is a sexually mature adult woman rather than a 'girly' fashion type. In creating her own kind of Coloured discourse, Monroe has started a process of materialising and normalising renewed Coloured narratives and images that convey the message that Coloured women are not subordinate to Coloured men or circumstantial victims, and that Coloured women do have a choice to be sexy, confident and successful in a patriarchal South Africa. Despite the fact that her SMP usage is not overtly political in that she does not position herself as a celebrity activist in her postfeminist exertions. She should be recognised for levelling the playing field in a male-dominated celebrity industry in a non-aggressive manner. In this she asserts her self-defined sexuality as a means of satisfying a 'sexy' but not hypersexual degrading image, and for carrying the responsibility for her own sexual freedom as a local icon. As such, she is fostering micro societal changes within her fan group which are commendable.

## CHAPTER 3: RETHINKING MODESTY CULTURE: AISHA BAKER'S ONLINE SUBMISSION AND SUBVERSION

### 3.1 Introducing Aisha Baker

The upsurge of celebrity throughout all media spheres has changed over the last two decades due in the main to technology's increasing influence on the new public communication culture (PCC) that has led to a shift in the definition of 'celebrity'. Recently, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the gap between the 'celebrated' and the 'ordinary' has been constantly shrinking (Turner 2006:153-154) due, in part, to the effects of social media<sup>54</sup> and the increasing visibility and elevation of the ordinary individual that one can easily relate to. In the South African social media Aisha Baker represents the proliferation of a new 'celebrity text' and socio-cultural shift in a space where the Internet has established "a new reality" (Burns 2009:11) and novel modes of civic participation. In this chapter, the aim is to define this new celebrity text in terms of SMI culture and discover whether or not Baker, specifically makes use of her SMI position for a postfeminist cause that differs to Monroe's approach.

As a Cape Town-born Muslim blogger and social media all-rounder, Aisha Baker became popular when she started a personal blog called *Baked The Blog* (now called *Baked Online*), in 2009. The predominantly fashion blog (at the time) was started as a hobby whilst she completed her BCom degree at the University of Cape Town ('Mela' on SABC 2 2016). This came at a time when blogging was becoming a popular means of communicating with groups of people with similar interests and passions. Baker developed an eye for fashion from a young age and cites her grandmother as one of her main fashion influences ('Mela' on SABC 2 2016). Her keen eye for the classic yet modern style shaped her blogging career, which later developed into an entrepreneurial business venture. Since 2009, Baker has become a South African household name and her personal brand resonates with women of all ages who are interested in fashion and beauty.

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<sup>54</sup>In his recent writings on participation in social media practices, theorist Graeme Meikle characterises what he terms "the social media effect" (2014:376). For Meikle, the media (especially social media) has become that which we actively 'do' rather than that which we merely observe. Therefore, society has adopted a new set of rules regarding public visibility. Meikle suggests that "we present and perform versions of ourselves for self-selected audiences. And there are uses of such performance to connect with others – to network, interact, and share with others we might never have encountered otherwise" (2014:376). However, along with these new rules comes new requirements regarding being monitored and analyzing others, performing and exhibiting ourselves, and associating with individuals who are newly made visible to us and who we ourselves are consecutively made visible to as well (2014: 381).

After her blog was launched, Baker began to broaden her social media influence by interconnecting her blog to a range of SMPs, such as Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The mass circulation of her brand, via both social media and traditional media channels, elevated her social position from blogger to ‘influencer’. Thus, it was no surprise when internationally acclaimed female hair care brand L’Oréal employed her as an ambassador for their Casting Crème Gloss range (Dlamini-Qwesha 2015). Later in 2016, Baker was nominated for a Nickelodeon Kids’ Choice Award for a newly integrated category – ‘Best Blogger in Africa’ (Mahlalela 2016). Despite not winning the award, the award itself signalled a cultural shift towards the acceptance of a blogging culture, and marked the first acknowledgement of a South African blogger. Thus, Baker can be considered as a pioneer in the digital culture of local and international online influence. More recently, Baker was employed by one of South Africa’s leading beauty and fashion magazines, *Cosmopolitan SA*, as one of their March cover girls for their ‘Influencer’ issue (see Figure 3.1). This particular issue had three respective covers with three different local influencers on them. The cover was also accompanied by an eight page special feature inside the magazine. This issue was then promoted on multiple SMPs, including Baker’s personal Instagram account. Such a progression from blogger, to influencer, to revered cover girl is a clear demonstration of her rise to ‘stardom’, whereby she transformed from being an ordinary young woman writing informational pieces in her private time to being an esteemed entrepreneur and social media influencer (SMI).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Her celebratised position can also, arguably, be attributed to the fact that she married South African Protea cricketer Wayne Parnell in May 2016, at which point she became Aisha Baker-Parnell. However, I refer to her simply as Baker throughout the rest of the article to assert her independence as a public figure. Wayne Parnell stands as a sports celebrity, thus, together, the two might be deemed a ‘power couple’. This is a highly celebrated discursive category, specifically in 21<sup>st</sup> century youth culture and adds to Baker’s social and cultural capital.



**Fig. 3.1** @bakedonline: February A. 2018. Screenshot of magazine cover post, Instagram

What Baker brings to the forefront is a new occupation is available to ordinary women - the role of social media influencer (SMI). Some theorists argue that SMIs are internet sensations who embody “a new type of independent third party endorser who has the ability to shape the attitudes of an audience” (Freberg Graham, McGaughey & Freberg 2010:1) whilst simultaneously generating SMI capital.<sup>56</sup> Companies turn to these public figures, with their vast online following as a prerequisite, to amplify the public recognition of their product or service information across large populations. Therefore, SMIs are persuasive entities<sup>57</sup> or industry experts in a social network

<sup>56</sup> From a business and marketing standpoint, SMIs are the key individuals or ‘driving forces’ behind “viral marketing” (More & Lingam 2017:1) and are the dominant social media users who create and curate popular trends and play a crucial role in forming and/ or swaying the opinions that develop within social network spaces (More & Lingam 2017:1-2).

<sup>57</sup> Recently, commercial companies have been able to identify influential public figures and social media users (who have an image that is compatible with their company ethos) via statistical models, algorithms and the use of API technologies so that they may strategise and plan in advance for effective product launching, promotion, and for reaching potential customers (More & Lingam 2017:7).

who produce visual content, review and promote products and services to assist potential customers in making decisions regarding their purchases (More & Lingam 2017:1-3). In turn, SMIs influence or persuade customers' opinions and desires through social networking sites (SNSs) and SMPs. As a blogger, content producer, SMI and brand ambassador, Baker does exactly this. In addition, however, she has been vocal in the media about developing a personal brand online that is an extension of her true personality which does not stand in conflict with her own morals and beliefs (*Baked the Vlog* 2016). Thus, she exhibits a responsibility and agency when it comes to being highly selective of her affiliation with the brands she presents to identify herself in a modest, visually pleasing manner (*Mela on SABC 2* 2016). This choice of SMP for self-branding is critical to her decision-making process and fosters a parasocial interaction with her audience that is beneficial for both her and her followers.

Interestingly, and contrary to expectations, Baker confirmed that her status as influencer or 'celebrity' was not a primary goal during an interview for local online retailer *Superbalist.com*. "My celebrity is accidental. I actually hate being put on celebrity lists. Wayne is far more high profile, but doesn't see himself that way at all" (Muhlenberg 2016). In fact, Baker views her celebrity as a by-product of her entrepreneurial skills, self-branded image and SMI capital (which is bestowed upon her by her increasing online following). However, as an influencer Baker herself conceivably also becomes the 'ideal' being promoted or 'sold' to the public, even though this may not be her initial goal. Thus, in terms of her online identity, it becomes essential to investigate her use of social media and how social media users respond to her self-branding.

### **3.2 The Age of the SMI: Using the Blog for Self-Branding**

A more definitive characterisation of the typical SMI in which social media is quintessential, has been introduced with influencer marketing as an innovative, dynamic digital alternative that is increasingly replacing television and radio advertisements. As described by the marketing sector, influencer marketing teams up SMIs, with a significant amount of loyal followers on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Instagram (or a combination thereof) with companies looking to market their product to current/new customers through the SMIs social media channels (IZEA Inc. 2017). The ideal SMI should, therefore, be:

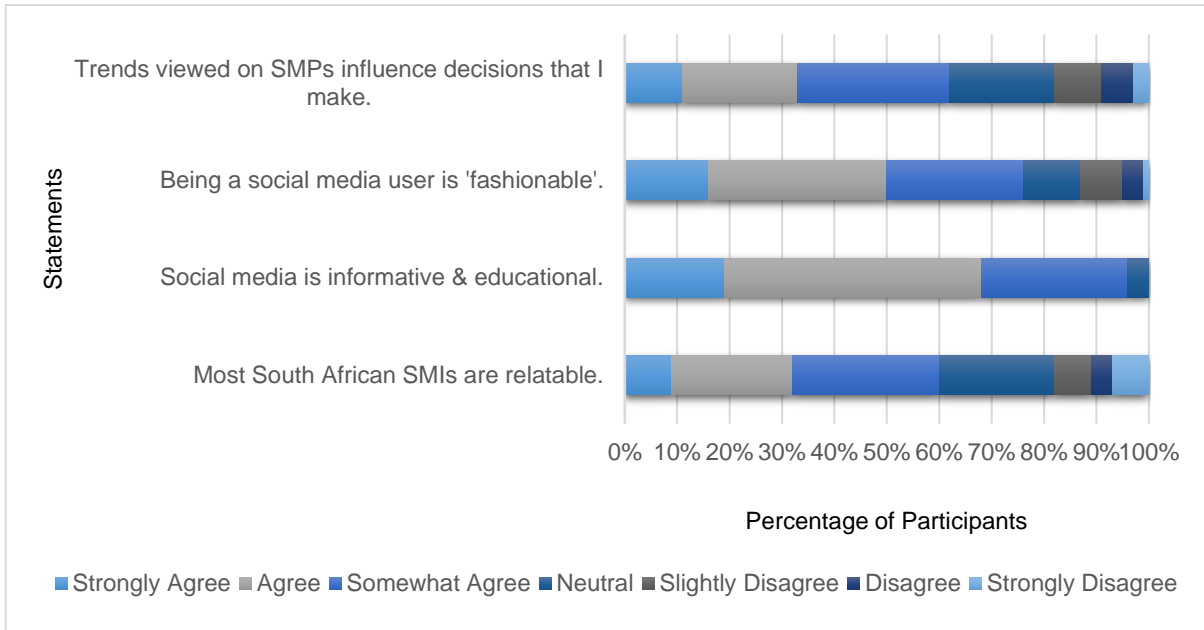


[S]ocial media icons with a great following and credibility within a certain niche. They could be: YouTube users, bloggers, celebrities, industry experts, activists, [and/or] enthusiasts. They collaborate with businesses to create campaigns that increase brand awareness and drive sales by promoting a brand or product to their social audience ... Businesses compensate influencers monetarily and/or with free samples (IZEA Inc. 2017).<sup>58</sup>

After conducting a survey to investigate the use of social media by young women between the ages of 18 and 28 in Cape Town, this research gained insight into SMI culture. The sample consisted of 100 women, of which 89 had some sort of idea of an SMI, and 84 women admitted to following South African SMIs on social media. The rest of the sample had no knowledge of SMI culture and did not follow any online. Upon further investigation, the objectives of these participants became clear; their interest in following local SMIs was mainly due to the ability of these public figures to relate and provide information, and that participation in the social media space was a 'fashionable' endeavour. The majority of the sample of women who admitted to following local SMIs (see Figure 3.2) also specified that the trends they viewed online in SMIs influenced the decisions they made on a daily basis. When questioned as to why they follow SMIs, more than 50% of the participants stated that they followed local SMIs to get beauty tips and keep up with fashion and style trends. Other aspects specified by these female participants (just below 40%) as their motivation for regularly seeking out SMI profiles on SMPs were: lifestyle tips, product and brand information and travel inspiration as motivation. This statistical analysis can be seen in Figure 3.2.

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<sup>58</sup> When companies seek out these SMIs they tend to rate them in terms of having a high level of social media engagement, top-notch and aesthetically-pleasing content, and a complementary style and ethos (*IZEA Inc. 2017*) that stands in accordance with that of the company. Thus, the onus falls upon the SMI to form a cohesive and appealing social media brand so as to maintain their popularity, and ultimately their career. This is a task that Aisha Baker has tackled with a pioneering finesse, managing to conduct business effectively whilst still having the freedom to express herself as a woman online.



**Fig. 3.2:** Distribution of Capetonian women’s interest in SMI culture, popular trends and social media (2018).



**Fig. 3.3:** Clustered bar graph indicating motivations for Capetonian women’s interests in SMI culture (2018).

The results of this survey and statistical analysis, particularly the fact that it is a Capetonian sample, prove instrumental to studying Baker's online following as an esteemed Capetonian SMI. In an interview with 'Mela' on SABC 2, Baker refers to her blog as being the launch pad of her career (2016) and demarcates it as being her first step into the SMI industry. Although blogging started as a distraction from her studies, it was essential for establishing the tone of her personal brand, which later on, attracted various brands and companies for collaborations. In discussing the objectives of *Baked Online* during the above-mentioned interview, Baker argued that:

Having a professional look and feel, and regular content on your blog, really helps to get your blog to a level where it can compete with a magazine because brands are kind of spending money on either a blog or a magazine (Mela on SABC 2 2016).

Thus, Baker's blog has an expertly laid out content management system (CMS) and her content is categorised for self-branding purposes into style, beauty, lifestyle and family (*Baked Online* 2018). In conducting a thematic analysis of her blog, a systematic approach to interval sampling was adopted. Based on these four main content categories one blog post from each category was selected for analysis as follows:

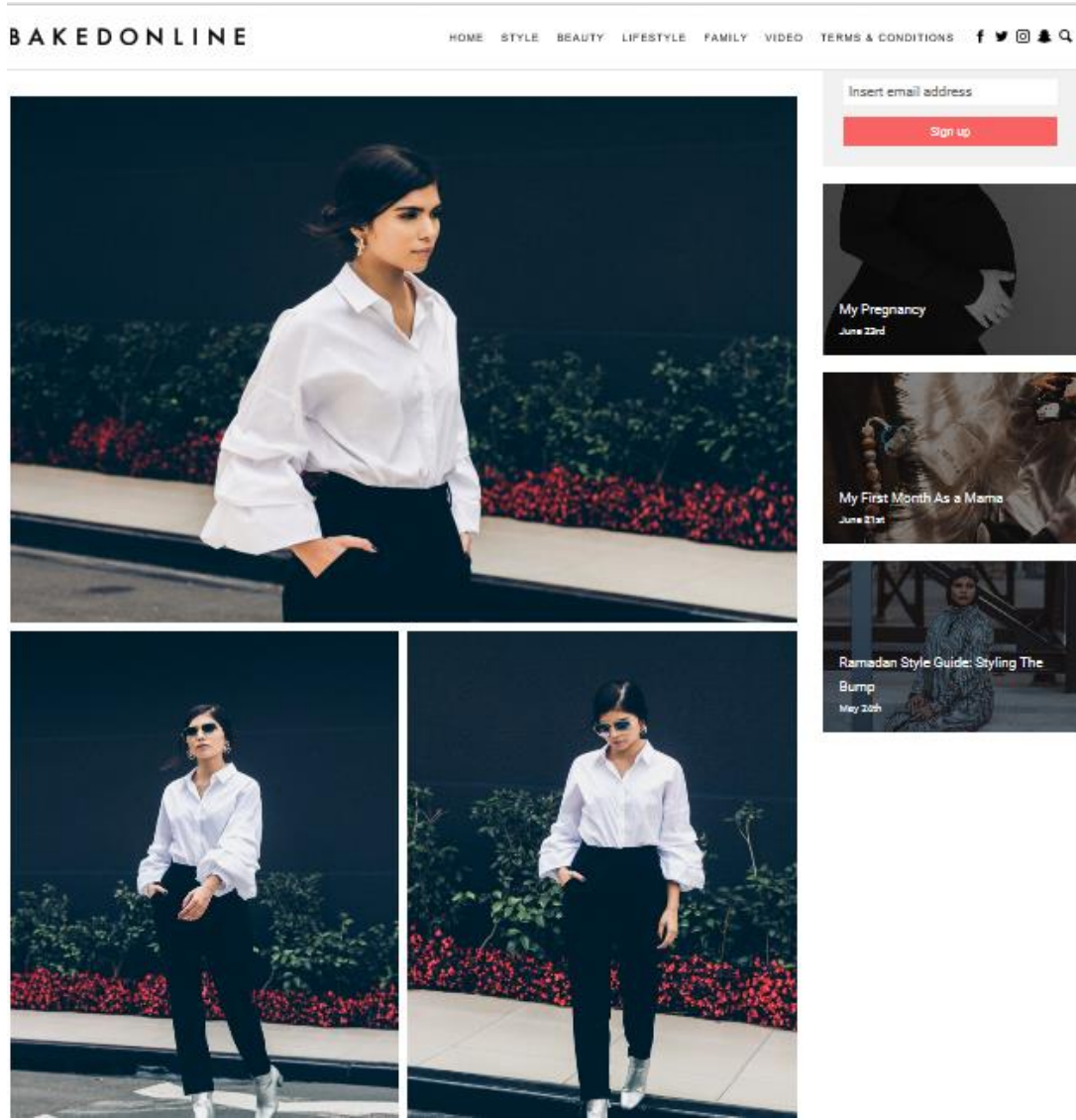
- a style blog from January – April 2017;
- a beauty blog from May – August 2017;
- a lifestyle blog from September – December 2017; and
- a family blog from January – April 2018.

