

**THE EFFECT OF POSTING SELFIES ON AN ADOLESCENT'S SELF-ESTEEM**

by

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I dedicate this thesis to my daughter, Gabriella Mila Jackpersadh. I eagerly await the day when I will also call you “Doctor”.

## Declaration

I declare that “The effect of posting selfies on an adolescent’s self-esteem” is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted, have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements of originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



\_\_\_\_\_  
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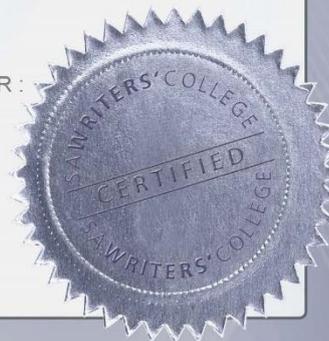
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## **Abstract**

The study aims to explore the psychological impact of the selfie on the self-esteem of adolescents. The selfie, a self-presentational tool, has experienced an escalation of use in the past decade with social networking sites being the primary platform in which the selfie is displayed. While the selfie can make people feel good, there is also evidence of potential negative effects to their self-esteem, particularly with the adolescent who is at a crucial stage of identity development. The study therefore investigates whether a selfie, which is posted on social media, has a positive or negative effect on adolescents' self-esteem, by exploring body image and narcissism.

As there is a lack of research in South Africa regarding the effects of the selfie on the adolescent, this study aims to fill this gap. A qualitative research was undertaken where 14 adolescents were sampled via Facebook and Instagram and then through the snowball sampling method. An observation of participants who posted selfies was completed, followed by an interview using a semi-structured questionnaire, constructed and piloted by the researcher. Data were analysed, using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and computer assisted data analysis (NVivo). Results of the combination of IPA and NVivo analysis found that, while adolescents saw the selfie as a confidence booster, there were also underlying feelings of body image concerns and narcissistic behaviour which in turn affected the self-esteem of the adolescent.

The findings of the study will serve to educate parents, teachers, and adolescents about the influence of the selfie on one's psychological level.

### **isiZulu**

Lolucwaningo luhlose ukuhlola umthelela wengqondo we-selfie ekuzethembeni kwentsha. I-selfie ithuluzi lokuzethula ngokuzithwebula, ibonakalise ukwanda kuleminyaka eyishumi edlule lapho izingosi zokuxhumana ibe yisisekelo sokuqala lapho kukhonjiswa khona i-selfie. Ngenkathi i-selfie yenza abantu bazizwe bethokozile, kukhona nobufakazi bemiphumela emibi engaba khona ekuzethembeni, ikakhulukazi kubantu abasebasha, asebengena esigabeni esibalulekile sokuzithola ubuwena. Ucwaningo luhlose ukuphendula ukuthi ngabe i-selfie ethunyelwe ezinkundleni zokuxhumana inomphumela omuhle noma omubi ekuzethembeni

kwentsha, lokhu kuzophenduleka ngokuhlola imizwa yomuntu ngomzimba wakhe kanye nendlela yokuziphatha yokuzicabangela wena wedwa. Kunokuntuleka kocwaningo eNingizimu Afrika maqondana nemiphumela ye-selfie entsheni, ngakho-ke lolucwaningo luhlose ukuvala leli gebe. Kwenziwe ucwaningo lwekhwalithi lapho intsha engu-14 yathathwa isampula kusetshenziswa u-Facebook no Instagram yabe isetshenziswa ngendlela yesampula ye-snowball. Kubukwe abahlanganyeli abathumele ama selfie kwaqedwa kwalandelwa ngenhlolokhono kusetshenziswa uhlu lwemibuzo evulekile, olwakiwe lwahlolwa ngumcwaningi. Idatha yahlaziywa kusetshenziswa ukuhlaziywa okucutshungulwayo kwe- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) kanye nokuhlaziywa kwedatha okusizwa ngamakhompiyutha (i-NVivo). Imiphumela yokuhlaziywa ye-IPA ne-NVivo ihlangene ithole ukuthi ngenkathi intsha ibona i-selfie njengesikhuthazi sokuzethemba, bekukhona nemizwa eyisisekelo yokukhathazeka kwendlela yemizwa ngemizimba yabo nendlela yokuziphatha yokuzicabangela bona bodwa nakho okuthinte ukuzethemba kwentsha. Okutholakele ocwaningweni kuzosiza ekufundiseni abazali, othisha kanye nentsha ukuthi i-selfie emithonjeni yezokuxhumana ingamthinta kanjani umuntu ngokwengqondo.

## **Afrikaans**

Die doel van hierdie studie was om ondersoek in te stel na die sielkundige invloed wat 'n selfie kan uitoefen op die selfbeeld van die adolessent. Die selfie, wat 'n persoonlike aanbiedingsinstrument is, se gebruik het aansienlik toegeneem oor die afgelope dekade, met sosiale netwerkwerwe as platform van aanbidding. Waar die selfie mense goed kan laat voel, is daar ook getuienis van potensiële negatiewe effekte op 'n persoon se selfbeeld. Dit is welbekend dat adolessensie 'n moeilike stadium van ontwikkeling is wat verskeie aspekte van ontwikkeling behels, ook ten opsigte van sosiale en emosionele ontwikkeling.

Die studie het daarom ondersoek ingestel of 'n selfie wat op sosiale media gepos is, 'n positiewe of negatiewe uitwerking op 'n adolessent se selfbeeld sal hê. Die liggaamsbeeld en selfliefde is ondersoek.

Aangesien daar 'n bewese tekort aan navorsing in Suid-Afrika is ten opsigte van die effek van die selfie op die adolessent, wil hierdie studie daardie gaping vul. 'n Kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is gebruik vir die doel van die studie. Die ondersoekgroep het 14 adolessente ingesluit tussen die ouderdom van 14 en 18 jaar. Die geselekteerde ondersoekgroep wat aan die seleksiekriteria voldoen het, is verkry deur middel van Facebook en Instagram, deur van

die sneeubalmetode gebruik te maak. Deelnemers wat selfies gepos het, is waargeneem en opgevolg met 'n onderhoud waar 'n semi-gestruktureerde vraelys gebruik is wat deur die navorser opgestel en bestuur is. Die data is geanaliseer deur gebruik te maak van die Interpretatiewe Fenomenologiese Analise (IPA), rekenaar gerugsteun deur 'n data analise (NVivo). Die resultate van die kombinasie van IPA en die NVivo analise dui daarop dat terwyl die selfie 'n positiewe invloed kan hê op adolessente se selfvertroue, is daar nog altyd die onderliggende liggaamsbeeldbesorgdheid en narsistiese gedrag wat weer die selfbeeld van die adolessent kan beïnvloed.

Die bevindinge van hierdie studie sal dien om ouers, onderwysers en die adolessente te onderrig oor wat die uitwerking van die selfie op sosiale media op die sielkundige vlak van die adolessent kan wees.

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# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

This research study was adapted to suit the situation in the country. As the Covid-19 pandemic is currently sweeping through the country, its highly contagious nature has made it necessary to change sampling and research methods for the safety of participants and the researcher.

### **1.1 Introduction**

The current qualitative research study presents findings conducted with adolescents (also called teenagers between 12 and 18 years of age). The study will explore how adolescents perceive their selfie (an image which is a capture of the self) which is posted on social media and the potential effects that the posted selfie can have on their psychological wellbeing. This chapter will begin with a background to the study and will delve further into defining and understanding the selfie and the impact that it has on adolescents around the world. Using related existing literature, the background to the study will provide an overview of the selfie problem in relation to the adolescent.

The background of the study is followed by a description of the awareness of the selfie problem among societies. This section will describe the level of awareness that societies have regarding the potential challenge and will further describe who the various individuals are that can potentially be helped by the findings of the study. This is followed by the problem statement which will clearly outline the problem addressed by the study. The chapter will proceed to provide the research questions which are essential to the study as they provide direction and boundaries that will define the specific areas to be explored. A description of the research design and methods will be provided, detailing how the study will be conducted. Finally, this chapter will provide the significance of the study which refers to how the study will add to the greater good of society. A list of operational definitions of terms which will be used throughout the study are found at the end of the chapter.

### ***1.1.1 Background of the Study***

The background of the study will aim to provide an overview of the selfie challenge with particular focus on the adolescent. A discussion of the adolescent's developmental stage will be given which will provide more insight as to why the adolescent is more susceptible to the potential harmful effects of the selfie and in turn how the selfie can perpetuate adolescent developmental challenges.

The adolescent or teenage stage is considered to be complex in nature due to the physical, mental, emotional, and social development changes (Erikson, 1950). This culmination of changes can be explained through the psychosocial stages which Erik Erikson (1950) describes as the way in which a personality develops in a predetermined order through eight stages. According to the psychosocial stages of development by Erikson (1950), the personality develops when the individual overcomes various life stages. The adolescent stage is considered to be the most critical stage in human development as it marks the beginning of identity formation. Adolescents not only have the difficult task of searching for a stable identity, but they also have to find their "fit" in society before they enter adulthood (Thom & Coetzee, 2004). The successful fulfilment or achievement of the adolescent's psychosocial stage as highlighted by Erikson (1950), leads to identity achievement, while not achieving success in the psychosocial stage, leads to role confusion or feelings of being unsure of who they really are.

According to Erikson (1950), identity achievement is considered to be the ideal and is achieved mainly through interaction with peers who confirm the adolescent's standing in society. With the onset of the adolescent's psychosocial stage, an increased sense of vulnerability presents itself and the parental bond becomes much weaker, while the bond with adolescent friends becomes stronger as they are able to identify with friends. Parents no longer prove to be effective in the identity search process (Erikson, 1959) and friends become a reference point in developing a sense of identity, as they provide information about the world outside the family and the adolescent (Santrock, 2001).

Adolescents find identification with peers through online behaviours as, according to Valesco (2017), they are feeling more at ease to communicate in an online environment with peers than in a face-to-face situation. A possible reason as to why adolescents are more comfortable

in a digital environment, is possibly due to the generational era which current-day adolescents have grown into. Today's adolescents are referred to as Generation Z (hereafter Gen Z, also referred to as iGeneration, plurals, and Gen next). Gen Z adolescents comprise 32 percent of the world's population and they are the first generation born into a world of highspeed internet, smartphones, and social media (Spitznagel, 2020).

From an international perspective, one in four adolescents are consumed by their mobile devices (Bates, 2015). This statistic was found by the Pew Research Centre in a study where they asked 1,060 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17 about their phone habits (Lenhart, 2015). Although this study was carried out on American adolescents, the results could be far worse for adolescents in the United Kingdom, as more adolescents in this country own smartphones (Lenhart, 2015).