The results of the analysis of the selected blog posts are tabulated in Table 3.1 below. Overall, Baker's brand is characterised by modest beauty, classy style and sophistication – all of which appear to be aspirational to her followers. For example, in terms of the style post, published April 15, 2017 Baker creates a brief summary of her experience at the annual Forbes Women Africa event. Her inclusion in such a prestigious event is evidence of her social capital as a female entrepreneur and SMI.

Post	Date	Type	Content	Affiliated Brand(s)	Call to Action (CTA)
1.	April 15, 2017	Style	Outfit worn to Leading Women Summit '17	Forbes Women Africa; Zara; Ray-Ban	Dressing appropriately for a 'business' event
2.	May 25, 2017	Health & Beauty	Review of Azzaro's men's fragrance, Wanted	Azzaro	A scent for the confident, carefree man – like her husband Wayne Parnell
3.	September 26, 2017	Lifestyle	Review of H&M's Reuse, Reware and Recycle campaign	H&M	Be a conscious fashion consumer and reuse and recycle old garments
4.	April 13, 2018	Family	Greenery-themed baby shower event	Flower Girl Décor; Just Baked Cakes; Twin Image Clothing; Kimlyn Sisman Make-up & Hair; Tegan Smith Photography; Mane Studio	How to put together a greenery-themed baby shower

**Table 3.1.** Thematic analysis of Aisha Baker's blog, *Baked Online* (2018).

The blog post includes images of her outfit, which is a modest yet stylish fashion choice. Dressed in a crisp white shirt, high-waisted tailored black pants, trendy sunglasses and a statement silver heel, her female readers responded to the post with a sense of appreciation for her “classy” style (*Baked Online* 2018). This is illustrated in Figure 3.4, where viewers have an immediate sense that Baker is habitually associated with a modern elegance and sophisticated demeanour.



**Fig. 3.4:** *Baked Online: Style* (2017). Screenshot of fashion blog post, Blog.

Another example is the fourth post (see Figure 3.5), which is about family. This is a recent addition to the blog as Baker recently became a mother. This post is about the planning of her ‘greenery-inspired’ baby shower event (*Baked Online* 2018). In this text, Baker documents her event with professionally taken photographs shot by local photographer Tegan Smith. Here, this blog post, presents elegant white and green décor, helium balloons filled with gold confetti, chic flute glasses and bubbly champagne, and Baker dolled up in her finest attire and makeup with a leafy gold and white flower head band. In the comments section, Baker’s female audience express themselves

through heart-eyed emoji's and smiley faces, indicating an excitement and adoration for the look and feel of her baby shower. One respondent called the event 'beautiful', another called it 'stunning', whilst the third respondent called it "goals" (*Baked Online* 2018) and was of Muslim affiliation (indicative of her Muslim audience). In millennial PCC, individuals often use the term 'goals' to identify an aspirational, most desired or ideal aesthetic, object or group. Thus, Baker's female readers view her modest style and sophisticated lifestyle as something to aspire to. This is indicative of her growing social influence.

The content of these blog posts would satisfy Capetonian women between the ages of 18 and 28, as illustrated by Figure 3.3. However, most of Baker's blog posts and brand as a whole appeals to women of upper working class domains due to her affiliation with high-end brands. However, as part of the abovementioned survey, Capetonian women were asked to specify their occupation (see Figure 3.6). Majority of the women who participated in this survey were either just starting a career as junior employees or were unemployed students, which is indicative of a middle class/working class Capetonian demographic. Thus, it is arguable that Baker's brand appeals to women who aspire to the lifestyle she projects on her blog even if they cannot realistically afford to. Therefore, in terms of Graeme Turner's argument (2006) regarding the 'demotic turn' towards the "celebrification" of ordinary, everyday individuals, Baker poses a paradoxical position.<sup>59</sup> On the one hand, she comes across as inhabiting an "intrinsic ordinariness" (Turner 2006:154-155) and is celebrated as a normal woman who has achieved success by making a living with her hobby as a style blogger,<sup>60</sup> yet, on the other hand, Baker's privileged status as a female SMI is simultaneously considered brave or validated (Turner 2006:154) by the sophisticated online appearance of an aspirational lifestyle.<sup>61</sup> This seems to be a recurring theme with celebrated influencers (as it is with Monroe).

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<sup>59</sup>Richard Dyer characterises this paradoxical position as the combination of the spectacular with the mundane and the special with the ordinary (2006a:154). This is the consequence of 'stardom' and can often become problematic in that this paradox may undermine a celebrity's authenticity.

<sup>60</sup>In recent SMI studies, investigations have proven that style bloggers who utilise social media as a stepping stone to generate self-brands, specifically, inhabit high levels of resourcefulness and experience high levels of self-expression because they do not need to follow a traditionalist fashion mold, and are able to take the initiative in how they present themselves and their style (Liu & Suh 2017:13).

<sup>61</sup>Don Slater, a theorist who writes about the changing nature of photography in a digitally advanced society, would argue that the 'aspirational affect' which Baker inhabits can be attributed to her use of photography on her blog. Slater argues that contemporary photographs of everyday life and domesticity are "leisure commodities: (1995:130-131) which Postmodern society has an insatiable appetite for. Thus, there is immense pressure on the field of photography



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[Mvumikazi](#) · a month ago  
Oh my Goodneeeses 😍 everything was so beautiful. I'm literally smiling from ear to ear

[Mvumikazi | Urban Minguni](#)  
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[Reshana Asharam](#) · 3 months ago  
Everything looked absolutely stunning Aisha!

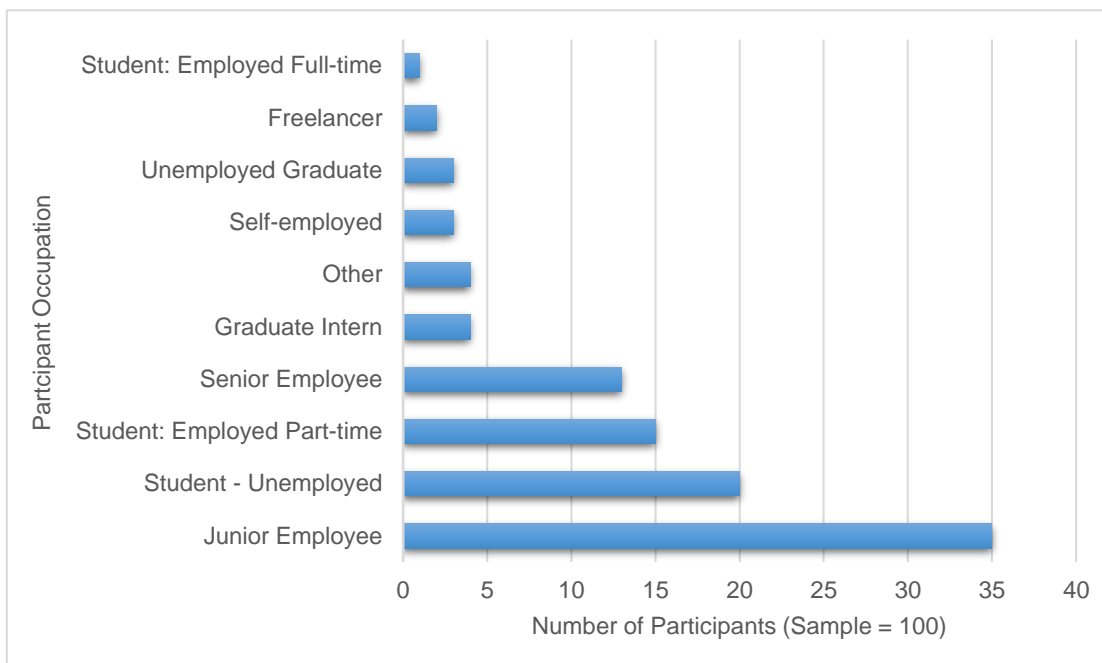
[Reshana Asharam](#) · 3 months ago  
^ | v · [Reply](#) · [Share](#)

[Bushraa Kamaldien](#) · 3 months ago  
Your baby shower is stunning! It's absolutely goals for me! You also have an amazing pregnancy glow! Slamta to you and your family on the new addition to the family 🥰

[Bushraa Kamaldien](#) · 3 months ago  
^ | v · [Reply](#) · [Share](#)

**Fig. 3.5.** *Baked Online: Family.* 2018. Screenshot of baby shower blog post, Blog.

to “structure everyday life in the very process of representing it” (Slater 1995:129-130). This is exactly what Baker does as an SMI who utilises the photographed image to build her self-brand into an enterprise.



**Fig. 3.6.** Clustered bar graph illustrating occupations of Capetonian samples' participants, between the ages of 18 and 28, based on qualitative survey to discover the online behaviours of Capetonian women (2018).

Creating memorable narratives and images is a critical part of Baker's job as an SMI. Although her blog acts as a launch pad by catapulting her into 'novel celebrity', her visibility and influence as a brand has been highly amplified by her use of the SMP Instagram (Mela on SABC 2 2016).<sup>62</sup> The focus of this research will now turn to Baker's photographic Instagram content and how her curating skills have assisted in the maintenance of her brand and presentation of her identity as a Muslim woman in South Africa.

In gathering a systematic sample of posts from Baker's Instagram account (*@bakedonline*), a random selection of twelve posts (one post from each month of the year) was examined between

<sup>62</sup> Instagram is an image-saturated online community that allows its users to generate, present and manage their own photographic content. Access to this community is permitted via internet networks and mobile applications. Thus, speeding up the dissemination of what could be termed 'Insta Discourse', which is an amalgamation of celebrity culture, SMI culture and all other popular culture streams. Recently, the SMP has also allowed its users to publish short video clips via its 'Insta stories' option and has also branched out into IGTV (Instagram TV) which always prominent Instagram community members to publish longer-length videos (*Instagram* 2018).



February 2017 and January 2018. Each post was partitioned into categories based on a call to action (CTA), which is the message communicated to her audience such as

- captions;
- hashtags used for search engine optimisation (SEO);
- affiliated brands or sponsors; and
- the season or holiday with visual elements such as content type and subject matter.

The results of this analysis are represented in Table 3.2. Much like the layout of her blog, Baker's Instagram account represents the same form of curated content: fashion, health and beauty, lifestyle and a selection of private family moments.<sup>63</sup>

Consistent with her blog, Baker's Instagram is also the main 'display board' of her self-brand associated with a luxurious yet modest quality. Brands such Estée Lauder and H&M, as well as international locations such as New York and California have been tagged in 10 of the 12 posts where Baker reviews and provides testimony to the quality of certain products. Only two of the 12 posts do not tag brands at all, as they are family orientated. This is conceivably a sign of Baker's ability to compartmentalise her public image, in that she is visually explicit when and if she supports a company and alternatively when she uses the SMP in terms of more private and intimate matters regarding her faith, family and femininity (@*bakedonline* 2018). This will be addressed in the next section.

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<sup>63</sup> As of June 2018, Baker's following amounted to more than 132, 300 followers (*Instagram* 2018) of which most were women in their mid-twenties perhaps indicating that she is a renowned SMI who appeals to the millennial generation of women in South Africa, specifically.

Post	Date	Call to Action (CTA)	Hashtag(s)	Affiliated Brand(s)	Season/Holiday	Content Type	Subject Matter
1.	February 23, 2017	Instagram giveaway announcement	#BakedonAHundred	ClipinHair™ & Tegan Smith Photography	Summer	Lifestyle	Inflated foil balloons
2.	March 12, 2017	General plans for the day	N/A	Anna-Louise Sleepwear & Fox Box Mobile Nail Service.	Autumn	Fashion	iPhone mobile device & sleepwear.
3.	April 29, 2017	'The Force is Female'	N/A	Loop Photography	Autumn	Fashion	White slogan T-shirt with grey font
4.	May 1, 2017	See Insta Stories for 'How To' on using face mask	#Ad; #glamglowgravitymud; #spacegirl; #judyjetsen	Glam Glow SA	Autumn	Health & Beauty	Metallic face mask
5.	June 26, 2017	Eid Mubarak wishes & fashion retailer information	#Eid2017	Nala Cape Town & The Scarf Company	Winter/ Eid	Fashion	White two-piece outfit & head scarf
6.	July 29, 2017	Wishing her audience a Happy Lipstick Day, and asking followers what their favourite lipsticks are	N/A	Urban Decay Cosmetics, MAC Cosmetics, ClipinHair™, Tegan Smith Photography & Zara Omar	Winter/ International Lipstick Day	Health & Beauty	Red lips, long hair & faux fur jacket
7.	August 8, 2017	Call to support charity T-shirt retailer and homeless women's support organisation	#FeministTeeProject; #tshirtsforchange; #WomensMonthSA; #HappyWomensDay	T-Shirts For Change Africa, Frida Hartley Shelter & Fruit of The Loom Clothing	Winter/ Women's Month	Fashion & Activism	White T-shirt with black capitalised font – 'Feminist'
8.	September 13, 2017	Site seeing in New York with husband	#NewYorkCityIn48hours	N/A	Spring	Family	Matching black & denim outfits
9.	October 24, 2017	Touring Los Angeles, California	N/A	Lauren Lotz Photography, H&M, MISHA Collection & Tatiana Karelina Hair Extensions	Spring	Fashion	Bell sleeve lace top & jeans
10.	November 24, 2017	Announcement of Black Friday personal shopping discount code	#BlackFridayEsteeLauder	Estée Lauder SA	Spring/ Black Friday	Health & Beauty	Estée Lauder Advanced Night Repair facial product
11.	December 4, 2017	Recommendation of MAC Cosmetics travel essentials	N/A	MAC Cosmetics	Summer	Health & Beauty	MAC Cosmetics & polaroid photos
12.	January 15, 2018	Announcement of first pregnancy	#BakedTheBaby	N/A	Summer	Family	Pregnant belly

**Table 3.2.** Thematic analysis of Aisha Baker's Instagram account, @bakedonline (2018).

### 3.3 New Visibilities: Balancing Faith, Femininity and Fashion

Baker's position as a Muslim female blogger and SMI presents her with many challenges to consider about her religious affiliation with the Muslim community. This is because Muslim women's identities, globally, are tightly bound to the Islamic paradigms regarding faith and cultural laws. However, while this researcher is neither a religious scholar nor is this study an attempt to zoom in on Islamic culture one can make certain observations which are pertinent to this study. Conventionally, the typical image of a female Muslim is described as the "veiled woman" (Jardim & Vorster 2003:271) – the ideal of which is virtuous and modest and does not make a spectacle of her face and body and who is engrossed in her faith.<sup>64</sup> The historical narrative of the 'faithful', subordinated woman, pervades contemporary texts largely due to the fact that the Islamic sacred book, the Quran, prescribes that Muslim women adhere to a 'modesty culture' especially in terms of "public modesty" (Zempi 2016:1745). Within this paradigm, Muslim women are expected to behave in an honourable manner where they are mindful of their faith and cultural practices (Zempi 2016:1744-1745). Despite the prescriptions of the Quran, in which a Muslim patriarchy exists (Jeenah 2001, 2006) women and men are, considered to be a "complimentary" union (Jeenah 2001:8). For academic Nuraan Davis, the Muslim woman is often proclaimed in Muslim culture as the upholder of family values, humility and purity. However:

[T]he very essence that designates her as the custodian of particular values – and therefore at the center of Muslim culture – relegates her to the periphery. While she is included and centrally located on the basis of what she brings in terms of her Muslim identity as daughter, wife and mother, she is excluded on the basis of her gender and sexuality – that is of being a woman. In other words, if she accepts her inclusion as a Muslim woman, she simultaneously has to accept her exclusion as a (Muslim) woman – because that is what ensured her inclusion in the first place (Davis 2016:46).

When translated, the Quran permits that men head their households (Jeenah 2001:9) but Muslim women must then maintain their households and not cause any "dazzling display" (Jeenah 2001:

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<sup>64</sup> However, it is Orientalist discourse of the past that in fact initiated this perception of Muslim women centuries ago. Writer Edward Said coined the term 'Orientalism' to evaluate the way in which Western scholarship perpetuated a misleading image of the East (1978). Said argued that the historical work of imperialists was fixed in the margins of their colonialist understandings of the East. They used this as a means of constructing 'an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness' (Said 1995:56.) The Orient was, thus, narrated as essentially primordial, exotic and peculiar; the place of totalitarians and "mystics" (Afshar 2008:412-414) which was inhabited by a timid, 'othered' population of apathetic men and subordinated and unvoiced women.

9) of themselves as this would be considered uncouth and secular. Muslim culture, then, opposes any hyper visibility (as seen with Monroe's branding previously) of women. In this sense, Islam stands in opposition to the ideas of Western feminism which proliferate with the images of women. Although Western feminism is always the leading hegemonic paradigm (Seedat 2013a:28), it has come under mass criticism in Islamic regions. Islamic Feminism, simply put, is a combination of 'feminisms' and 'Islamicisms' that seeks to articulate a feminist ethos from the perspective of Islamic women. In this instance, it is an initiative towards the enhancement of Islamic women and to reform religious thought (Moghadam 2002:1162). As transformative and inclusive as this may sound, such an analytical perspective has received much criticism. Islamic theorists Haiden Moghissi (1998) and Hammad Shahidian (1994) are two writers who dismiss the idea of an Islamic feminism and feminist theology. For these theorists, Islamic feminism is problematic because, for them, Western feminism has had too much of a secular influence on Islamic culture. However, this is considered quite a narrow perspective of feminism as a movement and theorist Valentine Moghadam (2002:1165) argues that the label 'Islamic feminism' is too exclusive despite being a step in the right direction for Islamic women:

Feminism is a theoretical perspective and a practice that criticises social and gender inequalities, aims at women's empowerment, and seeks to transform knowledge—and in some interpretations, to transform socioeconomic structures, political power, and international relations. Women, and not religion, should be at the center of that theory and practice. It is not possible to defend as feminist the view that women can attain equal status only in the context of Islam. This is a fundamentalist view, not one compatible with feminism

Feminist theorist Fatima Seedat (2013b:420) also argues that if it is a problem of resistance towards the feminist label, or the resistance towards the supposed merging of Islam and feminism (or even a problem of supporting feminist ethos whilst taking Islam for granted), then the relationship between Islam and feminism is a hypothetically dynamic and creates a constructive space from which to hypothesise contemporary "Muslim gendered ways of being". Thus, the focus should fall upon the struggle towards equality for all women, including Muslim women. From a South African perspective, the Muslim community accounts for roughly 2% of the population (Jeenah 2006:27). However, this minority position has not left them excluded from political endeavours and, between 1990 and 1998, has seen the emergence of Islamic feminism. For South African Muslim women,

adopting the ‘feminist’ label explicitly has always been avoided due to its intense hegemonic Western implications.

However, Naeem Jeenah (2006:27-28) argues that, within the South African context, Islamic feminisms emerged when both men and women enunciated a discourse and common struggle towards the establishing of women’s dignity, “gender equality and the subversion of patriarchy”. This occurred with the appearance of organisations such as the Muslim Youth Movement (1970-2006:27-28), who worked towards confronting religious leaders regarding women’s place in mosques (Jeenah 2006:30-32). By the end of the campaign, equality was achieved for Muslim women, in that female facilities such as women’s toilets began being incorporated into South African mosques. However, South African Muslim feminists still feel that the ‘Islamic feminist’ label carries too much weight, and is less successful than it is made out to be, but they still choose to partake in and support feminist work regarding human rights (Jeenah 2006:38). Despite this realisation, both Muslim woman/girlhoods in contemporary South Africa are anchored at many opposing and conceivably conflicting positions due to essentialist Islamic and feminist paradigms (Patel 2013:79) which dictate the Muslim female identity.

Arguably, the realm of social media (Fourie 2017) has provided an innovative solution to articulating the struggle. In the case of SMI Aisha Baker, being both a Muslim blogger and South African social media pioneer, has proved beneficial for not only her career and modest public visibility, but for her identity negotiation as a Muslim women as well. The online space has something of a cultural fascination (Kasana 2014:237) with Muslim bloggers and SMIs because Muslim society still feels attached to the traditional veiled image of Muslim women who should adhere to a modest regime rather than participate in the contemporary PCC and secularised social media culture. However, while such beliefs revive and condone the patriarchy and sexism (Kasana 2014:238) that burdens Muslim women globally, social media<sup>65</sup> can be used as a catalyst for change in these issues.

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<sup>65</sup>Merlyna Lim argues that the online realm provides a space in which real world or ‘offline’ events may be addressed in a way that is linked to the “corporality of its users” (2009:192-193). Thus, resistance which occurs online translates

When it comes to her identity as a ‘feminist’, Baker has been quite open and liberal about her opinion on the movement. In her interview with *Cosmopolitan SA* magazine for the Influencer issue as one of the cover girls, Baker professed that:

It’s such a heavy word [‘feminist’], with so much weight behind it. People get very emotional about it. There seems to be this thing about dictating what a feminist should be ... I believe you can be beautiful, well-dressed, in love with pink – and still be a feminist. A feminist is not that scary ball-buster that I think women were forced to be in the past. I’m a gentle person – but I still consider myself a feminist ... There is a new wave of women who feel empowered and okay with being feminine, and with standing up for something they believe in. My form of feminism is being okay with who I am: a softly spoken person with an opinion, who doesn’t wear a headscarf but doesn’t feel as though she’s offending her religion or going against it (Meadows 2018:37).

With this statement it becomes clear that Baker publicly asserts her position as a ‘feminist’ while at the same time speaks of a ‘new wave’ of feminism to which she subscribes. This new wave is not limited in the way that conventional feminism seeks to control the image of women to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes. Baker asserts that she is not supportive of such dictatorship, and seeks agency over her image and identity, where she is able to be attractive and successful, feminine and empowered (Meadows 2018:37). This statement becomes even more intriguing since, as a Muslim woman, her Islamic affiliation requires her not to attract any public attention or expose her face and body to fulfil the traditionalist ideals of Islamic dress codes. In this statement, she specifically refers to wearing a headscarf by choice and not force. Thus, Baker believes in a feminism where social, cultural and religious binaries are broken; and also a feminism that empowers and gives all women the right to choose what they want to be. According to co-writers Melissa Burkett and Karine Hamilton (2012) as well as Sarah Banet-Weiser (2015) these are arguably the same postfeminist motifs as empowerment and choice, and the same postfeminist sensibility which Rosalind Gill (2007, 2016) and Angela McRobbie (2006, 2007) characterise in their writings. For all these five postfeminist writers, there is a ‘new wave’ of feminism articulated by contemporary popular culture. A wave in which female success, individualism, agency,

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outwards into the offline, corporeal world. This is the supposed power of the Internet in a contemporary society that seeks new ways of dealing with political, religious and personal struggles. Social media, therefore, provides malleable boundaries for new social and cultural identities to be integrated.

freedom of choice and female empowerment stand as pillars to guide the mission of the wave itself (Gill 2007:148-149). Postfeminism modernises the idea of femininity (Gill 2007:151) by causing a shift to occur in the way that power controls the female body in terms of moral law, societal structures and patriarchy. For postfeminists, women must regulate and supervise their own bodies in a manner that is satisfactory to them – not for the rest of society. The act of asserting femininity and sexuality must be an autonomous, liberating pursuit (Gill 2007:149-152). For Baker, this postfeminist sensibility is quite evident in the way in which her self-brand and identity as a female Muslim SMI is publicly asserted on her Instagram account, *@bakedonline* (2018).

In a thematic analysis of Baker's Instagram account (Table 3.2), 12 posts were accumulated as a sample for investigation. Within this sample, two particular posts stood out as direct public assertions of Baker's allegiance to feminism, namely, post 3 and 7 (Table 3.2). Post 3, illustrated by Figure 3.7, is a photograph which was taken in April 2017 where Baker wears a white slogan T-shirt with grey font, which states: 'The Force Is Female' (which Baker also uses as the accompanying caption of the photograph). As a stand-alone fashion post, the content of the photograph is acceptable in a contemporary popular culture where the quintessential 'slogan tee' has become a political and fashion statement. As can be seen in the comments section of the post (Fig 3.7), Baker's female audience find the image to be 'on trend' and fashionable, seeking to find the same T-shirt for themselves. In this way, Baker's social influence online and offline is once again affirmed, in that she is visually persuasive in promoting consumer products.<sup>66</sup> However, because of the commercialism of the photograph, and in a time when societies are critical of the blend between fashion and feminism, some individuals may see this allegiance to feminism as a form of "Instavism" (Senne 2017:54-55). This is indicated by the use of the Instagram SMP for activism, which perpetuates a kind of "slacktivism" (Senne 2017:55). In this way, Baker's slogan T-shirt implies she is feminist and for female empowerment but at the same time defuses tangible revolution by generating an impression of engagement with a feminist cause without doing so in a politically significant or revolutionary way (Senne 2017:55). However, one could argue that Baker's modest public presentation of the slogan T-shirt was not meant for any overt political

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<sup>66</sup>Arguably, this represents a "consumer-to-consumer" (Mangold & Faulds 2009:357) communication, in that Baker herself stands as a consumer/ assessor of fashion who persuades and informs other online consumers. This can be seen as a hybrid element that is evocative of new-age promotional strategies (Mangold & Faulds 2009:357-358).

activism, but rather to gently allude to her identifying with some (not all) conventional feminist ideals regarding gender equality and empowerment, whilst at the same time fulfilling her duty as a fashion blogger who needs to be in the know and present such trending content to her Instagram audience.

In post 7, however, Baker does call attention to a more overt social and political issue; the poverty issue in South Africa and of underprivileged women seeking assistance from a women's shelter called the Frida Hartley Shelter. This is a charity organisation which relies on donations and civic support. In this instance, Baker uses her influence as an SMI to draw awareness to this women's' organisation and the Feminist Tee Project, run by T-Shirts For Change Africa, which seeks to raise funds for the upkeep of the shelter. This can be seen in Figure 3.8, a post published in August 2017. She does this by wearing one of the feminist T-shirts and promoting it in a light-hearted way to her audience. This is, arguably, a strategic move on Baker's part in that online social media users do not always want to be bombarded by posts and images that are heavily political or that seem too serious. Thus, she presents the project in a congenial way to relate more to her followers. This is confirmed by just under 4 000 likes and comments received by the post, which proves that Baker is able to use her 'privileged' SMI position to give meaningful attention to a feminist cause in the form of T-shirt sales and financial support of the women's organisation. However, some radical feminists would argue that this is still quite a shallow feminist endeavour.





**Fig. 3.7.** @bakedonline: April. 2017. Screenshot of ‘The Force is Female Tee’, Instagram.



**Fig. 3.8.** @bakedonline: August A. 2017. Screenshot of photograph of feminist slogan tee, Instagram.

Since Instagram is a photographically-saturated medium, it also becomes important to acknowledge photography's role in Baker's self-presentation online. For photographic theorist Martin Lister (1995) photography plays a role in how society makes sense of the postmodern experience. Lister (1995:4), an enthusiastic advocate of Susan Sontag's writings *On Photography* (1977) states that:

In an image-based economy, these images have an imperious scope: they are enlisted to produce desire, encourage commodity consumption entertain, educate, dramatise experience, document events in time, celebrate identity, inform and misinform, offer evidence. Change, then, in how such artefacts are produced, consumed and understood, is a matter of some historical moment.

In addition, Lister (1995:4-5) asserts that changes in the way in which photographs are produced and mass reproduced, and the way in which the world is reflected in imagery are taken to be alterations in how reality is seen and understood, which is evocative of a shift in how society and identity is known. This argument stems from Sontag's characterisation of photography's 'indispensability' in terms of the economy, ideologies and the pursuit of personal and private happiness (Sontag 1977:153-154).

Photography also possesses the propensity to visually drive change; to present new realities, counter narratives and counter images, and illustrate that humanity is not necessarily limited by the confines of our existing predicament (Davies 1988:54). Photography documents change and proposes that there are no boundaries because society may break binaries and subvert oppressive, representational ideologies. It is this power of photography which Baker taps into as a female Muslim SMI. She seeks to photograph her life in ways that, firstly, assert a new more inclusive wave of feminism that is not dictatorial, and secondly, subverts patriarchal paradigms which seek to undermine and evoke a sense of animosity towards her online identity as a Muslim woman.

Muslim women are expected to remain 'veiled' to society to eliminate the risk of making herself a spectacle and to reduce the risk of 'temptation' for men, which negate and control her sexuality. This implies that a Muslim women's femininity is directly linked to an inherent "danger" (Moghadam, 1988:223), where her face and body are distracting or provoking. This belief highlights the deep sexism that still exists in contemporary Muslim paradigms such as the Islamic

dress code, more specifically the symbolic items of the burqa, niqab<sup>67</sup> and the hijab. Each of these Islamic body coverings seek to proliferate the modesty associated with the culture, but at varying levels. Contemporary Islamic theorists elaborate key perspectives on the importance that is still placed on the veils of the Muslim woman in postmodern society. For theorists such as Valentine Moghadam (1988) Nayyar Javed (1994) and Georgina Jardim and J.M. Vorster (2003), assert that the wearing of the veil is a sign of “female orthodoxy” (Jardim & Vorster 2003:278) and modesty. However, the covering of the head or entire face (in the case of the burqa) represents an overall behaviour which Islam seeks to instil in Muslim women. Whereas, the hijab (head scarf) and niqab (veil with opening for eyes) form part of the identity of a Muslim woman who seeks to present herself in a respectful, modest manner (Moghadam 1988:224) and therefore, all three are symbolic clothing items for Muslim women. Nonetheless, for Jameelah Medina, moral tug-of-war is taking place over the terrain of the Muslim female body and she argues that:

The belief that Islam requires the hijab (headscarf or covering) lends itself to enforcement of hijab or even shaming or scaring women and girls into it. When a woman or girl feels forced, shamed, or scared into wearing the hijab, it may become virtually meaningless. It also implies that upholding mainstream Islamic expectations and the outward presentation of Islam (e.g., sartorial practices) are more important than holding the religion dear to one’s heart and organically and authentically feeling moved to wear the hijab from deep within not just: to please God; because it is an obligation; nor to avoid punishment or hell. In other words, forcing this onto women makes the performance of religion more important than the belief and the inward spiritual journey. It encourages hypocrisy as it is oppression by expectation and enforcement masquerading as piety, righteousness, modesty, and chastity (2014:877).

Another perspective is that wearing these symbolic garments is considered a sign of solidarity and religious pride and assertion. In the case of liberal democratic nations and feminist contexts, a Muslim woman’s decision to wear a hijab is a personal “matter of faith and identity and a political act of solidarity, but not one that alienates them from their kin and communities” (Afshar 2008:424). Here, the hijab becomes indicative of the fluidity of an identity that is inclusive instead of delineating margins between non-Muslims and Muslims. Taking all of this into consideration, it becomes clear that the femininity of a Muslim woman is inescapably tied to her religious

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<sup>67</sup> In making a choice to wear the niqab, Muslim women are often perceived as being submissive, as ‘niqab acceptance’ is a practice that has become “synonymous with religious fundamentalism and, as such, one which fosters political extremism” (Zempi 2016:1738-1739).

affiliation, whether she submits to religious embodiments or attempts to subvert them in hope of empowering herself.

Baker has spoken up about the connection between her self-brand, identity as a woman and her religious affiliation to Islam. In a vlog (video blog) that she posted on her YouTube channel *Baked the Vlog*, Baker (2016) affirms on her social media platforms that she does come across hate speech on the matter. The condemnation is from disgruntled social media members (who may or may not be a follower of her brand) because her SMI position stands in conflict with conventional Islamic culture. For Baker, this can be quite ‘hurtful’ (*Baked the Vlog* 2016) because religion is a personal aspect of one’s identity and often ‘outsiders’ looking in do not know one well enough to understand one’s personal beliefs and preferences. Therefore, most of the time Baker ignores hate speech (*Baked the Vlog* 2016) but she is conscious of religious responsibility.

Nonetheless, Baker presents herself as hyper visible online when she wears ‘secular’ clothing and shows some skin which might undermine her feminist and Islamic affiliation. This is illustrated by Figure 3.9 where she is depicted in a beach selfie wearing a purple bathing costume and refers to herself as a ‘beach babe’. This image is not overtly sexual in that she is not wearing a two-piece bikini to reveal too much skin; however, this dress item is a part of the sexualised Western cultural dress code which conflicts with traditional Islamic imagery. Other parts of her Instagram content can also be considered unorthodox and provocative in that she does not shy away from her feminine sensuality (although, it must be noted that her content is never overtly sexual or erotic – it is modest). She also reviews beauty brands (Table 3.1 and Table 3.2) on her blog and Instagram and wears makeup and expensive jewellery for various photoshoots and magazine covers (see Figure 3.1), which means she is invested in beautification and adornment – all of which are arguably defiant of Muslim veiling culture (Macdonald 2006:13-14). At the same time, however, a contemporary and divergent society may see this ‘defiance’ as a liberal, subversive act or resistance towards “extreme versions of Islam, [and] Western discourses [that] repeat the connotations of a hidden and mysterious beauty previously evoked by the harem” (Macdonald 2006:13-14).