Similarly, from a local perspective, mobile devices are largely used among adolescents. An empirical study in the Western Cape province of South Africa comprising 13,000 adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years, found that 92.3 percent accessed social media on their mobile devices (Duffett, 2017). Furthermore, 83.1 percent accessed social networking sites either daily or several times a day. This percentage is also equivalent to international research. According to the research study by the Pew Research Centre, the social networking site, Facebook remains the most used site as 71 percent of adolescents are active members in the USA (Lenhart, 2015). A social networking site can be described as a social community that allows people who have common interests to join each other, communicate, and share information with ease, and allowing its members to build their own online profile with data, pictures, and other personal information (Ahmad, 2011). There is a number of social networking sites, but Facebook and Instagram are the most popular.

Gen Z individuals are mainly found to use social networking sites as it allows them to connect with others, specifically their peers. These social networking sites are accessed via their mobile devices. Studies have already shown that the use of social networking has negative effects on the development of adolescents (Kim, Min, Min, Lee & Yoo, 2018). The selfie which predominantly appears on social networking sites can lead to the negative psychological development of the adolescent (Chua & Chang, 2016) which in turn can have negative consequences on the identity search process. The selfie can be described as an image that people capture of themselves with a mobile device held at arm's length, with the

intention to convey different messages such as mood, emotion, and most importantly, to convey appearance to others who view the image (Senft & Baym, 2015). The selfie is therefore a photographic image which is considered to be a self-representational object. It has become a cultural phenomenon which has taken over the way in which people communicate with each other (Toole, 2014).

The use of social networking sites has created an explosion in the number of selfies being captured (Senft & Baym, 2015), leading to a worldwide rise of what is called the 'selfie phenomenon'. Evidence is highlighted by research undertaken by the media and news company, TIME, where images which were downloaded over a 24-hour period from Instagram API (application program interface) were analysed. During this period, 402,197 Instagram images tagged with the term "selfie" were uploaded and their geographical coordinates were saved (Wilson, 2014). The study revealed that the Philippines was rated as the country which takes the most selfies, followed by four cities in the USA (Writer, 2014). From a local perspective, South African cities were rated further down the list in terms of number of selfies captured and posted. Johannesburg was rated as number 313 with the most selfies captured and posted compared to other cities in South Africa (Writer, 2014).

Given this worldwide craze of the selfie, it has become an important tool for self-expression and self-presentation, aiding in identity achievement or role confusion through feedback obtained from others (Barry, Doucette, Loflin, Rivera-Hudson & Herrington, 2017). Adolescents need to fulfil the need to belong, which is a large and important part of their identity search process and is a reason as to why self-presentation would be of importance to the adolescent. Research undertaken in the UK by Fullwood, James, and Chen-Wilson (2016), found that adolescents between 13 and 18 with a less stable self-concept, reported experimenting with online self-presentation more regularly than those with a more stable self-concept. However, a selfie does not always provide positive feedback and if positive feedback is not achieved this could affect the overall self-concept. The adolescent will then strive to attain the perfect selfie through increased self-presentation. Once they have achieved this, it will then fulfil their need to belong and fit in with society. This process becomes critical on the adolescent's self-esteem (Barry et al., 2017) and in turn their identity search process.

Various researchers support the fact that the selfie can be harmful to an individual's self-esteem (Barry et al., 2017; Mullai, Macaj & Kotherja, 2017). An important aspect that can

potentially make the selfie harmful to self-esteem is using photo-editing software commonly known as “filters” which are designed to enhance a selfie, thereby making an individual more attractive than they really are (Chae, 2017). Appearance is crucial in the adolescent developmental stage (LaVoie, 1976) and enhancing a selfie can be damaging for their self-concept. Research by Siibak (2009) found that 76 percent of adolescent girls and 67 percent of adolescent boys edited their selfies to look better and in turn fit in or become more popular. However, according to Siibak (2009), this can be dangerous to an adolescent’s self-concept when online fame does not exist in reality, resulting in body image concerns which in turn can have an effect on self-esteem. This is highlighted in a study by Chua and Chang (2016) where young girls were not happy with their body images and through the selfie, they presented a more appealing self. In doing so, it made them feel better about themselves as they received more attention for their edited selfie. Brown (2017) describes a survey by Lendu, a consumer finance comparison site, which found that 64 percent of college students rated the photo-filter Instagram app as the world’s most narcissistic social media platform, turning an ordinary person into an overnight celebrity. According to Wickel (2015), narcissism can be described as a feeling of superiority over others, linked to egotistical behaviour and the tendency to gain admiration from others. It is a personality trait which includes an overly positive self-view where social popularity and physical appearance are central to the individual (Wang, Xie, Wang, Wang, Nie & Lei, 2018a). This information is alarming, as filtering software could possibly be creating body image issues. The concern with appearance and how adolescents present themselves on social networking sites through the selfie has, according to researchers, led to a narcissistic society (Wickel, 2015).

Narcissism has been a point of concern for selfie takers, especially adolescents who want to be liked by others and thus unconsciously fulfilling the need to belong (Wickel, 2015). For the adolescent in particular, this narcissistic behaviour can be fuelled by the need to belong as they will manipulate selfies through photo-editing to look better, in order to be more liked or accepted. Furthermore, self-presentation through the selfie allows the adolescent to obtain the desired adoration from others (Wickel, 2015). This type of narcissistic behaviour can prevent adolescents from forming meaningful relationships, as their egotistical thinking is exacerbated. Narcissistic behaviour is increasingly leading to a self-absorbed youth.

The selfie, however, can also be positive. Research undertaken in Texas by Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) which involved young adults aged between 18 and 29 years, found that the

number of positive comments and likes that one receives for posting their selfie on social media, had an influence on their self-confidence levels, especially with people who have a low self-esteem. However, their study consisted of young adults and not adolescents, and a possible reason for their findings is that young adults find themselves at a different psychosocial stage and would possibly have developed a stable identity at this stage.

The current study will explore if posting selfies on social networking sites has a positive or negative effect on an adolescent's self-esteem. From the literature, the selfie is regarded to have an impact on body image and narcissism. These two concepts will therefore be explored in depth to understand how overall self-esteem is affected.

### ***1.1.2 Awareness of the Problem***

This section describes the awareness of the selfie problem in society. The phenomenon of capturing and sharing the selfie has become widespread in everyday life (Shin, Kim, Im & Chong, 2017). Evidence of this statement is highlighted by Writer (2017) who describes how individuals capture selfies even while driving. This behaviour poses a danger to the individual as it can lead to road accidents. Similarly, Wakefield (2015) states that individuals take selfies while performing dangerous activities which can also be harmful. Wakefield (2015) provides an example of a 17-year-old male who fell to his death from a rooftop as he attempted to capture a selfie for his Instagram page. Another incident is described in Waterton Canyon Park in Colorado, which was closed off due to several people approaching the wild animals in order to obtain an unusual and perfect selfie.

Further evidence of the selfie found in everyday usage can be found in local awareness marketing campaigns. A 2017 campaign originating in Pretoria, South Africa, promoted responsible driving by encouraging drivers to capture a selfie using their seat belt and to post their image on social media (Dibakwane, 2017). A further campaign undertaken by PINKDRIVE in 2016 invited women to support breast cancer and build confidence by taking a selfie to be uploaded on social media (Lodewyk, 2016). Apart from awareness campaigns, South Africa also broke a record of the Guinness World Book of Records in 2015 when Samsung electronics South Africa captured the largest number of selfies within a 24-hour period (Van Zyl, 2015). These campaigns which are initiated by large and well-known brands can also perpetuate selfie-taking among individuals in society.

Despite the evidence that the selfie has pervaded our lives, there is still very little awareness made to society regarding the possible negative effects of the selfie (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2017), particularly to adolescents who are in a critical stage of their identity development.

In March 2014, a news story appeared in the Adobo Chronicles website stating that the American Psychiatric Association (APA) classified “selfitis” as a new mental disorder (Vincent, 2014). The article claims that selfitis was an obsessive-compulsive desire to capture images of oneself and to post these images on social media as a way to compensate for low self-esteem. However, the assertion that selfitis was classified as a mental disorder, was not true.

A group of individuals from Nottingham Trent University and Thiagarajar School of Management explored the possibilities of selfitis (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2017). This group researched selfitis as an addictive behaviour that could possibly point to other underlying mental issues such as a lack of self-confidence (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2017). 200 participants from India were studied, as this country has the highest death rate of individuals who died while taking a dangerous selfie. These individuals found that obsessive selfie-taking was correlated with six other behaviours (self-confidence, attention seeking, mood modification, environmental enhancement, subjective conformity, and social competition). This study indicates the role that the selfie plays on self-esteem. Furthermore, the youngest group of participants (aged 16 to 20) was most susceptible to developing selfitis, as nine percent took more than eight selfies per day while about 25 percent shared at least three images on social media every day (Balakrishnan & Griffiths, 2017).

Research by Balakrishnan and Griffiths (2017) has pinpointed that a problem does potentially exist with the selfie, particularly with the individual’s psychological wellbeing. However, the authors also state that more psychological research is needed regarding other factors that are likely to play a role in the acquisition, development, and maintenance of selfitis, including personality traits, motivations, cognition, and attitudes. Before this study by Balakrishnan and Griffiths (2017), there was very little research done on the phenomenology of the selfie-obsession.

However, although little research has been undertaken regarding the selfie obsession, awareness is still created via various online articles. An online article by Verywell Family provides advice to parents regarding the effects of the selfie on their teenager. The article describes the negative effects that the selfie has on an adolescent's self-worth and reputation (Morin, 2018). Morin (2018) states in her online article that the selfie can aid in healthy ways for the adolescent to express themselves. However, parents also need to play a monitoring role towards their adolescent's social media behaviours and provide guidance where needed. A similar article was posted in 2014 on a United States News website, reaching out to parents and teenagers regarding the negative effects of the selfie (Webster, 2014). Articles like those of Morin and Webster serve as important sources of information to educate parents and teenagers. This is echoed by Kaur and Vig (2016) who state that there needs to be campaigns and programmes to educate teachers, parents, and their teenagers about this increasing addiction to the selfie and the impact that it has on one's mental health. These authors further add that parents need to be more aware of the emotional needs of their teenagers and their (the parents') role as mentors to prevent the dependency of their teenagers on social networking sites which are used to boost self-esteem and receive attention.