**Fig. 3.9.** @bakedonline: August B. 2017. Screenshot of photograph taken on the beach, Instagram.

Baker submits to wearing the hijab. However, the relationship has a push-pull effect because in compartmentalising her self-brand, Baker presents herself online wearing a headscarf in a selective manner in the sense that the hijab is not constantly featured on her Instagram account, almost to assert that she is submissive or obligated to wear a hijab. However, the hijab only features on her account in relation to the religious spaces, events and practices, especially during Ramadan and Eid. Each year without fail, during this religious tradition, Baker's content involves inspiring Muslim women in terms of 'Ramadan fashion' and how to dress modestly but still fashionably for Eid celebrations. Here, once again, Baker circulates the idea that modesty can be aspirational and fashionable (see Figures 3.10 to 3.12). In these screenshots, the hijab is re-appropriated affirmatively alongside 'secular' garments and spaces. For Baker, wearing the hijab is symbolic of her personal faith and affiliation to Islam, however, she subverts the oppressive discursive meanings that have been attached to the hijab in Western discourse, by posing in the hijab as an empowering garment (in both Islamic and secular spaces) as a sign of religious pride and solidarity, and to signal a move towards a more transformative, converged identity as a Muslim feminist at the same time. The binaries are blurred between modesty culture and postmodernity, faith and





**Fig. 3.11.** @bakedonline: June. 2017. Screenshot of photograph taken on Eid 2017, Instagram.



**Fig. 3.12.** @bakedonline: February B. 2018. Screenshot of photograph taken inside Sheikh Zayed Mosque, Instagram.

### 3.4 Addressing Social Inclusion & Racial Affirmation

Thus far, this study has examined Baker's position as a social influencer and Muslim woman in South Africa. However, identity cannot fully be detached from some or other racial categorisation (Zegeye 2001:27-228) due to the country's longstanding colonial discursive practices and social structures. Baker's approach to her use of SMPs and her blog seeks to be more inclusive of marginalised female identities, as can be seen by her re-appropriation of the hijab and her assertive postfeminist sensibility that appeals to women of a younger, more modern generation. In this respect, she does not overtly or excessively assert a racial identity as such, that would perpetuate existing Coloured stereotypes to foster any kind of positive racial identity with her followers.

This seems to take cognisance of the South African context, in which race is a complex form of identity to articulate due to the Apartheid experience that sought to segregate the country into racial groups based on skin colour and origins.<sup>68</sup> In terms of apartheid's racial categorisation, a division of the 'Coloured' category included indigenous Griqua sub-groups, Indians, Cape Malays, as well as the "basic Cape Coloured group" (Christopher 2002:405-407). Race theorist, Abebe Zegeye, explains that the Muslim community of the Western Cape, specifically, have been regulated as members of what can be termed a "Malay diaspora" (2001:207-209), which falls under the Coloured category as a subdivision. This poses a conflicting view of the South African Muslim community as their origins are linked to Indonesian roots but are also placed alongside the more indigenous Coloured racial category. Zegeye goes on to provide a characterisation of this contradictory stance:

'Coloured' identities in many ways function as the conscience of South Africa. Amidst the continuing deep alienation between the races brought about by Apartheid, the [C]oloured people of South Africa are a visible reminder of what South Africa could have been without Apartheid ... At the same time, research focusing on 'coloured identities' has been lacking, for two main reasons. These reasons are first that 'coloured

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<sup>68</sup> In 1948, specifically, the National Party government was voted in to implement an intensive systematic procedure of racial separation. An essential function of this procedure, was to impose the Population Registration Act of 1950 (Christopher 2002:405), which stipulated that it was compulsory for all people in the country to be registered and designated to a specific racial category (Christopher 2002:405). These representative racial categories, thus, became an essential concern when the Group Areas Act (1950) was implemented, forcing certain people into urban sections of the country, via the marking of specified racial territories.



identity' is an extremely elusive concept because 'coloured people' have, insofar as they can be described as a distinctive group, tended historically to be viewed in South Africa as a 'minority group' that does not warrant separate research attention. Second, many coloured people accepted the identity the government attempted to impose on all 'coloured people', making it a hazardous research task to determine which identities dominate social formation among 'coloured people'. In spite of the Apartheid government's attempts, however, today no single coloured identity or definition of colouredness can be identified; rather, there are multiple identities based on regionalism, language and ideology (2001:207).

Taking these insights into consideration, it is clear that Baker does not feel any sense of pressure to assert a fixed racial identity as it is a convoluted topic to address within the online space. As an SMI, Baker is forced to be extremely conscious of being inclusive of all audiences, as to not negate or favour any particular racial demographic. Thus, her content is not overtly racial in tone. However, the colour of her skin and her affiliation to the Muslim community in the Western Cape cannot go unnoticed. In this way, her imageries of the hijab and her tanned brown skin, stand as the only 'visual markers' of her identity as a Cape Malay South African woman. However, Baker has alluded to her acceptance of the racial category 'Coloured', in a Twitter status which was published in 2016, on the @bakedonline Twitter account (see Figure 3.13). In this series of tweets, which went viral online and circulated across multiple media platforms, Baker comments on racial Othering in the media sphere, specifically referring to advertisements by stating:

The 'other' race is often excluded in South African ad campaigns. + - 5 million people soma just don't exist, as if SA is Black & White only. I don't understand why we don't get represented. At least give us a shout out with one of the models being mixed/coloured/Indian [or] something. And we never really talk about it. I rarely see coloured people complaining about not being showcased [.]. Are we scared or just don't care? Genuinely asking questions, not making statements on this topic cause it's just confusing and I've observed these things over time.

This bold expression made by a Muslim woman in South Africa who feels under-represented is amplified by Baker's high level of social capital and influence. In the case of the series of Tweets under discussion, Baker publicly pledges and confirms her allegiance to the Coloured racial category, in that she uses the term 'we' when referring to the group. She also makes use of the colloquial term "soma", which is a unique Coloured expression usually communicated with an

offended tone to simply mean ‘just’ or ‘without a care or thought’. Therefore, Baker feels like Coloured people ‘just’ do not exist in the minds of the larger South African society and is, thus, offended by their exclusion from advertisements. In this way, Baker expresses a dislike for the way in which the Coloured community (including the subdivision of Cape Malay people) is Othered while at the same time she shows solidarity with the racial group. Coincidentally, two years after this series of tweets went viral, Baker was employed as a cover girl for a renowned magazine company (see Figure 3.1). Thus, in her own way as an SMI, she used her social influence to address the under-representation of Coloured women in the South African media.



**Fig. 3.13.** @bakedonline 2016. Screenshot of tweet, Twitter.

In this case, Baker uses her social influence to encourage her online Coloured, Indian, Cape Malay or mixed race audience to actively confront their underrepresentation. Baker is an example of discursive text from which her female audience, particularly, might gain inspiration and a sense of gender empowerment. Despite having an ambivalent identity that is convoluted by the contradictory racial divisions and subdivisions of Apartheid, Baker affirms a Coloured identity, does not resort to essentialist narratives or imageries, and seeks to naturalise and integrate the 'Other' into the South African media sphere by redressing the under-representation of Coloured women as a female Coloured Muslim SMI. Arguably, social media plays a vital role in raising awareness about the multiplicity (Zegeye 2001:207) of Coloured identities in the South African, and especially the Western Cape landscape.

### **3.5 Concluding Remarks**

Aisha Baker proves to take on an alternative online identity that translates into the offline world. As an SMI, she has developed a self-brand that stirs up both desire and pleasure for her female audience. Whereas by adopting a postfeminist sensibility, Baker takes on the pressure and responsibility that comes with being a Muslim woman, a feminist and receiving hyper visibility in a highly public domain. By a simultaneous submission to and subversion of Islamic dress code paradigms, she raises the question of whether or not modesty is important in a convergent and digital society that currently seeks counter narratives and images to make sense of a changing world and reality.

Through Baker's commodification of herself and her gender, she seems to undermine her status as feminist, and also, powerfully reconciles her feminist ethics with her Islamic faith by making modesty aspirational. She reminds her followers that modesty is the opposite of overt sexualisation and she can therefore be a feminist since many kinds of feminism overtly criticise the sexualisation of women. Baker proves that Muslim women can move beyond burdensome cultural affinities that are respectful of Islamic faith and practices. One needs to be mindful that to provoke any social change within the social media space a high level of power and influence is required, and only a

small minority of South African woman currently occupy this space and have such major social influence.

Baker's validity is affirmed in her multiple identities as a Coloured Muslim woman who avoids resorting to stereotypical imageries of 'Coloured' that currently pervade the South African media and popular culture domains. While she might be provoking racial change at a considerably micro level, she has made giant leaps in terms of producing counter-hegemonic imageries that empower South African Muslim women and provide them with new socio-cultural visibilities.

## CHAPTER 4: POETRY, PRECARIETY AND PUBLIC RECOGNITION: KIM WINDVOGEL'S ONLINE QUEER PRACTICES

### 4.1 An Introduction to Kim Windvogel

Thus far, I've taken a look at two different celebratised Coloured Capetonian female figures, and the manner in which they deal with their identities within the South African social media space. Both Monroe and Baker maintain a high level of social and cultural capital due to public recognition in the form of online SMP fans or followers. In contrast to this, I now move on to address an alternate public figure, namely that of a “polygonal creative” (Nokoyo 2017) who is an activist both online and offline. In this chapter I aim to investigate Kim Windvogel's online activist practices and whether or not it has the potential to invoke real-world change in South Africa. Windvogel describes themselves<sup>69</sup> (I will be making use of they/their/them pronouns henceforth as a conscious acknowledgement of Windvogel's self-identification) publically as an “intersectional feminist living in hetero-patriarchal world” (Maremela 2017). I aim to unpack this statement and discover whether or not their online practices are indicative of a feminist or postfeminist rhetoric. I also address their intersectional approach to negotiating their gender and overall identity as a Coloured Capetonian womxn living in a contemporary post-apartheid landscape. Windvogel is an openly queer 26-year-old millennial. Therefore, it is imperative that I address their queer politics as well.

Windvogel is a poet, singer, activist, sex educator, and co-founder of the local South African organisation known as Femme (Freedom of Education Motivates Empowerment) Projects, which was founded in 2014 with the help of co-directors Loren Loubseer and Kelly-Eve Koopman. This project was initiated when the Transnet Foundation approached these three young womxn<sup>70</sup> for the development of a “Comprehensive Sexual Education (CSE) and Sexual and Reproductive Health

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<sup>69</sup> Windvogel has spoken openly about assuming a “non-binary, pansexual” (Blouse 2018:54), or omnisexual gender identity. This is addressed in depth later on in the chapter. However, because of this non-binary gender affiliation, Windvogel prefers the use of the pronouns ‘they’, ‘their’, or ‘them’ rather than ‘she’ or ‘her’ (Blouse 2018: 54). Due to this personal preference (which I do respect), I will henceforth make use of the abovementioned pronouns throughout this chapter.

<sup>70</sup> I use the spelling ‘womxn’ instead of ‘women’ in this chapter as it is Windvogel's preferred linguistic choice as a feminist (Windvogel 2018).

and Rights (SRHR) curriculum for womxn enrolled at under-resourced schools based in rural and urban communities across the Western Cape” (*FemmeProjects: About Us* 2017). Thus far, the organisation has managed to reach 4000 young womxn in poverty-stricken schools around the Western Cape, undertaking a ‘nothing is taboo’ approach (*FemmeProjects: About Us* 2017) to sexual and reproductive education, and providing sanitary resources to these womxn. In May 2018, FemmeProjects also launched their ‘Cycles Campaign’, in which sexual and reproductive agency was encouraged (*FemmeProjects: Cycles Campaign* 2018) and womxn (both old and young) got together to address menstruation and the misconceptions and anxieties associated with it.<sup>71</sup> Windvogel was born and raised in Cape Town to artistic parents of Boland descent, who encouraged them to think unconventionally and autonomously (*FemmeProjects: The Team* 2017). Gender dynamics appears to be Windvogel’s prime interest. Much of their writing address gender and race stereotypes and taboos. In 2016, they graduated from the Activate Change Drivers leadership program and released a self-published poetry anthology, *Resist: The Paradox of Love and Other Societal Disorders* in 2017 (Nokoyo 2017), which was well-received locally. Since 2016, Windvogel has participated in regular panel discussions, around South Africa, relating to womxn’s rights, gender and sanitation. Currently, they are a member of a fellowship with the United Nations via the OutRight Action International organisation, in New York City (*FemmeProjects: The Team* 2017). They have also been regularly featured on digital publications (Spree, She Leads Africa and 10 and 5) and in print publications such as Cosmopolitan SA and Mango’s in-flight magazine called Juice (*Blazing Non-Binary* 2018). According to Windvogel, gender should be that which we ‘wear’ (much like clothing items), “accepting both feminine and masculine in our lives without enforcing any gender roles on anyone based on the sex they were assigned at birth” (*FemmeProjects: The Team* 2017). However, of course, the current world we live in is not that idealised by any means whatsoever.

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<sup>71</sup> This project was launched locally in an effort to increase awareness about the importance of sexual education, and to open up a space for discussing personal experiences regarding menstruating. This initiative aimed to help young womxn make informed decisions about their health and bodies. As part of the initiative, social media campaigns were launched on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. T-shirts with a print of the female vulva were designed and put up for sale (*FemmeProjects: Cycles Campaign* 2018). Prominent figures such as KFM radio host Sherlin Barends, Palesa Kgasane of ELLE magazine, artist Lady Skollie, and local actress Denise Newman took part in the photographic element of the campaign (*FemmeProjects: Cycles Campaign* 2018), as to increase awareness about and circulate information regarding the exclusive vulva-inspired T-shirts, both online and offline.

As mentioned previously, Windvogel is a poet who writes extensively on gender dynamics and sexuality, including their position and experience as a queer womxn in South Africa. As it stands, Windvogel's writings are quite expressive (and explicit), sexually and racially, making their poems and public speeches political encounters. In terms of their identity, Windvogel explained, in an interview for *Cosmopolitan SA*'s February 2018 LGBTQI+ issue, that:

The big misconception about gender-nonconforming people is that we are gender confused. The only confused person is the person telling us that we are confused! I went through my confusion time, and that was not because I was confused about my gender – it was because I was confused by the way people reacted to me living my life as I wished to live it. Also, this is not a phase. I am perfectly happy being an open, free and inviting person of colour who identifies as a non-binary and pansexual. Pansexual means you fall in love with a person and their being, not with their genitals (Blouse 2018:54).

As can be seen in this quote, Windvogel feels very passionate about being a nonconformist when it comes to gender and sexuality. Accordingly, their approach to cyber culture and SMPs is also non-binary and completely unapologetic; they do what they want where they want to do it for their own satisfaction. Windvogel uses the SMP Facebook as a personal blog, on which they share their poetry, opinions of current social and political matters, information about FemmeProjects, and media features. This personal blog is named 'Blazing Non-Binary'<sup>72</sup> (*Blazing Empress* 2018) and was started 29 April 2013. As of 13 June 2018, Windvogel had posted 314 times and had accumulated 1263 likes and 1258 followers (*Blazing Empress* 2018). In an interview with Windvogel, they indicated that this particular SMP is used specifically for 'activist issues' (Windvogel 2018) and mostly 'unadulterated' poetry excerpts rather than posting explicit poetry and explicit photographs of themselves. On the other hand, Windvogel makes use of Instagram for more uncensored practices, such as posting nude photographs and their most expressive pieces of writing (Windvogel 2018). Subsequently, Windvogel occupies three different Instagram accounts – Kurlykimi, Blazing Non-Binary and Femme Projects – which are somewhat compartmentalised according to its function. Kurlykimi is a personal account dedicated to Windvogel's hair and personal adventures (*Kurlykimi* 2018). The Blazing Non-Binary account is their main one and is dedicated to images about sex and body positivity, 'feminist endeavours', queer politics and

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<sup>72</sup> In an interview with Windvogel they explained that the use of the screen or social media name 'Blazing Non-Binary' stems from the fact that 'non-binary means "that you do not believe in the binary of genders. You do not believe that you have to be either or. I realised that I could be fluid in my gender identity and my expression thereof. I realised that gender is a spectrum, not a binary"' (Windvogel 2018).

sharing specific poetry pieces that pertain to body, sexual and gender politics (*Blazing Non-Binary* 2018). The Femmeprojects account is run by all three co-founders of the organisation, including Windvogel, and is entirely devoted to the happenings and campaigns of the organisation, specifically their T-shirt sales and outreach programmes (*Femmeprojects* 2018). The statistics of these Instagram accounts is represented by Table 4.1 For the purpose of this research article, I will be analysing Windvogel’s use of Facebook in terms of their poetry and online approach to creating social awareness of queer identities. I will also investigate how responsive their audience is to their posts and whether or not their personal blog is effective, in terms of Windvogel’s online identity negotiation and of honing a collective consciousness. I will then analyse three photographic examples from Instagram in terms of sexuality, gender and feminist and postfeminist rhetoric. I will then make use of an example from Facebook to analyse the intersection of Windvogel’s Coloured and queer identities. This will be addressed in the upcoming sections of this chapter.

Instagram Account	Total Posts	Total Followers	Total Likes
Kurlykimi	49	281	2005
Blazing Non-Binary	142	1531	8853
Femmeprojects	158	1700	8067

**Table 4.1.** Summary of Instagram accounts affiliated with Kim Windvogel tabulated on 13 June (2018).



## 4.2 Poetry and Power: Windvogel's Personal Blogging on Facebook

As mentioned previously, Windvogel makes use of the Facebook SMP specifically for activist issues and matters relating to her work as a writer and poet.<sup>73</sup> In the past few years social media has increasingly been utilised worldwide as a tool for political and social activism (Eslen-Ziya 2013:861-862). This can be seen with movements such as #FreeTheNipple of 2014, Black Lives Matter (Senne 2017: 55), “Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women” (Brown [et al.] 2017:1833), #StopRacismAtPretoriaGirlsHigh (Senne 2017:55), and, more recently, the ‘Men Are Trash’ and ‘Me Too’ social media movements (each of which were geared towards exposing issues of rape, sexual harassment and sexual assault of womxn). These are just a few movements which had a massive public response online and offline. However, there has been a plethora of other examples that have occurred. Thus, what becomes evident is the fact that individuals and collective groups of people have come together within the contemporary online realm to address political and social injustices, in an effort to evoke change (in some way - whether it be at a micro or macro level) in the offline, corporeal world. Windvogel attempts to address issues relating to activism, sex education, sexuality, identity and gender on Facebook so as to educate people, affirm queer identities and provide a space where that which is queer<sup>74</sup> can be made visible and therefore be acknowledged and accepted.<sup>75</sup> The use of Facebook as a personal

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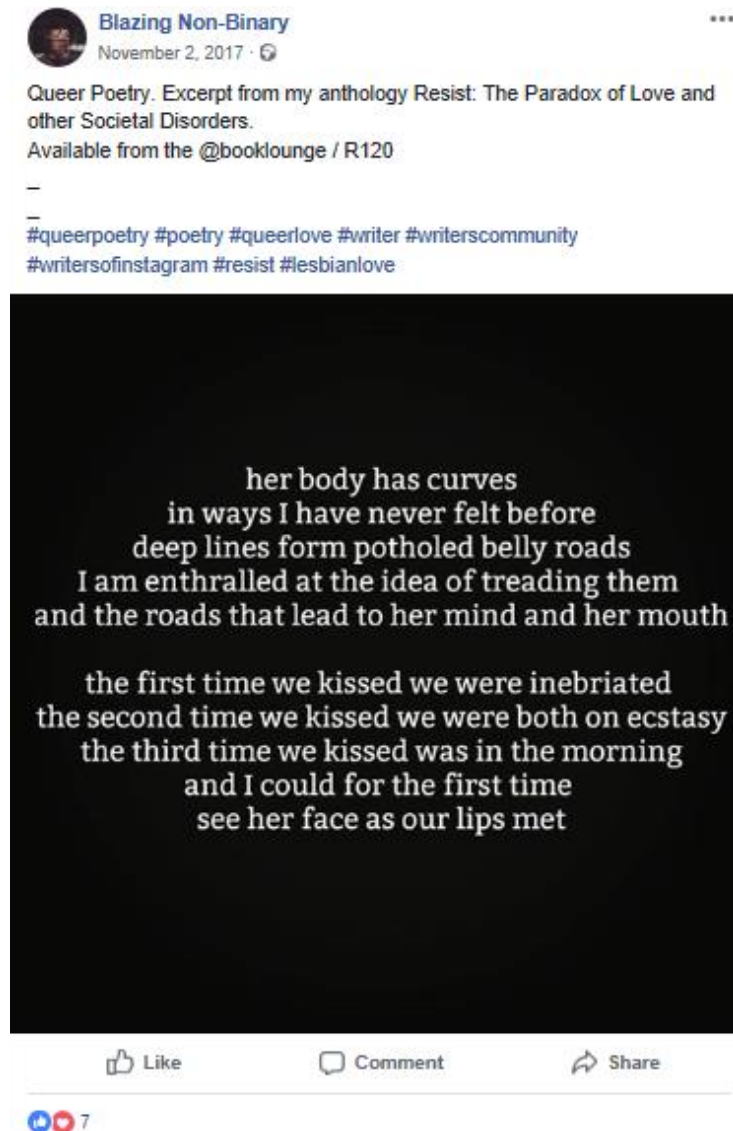
<sup>73</sup> In a recent interview, regarding the use of specific SMPs for certain tasks, Windvogel disclosed the following: “For my writing I believe that Instagram has been my favourite tool. This is where people love engaging with my kind of work. I write about sex a lot. Being queer is also one of my favourite topics to write about. I think that Instagram is a great place to share your work because many older people do not frequent that space and I believe people are more likely to ‘love’ your provocative upload of someone squirting on your face on there [Instagram] than ‘liking’ a status about the same topic on Facebook because many of their parents, family, pastors and community leaders will see what posts they are ‘liking’. In terms of writing about activist issues, Facebook is great, because people love to hear the updates on what is going on in Comprehensive Sexual Education and the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights movement. People love knowing what you are doing and what fellowship you are a part of and how your life is going on Facebook - not so much the ‘freaky’ shit. They will rather inbox you about it [explicit details] and say how much they love it, than [publically] like it on Facebook” (Windvogel 2018).

<sup>74</sup> “The term ‘queers’ has been used in a ‘lay’ connotation to refer to all those who do not see themselves as fitting into the matrix of heterosexual desire – those who would generally fall under the daunting acronym of LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersexual and Asexual). On the other hand, ‘queer’ has also been mobilised by an academic tradition that treats it as a synonym of ‘rebellious’, ‘anti-normative’ and ‘against the normal’” (Milani 2013:630).

<sup>75</sup> In an interview with Windvogel it was stated that the availability of SMPs, such as Facebook, has provided many people with a newfound sense of representational agency: “We are tired of media not taking the responsibility of representation. Social media platforms, that many now have access to, have given the youth and even older people an outlet to express and to represent themselves. We are tired of being boxed. We are also tired of the world pulling the wool over our eyes. We want to take our power back. We want to take back our agency. We want to be informed because information is key to our own and others’ empowerment” (Windvogel 2018).

blog also allows Windvogel's followers, who can relate to these issues, to feel a sense of belonging and support online (which may or may not impact their offline lives).

The use of SMPs for the above mentioned issues, stands in contrast to conventional methods of approaching activism, such as civil marches, strikes and public protests, and televised social campaigns. Theorist Graham Meikle describes this shift towards a contemporary, alternative form of 'citizenship' and activism in his writings on social media and visibility. For Meikle, "the media are now longer just what we watch, read or listen to – the media are now what we do" (2014:374). What Meikle conveys is a sense that social media has changed the way in which we communicate every day and has, thus, provided the 21<sup>st</sup> century society with a set of new practices and rules (2014:375). Social media has the capacity to digitally make SMP users visible to each other in new, alternative ways. Meikle argues that social media has the power to make those who were historically 'invisible' visible (2014:375). This pertains to underrepresented groups, ethnic minorities and those who are stigmatised and discriminated against – those who are evidently othered in society. Meikle also suggests that the "practice of sharing [information] is key to making the invisible visible in the networked digital environment of social media" (2014:377). Similar to this, Windvogel shares much of their life experiences as a pansexual individual, sex and reproductive information, and personal writings and thoughts on Facebook in an effort to make themselves and other queer identities more visible within the online environment – specifically the South African social media environment. Thus, it is conceivable that Windvogel is attempting to educate the larger South African public about queer identities and sexuality, and also normalise 'pansexuality' online, by making themselves (as a pansexual individual) and their convictions increasingly more perceptible on their personal Facebook blog. Windvogel arguably does this in an effort to give those who are discriminated against, based on their gender, body or sexuality, a louder voice online that could potentially then resonate in offline environments as well.



**Fig 4.1.** *Blazing Non-Binary: Poetry Excerpt November 2. 2017.*  
Screenshot, Facebook.

In Figure 4.1, an image of an excerpt from Windvogel’s self-published queer poetry anthology<sup>76</sup> *Resist: The Paradox of Love and other Societal Disorders* (2017), Windvogel expresses personal thoughts on love and intimacy between themselves and a womxn. On first glance one may label this

<sup>76</sup> Theorist Steve Mann writes extensively about authentic ‘making processes’ and social change. Mann developed the term “Maktivism” (2014: 29) to refer to the bringing together of media, technology, activists and artists. For Mann, Maktivism is about making things that are intended to bring about social change (2014: 29). Mann might describe Windvogel as a ‘maktivist’, in that they create poetry to open up a space for exchange or ideas, to educate and inspire, and have a “high degree of personal involvement and commitment in the existemological (learning by being) (2014:29).

poem as one which speaks of a ‘lesbian’ relationship (a relationship between two womxn). However, Windvogel identifies as ‘pansexual’, not lesbian. Thus, I must briefly elaborate on what is meant by this perplexing term. Pansexuality, an unconventional sexual identity, became a prominent topic of discussion worldwide in 2015 when the U.S. official Mary Gonzalez and celebrity Miley Cyrus exclaimed that they were pansexual (Morandini, Blaszczyński & Dar-Nimrod 2017:911). This created much popular interest regarding the development of ‘alternative’, unconventional sexual identities to that of traditional, same-sex binary categories such as gay and lesbian. Pansexuality refers to:

Sexual or romantic attraction to people regardless of their gender expression (masculinity or femininity), gender identity, or biological sex. It is frequently distinguished from bisexual identity on the basis that it explicitly rejects attractions based on binary notions of sex (male versus female) and gender (man versus woman) (Morandini, Blaszczyński & Dar-Nimrod 2017:911).

Windvogel’s online identification with pansexuality indicates that her poetry and Facebook personal blog are representational forms of pansexual advocacy and resistance to sex and gender binaries.<sup>77</sup> Being queer in itself also defies all normative categories such as heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual which are considerably narrow and often oppressive. Thus, the term pansexual has recently been accepted and added underneath the umbrella term ‘queer’, by LGBTQI+ activists and scholars, because it is another form of favoured gender nonconformity (Morandini, Blaszczyński & Dar-Nimrod 2017:911-912).

Figure 4.1 explicates Windvogel’s deep feelings for a curvaceous womxn whom they are in love with. The words “curves” and “deep lines form potholed belly roads” (see Figure 4.1) lexically indicate that Windvogel is speaking of a fuller, voluptuous female body. This arguably stands as an affirmation of larger or ‘plus size’ bodies. This defies longstanding normative beauty standards which praise slender female bodies. The excerpt explains intimate, romantic feelings regarding the

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<sup>77</sup> Theorists Matt Ratto and Megan Boler would refer to Windvogel’s online identity negotiation as a form of “DIY citizenship” (2014:18). What this refers to is a do-it-yourself citizenship which forms in a technologically advanced and mediated society, where individuals are reflecting upon social and political norms (2014:1-2) and are actively challenging traditions and ideologies so as to create a space for transformation and boundary-breaking. “Critical makings” (Ratto & Boler 2014:3) or politically and/or socially metamorphic activities such as craft making, artworks, protest poetry, performance art and so forth, are vital to DIY citizenship, whether this be articulated online or offline - one must actively work towards transformation, modernisation, recognition and inclusion so as to maintain a sense of belonging.

womxn's mind and mouth which Windvogel enjoys. Windvogel writes of the experience of the first, second and third kiss with this womxn and expresses feelings of ecstasy and inebriation (see Figure 4.1). The excerpt illustrates a newness and excitement surrounding this queer relationship. The idea of a queer relationship is romanticised and put forth in a manner that evokes a sense of endearment and normalcy rather than eerie feelings of strangeness. In this instance, Windvogel's own feelings have been publicised on Facebook for all followers to see. The poetry excerpt stands as an indication of her sexual identity and beliefs and also educates the public about queer relationships in a way that is relatable. Windvogel normalises queer love and the idea of a queer love story within the online space, giving visibility to a form of human interaction or intimacy between individuals who are typically underrepresented and frowned upon. In this sense, Windvogel's poetry<sup>78</sup> is indicative of a form of activism in that it attempts to raise social awareness regarding queer identities.

This post received a reaction from seven of Windvogel's followers who either clicked 'like' or 'love' underneath the excerpt. This statistic is quite low in terms of public engagement. In the survey conducted with Capetonian womxn between the ages of 18 and 28, only 2 participants indicated that they use SMPs to follow SMIs who identify with activism and activist practices (see Figure 3.3). This indicates that a very low percentage of Capetonian womxn are interested in or aware of any online forms of activism. What this could mean is that not enough information is circulating regarding activism in South Africa or Cape Town specifically, or that not many womxn in the 18 to 28 age bracket in Cape Town have jumped onto the activism bandwagon per say. Taking this into consideration, this may be why Windvogel as a Coloured Capetonian womxn who is an activist is not receiving a great amount of engagement on Facebook, despite being a well-known local public figure. Windvogel's public recognition is very different to that of Monroe (celebrity) and Baker (SMI) in that they do not have an online following that spans beyond thousands of online SMP users like them. Thus, in contrast to Monroe and Baker's established level of fame and hyper visibility, Windvogel stands as an emergent public figure who is taking

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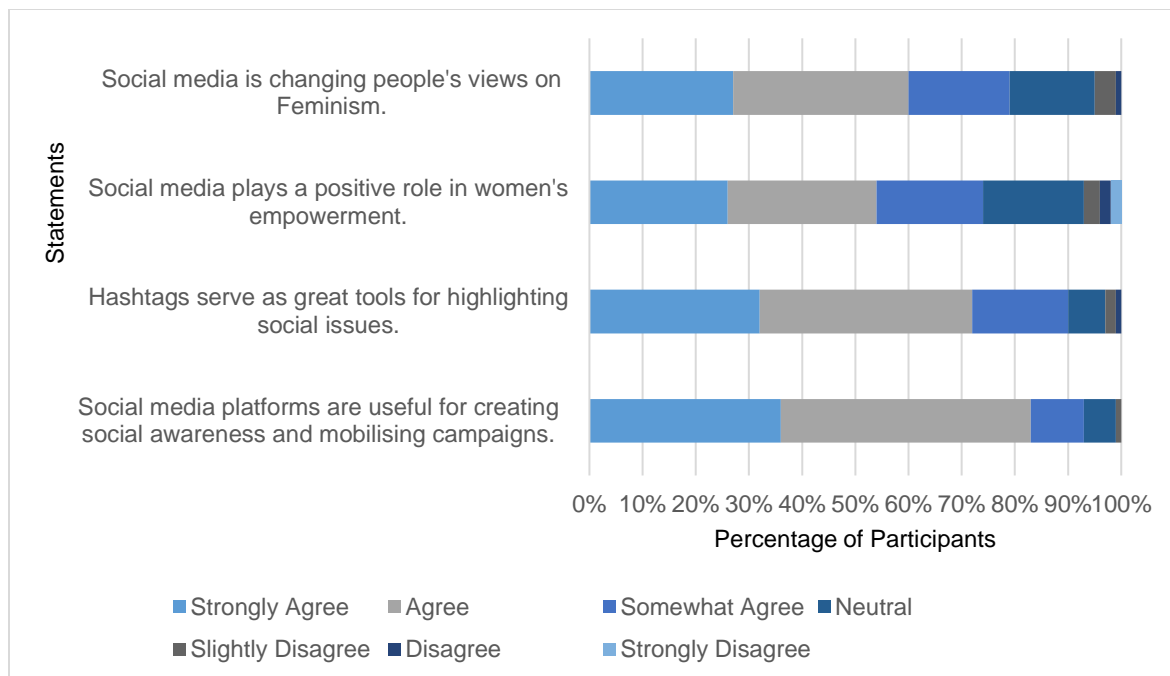
<sup>78</sup> Ratto and Boler would argue that poetry would fall into the category of "hybrid forms of activism and modalities" (2014:23). For these two theorists the making of poetry is a DIY act that intersects with activism, and is a form of liberation. This intersection is a site for re-examining existing dichotomies and ideologies (2014:23-24). Thus, Windvogel's poetry is conceivably an expression of political, social and overall civic engagement. This is a participatory act that falls under DIY citizenship.

agency in self-presentation and poetic expression online, so as to affirm queer identities and queer communities, and educate and inspire (Windvogel 2018) online Facebook followers. Also, despite this low statistic, the survey also indicated that the majority of the Capetonian participants felt that SMPs are in fact useful for empowering womxn, highlighting important social issues, creating social awareness and mobilising activist campaigns. This is illustrated by Figure 4.2. This means that Capetonian womxn are aware of activist endeavours which take place online. However, this is also an indication that there is still much work to be done within South Africa and Cape Town specifically in terms of generating more interest in and efficiently mobilising social media activism. However, Windvogel is very conscience of slacktivism and the fact that one social media post is not enough to provoke major changes or hone a collective consciousness.<sup>79</sup> This is why, aside from posting inspirational and educational poetry excerpts on social media, Windvogel is actively working within the local Capetonian community to educate womxn of all sexual identities, with the help of the FemmeProjects organisation. Thus, Windvogel is not merely posting about social issues regarding gender and sexuality, but doing something in the offline world to generate social change (micro or macro). In terms of their use of social media and their online objectives, Windvogel stated the following during our interview:

I set out to do a few things. To expose the truth, to represent people like me who are not heterosexual, people who are queer, people who are not white, who are different - in any shape or form. And that is what I will continue to do. Me being represented doesn't mean that **everyone** in the identity I identify with are represented, but hopefully me being me and talking about the issues I speak of will help others to live their own truths and to write or tell their own stories (Windvogel 2018).