Despite a number of research studies which claim that the selfie has a negative effect on mental health (Kaur & Vig, 2016), our government has not created an awareness of the different effects of the selfie on mental health. In some countries, however, the government has banned the selfie for other reasons. For example, the Russian government has banned dangerous selfies, following numerous deaths which occurred after daring individuals captured selfies while performing dangerous activities (McGinn, 2017). The Russian campaign's motto is, "Even a million likes on social media are not worth your life and wellbeing". This motto communicates that individuals are taking novel and dangerous selfies in order to acquire more likes (McGinn, 2017), thus highlighting the need for attention. This campaign is similar to a campaign undertaken by the government in India where the Mumbai police identified 16 accident prone zones where selfie related deaths took place (Thiagarajan, 2017).

The mental health issues associated with the selfie needs to be taken more seriously, as this can have an impact on an individual's emotional functioning (Kaur & Vig, 2016). Of importance is the adolescent who is on the journey of constructing an autonomous identity – thus awareness of the selfie on their mental health is of prime importance, considering that it is this generation who is immersed in the world of the internet and social media.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The selfie became a phenomenon in 2013 due to advances in technology and social networking sites (Barry et al., 2017). While taking selfies may be a way to express oneself and may seemingly be unproblematic on the surface, a bigger underlying problem can potentially exist which is silently affecting society, while many individuals are unaware of this.

The selfie is used by individuals of various ages (Fox & Rooney, 2015) and also by both genders (Fox & Rooney, 2015; Mascheroni, Vincent & Jimenez, 2015). The selfie challenge becomes even bigger, as it is a universal phenomenon (Selfie City, 2014) affecting Western and Eastern cultures. Evidence of this statement can be found in various research studies where the impact of the selfie was studied, like in India (Srivastava, Upadhaya, Sharma & Gupta, 2018), Singapore (Chua & Chang, 2016), and various European countries such as Italy and the UK (Mascheroni et al., 2015).

The current study focuses on the adolescent, as according to Erikson (1950), identity formation is critical to the adolescent's developmental stage. According to Dutta, Sharma, Dikshit, Shah, Sonavane, Bharati, and De Sousa (2016), the selfie is a social phenomenon among adolescents and becomes a self-presentational tool which is used to enhance identity. The challenge develops when an adolescent captures a selfie and puts it on a social networking site which can possibly result in negatively affecting their psychological wellbeing and in turn their identity formation.

The selfie can possibly affect one's psychological wellbeing through their body image. This is further exacerbated when filtering software is used on a selfie to enhance the image. The objective of enhancing an image is to look more attractive than what one really is and to receive positive feedback from the peers who are viewing the selfie. The issue of body image holds particular importance for the adolescent as, according to LaVoie (1976), the concern with one's body image is an important challenge in the adolescent's search for a physical identity. Body image concerns also arise due to the physical maturation taking place during this particular developmental stage. Further information regarding the selfie and body image will be found in chapter 2.

The rise of the selfie has also experienced an increase in the personality trait of narcissism, which is further negatively affecting the individual's psychological wellbeing. A study comparing traits and life goals of young people who are currently in high school and college with those of Generation X (hereafter Gen X) and baby boomers, show an increase in extrinsic values rather than intrinsic values (Twenge, Campbell & Freeman, 2012). This study indicates that money, image, and fame are more important to the current-day generation than community, affiliation, and self-acceptance. The selfie is an important tool used to enhance self-image and therefore one can deduce that this plays a role in increasing narcissism in that the more emphasis one places on how they look, the more narcissistic one becomes.

In relation to this statement, a study by Carpenter (2012) found that people who score higher on the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI) questionnaire, tend to have more friends on the social networking site, Facebook, tag themselves more often in photos, and update their statuses more frequently. Taking selfies and sharing photos on popular social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, are considered to be one of the biggest contributors to the rise in narcissistic behaviour among today's generation. Narcissism and the selfie are predominantly researched among young adults and not adolescents – this poses a gap in the research. Furthermore, from a South African perspective, there is also a gap in research regarding narcissism and the adolescent. The current study will therefore also explore narcissism among adolescents from a South African perspective.

In identifying that the psychological wellbeing of the adolescent is potentially affected when posting selfies on social media, it therefore becomes important to remedy the possible problem. If the problem is unattended to, it could perpetuate body image issues and narcissistic behaviour which in turn can affect the healthy psychological development of the adolescent. The resolution of the problem can possibly lead to individuals becoming more aware of the problem and can further assist parents and teachers who find themselves in close contact with adolescents who are addicted to their mobile phones and capturing images of the self.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The goal or purpose of the study is to explore how adolescents perceive the selfie in their everyday lives as well as their specific attitudes towards the selfie before and after posting the

image on social networking sites. Apart from understanding the adolescent in relation to the selfie, the end goal of this study will further serve to benefit various stakeholders such as parents and teachers. By understanding the impact that the selfie has on the adolescent, parents and educators will be better equipped to understand the adolescent or the current Generational Z (hereafter Gen Z) group. The research will also assist the adolescent, as they will be able to reflect on the impact that the selfie has made on them.

### ***1.3.1 Research Questions***

The research methodology utilised in the current study is qualitative in nature. The aim of qualitative research questions should effectively communicate what a researcher wants to know about the intentions and perspectives of those involved in social interactions (Agee, 2009). The specific research questions in the current study are aligned with the methodology of qualitative research, as the questions are open-ended in nature, allowing the researcher to be able to explore how participants perceive the selfie (Agee, 2009). The research question for this study is:

*How does posting selfies on social media impact an adolescent's self-esteem?*

The problem statement of the research describes how the selfie can potentially negatively impact the psychological wellbeing of the adolescent. The research question is therefore in line with the main aim of the study and will explore how adolescents view the selfie and the impact that it has on self-esteem. Self-esteem is an important concept in the identity formation process of the adolescent (Erikson, 1950), and by understanding the psychology behind the selfie, I will be able to explore how this affects self-esteem.

The sub-research questions are:

*1) What effect does the selfie have on an adolescent's body image?*

The selfie places emphasis on the physical appearance (Chae, 2017) and is therefore a self-presentational tool used by the adolescent who views their physical appearance as most important (Twenge et al., 2012). This research question will explore how adolescents perceive their body image in relation to the selfie.

2) *What effect does the selfie have on the personality trait of narcissism in the adolescent?*

Linked to self-esteem and body image, the narcissistic personality trait has increased due to the increase in selfie taking. The qualitative phenomenological study will aim to explore how adolescents perceive likes and comments on their selfies and the ways in which they use photo editing software. By taking a close look at this, I would be able to explore narcissism among the adolescents.

## **1.4 Research Designs and Methods**

### **1.4.1 Epistemology**

Epistemology is fundamental to understanding how we acquire knowledge and how we develop concepts in our minds. Epistemology is therefore the investigation of the nature of knowledge itself and focuses on how we can differentiate between truth and falsehood (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). The epistemology to be used for the current research is phenomenology.

Phenomenology takes the primary stance which states that the most basic human truths are only accessible through inner subjectivity where the individual is regarded as central to the environment (Flood, 2010). In phenomenology, uncovering knowledge is obtained by sharing the common meaning of mutual history, culture, and language of the world and it is through this sharing that meaning is revealed (Flood, 2010). According to Flood (2010), meaning in phenomenology can be offered in two ways, i.e., cognitively and non-cognitively. In the cognitive sense, meaning is offered through semantics and linguistics, making social understanding possible through conversation. Meaning can also be obtained non-cognitively through human experience of memories and feelings resulting in phenomenological information which adds depth to our understanding of everyday life (Flood, 2010).

The phenomenology in the current research takes on an interpretative framework in which one seeks to understand social worlds from the point of view of the participants to gain in-depth knowledge on the situation. According to Flood (2010), phenomenological knowledge changes understanding and leads to more thoughtful action through constructionism. Through the interaction between individuals in a social context, constructionism occurs. In chapter 3

further information will be provided regarding social constructionism, specifically from the sociological point of view of the everyday reality of Berger and Luckmann (1967). Berger and Luckmann (1967) were influenced by philosopher and sociologist, Alfred Schutz, who in turn was strongly influenced by the phenomenological approach of early philosopher, Edmund Husserl.

As stated, the current research takes on an interpretative framework. The work of German philosopher, Martin Heidegger, was instrumental in the interpretative/hermeneutic approach. The basic premise of interpretative/hermeneutic phenomenology is that our experience of the world is already full of meaning (Lavery, 2003). Heidegger suggests that, by rather focusing on people or phenomena, true exploration of individuals' lived experiences should be the focus (Flood, 2010). The lifeworld refers to the stories that people tell of their experiences (Kafle, 2011). It is through the lived experiences or the lifeworld that we are able to experience the world through the individual. In this regard we are able to find the genuine objective nature of things as realised by the individual (Kafle, 2011). According to Kafle (2011), the focus is on bringing to light various aspects of experience and to give it meaning and a sense of understanding. In order to describe their lifeworld, the individual's background is important as their background consists of culture being handed down from birth, and presents ways of understanding the world (Lavery, 2003). This means that it is found by doing research on individuals being constructed by the world, while at the same time the individuals are constructing the world from their backgrounds and experiences (Lavery, 2003).

In understanding the lifeworld of the individual, interpretation becomes important. Hermeneutic phenomenology is therefore described as an interpretative process where the understanding of a phenomenon takes place through language (Lavery, 2003). The interpretation of a phenomenon is achieved through the hermeneutic circle which moves from parts of experience to the whole of experience and back and forth numerous times to fully understand the text of a certain phenomenon. To achieve this in depth understanding, I will involve participants in the data analysis to increase trustworthiness of the findings. This process will involve the co-construction of the data with the adolescent as we engage in the hermeneutic circle of understanding. We will therefore work together with the adolescent to bring life to the experience which is explored through the use of imagination and attention to language (Lavery, 2003).

To fully understand the lived experience of the adolescent, it will require attentiveness in how language is used, an interest in human meaning, and how the adolescent makes sense of their lives as well as awareness of life as an interpretative experience (Laverty, 2003).

A qualitative research design will therefore be well-suited to this research, as the research design is of a phenomenological nature (Laverty, 2003). Furthermore, the underlying paradigm of qualitative research is interpretivism (Hennink, Hutter & Bailey, 2010). A qualitative research design is also well-suited as, according to Orb, Eisenhauer, and Wynaden (2000), qualitative research focuses on exploring and examining people in their natural environments. Prior to the semi-structured interview taking place, the researcher will analyse selfies that are posted by the participant. The analysis will involve the identification of information related to the research. This analysis will allow the researcher to explore and examine the participant in their natural environment which is the social networking sites. Through exploring the participant's life story, the researcher will be able to interpret the psychological effects of capturing and posting selfies on social media.

#### **1.4.2 Sampling**

The method of sampling to be used in this research is a snowball convenient sample. This method was used due to the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic in the country. Covid-19 is a highly contagious virus which is characterised by a fever, dry cough, and pneumonia-like symptoms (Wu, Chen, & Chan, 2020). The South African government has placed lockdown restrictions on the movement of people, with social distancing protocols being maintained among all the citizens. According to Merriam (2009), snowball sampling is a technique where the existing study participants recruit future participants from among their acquaintances. In this way, participants can be sampled while maintaining social distancing protocols.

According to Merriam (2009), selection criteria is important in choosing participants for the research study. The first criterion for inclusion in this study is that participants must be in the adolescent age group (12 to 18 years of age). Adolescents are chosen in this study as they form part of the Gen Z group that has grown up with internet and technology (Valesco, 2017).

The second criterion of inclusion is that the potential participants should belong to the social networking site, Facebook, and can also belong to Instagram. The participants will be recruited via Facebook because of the various public and private groups being found there. There are various social networking sites. However, currently Instagram and Facebook are the fastest growing and most popular. Facebook is regarded as the most popular social networking site (Wagner, Aguirre & Summer, 2016). In South Africa, its numbers have increased from 12 million to 13 million within a year. Instagram is the fastest growing from 1.1 million in 2015 to 2.68 million in 2016. Furthermore, Instagram has created the biggest rise of the selfie as it creates the dissemination and consumption of the selfie.

The third criterion of inclusion is that the potential participant should at least take a selfie once a month. This criterion is important as the research study involves identifying the psychological effects of the selfie. Furthermore, according to Wang (2016), a survey of 1,000 young people in 2015 found that the average number of selfies shot per week is nine, thus the criterion of posting a selfie once a month is sufficient.

The fourth criterion of inclusion is that the potential participant should post the selfie on a social networking site, a platform facilitating the sharing of the photo online (Senft & Baym, 2015). This criterion is important, as the research study involves identifying the psychological effects of the selfie when posted on social media.

In terms of sample size, some studies state that six participants are recommended for phenomenological studies while others state that between five and 25 are needed for a phenomenological study (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006). The sample size for this research will also be dependent on the method of data analysis which will be used, which is IPA. According to Smith and Osborn (2007), IPA studies are conducted on small sample sizes, with six to eight individuals being the recommended size. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2011), six to eight participants provide an opportunity to examine similarities and differences between individuals. The main aim in IPA in terms of sampling is that a study should rely more on depth than on breadth. The current research will have a sample size of 14 participants, as it is also guided by the theoretical principle of saturation (Terre Blanche et al., 2006), which refers to sampling until no new information can be acquired.

## **1.5 Instrumentation and Data Analysis**

The method of data analysis to be used is IPA, as the main aim of IPA is to elicit rich detailed and first-person accounts of experiences and phenomena under investigation, which can be achieved by a semi-structured interview (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2011). Therefore, the method of instrumentation that is used for the current study is a semi-structured questionnaire. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2011), the advantages of this type of questionnaire is that it allows the participant and the researcher to engage in conversation in real time and it further provides enough space and flexibility for unexpected issues to arise.

The semi-structured questionnaire will be compiled by the researcher. The question types of Patton (2002) will be used as a guide to formulate questions for the interview guide, together with similar existing literature. The interview guide will be piloted to ensure that the final product will adequately answer the research question.

The IPA data analysis draws upon the principles of phenomenology and hermeneutics, resulting in a method which is descriptive because it is concerned with how things appear, allowing things to speak for themselves. To briefly describe the interpretative/hermeneutic framework, the researcher needs to understand the mindset of the adolescent and their language which mediates their experiences. In translating their message, I would be able to understand their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2011). IPA will therefore allow me to understand the language of the adolescent through the text in the data analysis stage.

IPA can be regarded as a dynamic process where the researcher is obtaining access to the participant's experiences and how, through an interpretative activity, it makes sense of the subject's personal world (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2011). The process of analysis is therefore described in terms of the double hermeneutic where the participants make meaning of their world, and the researcher tries to understand the meaning to make sense of the participants' meaning making (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2011). The interpretation of text will take place by interpreting the information obtained after administering the semi-structured questionnaire.

The analysis of the text will involve four stages. The first stage involves a multiple reading of the information that is obtained from the semi-structured questionnaire and making notes where needed. By closely reading the transcripts, an immersion of data will take place,

allowing the researcher to focus on language, context, and initial interpretative comments (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2011).

The second stage of analysis involves transferring notes into emergent themes. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2011), themes serve the purpose of enabling the reader to assess the importance of interpretations, while also retaining the voice of the participant's personal experience. The notes made by the researcher in the first stage must now be used to produce emergent themes. However, the themes which are produced, must not lose the essence of the participant's voice and thus should still be grounded in the participant's account of the experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2011).

The third stage of analysis involves finding relationships between the themes. Connections are made with emerging themes and grouped together according to similarities. A list of themes and sub-themes will be formulated (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2011).

The final stage includes the taking down of the analysis, which includes quotes by the participants and the interpretative commentary by the researcher. The interpretation can be of low level or more detailed (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2011).

Chapter 5 consists of a more detailed description of IPA.

## **1.6 Ethical Considerations**

In the current research, autonomy will be honoured, which refers to respect for the individual. Autonomy ensures that participants in a research study make their own decisions and are respected (Owonikoko, 2013). Furthermore, autonomy also protects the vulnerable, such as the young, old, or disabled, by preventing the decisions which may be forced upon them (Owonikoko, 2013).

The current research will involve adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 years of age. According to Van Huyssteen, Van der Merwe, and Maxwell (2010), adolescents over the age of seven and below the age of 18 are considered to be minors. According to the Children's Act 38 of 2005 (Act 38, 2005), a person is considered to have full capacity to act when they reach the age of 18 years, unless a person does not have the independent ability to do so, due

to other factors such as mental deficiency (Havenga & Havenga, 2007). Although a minor has independent intellect, they do not possess mature and sound judgement. Therefore, in order to supplement this defective judgement, a minor needs assistance from someone who has full capacity to act (Havenga & Havenga, 2007; Van Huyssteen et al., 2010). According to Kruger, Ndebele, and Horn (2014), parents are traditionally the primary decision makers for their minor children and they therefore exercise the right to make decisions for their children regarding participation in research. In South Africa, parental consent is mandatory.

According to Nienaber (2013), the National Health Act of South Africa, chapter 9, subsection 71(2) (Act 38, 2005), describes conditions when research may be conducted on a minor for therapeutic purposes. The Act states that research can only be conducted if it is in the best interest of the minor, with the consent of the parent or guardian of the child, and the minor must be capable of understanding the situation and consent to research. The principle of autonomy therefore brings to the fore the practice of informed consent (Owonikoko, 2013) which is a statutory imperative (Nienaber, 2013).

Parental consent will involve providing all aspects of the research to the parent or guardian. The research will be explained as comprehensively as possible in a language that the parent or guardian can understand. Furthermore, information about the research and reasons as to why it is undertaken, must be provided, as well as how results will be analysed and disseminated (Tarling, 2006). When providing parental consent, the potential consequences of their child's participation will be made clear. It will be explained that the minor has the right to decline participation in the research and also has the right to decline participation at any stage during the data collection process. In the proposed research, an information letter (Appendix A) will be provided to parents as well as parental consent (Appendix D).

However, according to Tarling (2006), parental consent should not exert pressure on the minor to participate. The minor should be able to make the decision independently and, in this case, the minor should be given an assent form to sign (Appendix C). Assent is regarded as the child's affirmative agreement to participate in the research (Field & Behrma, 2004). According to Kruger, Ndebele, and Horn (2014), the assent of the child is important, if they have the ability to understand the content of the research question and its expected outcomes. The assent form will contain all information relating to the research. Adolescents who are 18

years of age and can make their own decision to participate in the research, will receive the information letter as well as an informed consent form (Appendix B) to sign.

The semi-structured interview will take place via the platform, Skype (a telecommunications application). The interview will be recorded. Therefore, permission needs to be granted from both parents and children. Consent to record the interview will be highlighted in the information letter to parents as well as in the assent form to the minors.

The proposed research will also ensure beneficence, as confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research process. It is a moral obligation of the researcher to prevent participants' identities from being revealed, thereby preventing potential negative consequences (Orb et al., 2000). In the current research, participants will not be referred to by name but rather by participant numbers which will be used in the data collection and data analysis. Furthermore, the interview process will be recorded. Prior to recording, participants will be made aware that the interview will be recorded. However, participants have the right to decide against the recording of the interview.

The proposed research will also involve observing and analysing the adolescents' Facebook or Instagram selfies posted on their social media pages during the last two months. This will involve an analysis of bodily positioning of the selfie, selfie-editing, comments, and the number of likes on the selfie. The information which are gathered through observation will then be used in the semi-structured interview. This information will form part of the data collection process – hence ethics in social media thus also becomes important. The data which are required might not be easily available due to the privacy settings found in the social networking sites. Facebook provides users the opportunity to protect their displayed information through profile security settings. According to Moreno, Goniou, Moreno, and Diekema (2013), an individual's profile settings can be private (i.e., limiting some or all profile information access to online friends approved by the profile owner) or public (i.e., allowing any user access to the profile). Privacy settings can limit access to the profile as a whole or the individual can customise the settings to give limiting access to certain sections of the profile (Moreno et al., 2013).

The Facebook privacy policy states that when content is published using the “everyone” setting, it means that you are allowing everyone, including people off Facebook to access and

use that information and to associate it with you (i.e., your name and profile picture). A further statement in the privacy policy indicates that information set to “everyone” is publicly available information and as such the information may be accessed by everyone on the internet (including people not logged into Facebook), be indexed by third-party search engines, and be imported, exported, distributed, and re-distributed by others without privacy limitation (Moreno et al., 2013). These statements highlight the fact that the intention of Facebook is to share information, and profile owners should not have a reasonable expectation of privacy.

A further assertion in the privacy policy states that Facebook protects other people’s rights, in that, if information is collected from Facebook users, it is important to obtain their consent and to make it clear that it is not Facebook collecting their information. In the current study, it will be made clear what are required to participate in a research study for a Doctoral Thesis at the University of South Africa. It will further be explained in the consent forms what information will be collected and how it will be used.

In September 2012, it was announced that Instagram was acquired by Facebook – therefore its privacy policy became similar to that of Facebook. In the proposed research, participants accessed via Facebook will not only be given parental consent forms, but they will also receive an assent form (should the participant be under 18 years of age). Information letters will also be issued, explaining in detail the purpose of the research. Data will not be gathered without parental permission or permission of the adolescent (should the participant be under 18 years of age).