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<sup>79</sup> In a recent interview, Windvogel stated the following regarding online activist endeavours: "Social media activism can be effective, but in the same breath also not. How is it effective? It can inspire others to go out and to make that change. It can connect dots for people who have been struggling to understand an ideology. It can create and hold space for people who want to have their stories heard. The world has a nasty habit of silencing people. Social media also silences people, by deleting posts sometimes, but it does it less frequently than many marginalised people experience on a daily basis in the real world. How ineffective is it? It can make many activists believe that posting a status about something that is wrong in the world is enough. It isn't. If one truly wants to be an activist, one needs to be with the people and actively engage with those who are oppressed and figure out with them what the solution is. Sharing something on Facebook is not going to topple the system" (2018).



**Fig 4.2.** Distribution of Capetonian womxn's agreeability with social media activism (2018).

Thus far, I have come to understand that Windvogel's use of social media is not only I way of expressing themselves lexically, but also I manner in which they are reaching out to other queer individuals. Windvogel has opened up a digital space for queer expression and queer community-making. In this way, it is conceivable that Windvogel is forming a collective, in which other queers may find a sense of belonging and perhaps even affirmation. I now move on to investigate Windvogel's online self-presentation on Instagram, and discover whether or not their bodily presentation is evocative of a feminist or postfeminist representational rhetoric.

### 4.3 Destabilising the Norm: A Feminist Rhetoric or Not?

Windvogel openly identifies as a feminist both online and offline. As previously mentioned, they are also not in favour of existing gender and sexual binaries, and are concerned with the restricting ways in which womxn (queer or heterosexual) are being represented and perceived. As this research article has progressed, it has become clear that the labels 'feminist' and 'postfeminist' are quite perplexing, and a source of heated debates regarding the two labels being oppositional rather

than intersected in some way. In an interview with Windvogel, their sentiment toward the two labels was expressed as follows:

Postfeminist ideas are rooted in contradictions. Some postfeminists believe that feminism is dead and to an extent not needed in this current society anymore, as we should be taking a humanist approach to revolution. Another understanding of postfeminism is the belief that feminism needs to expand. There is truth to all theories, but these contrasting theories make it difficult for anyone to wrap their heads around what exactly postfeminist theory aims to be, as some of them are in solidarity with feminist movements and others are directly against feminist theories and wishes to subvert feminism. The first understanding I mentioned can only be used when all people of all genders, races, economic standing are of equal value. We are not. Therefore feminism is still relevant and necessary today (Windvogel 2018).

There is truth to Windvogel's argument, especially in terms of gaining equality for queer identities within the South African context. Since 1994, multiple legislative solutions<sup>80</sup> have been endorsed to undo the lingering discriminatory apartheid ethos and to guarantee "compliance with the Equality Clause in the South African Constitution" (Van Zyl 2005:19), specifically concerning sexual orientation. The sexual orientation subdivision published within the Bill of Rights has had a great effect on the lives of individuals who classify themselves as gay and lesbian. An important aspect of placing sexual orientation in the South African Constitution, is that it generates recognised "discursive spaces for everyday representations of same-sex relationships (though this also needs to be problematised) – opportunities for normalising our identities and relationships under the broad ethic of 'unity in diversity'" (Van Zyl 2005:19). Thus, it is evident that a shift is happening regarding the acceptance and articulation of non-heterosexual identities. However, this shift has not been entirely inclusive of all other queer identities in the South African LGBTGI+ community, especially those which have recently come to light.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps this is why Windvogel identifies with feminist ideals rather than postfeminist concepts, and is largely concerned about achieving representational, social and political equality for themselves and the larger queer

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<sup>80</sup> Laws and support structures for the queer community have been put into place, in South Africa, to ensure equality opportunities for all queer citizens, assist with representivity and combat discrimination. Examples of this are community organisations such as the Joint Working Group (JWG), the OUT LGBT Well-Being organisation, the SAPS Gay and Lesbian Policing Network and the national Equality Project (Nel 2015:296).

<sup>81</sup> Theorist Juan Nel argues that inclusion of the sexual orientation clause in the South African constitutions has encouraged much debate and has put sexual orientation issues out in the open (2015:296). Furthermore, it has also generated "a space for alternative discourses – to articulate experiences of life of individuals' preferred ways of being and thinking that were previously (and mostly still are) subjugated or disqualified" (Nel 2015:296). Nel also argues that the South African Constitution merely offers a legal framework to work with, and that much work is still necessitated to cause real change to occur in everyday lives of queer South African citizens (2015:296-297).



community. Her preoccupation with a feminist ethos is also the foundation for her identity as a local gender and body positive activist – both online and offline.

Despite Windvogel's self-proclaimed feminist status and suspicion of postfeminist ideals, they fail to acknowledge the ideas of theorists – Sarah Gamble (2001) and Naomi Wolf (2002, 2008) – who pose more optimistic ideas regarding what postfeminism is capable of as an analytical perspective of feminism. For example, Naomi Wolf argues that:

What's the definition [of postfeminism]? You know, I don't think it really needs to have a rigorous definition. I've never been one who's a fan of labels. To me it just means women who are younger - substantially younger than second wave feminists you know - does that generation of third and probably now fourth wave feminists have a different style in their feminism? I think there's some differences and they're good differences. I think third wave feminism tends to be much more pluralistic about sexuality and personal expression and, you know fashion, choices and [was] much less dogmatic. Which I think is great. I think third wave feminism tends to be more alert than some second wave feminists were to issues of class and race. I think third wave feminists tend to be more engaged with being willing to use power: like to use the media or to use the electoral process, or to use consumer practices for a good outcome [...] Second wave feminism tended to be kind of puritanical [in a sense that] we [feminists] can only be really good if we don't touch the marketplace; we don't touch the media; we don't touch politics as usual [...] Apart from that what I love about being kind of superannuated [is] being kind of the 'dinosaurs' [older feminists] and letting the young ones kind of carry the ball forward [...] It's time for them to make their own mistakes, to create their own theories and throw up their own leaders, and that's as it should be. That means that a movement [feminism] is long and vigorous (*Big Think* 2008).

In simpler terms, Wolf suggests that newer waves of feminism such as postfeminism and the feminisms that develop thereafter even, are not an abolishment of the ideals and legacy of earlier, more traditionalist feminist waves. Rather, these new waves are keeping the feminist movement alive by further questioning and resisting social, economic and political social norms and institutions that seek to permeate binaries and dichotomies which contribute towards propelling inequality. Wolf also suggests that it is younger womxn who are raising newer, important questions and looking at older feminist objectives with a keen eye so as to give it significant meaning during

contemporary times. Simply, postfeminism is about ‘keeping up with the times’, and this implies that new issues regarding inequality may arise in the future that will need new perspectives to be solved. In Wolf’s opinion the emergence of newer feminisms, like postfeminism specifically, revitalise conventional feminism. Thus, Windvogel may seek equality for womxn, young girls who need access to sanitary pads (as mentioned previously with regards to the FemmeProjects initiative), and the queer community on their SMPs, but what becomes questionable is whether or not Windvogel’s objectives are exclusively carried out in a purely conventional feminist manner.



**Fig. 4. 3.** *Femmeprojects: June. 2017.* Screenshot of photograph of menstruation T-shirt, Instagram.



**Fig. 4.4.** *Blazing Non-Binary: August. 2017.* Screenshot of greyscale photograph of Kim Windvogel, Instagram.

In Figure 4.3 one is presented with an image that was posted by Windvogel on her organisation's page called *@Femmeprojects*. As previously mentioned, Windvogel has three separate Instagram accounts for three different purposes. This profile in particular is dedicated to Windvogel's work as an activist for equality and access to proper menstrual health facilities, supplies and information. This particular image was posted on 18 June 2017 and received 50 likes and three positive comments (two from female followers and one from the organisation itself). The caption of the image reads "Whatever you rock between your legs, call it by its name and have no shame" (see Figure 4.3). This particular photography is a marketing images in which Windvogel wears white a FemmeProjects T-shirt that has a biological illustration of the female reproductive system – the ovaries, uterus, cervix, vagina etc. – over a long-sleeved red top, and a pair of blue jeans. The image printed on the T-shirt is pink and red in colour (conceivably seen as symbolically feminine colours) and has black font labels pointing to the various parts of the reproductive system. The following hashtags are also used: #reproductivesystem, #tshirts, #vagina, #sexualhealth, #menstrualhealth, #workshops, #ovary, #feminism, and #capetown (see Figure 4.3). These hashtags are used to increase the visibility of this post on Instagram. The post is intended to draw attention to a new fundraising initiative geared towards generating funds for the organisation of

public menstrual and sex health workshops (see Figure 4.3). Each T-shirt is being sold for R250. Windvogel proudly stands with their hands on their waist and a proud, almost pouting expression on their face. They also appear to be wearing a red lip balm on their lips. Windvogel's hair is also in a naturally curly afro style and has dark curls that frame their face along with the shadows created by the sun. They appear to be standing in front of a window that has white blinds on the other side of it.

Immediately one gets a sense that this photograph is intended to create awareness for the FemmeProjects organisation and their objectives regarding menstrual and sexual health of womxn in South Africa, particularly based in Cape Town. The post, however, received a small amount of likes (mainly from womxn), indicating that the organisation itself is still emerging and still gathering a significant audience. However, the post is an indication that Windvogel endorses the initiative and is affiliating their face with the organisation's plea for support. It also indicates that they are dedicated to creating equal opportunities for young womxn who are in need of access to sanitary pads, menstrual and sexual health facilities and knowledge. This fight for equality regarding reproductive rights and the female body is quite reminiscent of second wave feminism (Gamble 2001:44-54). However, the conventional objectives of the second wave are being approached in a contemporary way, in which graphic T-shirts (a fashionable item of clothing) is being utilised as a symbol for creating awareness and addressing these issues in a millennial manner. In this way, there is a slight postfeminist rhetoric that comes across in the same way that Baker brought attention to a homeless women organisation by wearing a slogan T-shirt. However, one must remember that this attempt to raise awareness around social and economic issues (in the offline world) online may come across as being superficial and ineffective.<sup>82</sup> The message may not be heard by non-internet users.

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<sup>82</sup> On the topic of raising awareness on an online platform, Windvogel had the following to say during an interview: "There are various challenges to only doing advocacy online. One good thing is that the world is going tech and soon the only way to educate yourself will be through the internet. But we have various class issues in our country and the globe in general. Many people have trouble accessing data [network coverage] needed to access various internet platforms. Many have issues affording the technology needed to load the data on that is needed to use the internet. So, who are you then truly reaching? The people who need the advocacy or the people who are used to reading the same information or who can already easily access it? People living in rural communities do not have the same range of access we as people living in urban areas have and this should be taken up by our government and our

In Figure 4.4, one is presented with a post from Windvogel's personal blog profile on Instagram, @BlazingNonBinary. In this particular greyscale photograph, Windvogel is photographed by professional local photographer. Here, Windvogel poses in an oversized white polo neck that reaches the top of their thighs. They pose with their head tilted backward, fingers gently pressed up against the side of their face, while their elbow leans against a surface that is cropped out of frame (see Figure 4.4). One leg is also gently placed over the other. This image is something that one sees regularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century - a gentle young womxn, posing slightly suggestively (not too sexy, but not too timid). This is a representation of womxn that one conceivably sees in magazines, advertisements and commercials. Today, with the proliferation of mobile photography, this 'pose' is often seen on social media platforms as womxn indulge in the modern practice of taking 'selfies' or doing impromptu photoshoots with their smartphones. Noticeably, however, the caption of the photograph stands in contrast to existing perceptions (the idea that womxn who pose showing their skin in a suggestive manner are being sexual or promiscuous) of this style of representation:

I think if we allow womxn (and all those who are able to fall pregnant) to make their own decisions when it comes to their bodies, we are actually for the first time fostering a society where womxn matter! It might sound like an injustice to men, but it's not. No. The freedom to choose what happens to your body is a right and I will fight to keep it alive for as long as I am breathing (Figure 4.4).

This particular caption was a quotation taken directly from an interview which Windvogel did with the online shopping websites known as *Spree*. This post is accompanied by hashtags such as #abortion, #prochoice, #sexualrights, #top, #womensrights, #womensmonth and #spree (see Figure 4.4.). Windvogel clearly believes that womxn have a natural right to take agency and control over their own bodies, whether it be in terms of sex, abstinence, sexuality, pregnancy or choosing to have an abortion. This is a notion that is reminiscent of Paglia's regarding being prosex and endorsing sexual freedom and womxn taking responsibility for their own sexual needs and desires (2018:227-228) despite existing social norms and longstanding binaries. Coincidentally, Windvogel is also in favour of disrupting binaries and social constructs regarding womxn's

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overflowing private sector. We need them to build the proper infrastructure in rural communities and to figure out ways of equal access for all" (2018).

physical bodies and their sexuality. Though Windvogel is a self-proclaimed feminist, this particular post has postfeminist nuances. Here, Windvogel uses the SMP Instagram to send a social and political message to her followers. This message is that Windvogel has a right to pose in a sexually suggestive manner and expose her thick thighs and even her cellulite (even though the image is filtered by greyscale there are still imperfections left visible in the photograph) if it makes them content. At the same time, Windvogel also has a right to speak out about taking agency back over their female body and making their own decisions regarding what their body will and will not go through. In this sense, Windvogel sends the message that other womxn have the right to do the same thing. Thus, Windvogel endorses sexual and bodily freedom and the notion of womxn taking agency back over their physical bodies. This particular message stands in line with McRobbie (2006:522-530) and Gill's argument regarding adapting a postfeminist sensibility (Gill, Kelan & Scharff 2017:226-244) by which 21<sup>st</sup> century womxn live and conduct their day to day lives; womxn have a right to regulate and oversee their own bodily and representational existence even if it means 'bending' the exclusive ideals of traditional feminist values. The main aim in the modern world is to take back agency for themselves – not to appease men or the State.

Author of *The Beauty Myth* (2002), Naomi Wolf, would argue that Windvogel is attempting to free herself and other womxn from “the beauty myth” (2002:19):

The 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 multiapplianced 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.

Wolf suggests that womxns' 'femaleness' has been perceived in a limiting manner that reduces them to a body, pretty face and brainless object. For years womxn have been regulated by ridiculous social standards that dictate how they should look, what they should eat, how they should dress etc. Wolf is quite aware of this and argues that womxn need to free themselves from these standards:

The beauty myth posited to women a false choice: Which will I be, sexual or serious? We must reject that false and forced dilemma. Men's sexuality is taken to be enhanced by their seriousness;

to be at the same time a serious person and a sexual being is to be fully human. Let's turn on those who offer this devil's bargain and refuse to believe that in choosing one aspect of the self we must thereby forfeit the other. In a world in which women have real choices, the choices we make about our appearance will be taken at last for what they really are: no big deal. Women will be able thoughtlessly to adorn ourselves with pretty objects when there is no question that *we* are not objects. Women will be free of the beauty myth when we can choose to (2002:273).