Taking into account the issue of public and private data, interactive research will take place with data which are not publicly available. Thus, should an individual wish to be part of the research, but their Facebook page is not available due to privacy settings, then interaction will involve a friend request in order to view the profile (Moreno et al., 2013). Friend requesting may lead to a misrepresentation of the researcher’s intention, but at the same time a large number of friends is considered a marker of popularity as Facebook friending implies a loose-tie relationship, often including acquaintances. It is therefore not likely that friending will trigger unreasonable expectations for a prolonged relationship (Moreno et al., 2013). However, participants who are friend requested will be deleted, once the research has been gathered.

## 1.7 Significance of the Study

Today's adolescents are referred to as Gen Z and are defined as the generation born approximately between 1996 and 2011. Gen Z makes up 25 percent of the world's population who has grown up with the internet, smartphones, and social media (Valesco, 2017). According to Valesco, the social networking sites are the most used by Gen Z, which mainly includes Facebook (78%) and Instagram (69%). Given that adolescents are major users of social networking sites (Velasco, 2017) and are more likely to capture selfies (Safna, 2017), it becomes rather alarming when one notes the negative effects that the selfie can have on one's emotional wellbeing (Chua & Chang, 2016; Wickel, 2015).

Because of the fact that the selfie can have various negative effects, such as a loss of confidence and self-esteem, mental illness, the use of plastic surgery, and even suicide, Safna (2017) argues that it becomes imperative for especially parents to get involved, as they should learn to understand the pros and cons associated with the selfie. The current research will aim to explore the possible psychological effects of selfie-posting on social media. This exploration will determine the overall effects on self-esteem and will specifically explore the effects on the body image and the personality trait of narcissism. The findings of this study will therefore provide valuable information that will contribute to the South African communities. Not only will this information be valuable to adolescents, but it will be more valuable to parents and guardians who are in the position to monitor their teenager's online activity. The findings of the study will also be beneficial to educators as well as health care professionals, not to mention the adolescents themselves.

The study becomes specifically important to parents as, according to Frith (2017), they do not always have the technical skills, as they grew up without social media, posing a challenge as they are not equipped to handle the difficulties faced by their children in today's online world. A 2014, research by Net Children Go Mobile found that 38 percent of children who were interviewed, felt that they knew more about the internet than their parents, highlighting the fact that children or at least Gen Zs are more technologically advanced than their parents (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2014). The results of this study suggest that if parents cannot understand their child's world of social media, then they will not be able to provide the role of monitoring their child's usage of internet and social media activities.

Chou and Farn (2015) state that once parents are educated about their adolescent's online behaviours, they can then develop specific approaches which will aid in healthy personality development. Some of these approaches include supporting the adolescent's self-image, clarifying the difference between the internet world and the real world, regulating the use of social networks, and supervising online activity. However, a possible downside to monitoring online activity, is that restricting adolescents' access to the internet could inhibit the development of the skills needed to handle online risks (Frith, 2017). A solution suggested by Frith (2017) which was a finding in research with teenagers in the UK, is that policy solutions should be focused on building young people's resilience and their digital skills, by supporting them to use the internet safely rather than by restricting their use of social media.

Parents also need to be educated on the impact of sexting on their teenagers. Sexting is defined as the transmission of a nude or semi-nude selfie. Houck, Barker, Rizzo, Hancock, Norton, and Brown (2014) undertook a study in Rhode Island in the USA and found that sexting was common among middle school youth and occurred with sexual behaviour. According to Agustina (2012), sexting can also take place through social networking sites. A selfie displaying the naked self would therefore have the same consequences of a normal selfie in that, if a desired response is not received, it can possibly have negative psychological consequences. Parents therefore need to be educated about the dangers of sexting. This study will not explore sexting, although sexting does have a direct relationship with self-esteem (Kumari & Srivastava, 2017).

Even though a parent can provide education and guidance to their teenager, this can often fall on deaf ears as adolescents have the inability to differentiate between the world as they think it should be and the real world (Elkind, 1967). This is referred to as adolescent egocentrism. The researcher hopes that the findings of this study will provide the adolescent with information regarding the possible dangers of social media on emotional wellbeing and in turn remove egocentric thinking.

Sharma (2016) states that, although many studies have investigated differences in online social networking, only a few studies have examined the rapidly growing social phenomenon of the selfie. This study will therefore make a significant contribution to the South African community.

## 1.8 Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

The assumption of the current study is that adolescents run the risk of also experiencing negative effects in their psychological wellbeing when posting selfies on social media.

A delimitation of the study is that other generational groups such as the millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1996) and Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980) – not included in the current study – are also prone to selfie-taking. The current study will focus on Gen Z, which comprises adolescents. While all psychosocial stages are important, I have chosen to focus on the adolescent psychosocial stage as it places emphasis on identity formation which is critical for the individual (Erikson, 1950). Nowadays, social media and the selfie play a crucial role in identity formation.

Facebook and Instagram are not the only social networking sites where a selfie can be posted, which is a further delimitation of this study. Other widely used social networking sites are YouTube, WhatsApp, WeChat, and QQ. According to the 2018 global statistics by Statista (Chaffey, 2018), Facebook is rated number one with over two billion active members, while Instagram is rated sixth with 700 million active members. The other social networking sites highlighted are rated in-between Facebook and Instagram.

YouTube was not used as a criterion in this study, as it is a video hosting and sharing social network (Ahmad, 2011) where pictures and in particular the selfie are not the main concern. WhatsApp is a social networking site which was created to replace short messaging services with a cross platform mobile messenger that works on an internet data plan (Yeboah & Ewur, 2014). Although WhatsApp allows users to post a profile picture, unlike Facebook and Instagram, these profile pictures cannot be liked. For this reason, WhatsApp was not suited for this study. WeChat and QQ are most commonly used in China, and are social messaging apps (Shen, 2017) similar to WhatsApp. WeChat and QQ were also not relevant to the current study and therefore not used.

A third delimitation is that, although there are various personality traits, only narcissism was considered in the current study. The study did not cover other personality traits such as extraversion and social exhibitionism which are also related to selfie-posting on social media (Sorokowska, Oleszkiewicz, Frackowiak, Pisansk, Chmiel & Sorokowski, 2016). In this

study, narcissism is regarded as an important trait in the adolescent's developmental stage in relation to the selfie. According to Bleiberg (1994), adolescence is a time of heightened narcissistic vulnerability which can reach its peak in the combination of social media and the selfie narcissism in adolescents (Ong, Ang, Ho, Lim, Goh, Lee & Chua, 2011).

A further limitation of the study is that, in order to source potential participants, Instagram could not be used, even though it is a criterion of inclusion. Instagram is a photo-sharing and video-sharing social network site that enables its users to take pictures and then share them on other platforms (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). However, Instagram lacks public and private groups which are found on Facebook. Using public and private groups on Facebook, will allow information about the research to be disseminated to a larger group of people throughout the country, in different provinces in the country, and at a faster rate.

Another limitation of the study is that parents of a minor will not likely agree to them participating in the study. In this case, I will have no control over the parents' decisions and will then proceed to seeking more participants to be part of the research. Added to this, the participants may not be honest during the semi-structured interviews, perhaps due to not wanting to come across as egotistical.

In terms of generalisability, the findings can be generalised to the wider population as the research will be conducted in a natural setting by observing the adolescent social media selfie activities and through interviewing (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Detailed steps that will be taken for the research will be discussed in chapter 4. By providing a thick description of the steps in detail, it will allow the research to be transferrable (Terre Blanch et al., 2006). The study will aim to sample 14 adolescents and to explore their lived experiences which will add to generalisability. However, as stated by Merriam (2009), snowball sampling which will be used in the study, may not be best suited for generalisability, due to a possible sampling bias that may take place.

## **1.9 Operational Definition of Terms**

### **Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem can be defined as the positive and negative evaluations which a person has about themselves, or one's approval or disapproval of oneself (Rosenberg, 1965). In the current study, self-esteem will be measured through the semi-structured questionnaire. Using IPA, the participant's narrative will be analysed, and self-esteem will be measured.

### **The Selfie**

The selfie is an image captured of the self with a front facing mobile device held at arm's length. The image is captured with the aim of visually communicating a particular message to an audience (Senft & Baym, 2015).

### **Narcissism**

Narcissism refers to a personality trait that consists of grandiosity and an overly positive self-view, especially of the individual's own social popularity and physical appearance (Wang et al., 2018a). In the current study, narcissism will be measured through the participant's responses in the semi-structured questionnaire. Behaviours on selfie-editing will be analysed as well as the participant's attitude towards a high or low amount of likes on their posted selfie.

### **Body Image**

Body image is a multidimensional, subjective, and dynamic concept that encompasses how the individual views their body. Body image is not limited to the aesthetic characteristics of the person, as it also takes into consideration their state of health, skills, and sexuality (Neagu, 2015). In the current study, the participant's thoughts, feelings, and/or perceptions about their body will be measured through the responses of the semi-structured questionnaire. Prior to the interview, the participant's selfies will be analysed in terms of selfie-editing, positioning of the selfie, and number of likes on the selfie. Responses from the participants will measure their body image.

## 1.10 Summary

To summarise the current research, the advances in technology have caused the rise of the selfie which has become a social phenomenon. The Oxford Dictionary has even given credit to the selfie as it was recognised as word of the year in 2013 (Mullai et al., 2017).

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram are the main platforms where a selfie can be showcased. Using the avenue of social networking sites, the individual's selfie can be used to present themselves in the most ideal way which would not otherwise be achieved in person. The feedback obtained from the selfie plays an important role in how individuals view themselves. The selfie thus becomes a self-presentational tool which can either increase or decrease one's self-esteem (Lobo & Gowda, 2016).

The concept of self-presentation is crucial for the adolescent who, according to Erikson (1950), is in the process of identity formation. Extrinsic factors such as image and appearance are more important for the adolescent than intrinsic factors. Therefore, the selfie becomes an important tool to present the ideal image. In presenting the ideal image, the need to fit in and belong is enhanced. According to Erikson (1950), the bond with their parents weakens as the adolescent identifies more with their peers. The need to belong is therefore an important aspect in the adolescent's journey which in turn affects the identity search process.

The selfie, although seen as a self-presentational tool, can be harmful to the adolescent's self-esteem as the ideal image presented may not be a credible representation of the selfie-poster (Chua & Chang, 2016). This can be due to selfie-editing techniques used by a majority of adolescents, which are used to change the appearance and to make one look more attractive (Chua & Chang, 2016). Social feedback obtained from the posted edited selfie in the form of likes and comments can be damaging to the self-esteem of adolescents if the desired response is not achieved. This in turn leads the adolescent to believe that they are not attractive or popular enough, thereby leading to obtaining the "perfect" selfie (Hines, 2016). This can lead to possible body image issues as well as creating a society that is narcissistic. Various researchers have identified the link between the selfie, body image, and narcissism (Szabo, 2015; Nnaemeka & Solomon, 2014; Oktan & Şahin, 2010). The current research aims to explore the psychological effects of posting a selfie on social media. The findings of this

research will greatly contribute not only to parents but to educators and health care professionals.