As seen in Figure 4.4, Windvogel uses the modern and innovative Instagram SMP to not only express themselves in the online space, but also to create awareness for the larger public regarding being 'pro choice' and taking a sense of freedom and agency back. This image is an illustration of both Windvogel's activist role and their role as a non-binary queer individual. Windvogel is attempting to achieve recognition and representivity for womxns' rights whilst also representing the South African LGBTG1+ community in the online landscape. Windvogel's demeanour in this image is conceivably both sexual and serious to a certain degree, which is exactly what Wolf discusses above. The juxtaposition of the seemingly contradictory representation and caption illustrates Windvogel's ability to make their own informed choices about their self-presentation (Turner 2010:13).



**Fig. 4.5.** *Kurlykimi: October. 2017.* Screenshot of nude photograph of Kim Windvogel, Instagram.

In Figure 4.5, one is presented with a nude photograph which was posted on Windvogel's second personal Instagram account, @Kurlykimi, on 27 October 2017. In this image, Windvogel is photographed by a local photographer from head to thighs. Here, Windvogel poses completely nude in what appears to be a garden or outdoor location, wearing only a black lace panties, and mostly covering their nipples (one nipple peeks through slightly) with their forearms. Windvogel gently caresses their neck with their fingertips and tilts their head upwards with closed eyes and a slightly opened mouth. This posture is conceivably quite a sensual and almost erotic image of Windvogel in comparison the abovementioned figures. The image is accompanied by a caption which states:

She looked at me afterwards and said: "don't be like that, it's just the truth, you're fat". This girl was the one everyone adored. Her mother would, in a few years' time, become my teacher while she was jetted off to a private school because...I don't know, maybe that school just wasn't good enough anymore. But I found my power; not to be necessarily sexualised (do that if you want, just don't tell me about how you're doing it at 2[am] in the morning), but to be internally happy with what I see externally (Figure 4.5).

The caption includes hashtags such as #thick, #bodypositivity, #plussize, #curly, #naturalhair, #fatfemme, and #thunderthighs (see Figure 4.5). In this instance, Windvogel is deliberately drawing attention to her naked body and curvaceous body type. As a body positive pansexual womxn, Windvogel is almost diarising their personal, introspective thoughts on how they're dealing with loving and accepting their body despite what society may tell them about beauty standards, on the online SMP. Windvogel clearly feels a certain level of safety in presenting themselves in this manner in a public and digital space. Even though Windvogel does not meet the criteria for the favoured, standardised body type (that is slim and flawlessly kept looking aesthetically pleasing), they are happy with their imperfect, curvy body that some would consider 'fat' or undesirable. They are also happy to present their naked, queer, Coloured body for public viewing as long as it creates awareness regarding body positivity and inspires other womxn to love



their bodies rather than subject it to the nonsensical standards of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Wolf might conceivably argue that Windvogel is taking significant steps towards freeing themselves from the pervading beauty myth (2002:273-279). At the same time, Windvogel is contributing to online queer discourse by posting such an unapologetic representation of themselves on Instagram. In this sense, Windvogel normalises the idea of the queer body being associated with the nude and the online landscape. Interestingly, this particular post only received 45 likes and has two comments that do not deliver much information other than LGBTGI+ pride in the form of multiple rainbow emojis (rainbow colours are universally symbolic of pride in the LGBTQI+ community). This indicates that Windvogel's objectives are reaching the public in a micro manner.

Thus far, it is conceivable that Windvogel utilises three separate Instagram accounts for three different purposes. *@FemmeProjects* is geared towards creating social awareness and negotiating Windvogel's activist identity. *@BlazingNonBinary* is used to negotiate their queer identity as a poet and self-proclaimed feminist (however I have found some postfeminist nuances). *@Kurlykimi* is an account dedicated to negotiating her identity as a Coloured, pansexual, South African womxn, with naturally curly hair and a curvaceous, non-standard body type. What becomes clear, in this case, is that (just like Baker compartmentalises her online identity according to what she wishes be presented publically and what must be left undisclosed) Windvogel acknowledges and hones into the fact that identity is a layered, complex and pluralistic concept to understand. Judith Butler has made this argument before, stating:

There is no reason to assume that gender also ought to remain as two. The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it [...] Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate [...] Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure (1990:6-16).

As Butler has notably claimed in the past, gender and identity is constantly undergoing changes and layering. This is exactly what Windvogel confirms by their use of the Instagram SMP. Windvogel uses this technologically advanced digital tool to negotiate the multiple layers of her

gender, sexuality and femininity.<sup>83</sup> Windvogel makes that choice on their own, regaining agency over how they are presented and perceived. This in itself is taking some sort of power back – purely having freedom of choice and claiming that right online each time they post.

What also becomes clear is that identity is never one singular aspect or quality (Butler 1990:16-17). Gender is a web-like intersection of various aspects, emotions, values, ideologies, and social and political constructs which act upon an individual. Gender is complex. This is why it is a challenge to conclusively name Windvogel as being a feminist or postfeminist. However, they are a self-proclaimed feminist who possibly unconsciously adopts postfeminist rhetorics in certain circumstances. In Windvogel's case, postfeminism is conceivably circumstantial and not conclusive. And perhaps, in this sense, postfeminism does become too elusive to pin point, as there are so many aspects of an individual that needs to be considered when understanding their gender and individual brand of feminism. Thus, feminism is a personal choice in this case.

#### **4.4 Coloured & Queer: An Intersectional Approach**

As mentioned previously, Windvogel's identity has brought about some challenges in terms of taking all their layers into consideration. This is why I propose that perhaps post feminism is just another wave leading to a more inclusive, welcoming feminism that is not confusing or contradictory, and does not ignore the issues of minority groups, as Wolf would argue (2008). Perhaps post feminism was a transitory state before this next more all-encompassing wave. The latest buzzword in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been the term “intersectionality” (Vidal 2014). This is where the term ‘intersectional feminism’ stems from, and this is the feminism that has emerged since post feminism was said to be too vague. Intersectionality is a term that was coined by feminist, race theorist, and American civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1959-). Crenshaw

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<sup>83</sup> Chris Atton suggests that society consider everyday media practices as a form of cultural citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2014:355). “Consider media practice in a performative sense, where individuals and groups use media to experience the world as they construct it for themselves, to shape local culture and collective imaginaries” (Atton 2014:355). In this sense, Windvogel uses social media to negotiate and create their own identity in a manner that is relatable for other Coloured, South African, pansexual womxn occupying the online space.

argues that there is an existing essentialism that is prevalent in today's society, and it is entangled with multiple over-lapping social identities and associated social norms, which are representative of discrimination, subjugation and domination (Crenshaw 1991:1242-1243). Crenshaw's intersectional theory (1980's) is a response to disregarded race and gender issues. This response elucidates existing issues surrounding the racial and essentialist portrayal of women of colour across all contexts. It is conceivable that womxn of colour are not just 'feminine'- they are subjugated, racialised and characterised by socio-economic conditions. In contrast to white woman being represented as the Eurocentric norm, women of colour's identities are more complex and troubled by darker histories and social, political and familial circumstances. Stephanie Shields argues that a coherent thread across definitions of intersectionality is that "social identities which serve as organising features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalise one another" (2008:302). The above mentioned identity politics, of women of colour, is explicated in all forms of popular culture – and even in social media culture. Intersectionality has been received in diverging ways across different fields of study (McCall 2005:1790-1794). Leslie McCall argues that this is because in order to utilise intersectionality a significant paradigm for analysing different circumstances and social positions, one would need to adopt a sense of "interdisciplinarity" (2005:1794). This means that a vast amount of research would be required across intersecting disciplines in order to get the full picture of any given circumstance that is being approached from an intersectional perspective. Thus, intersectional feminism would conceivably be a feminism that is mindful of, inclusive and accepting of all social identities and their various intersections.

In this regard, taking an intersectional approach to Windvogel's online identity would mean evaluating all the layers of their identity. Thus far, I have discovered that they are a self-proclaimed feminist, an activist, poet, body positivist, is pro-choice and favours sexual freedom, and is pansexual. What I have not discussed as yet is their Coloured layer of their identity. On the topic of race, Windvogel disclosed the following in an interview:

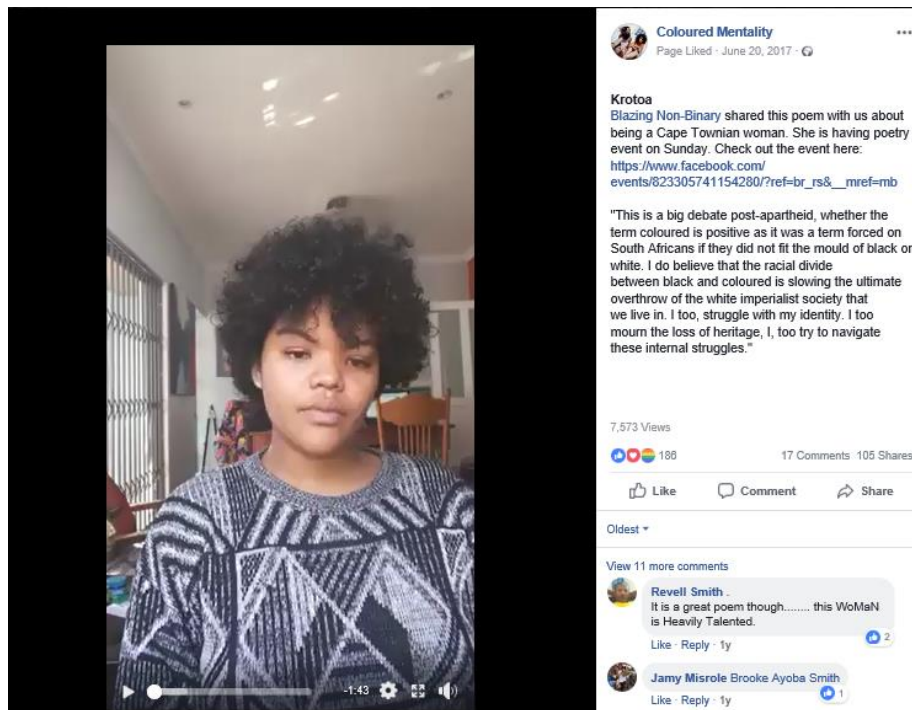
I don't always feel comfortable calling myself coloured. I have always felt a disconnect with the coloured community, with the white community, with the black community. I have never felt like my identity is linked to colouredness because coloured people would scoff at my Model-C accent, black people would mis-race me by calling me umlungu. For the longest time I thought white

people understood me (lol, when I was in school and not conscious), but that quickly faded away when I realised this was fleeting. You were only 'one of them' when you agreed with them, but they always knew you were different and they always treated you with just enough amount of inclusion to feel that you belonged, but with a tinge of: 'we know you're not completely one of us' for you to feel othered. My femininity is linked to the various forms of it that I have experienced in my life. It used to be linked to the femininity of the media, but that also quickly faded as I was not represented as a coloured woman on-screen, the only representation I saw of myself, of people who looked like me were people who were baby pushers, drug dealers, people with passion gaps and people who were aggressive. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that identity, but it dripped in stereotypes and I was not that. So the femininity I had access to was my grandmother and my mother. My grandmother is a woman who grew up in extreme patriarchal structures, she does all the social reproductive work even when she was working a full-time job just like her husband. I never wanted to be like that. My mother was never like my grandmother, my mother's version of femininity was just to exude whatever energy she harnessed on the inside and this is what I took as my personal version of what femininity actually is. My father was also a great source of femininity. He has his moments of patriarchal behaviour, but he in many ways is more feminine than my mother and I learnt a lot from him as well. This is a difficult question to try and encapsulate. I don't know why I am struggling with this one. In short, my identities are so interlinked and I believe the way I portray myself will always be a mixture of the masculine and the feminine and whatever energy lies in between. Sometimes they fall out of my mouth and my actions simultaneously. And because our ideas of the feminine and the masculine are evolving I am never sure which one is which. I am merely sure that whatever and however I portray myself online and all these various energies; they all belong to me and my identity (Windvogel 2018).

It is clear from this statement that racial identity is a challenging topic of discussion for Windvogel. What this means is that the personal circumstances and experiences mentioned above have impacted Windvogel in a way that has left them questioning the racial intersection of their overall identity as a Coloured South African womxn. This is no surprise due to the dark history behind the formation, miscegenation and trials of the Coloured community (Adhikari 2009:1-22). Theorist Cheryl Hendricks explains why many Coloured individuals find it challenging to articulate and affirm their identities:

Coloureds are not simply the offspring of inter-racial liaisons. And, conversely, children of ‘mixed marriages’ do not automatically lay claim to a coloured identity. This is a complex historically located identity that stems from the processes of slavery, genocide, rape and perceived miscegenation. The identity construction has been cloaked by the perceived shame of ‘illegitimacy’ and lack of authenticity that has to a large extent psychologically disempowered the bearers of the identity. For most of the history of this community, steeped in oppression and struggles for liberation, had been erased and/or silenced by successive regimes and the group members themselves (2005:118).

However, Windvogel has utilised the SMP Facebook, in particular, to address this challenge. This is what I now move on to address.



**Fig. 4.6.** *Coloured Mentality: June. 2017.* Screenshot of video of Kim Windvogel’s speech on race, Facebook.

On 20 June 2017, Windvogel made a short video clip in their home, in which they discussed their Coloured identity. This video was publically shared and circulated on social media. The organisation known as Coloured Mentality, posted this video on their Facebook page in solidarity with what Windvogel had to say regarding Coloured identity. This is illustrated by Figure 4.6. In this video, Windvogel had the following to say:

No! I'm not Brazilian. I didn't grow up on the coast of South America or play beach soccer in my teeny bikini with the little kids from the next village. No, I'm not Columbian. True. My hips don't lie and my curls don't go straight, but your Shakira comments are getting offensive. No! I'm not foreign either, and even if I were, who are you to grab me in the street and call me your 'Señorita'? I ain't Jay Z; I don't speak Spanish too. I'm Capetonian: born and bred in the valleys of its majestic mountains, in the richness of its diversity, and before the freedom to express information could be punished by law. I am one of the born-frees; supposedly born free from the oppression of my mothers and supposedly born free from the guilt of my fathers when they were the oppressors. Supposedly, not positively. I'm a Coloured and in my country that is not necessarily a racist slur. In fact, for many it's something to be proud of. I carry the blood of the Sotho, the courage of the slave, the audacity of the Germans, and the education of a modern women of colour. I am made up out of so many genocides and heartbreaks, triumphs and failures, stereotypes – but they don't shape me. I shape me. I am Capetonian and your deep, utter shock when I utter those words works on my poes! Capetonian enough for you? (*Coloured Mentality* 2017).

Windvogel passionately speaks about misconceptions regarding the Coloured community and their appearance as a Coloured Capetonian womxn. This speech stands in contradiction with what Windvogel disclosed in our interview regarding the acceptance of the term Coloured. Here, Windvogel expresses a pride and an annoyance towards arrogance that still exists in the South African landscape regarding what it means to be Coloured. Windvogel is highly aware of racism and is disgusted by it. Here, Windvogel reclaims their Coloured origins and identity. Windvogel conceivably seeks to use this SMP to make people more aware of the Coloured community and to dismantle misconceptions that are perpetuated in the media and popular culture. At the end of the speech, Windvogel makes use of the slang term 'poes', which in this circumstance can be loosely translated as 'nerves'. In other words, they are annoyed when people stare at them due to being Coloured or having a Coloured accent. Conclusively, Windvogel identifies with the Coloured community, and thus this becomes another intersection of her identity as a queer, pansexual, Coloured womxn living in Cape Town, South Africa. What also becomes clear is that Windvogel too seeks proper representation online and offline, in terms of this racial layer of their identity.

This is conceivably why they have taken agency back over their self-presentation online. Social media has assisted Windvogel in bringing this message across regarding the Coloured community; Windvogel has spoken up for a minority group that has remained silent since Apartheid. This video in particular is a direct response to and refusal to accept stereotypical representations of the Coloured community any longer.

## 4.5 Concluding Remarks

Kim Windvogel is an ideal example of the confusion that can occur when considering postfeminism as an analytical paradigm. Though they are a self-proclaimed feminist, their online identity and self-presentation has proved to be significantly complex. Windvogel endorses the ideals of second wave feminism and the idea that womxn have the right to make their own decisions regarding their bodies and reproduction. At the same time Windvogel is a practicing pansexual millennial activist. These credentials would conceivably make one believe that Windvogel is a conventional feminist. However, after investigating further, it became clear that their online presentation on their three Instagram accounts included postfeminist nuances. Windvogel believes in being pro choice, having sexual freedom, reclaiming agency over one's body and dismantling standards regarding beauty and the ideal body type. These are all indicative of a postfeminist rhetoric that McRobbie and Gill advocate. As postfeminism presented challenges, I moved on to taking an intersectional approach to Windvogel's online identity, making sure to understand her racial identity. Coloured identity has proven to be difficult to accept for Windvogel, personally. Conceivably, this is the case for many womxn who find themselves a part of this minority in South Africa. By utilising Facebook, Windvogel has taken a stand against existing stereotypes so as to speak up for the silent Coloured community – once again honing in to their activist role. As a Coloured South African, pansexual poet and activist who is a body positivist, Windvogel has multiple layers to their identity that is perhaps only accessible when taking an intersectional approach. This is true for both Monroe and Baker as well. Multiple layers of their gender and identity has needed to be explored in order to comprehend their feminism and use of SMPs.