### **1.11 Chapter Outline**

There will be six more chapters which will follow chapter 1. Chapter 2 consists of a comprehensive review of literature on the selfie and the adolescent as well as the relation between the two. Chapter 3 puts the study in a particular theoretical and conceptual framework. Chapter 4 includes the research design and specific details of how the study was conducted. While chapter 5 discusses the findings of the research, chapter 6 provides the conclusions and interpretation of findings. Chapter 7 ends with the final conclusions.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

Advances in technology caused the rise of the internet, social media, and social networking sites with adolescents being the main generational group exposed to this type of environment, solely because they grew up with this advanced technology (Bae, 2017). Social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram have gained the interest of teenagers due to the accessibility of connecting with other individuals. However, an important aspect which is hidden to the eye is that social networking sites aid in the creation of online identities (Mascheroni et al., 2015).

Adolescents face a critical stage in their psychosocial development as they are in search of an identity and have a desire to fit in and belong in society. In constructing an identity, the adolescent will achieve meaningful relationships and then successfully advance into the next psychosocial stage of development. The use of social networking sites allows the individual to create an online identity with the aim of being liked and thus fitting in with peers online (Waskul & Vannini, 2015). The selfie offers a visual way in which the adolescent can portray themselves to others in a positive light by not only changing their appearance through photo-editing software (Chua & Chang, 2016), but by creating a mood that conveys a message to peers viewing the image (Senft & Baym, 2015).

The adolescent years portray a time of heightened sensitivity towards appearance, while the selfie exacerbates an awareness to the self by making one more self-conscious of one's physical appearance and self-presentation to others (Voelker, Reel & Greenleaf, 2015). Adding to the increased awareness of appearance, the possible negative feedback obtained from posted selfies could also be harmful to the adolescent's self-concept, as negative feedback serves to question their appearance, while positive feedback can possibly increase the personality trait of narcissism in the adolescent due to the adoration and attention received on selfies (Lee & Sung, 2016). A potential problem can therefore exist when an adolescent posts a selfie onto social media, as this can possibly affect their identity and psychosocial development which in turn can possibly affect self-esteem.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a review of related literature based on the research questions in chapter one. This chapter starts by providing a background regarding the beginning of social media by discussing the growth of the mobile device and technology. The advancement of technology and the mobile device will be discussed from an international and local perspective to highlight the impact made on society. It is important to discuss these two aspects as without technology the selfie would not have materialised. Thereafter, social media and social networking sites will be discussed, as they are the primary platforms where the selfie is showcased.

The selfie which is the main element of the research will be explored in detail in terms of international and local statistics and its relation with social media. This chapter will also explore psychological aspects as to why adolescents take selfies and its relation with the personality trait of narcissism and body image.

The target group for the current study is the adolescent. The adolescent stage of development will therefore be discussed in detail in terms of psychological, social, and physical aspects, as well the relation with the selfie.

The purpose of this chapter is therefore to highlight the relation and effects of the selfie and the adolescent with relevant literature.

## **2.1 The Rise of the Smartphone**

The smartphone comprises integrated services of communication, computing, voice communication, messaging, and personal information, and has advanced the way in which individuals are communicating with each other (Sarwar & Soomro, 2013). In the initial stages the smartphone was created for business usage, but today it is used by the general public as a must have social accessory (Goswami & Singh, 2016).

The increase in smartphone usage and ownership is confirmed by an ongoing study by Porter, Hampshire, Milner, Munthali, Robson, De Lannoy, Bango, Gunguluza, Mashiri, Tanle, and Abane (2016) which began in 2006, covering Ghana, Malawi, and South Africa. The researchers administered a comparative survey data for people aged between nine and 18 years in 2007 and 2008, with the same age group in 2013 and 2014. The study revealed an

increase in smartphone ownership in Ghana and Malawi, while South Africa had a 50.8 percent increase in smartphone ownership specifically among adolescents. The findings by Porter et al. (2016) are relevant to the current study as it highlights how the adolescent age group is becoming more reliant on smartphones. From a global perspective, 90 percent of adolescents own a smartphone (Young, 2017).

While the smartphone has created a huge impact on society by allowing individuals to easily be connected at all times (Sarwar & Soomro, 2013), it could also negatively impact society, as excessive use can possibly lead to addictive behaviours. Mobile addiction is increasing and exhibiting similar behaviours to any other addiction (Goswami & Singh, 2016). According to Bae (2017), the increase in mobile addiction is due to the accessibility, portability, and the various appealing internet-based applications which are unique to smartphones. Gen Z adolescents are regarded as the major risk group for smartphone addiction (Bae, 2017) which is because of their constant exposure to technology. Gen Z comprises 25 percent of the world's population and is the first generation that has been born into and raised with highspeed internet, smartphones, and social media (Valesco, 2017).

An online newspaper article by Pieterse (2016) describes a South African research, highlighting the rise in smartphone addiction. The research was conducted in 11 high schools in the province of Gauteng and administered by Prof Deon Tustin from the University of South Africa (UNISA). The study examined three aspects among high school learners, which were dependency on mobile devices, texting, and the internet. From 1,684 learners that were surveyed, a staggering 80 percent were found to be dependent on their mobile devices. Nervousness and anxiety resulted when these adolescents were unable to find their mobile devices, thus highlighting the attachment associated with the smartphone. Mobile addiction was found among 47.6 percent of the learners being surveyed, with higher rates found among females.

The local study undertaken by Tustin is of particular importance to the current research, as it provides an indication regarding the extent of mobile device addiction among adolescents in South Africa. Mobile devices are used to gain access to social media sites, thus if 80 percent of the participants being surveyed were found to be addicted to their mobile devices, then this result could possibly have an impact on adolescents' selfie-posting behaviours on social networking sites.

The South African study by Tustin, as highlighted by Pieterse (2016), is positively related with other international studies regarding mobile addiction among adolescents. Statistics by the UK's telecommunications regulator, OfCom (2020) about studies on smartphone usage in the UK, found that 60 percent of adolescents are addicted to their smartphones. Adolescents have a higher percentage than adults, as only 37 percent of adults were found to be addicted to their smartphones (Sarwar & Soomro, 2013). The difference in percentage can be attributed to the adolescents growing up with highspeed technology and the internet, and therefore being more technologically advanced (Valesco, 2017). In both studies, local and international, a common finding was the dependency on the smartphone among adolescents. According to Pieterse (2016), the mobile device is needed by adolescents during mealtimes, while being in the bathroom, and even when they wake up in the morning.

The research by Pieterse (2016) and OfCom (2020) confirms a positive smartphone addiction among adolescents. However, an important question to explore is, 'What are smartphones actually being used for?' In a UK report by Frith (2017), over a third of adolescents are considered to be "extreme" internet users, indicating that the smartphone is used to access the internet, creating a concern regarding the duration that adolescents are spending on the internet (Porter et al., 2016). According to a Common Sense Media study (2015), it was found that on any given day, a US teen will average about nine hours of entertainment use on the internet, which includes accessing mobile games, video games, and social media. Given this information, the mobile device has therefore become the main avenue for entertainment among adolescents.

Frith (2017) states that social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat) are used extensively by adolescents. In 2015 it was found that at least 94.8 percent of 15-year-olds in the UK were using social media before and after school. Conversely, a large study with 2,600 adolescents undertaken by Common Sense Media (2015) in the USA found that 45 percent of teenagers use social media every day. However, this number is much smaller compared to the number of adolescents that prefer to listen to music (66%) or watch television (58%). In this study by Common Sense Media (2015), only 10 percent of teens chose using social media as their favourite media related activity. However, a more recent worldwide statistic provided by the statistics portal in 2021, found that Facebook has 2.6 billion active users (of which 7 percent are adolescents), while 1 billion are using Instagram (of which 7.5 percent are adolescents) (Tankovska, 2021). From these statistics, a large amount of time is spent in

accessing social media content via smartphones. These statistics are therefore important for the current research, as it aims to explore the effects of posting the selfie on social media among adolescents.

## **2.2 Social Media and Social Networking Sites**

Web 2.0 is regarded as the evolution of the World Wide Web, supporting individuals to have multiple conversations with others, thereby providing a means for individuals to enter into discussions (Ballew, Omoto & Winter, 2015). Social media is regarded as a product of Web 2.0, allowing people to meet and network in a virtual world where information is shared digitally. In this way individuals can actively participate in creating their online world and form connections with others (Ballew et al., 2015).

An online article by Kemp (2017) provides a global overview of the digital world, stating that social media usage has increased since 2015 with the number of active social media users having increased by 21 percent (482 million people) since 2015. Furthermore, the number of users accessing social media via their mobile device increased by at least 30 percent since 2015. Specifically in Africa, mobile social media rose by a staggering 50 percent since 2015. This surge of social media usage indicates the popularity that these social networking sites have among individuals. Social networking sites therefore provide new ways for people to communicate with each other, which further provides platforms to self-disclose, self-present, and managed impressions (Moon, Lee, Lee, Choi & Sung, 2016). The surge of social media usage via mobile devices in Africa (Kemp, 2017) is significant for the current research as it is based in South Africa.

A recent study undertaken by Shava and Chinyamurundi (2018) explored social media usage among rural South African youth. Using a self-administered questionnaire, data were collected from 447 youths in an Eastern Cape rural community. An analysis of the results collected found that habitual social media usage exists among the surveyed youth. Findings of the study revealed that adolescents use mobile devices for socialising and knowledge sharing purposes, and the study also noted addictive behaviours similar to the South African research done by Tustin (Pieterse, 2016). Furthermore, the participants also felt obligated to join Facebook because their friends were on Facebook, thus indicating the role of peer influence. Habitual use was correlated with Facebook use which means that the individual

gained satisfaction from having consistent and continuous access to Facebook. The findings by Shava and Chinyamurundi (2018) were among the rural South African youth who live in underdeveloped areas with poor telecommunications, thus highlighting that despite these challenges faced by the rural youth, they are still able to maintain their connections on social media.

There are various social media platforms. However, Facebook remains the most popular, being the first social networking site to have made a significant impact on individuals in the past decade (Caers, De Feyter, De Couck, Stough, Vigna & Du Bois, 2013). According to these authors, at the close of 2012, Facebook was already serving at least one billion active users with 80 percent of these users residing outside the USA, making Facebook a worldwide platform. Facebook allows users to create a profile page by entering personal details and adding an image of the self. Once a profile is created, the individuals can then create a network of friends. Furthermore, Facebook allows individuals to update their status with either text or a photo. In updating their status or uploading a picture, friends can then provide feedback by commenting on or liking the status. In this way, communication and networking take place. Facebook has experienced a 20 percent increase in the number of social media users since 2015 (Kemp, 2017) and it is the only social media platform which has experienced a 24 percent growth each year. These statistics are also confirmed by a more recent survey by the Pew Research Centre (Smith & Anderson, 2018).

Statistics vary regarding adolescents' usage of Facebook. According to an online blog by Lai (2017), research undertaken by Forrester Data Consumer Technographics in the USA found that 34 percent of the teens who are online believe that Facebook is for an older age group. Although there is a considerable number of teenagers who are members of Facebook, the social media platform has remained stagnant for adolescents, as they are opting instead for platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat. Statistics by Forrester Data Consumer Technographics show that Facebook usage among adolescents has dropped by two percent since 2014 (Lai, 2017). On the contrary, a local online article by Writer (2017) adds that Facebook is indeed the most popular in South Africa. Researcher Arthur Goldstruck states that there is a misconception that younger people are leaving Facebook as it is just a case of the younger Facebook users becoming older (Writer, 2017). These statistics are significant for the current research, as Facebook usage is a criterion of inclusion for individuals to participate in the research.

A UNICEF report published in 2012, highlights two local studies regarding social networking site activities among adolescents. The first study was undertaken early in 2009 by a survey of TNS research and consisted of a sample of 401 South African adolescents. A staggering 74 percent of teens reported to be users of social networking sites with 84 percent using Facebook. In contrast, an online article by Constine (2013) stated that Facebook was experiencing a decline regarding teen Facebook usage as teens opted for other social networking sites such as Snapchat. Of particular importance is that adolescents were avid social networking users, even though Facebook usage particularly among adolescents varied between the TNS research survey and the online article by Constine (2013). A more recent online article by Vermeulen (2017) states that Facebook in South Africa has experienced a considerable rise from 2010 to 2017. International and local research thus provide varying results regarding Facebook usage among teenagers with local research providing positive results for Facebook usage among adolescents.

The second most popular social networking site is Instagram which was bought by Facebook in 2012. Forrester Data Consumer Technographics states that Instagram has experienced a massive rise since its inception (Lai, 2017). Instagram was launched in 2010 and is a mobile photo sharing application (Lee, Lee, Moon & Sung, 2015) which enables its users to take pictures and videos and share them on other social networking platforms such as Facebook (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). However, unlike Facebook, text content cannot be created as Instagram is visually oriented. The creativity of Instagram also includes enhanced photo editing features providing an all-in-one package where individuals can take pictures, edit these pictures, and then post it onto Instagram (Lee et al., 2015). The photo editing features provided by Instagram offer special “filters” that alter the appearance of the image, creating enhanced colours and resolutions (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). The use of Instagram is thus well suited for the current research as it is visually oriented, while the aim of the study is to explore selfie-posting behaviours on social networking sites. A survey was undertaken by the NORC centre of public affairs (NORC 2017) at the University of Chicago in December 2016 with teenagers aged 13 to 17 in 50 states. Key findings of the survey are that at least 76 percent of teenagers use Instagram and 66 percent of them use Facebook. From a local perspective, research is very limited in terms of Instagram usage among adolescents. However, over the years, Instagram has experienced a considerable increase among South Africans in general (Vermeulen, 2017).

Due to Facebook being the most popular social networking site and Instagram the fastest rising social media platform, these two social networking sites will be used in the current study. According to the study by NORC (2017), teenagers are using a variety of social media platforms, with the average teenager using at least three different social media platforms. Becker (2016) describes a post on Facebook's IQ blog in which Facebook explored how visual language impacts the role of 13- to 24-year-olds from various countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, UK, and the USA). A finding from Facebook is that visual content allows people to express themselves better and allows for people to be connected easily. This could possibly be a reason as to why statistics highlight that Instagram is more popular among teenagers, as it is a photo based social networking site in comparison to Facebook which is both text based and photo based (Lai, 2017). Instagram is therefore more visually oriented for the adolescent. These social networking sites provide different ways for adolescents to self-disclose, increase self-presentation, and for impression management (Moon et al., 2016) which is generally done through the use of a selfie. According to the Facebooks IQ Blog, 63 percent of 13- to 24-year-olds on Instagram use the social platform to document their lives through photos with at least 72 percent posting photos on the platform on a monthly basis (Becker, 2016). This statistic highlights the important role that visual data play in the adolescent's experience of social media. This also correlates with the survey by NORC (2017), where they found that teenage girls are more likely to spend their time on photo or visually oriented sharing sites.

### **2.3 The Selfie**

It is important to understand how the visual culture has impacted society before discussing the selfie. The visual culture can be described as images on television, magazines, or on mobile devices that pervade our daily lives. Technological developments in particular have played an important role in shaping our visual culture, as social networking sites are image based. The visual culture is constantly reshaping our personal identities and our relationships with others and can thus be regarded as a transformational encounter, changing the way in which we view the world (Markello, 2005).

As more adolescents spend their time on visually oriented social networking sites, they are constantly reshaping themselves through visual data, particularly with the selfie playing a key role in shaping this visual culture.

The selfie is referred to as a “digital networked object”, as it is captured and uploaded on social media with the intention to network with peers (Tiidenberg, 2018). However, a selfie does not necessarily have to be shared onto social media networking sites. According to Eckel, Ruchatz, and Wirth (2018), an image can be stored for memory purposes and not posted on social media to be shown to everyone, although it still is a selfie. This is also confirmed by Tiidenberg (2018) who states that many people take selfies but choose to keep it on their phones instead of posting it for the wider public media to view. In the current study, the selfie being posted onto social media for the wider public to view, is important, as the aim of the research is to uncover how posting selfies on social media has an effect on the adolescent’s self-esteem in terms of feedback from others.

The selfie that is posted on a smartphone is regarded to have four main social functions, namely to capture memories, maintain relationships, to express oneself, and to visually communicate with the audience (Tiidenberg, 2018), thus highlighting that the selfie is not only responsible for maintaining online relationships, but it is also used as a self-presentational tool (Waskul & Vannini, 2015). Due to the popularity of the selfie, certain smartphones were specifically developed and adapted for the sake of the selfie. The Sony Xperia C3 Pro-selfie smartphone has a wide angle front camera consisting of a LED flash (Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017), thus providing an easy way for capturing a selfie, making it easier for people to express and present themselves to the public.

The word “selfie” has grown in popularity, as TIME magazine nominated the word as one of the most used buzzwords in 2012 (Shah & Tewari, 2016). Furthermore, in the year 2013 the word was named Oxford English Dictionary word of the year (Tobar, 2013). Usage of the word increased drastically by 17,000 percent from 2012 to 2014 (Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017). The word has increased in popularity to the extent that it is also used with linguistic changes. For example, a “helfie” is an image of one’s hair and a “legsie” is an image of outstretched legs. Other types of selfies include the “ussie” which generally includes a selfie of a couple, while a “felfie” is a selfie of a farmer (Shah & Tewari, 2016).

### **2.3.1 Statistics of the Selfie**

Statistics by Google in 2014 reported that 93 billion selfies on Android smartphones only were taken per day. A project undertaken by Selfie City (2014), highlights the universal

phenomenon of the selfie. Selfie City initiated a selfie mapping project, investigating how people across five cities (New York, Moscow, Berlin, Bangkok, and São Paulo) capture selfies and upload these selfies onto the social networking site, Instagram. The project revealed much information, such as that women take more selfies than men and that the selfie is mainly found among the younger generation. However, the main conclusion of the project is that the selfie is indeed a universal phenomenon.

### **2.3.2 *The Selfie and Social Media***

The most important form of communication on social media is the image, with the selfie being the most fundamental of these images (Meikle, 2016). While Eckel et al. (2018) state that selfies can be captured and not shared for anyone to see, they also state that selfies are taken with the knowledge and anticipation that it will be shared onto social media sites. According to Meikle (2016), once it is shared, it is no longer private. The increased accessibility and dominance of the internet makes it easier to share selfies (Tiidenberg, 2018). Furthermore, sharing selfies with others is made easier due to the major social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram that request individuals to immediately create a profile picture of oneself when one joins the platform (Meikle, 2016).

The basis of the selfie has a communicative function because once it is shared onto social media, it then becomes a “conversational” image (Eckel et al., 2018), as it is now moved from the private sphere of one’s mobile device to the public sphere of the social networking site (Waskul & Vannini, 2015). The selfie, once uploaded onto a social networking site, creates the opportunity for the selfie-taker to become a member of the online world. In becoming a member of the online world, the selfie not only allows self-expression, but the creation of new identities which are critical aspects especially for the adolescent (Waskul & Vannini, 2015).

Sharing and exchanging personal images on social media sites are fundamental to maintaining offline and online relationships and is thus considered to be relationship focused. Not only does a selfie communicate a visual presence, but it allows other individuals to comment textually on selfies. This is a two-way interaction, with the selfie-taker commenting on others’ selfies and others commenting on the selfie-taker’s selfie. The sharing of information which happens in real time, is an aspect that individuals enjoy as they have a strong

desire to connect with others and to belong (Waskul & Vannini, 2015). These images then help to maintain and expand one's online social connections, as the selfie leads to certain benefits such as collaboration, networking, creativity, and communication (Meikle, 2016).

The communicative function of the selfie is of considerable importance to the current study, which will explore how the selfie impacts the self-esteem of an adolescent. In order for selfie-posting to have any impact on self-esteem, there needs to be interaction between the selfie-poster and the selfie-viewer. Although Meikle (2016) points to positive aspects of selfie-posting such as creativity, networking, and communication, the communicative function of the selfie can also be negative when less likes and (more) negative comments are received. A posted selfie can receive likes which involve peers liking one's image, which communicates to the selfie-taker that they are attractive or likable. According to Chua and Chang (2016), the number of likes and comments received is an indicator of popularity – thus less likes and comments suggest unpopularity and a message of not being liked.

The selfie is therefore not always a positive communication tool.

### ***2.3.3 Why Do Adolescents Take Selfies?***

The developmental stage of the adolescent is met with feelings of insecurity as they try to fit into a society in order to find their place in the world (Erikson, 1950). For adolescents, it is important to be liked and accepted, particularly by their peers (McElhaney, Antonishak & Allen, 2008). In turn, the adolescent's self-worth becomes tied to other individual's approval. This statement can explain why adolescents take selfies, as the more likes or positive comments they receive, the better they feel about themselves (Barry et al., 2017). Popularity and social inclusion will thus be discussed as a reason as to why adolescents take selfies. Related to the concept of popularity and social inclusion is social desirability. In order to obtain the desired response on social networking sites, the adolescent will post attractive selfies which are often edited in order to gain attention (Chua & Chang, 2016). Social desirability will also be discussed as a reason why adolescents take selfies.