## CONCLUSION

In the beginning stages of my research I aimed to investigate the ways in which specific Coloured women, of various social rankings, utilise social media to negotiate their identities. This proved to be an immense task as there are multiple interlinking aspects and intersections to consider when attempting to comprehend identity. However, after taking a mixed methods approach to investigating the complex manner in which Patty Monroe, Aisha Baker and Kim Windvogel negotiate their respective identities online, it became clear that an interdisciplinary stance was needed to critically look into online culture and the ways in which its effects translate into the corporeal, offline world. To sum things up, theorist Graham Meikle presents an ideal concept:

We present and perform versions of ourselves for self-selected audiences. And there are uses of such performance to connect with others – to network, interact, and share with others we might never have encountered otherwise [...] Social media make us visible to others and make those others visible to us in turn. This creates opportunities for collective action and collaborative creativity [...] The practice of sharing is key to making the invisible visible in the networked digital environment of social media (2014:376-377).

The online space allows for individuals to have a voice, visibility and representivity they wouldn't have otherwise. This is why it is often thought of as a democratic space that offers democratic citizenship – anyone with internet access may take their spot in this space. This is, however, problematic in situations where people do not have internet access.<sup>84</sup> The 21<sup>st</sup> century's public communication culture (PCC) depends heavily on internet access and SMPs for faster communication and circulation of ideas and knowledge. Individuals take selfies now every day,

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<sup>84</sup> On the topic of digital privilege, Kim Windvogel disclose the following argument during an interview: "By promoting a space where marginalised people (with access to the internet) can represent themselves in all their diversities without being exploited by the Western idea of marginalised people. Poverty Porn is a real thing and the West enjoys using the narrative of victim-hood to define marginalised groups. However, although the space is there to be used as a way of self-representation we have seen people of colour and their experiences be silenced or censored to a stronger degree than white people. Posts by activists from the Black Lives Matter movement etc. were censored or removed to a stronger measure than those of white neo-nazis. Internet is still a vastly privileged thing. Not only in terms of having data, internet access or the resources to connect to the internet, but also in terms of understanding how to use the internet and understanding what it means to be socially recognised on the internet and how to effectively do that" (2018).

post blogs about their experiences (the new public diary format), make long Facebook rants about politics, and check the news on Twitter etc. It is conceivable that despite this technological innovation and faster communication, we have succumbed to an emerging digital ideology that adopts a ‘more is more’ ethos. This ideology has arguably also pushed individuals in a new aesthetic direction that affects the ways in which they present and represent themselves in the online space (this may differ to the offline space). Thus, individuals may be living a double life, which is concerning. This could potentially be true for Monroe, Baker and Windvogel. However, one cannot conclusively state that they are. However, postfeminists might argue that everyone has the freedom of choice to choose how they want to live their lives – it’s their right.

In terms of analysing any possible postfeminist rhetorics present in Monroe, Baker and Windvogel’s utilisation of SMPs, multiple elements which Angela McRobbie (2004, 2006, 2007) and Rosalind Gill (2007, 2016, 2017) have previously discussed have come up. Monroe resorts to self-sexualisation in order to be recognised for levelling the playing field in a male-dominated celebrity industry in a non-aggressive manner. In this she asserts her self-defined sexuality as a means of satisfying a ‘sexy’ but not hypersexual degrading image, and for carrying the responsibility for her own sexual freedom as a local icon. Baker compartmentalises her online image according to a sophisticated SMI brand that she has formed since her career started. Baker takes on a unique responsibility that comes with being a Muslim South African woman, a feminist and an SMI who is receiving hyper visibility in a highly public domain. By a simultaneous submission to and subversion of Islamic dress code paradigms, she raises the question of whether or not modesty is important in a convergent and digital society that currently seeks counter narratives and images to make sense of a changing world and reality. She, thus, resists the conventional, and chooses to not be solely defined by religion or culture. In Windvogel’s case, their feminism and identity is even more complex to comprehend. While they accept and practice the ideals of second wave feminism, they also believe in being pro choice, having sexual freedom, reclaiming agency over one’s body and disassembling standards regarding being queer, being considered as beautiful and having the ideal body type. These are all elements associated with a postfeminist rhetoric.

As Coloured women, there has been three constant threads that have come up in each of these individuals use of social media: self-presentation, visibility and representivity. Though each of these individuals accept their Coloured identity at varying levels, and are dealing with it in their own way, it is clear that it is extremely important for each of them to have agency over how they are portrayed online, regulate how visible they are to the public and a specific audience, and be represented in a non-stereotypical manner. For each of them, it is of great importance to not perpetuate the limiting ideas and misconceptions, regarding the Coloured community, that have been proliferated by South African media, film and television. This is why they are taking back their representational power and occupying their respective roles in the online space. Each of them are making the invisible visible in an effort to redress issues surrounding the Coloured community, specifically, Coloured women.

Coloured women in South Africa are a complex demographic to study as a collective but what is clear is that Coloured women of all social and political rankings seek representation that is not stereotypical or typecast, postfeminism as an analytical tool for enquiry uncovers ways in which the conventional feminist movement can continue to grow and be more inclusive of minority groups. Women want more choices, responsibility over their bodies and aesthetic appearance, freedom to express themselves without fearing the judgemental iron hammer of traditional, uncompromising feminists, women want to take back agency. And many are making this endeavour known on SMPs as they view these platforms as spaces for resistance towards the confines of dichotomies and existing binaries. These are spaces in which they may start a public dialogue in which issues and concerns regarding gender, sexuality and femininity can be addressed in a somewhat but not entirely 'democratic' manner (SMPs still run on an ever changing algorithm that may block undesired, inappropriate content). Whether social media is a good or bad thing is not the focus of this study. There are conceivably multiple pros and cons regarding this topic. However, what is clear is that women of Colour are utilising this digital innovation to make concerns known that are being ignored or left unaddressed in the offline space. Perhaps if the correct political, economic and social structures were put into place within the offline landscape, women would not feel the need to resort to using these new technologies and the digital landscape to have their voices heard.

Intersectionality is a useful analytical paradigm when taking a look at the lives and experiences of women of Colour. Thus, I propose that an intersectional feminism be the next wave of enquiry when researching the Coloured demographic. This paradigm insists that an interdisciplinary approach be taken (McCall 2005:1794) in order to create a much more inclusive academic and feminist environment. We must not forget traditional feminist waves, but continue to persevere in our quest for equality (Big Think 2008) as this has not been achieved yet. We must habitually revitalise feminism to ensure its longevity and effectiveness. Understanding an intersectional feminism may be a foot in the right direction when researching women of colour specifically.

Further investigations in fields of psychology and sociology, regarding Coloured identities in the online space, may be beneficial in understanding why this minority group has been so silent for so many years after Apartheid and why there is an intense need to achieve visibility and fair representation both online and offline. These fields may also contribute knowledge on why the 21<sup>st</sup> century has succumbed to an emerging digital ideology that is being perpetuated by social media and the internet.

This study looks at three specific individuals only. Thus, it is hard to generalise these findings in terms of the collective community of Coloured South African community. What can be seen from the social media survey which was conducted, however, is that Coloured Capetonian women between the ages of 18 and 28 are very interested in popular culture, celebrity culture, social media, and social media influencers (SMIs). Thus, the research collected in this mixed methods study may be of social and academic benefit for the Capetonian demographic specifically. This study may also illuminate concepts regarding Coloured identity in South Africa for international scholars. The information collected in this study also assists in mending the existing discursive gap that exists for Coloured women in South Africa and the alternative ways in which they choose to communicate or voice their opinions online.

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## APPENDIX A



UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY  
jou kennisvenoot • your knowledge partner

### **STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

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You are invited to take part in a MA study conducted by Charndré Kippie from the Visual Studies Department at Stellenbosch University. You are being approached as a possible participant because the study primarily involves South African women and social media practices, of which you are a regular user.

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

To explore social (new) media as a 'culture' i.e. how it is used as a strategic tool by South African women and the role it plays in the way(s) in which young South African women, especially Coloured women, deal with femininity and identity politics.

#### **2. WHAT WILL BE ASKED OF ME?**

The participants contributing to this study will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in interviews about their social media use and experience, and thoughts regarding their online representation and possible feminist and/or post-feminist links or nuances.
- Interviews will only take place if all participants agree to contribute their insight.
- Interviews will take place in the Cape Town area for participants' convenience.

#### **3. POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

I do not foresee any concrete risks to participants.

#### **4. POSSIBLE BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO THE SOCIETY**

Participants will not benefit from the participation.

#### **5. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

Participants will not receive payment for participating.

#### **6. DISCLOSURE AND IDENTITY AGREEMENT**

Any information that is acquired in connection with this study and that could be linked directly to you as a case study participant will only be divulged with your permission or as required by law. Any information transcribed will be quoted verbatim. Any participant may request to look at the notes and/or listen to the voice recordings of their individual contributions at any stage. Participants may request to review or edit any information mentioned in interviews.

Results will be reported in the Masters study, but any participant may decide to edit or review their responses at any time before it is published. The date of publishing will be made available to all participants and a suitable time frame will be allowed for responses. Information will be erased when the Masters study is published.

All interview participants will be briefed, and their participation is completely voluntary. All individuals will be free to withdraw without any consequences.

**7. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you agree to take part in this study, you may withdraw at any time without any consequence. You may also refuse to answer any questions you don't want to answer and still remain in the study. The researcher may withdraw you from this study if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

**8. RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Charndré Kippie, at 082 450 0205 or ckkippie79@gmail.com.

**9. RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Maryke Hunter-Hüsselmann (mh3@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4623) at the Division for Research Development.

.....

**DECLARATION OF CONSENT BY THE PARTICIPANT**

As the participant I confirm that:

- I have read the above information and it is written in a language that I am comfortable with.
- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.
- All issues related to privacy, and the confidentiality and use of the information I provide, have been explained.

By signing below, I \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of participant*) voluntarily agree to take part in this research study, as conducted by \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of principal investigator*).

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Witness Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**DECLARATION BY THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR**

As the **principal investigator**, I hereby declare that the information contained in this document has been thoroughly explained to the participant. I also declare that the participant has been encouraged (and has been given ample time) to ask any questions. In addition, I would like to select the following option:

	The interaction with the participant was conducted in a language in which the participant is fluent.
	The interaction with the participant was conducted with the assistance of a translator (who has signed a non-disclosure agreement), and this "Consent Form" is available to the participant in a language in which the participant is fluent.

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**Signature of Principle Investigator**

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**Date**

## APPENDIX B

### Social Media Survey: Online behaviours of young women in Cape Town, South Africa

This research survey aims to investigate the utilization of social media platforms within a South African context - specifically looking at female Capetonian social media users between the ages of 18 and 28.

All responses collected will be statistically analysed and presented as part of an academic thesis, based in the field of Visual Studies, regarding the contemporary use of social media as a tool (by South African women) and its effect on Feminism.

By submitting your responses, you are agreeing to the use of the information collected by this survey for academic purposes. Your response is entirely confidential and anonymous; results are only used on an aggregated level.

\*Please note: The survey takes approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

\* Required

#### 1. Email address \*

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#### 2. Please indicate your age.

*\*Mark only one oval.*

- 18-20
- 21-24
- 25-28

#### 3. Please indicate your race.

*\*Mark only one oval.*

- White
- Black
- Coloured
- Indian
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. What is your current occupation?

*\*Check all that apply.*

- Student: Employed Part-time
- Student - Unemployed
- Graduate Intern
- Junior Employee
- Senior Employee
- Unemployed Graduate
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 5. Do you consider yourself to be a regular social media user?

*\*Mark only one oval.*



- Yes
- No

6. **If not, please indicate why. \***

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7. **Approximately how much time do you spend on social media platforms per day?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- 30 minutes
- 1-2 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6 or more hours

8. **What do you primarily use social media for?**

*Check all that apply.*

- Work purposes
- Staying in touch with friends and family
- News updates
- Trendspotting
- Professional networking
- Entertainment
- Research
- Sharing image and/or video content
- Downloading content
- Blogging
- Vlogging
- A Shopping Guide
- Activism

9. **Which 3 social platforms do you habitually make use of?**

*\*Check all that apply.*

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- YouTube

- LinkedIn
- Google+
- Pinterest

**10. Where do you primarily access your preferred social media platforms from?**

*Check all that apply.*

- A smartphone
- A public PC
- Personal laptop
- Home PC
- A Tablet
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**11. When do you prefer going onto social media platforms?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- First thing in the morning
- During lunch time
- In the evening
- Anytime throughout the day
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Are you aware of what a social media influencer (SMI) is?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

**13. Do you follow any South African social media influencers online?**

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- No

**14. If so, why do you follow them?**

*Check all that apply.*

- Fashion Trends & Style Tips
- Beauty Tips
- Product or Brand Information
- Lifestyle Tips
- Travel Inspiration
- Event Information
- Visual Pleasure

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**15. Please indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.**

*Check all that apply.*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neutral	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Social media is informative and educational.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I follow my favourite celebrities on social media.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I belong to my favourite celebrity's fan page/ fan group online.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social media enhances one's appreciation for popular culture.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Most South African social media influencers are relatable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social media platforms are useful for creating social awareness and mobilising campaigns.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Posting your opinion on social media is risky.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hashtags serve as great tools for highlighting social issues.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social media plays a positive role in women's empowerment.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social media is changing people's views on Feminism.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being a social media user is 'fashionable'.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trends viewed on social media platforms influence decisions that I make.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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## APPENDIX C

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dear prospective participant

My name is Charndré Kippie, a student at the University of Stellenbosch, and I would like to invite you to take part in a survey, the results of which will contribute to a research project in order to complete my MA Visual Studies degree.

Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the contemporary use of social media platforms within a South African context - specifically looking at female Capetonian social media users between the ages of 18 and 28. All responses collected will be statistically analyzed and presented as part of an academic thesis, based in the field of Visual Studies, regarding the use of social media as a communicative tool and its possible effects on Feminism and Postfeminism.

The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete and will contain a combination of questions covering social media habits and preferences.

Participation in this survey will automatically enter you into a competition draw for a Canal Walk Shopping voucher valued at R1000. So please be sure to provide **an active email address** at the beginning of the survey. All entries will go into an automated draw. The winner will be contacted via email, by mid-May 2018, regarding their prize and collection details.

#### RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS:

You have the right to decline answering any questions and you can exit the survey at any time without giving a reason. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact Mrs Maléne Fouché [mfouche@sun.ac.za; 021 808 4622] at the Division for Research Development.

Your information and response to the survey will be protected by Google's privacy and safety measures, as this survey has been put together using Google Forms. For more information on this, please see: <https://www.google.com/policies/technologies/product-privacy/>.

All responses will remain completely anonymous and full name identification will not be required. If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact the researcher Charndré Kippie on 082 450 0205 and/or the Supervisor, Stella Viljoen on 021 808 3048.

To save a copy of this text, please copy and paste this for your personal storage or simply print a copy.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided for the current study.	YES	NO
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I agree to take part in this survey.	YES	NO
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## APPENDIX D

Dear Potential Participant(s)

As part of my Masters thesis, currently being completed at the University of Stellenbosch's Visual Studies department, I am conducting research on the use of social media by young women between the ages of 18 and 28 in South Africa. As part of an ongoing effort to gain relevant insight into local social media practices, I would like to request your participation in a short online survey. It should only take 10-15 minutes to complete.

Participation in this survey will automatically enter you into a competition draw for a **Canal Walk Shopping voucher valued at R1000**. So please be sure to provide an email address at the beginning of the survey. All entries will go into an automated draw. The winner will be contacted via email, by mid-May 2018, regarding their prize and collection details.

This particular survey will be active for a limited time only. If you are interested in participating, please make sure to submit your responses as soon as possible. This survey has been put together using Google Forms. Please note that all responses will remain completely anonymous. In order to take the survey, please click on the link below:

<https://goo.gl/forms/ujHE6ERbXkqDFwcI3>

If you have any concerns regarding the authenticity of this email or to find out more about this research survey, please do not hesitate to contact me directly on 082 450 0205. Should you wish to read up on Google's privacy and safety measures, please visit the following link: <https://www.google.com/policies/technologies/product-privacy/>

Thank you very much for your time and effort!

Sincerely,

Charndré Kippie