### ***2.3.3.1 Popularity and Social Inclusion.***

Research by Wickel (2015) suggests that selfies are taken with the aim of receiving attention and gaining popularity, further emphasising the communicative element of the selfie. Wickel (2015) administered a survey at Elon University, North Carolina among 93 female millennials, with the aim to explore the reasons why they post selfies on social networking sites and the benefits that it has for them. A finding from the study was that popularity was important and was achieved through a large number of likes or positive comments on a selfie. A staggering 90.2 percent of the participants reported that selfies are posted with the main aim of achieving likes and comments from their online friends. A small percentage of 15.7 indicated that if a selfie did not achieve positive feedback, it would be removed. Removing the selfie from social media, indicates the insecurity that an individual has when a selfie is not considered desirable by others.

The research by Wickel (2015) provides valuable information regarding the selfie being used as a tool to gain popularity. However, there are limitations to this research in that, apart from being a small survey of 93 participants, it only consisted of female participants who were all millennials. In-depth interviewing would have also yielded better results. The current research will aim to focus on both male and female participants and will consist of semi-structured interviewing to better explore adolescents' experiences when they capture selfies. Furthermore, the current research will focus on Gen Z and not millennials. Gen Z consists of those born after 1997 to the early 2000s, while millennials consist of those individuals born between 1981 and 1997. Similar to the current study, research by Mascheroni et al. (2015) comprised adolescents between the ages of 11 and 16 and aimed to explore how they develop and present their online identities, and the interaction with their peers online. A finding from this research, similar to Wickel (2015), was that popularity was important to adolescents with likes being a determining factor of popularity.

Similar to the international research of Wickel (2015) and Mascheroni et al. (2015), local research shows that by being connected via social networking sites, becomes a constant desire because of the popularity of networking. The importance of connecting with other adolescents is highlighted in a research study done by Youth Dynamix (2009), who partnered with TRU USA in their global teen study in 2008/2009, which included teenagers aged 12 to 19 years. The study was done in 16 countries worldwide. South African teenagers compared

well to international teenagers regarding the time spent on social media as well as the interaction which took place, especially on photo sharing social networking sites.

If the selfie is used as a tool to gain popularity or social inclusion, then this in turn can affect self-esteem, as adolescents are constantly seeking approval. Given this statement, it becomes even more significant for the current study to explore changes in self-esteem, once the image is posted on social media. An individual's self-concept does not only consist of personal attributes, but also of social attributes, thus highlighting the importance of group membership (Rogers, 1961). An individual feels that they are included in the in-group when their selfie receives a positive response. This feeling of social inclusion is an indicator of popularity and hence can positively affect self-esteem. Self-esteem will be discussed further in the conceptual framework found in chapter 3.

#### **2.3.3.2 Social Desirability.**

Often individuals capture and post selfies to appear more desirable than they actually are, with the end goal of becoming more popular or being liked more. Manipulation of the selfie through the method of digital enhancement techniques can enhance an individual's self-presentation and increase feelings of likeability. Research by Mascheroni et al. (2015) also identified the importance of editing a selfie to gain social desirability. In their research, data were collected from adolescents living in Italy, Spain, and the UK. After focus groups and interviews took place, the data revealed that participants would edit an image to appear more attractive than what they are in reality. Furthermore, participants expressed that the number of likes on an image was an important indicator not only of attractiveness but also the level of social desirability. Selfie editing apps were used to prevent being marginalised by their online friends, thus further highlighting the need to be part of the in-group.

Similar results were yielded in a Singapore research by Chua and Chang (2016) among 24 teenage girls. After the in-depth interviewing took place, the study analysed the adolescent girls' narratives on the relation between self-presentation and peer comparison in the context of beauty. From the in-depth interviews it was revealed that girls edited their selfies by enhancing their skin tone, removing blemishes and blurring facial imperfections. Photo manipulation was used in order to impress peers and enhance one's self-image, thus increasing

their social desirability among the online community. The act of impressing peers is a main characteristic of adolescent development (Erikson, 1950).

Studies done by Chua and Chang (2016) and Mascheroni et al. (2015) highlight how altered body images such as facial imperfections through photo manipulation affects social desirability. These studies bear many similarities to the current research as the current study will also include exploring adolescent selfie-posting behaviours. However, the current research will include both male and female participants and will not only be limited to females. An advantage of the current research will therefore be to assess male adolescents' experiences of body image concerns in relation to social desirability when posting selfies on social media. A research question which the current study will explore is the effects of the selfie on the body image among adolescents. In exploring this, the importance of social desirability will also be revealed. As highlighted by the research by Mascheroni et al. (2015), the selfie clearly impacts body image as it leads one to be more aware of their body image concerns, which then leads individuals to conform to beauty standards through photo-manipulation.

Most selfies captured by adolescents, are posted to gain popularity and to increase self-image (Wickel, 2015). However, research by Wickel (2015) also indicates that this may not be the case for some adolescents. From the findings of research by Wickel (2015), it was clear that some adolescents take selfies in order to keep friends and family updated on their life. Selfies are also regarded as a way of keeping memories for the selfie-taker.

The obsession with obtaining flawless selfies has also proven to be very dangerous, as selfie-takers sometimes try to take novel selfies under extreme circumstances. Capturing and posting novel selfies on social media also aid in social desirability or popularity. For example, South Korea has banned the use of selfie sticks (a stick where the phone can be attached to capture an extended selfie), while Saudi Arabia has banned the selfie in Mecca, and Spain has banned any selfies from being captured at the annual running of their bull festival (Shah & Tewari, 2016).

#### **2.3.4 *Effects of Selfie-Taking***

Narcissism and psychopathy have been linked as consequences for excessive selfie-taking. A study by Fox and Rooney (2015) administered an online survey with men aged between 18

and 40 in the USA. The study aimed to assess trait predictors that social networking sites use, as well as editing images and posting images. An analysis of the surveys revealed that those individuals who are narcissistic (with grandiose views of themselves) and showing the trait of psychopathy, reported posting selfies more frequently on social media. Narcissists and individuals who were high in self-objectification, more frequently manipulated their images. The study therefore predicted that the personality trait of narcissism was related to the excessive use of the selfie. Narcissism and the relation to the selfie will be explored in more detail in the current chapter.

Excessive selfie-taking makes individuals more conscious of their appearance, which can lead to body image problems and eating disorders. Young individuals are pressurised to be as physically attractive as their peers on social networking sites and can, under extreme circumstances resort to plastic surgery. Shah and Tewari (2016) describe a survey conducted by the American Academy of Facial Plastic Reconstructed Surgery where an increase of five to 10 percent of plastic surgery cases occurred due to individuals engaging in more frequent selfie-taking. The relation between body image and the selfie will be discussed in further detail in this chapter.

Excessive selfie-taking is also regarded as affecting an individual's health. Research undertaken among 250 students aged 18 to 25 in India, by Kela, Khan, Saraswat, and Amin (2017) found health complications such as low back ache, stress, cervical spondylitis, headaches, and selfie elbows from excessive selfie-taking. At least 10 percent of the participants suffered from selfie elbows, which is caused by holding a phone for several minutes in a difficult position. The strain from holding the mobile device causes trauma to the muscles and tendons of the elbow.

However, the selfie does not always have negative effect. Kasch (2013) states that the selfie can also have a positive impact on self-esteem. Capturing a selfie helps to increase awareness of the self which results in self-confidence and hence increased self-esteem. Furthermore, the immediate affirmative feedback obtained after posting a selfie on social networking sites through comments enhances the self-image. In agreement with the positive aspects of the selfie, The Real Beauty Campaign, undertaken by Dove, which took place in 2014, was a campaign conducted on mothers and their teenage daughters regarding their looks and insecurities after a selfie exhibition comprising their pictures was erected for viewing

(Murphey, 2014). The feedback from their selfie exhibition made the mothers and daughters more aware of their unique features which differentiated them from others. In this case, the selfie had the power to redefine beauty and widen its definition of beauty which was previously restricted to picture perfect images of celebrities.

There are therefore mixed findings on whether the selfie has a positive or negative impact on the individual.

## **2.4 Body Image**

Body image is a psychological phenomenon created by social factors influencing an individual's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings about their body (Grogan, 2017). In this regard, body image should not only be viewed subjectively, but it needs to be viewed as part of the environment in which it exists (Grogan, 2017).

The social construction of the body image implies that there is already an image created as to how an individual should look. According to Grogan (2017), slenderness is considered to be important in the Western societies as it reflects happiness, success, youthfulness, as well as social acceptability. Therefore, being overweight is regarded as physically unattractive and associated with various negative characteristics. Physical appearance is regarded to be very important. However, many people do not naturally have a slim, slender, and well-toned body, and therefore have to attempt dieting and exercising to conform to the socially constructed ideals of beauty (Grogan, 2017).

According to Grogan (2017), the media plays a crucial role in producing changes in the way the body is experienced and evaluated, depending on how important the media imagery is for participants. Adolescents, for example, are more vulnerable and sensitive to media imagery specifically related to body image, as the adolescent is undergoing physical and psychological changes associated with puberty. Given that media imagery plays a pivotal role in body image, it is thus important for the current research to discuss body image in relation to the selfie and social networking sites.

#### **2.4.1 *Body Image, the Selfie, and Social Networking Sites***

As stated by Grogan (2017), body image issues are dependent on how an individual's physical appearance is viewed or judged through social experience. Taking this statement into account, one can deduce that selfies on social networking sites impact body image. The selfie is highly visual in nature, placing emphasis on physical appearance (Chae, 2017), while social networking sites are considered as the vehicle, implementing the selfie to be viewed by the online community who plays multiple roles like being a judge, a vicarious learning source, and comparison target that shape individuals' perceptions and presentations about beauty (Chua & Chang, 2016).

Similar to the current study, an Estonian research by Siibak (2009) explored the characteristics that adolescents attach to their profile image. The research comprised male and female adolescents aged 11 to 18 years, where a survey was administered to reveal the reasons as to why adolescents join social networking sites. The results revealed that 28 percent of the girls and 23 percent of the boys joined social networking sites because they were curious as to what other individuals in the online world thought of them, while 20 percent of the girls and 16 percent of the boys joined online communities because they wanted to show themselves off. This finding suggests that adolescents consider their image important as well as how they present themselves to others. Self-presentation is of particular importance to the adolescent in the search for an identity creation. The online environment on which the selfie was posted, therefore allows the adolescent to construct and reconstruct the self on social networking sites. In this regard, body image plays a huge role in affecting self-presentation behaviours.

A second finding of Siibak's research is that a selfie selected for social media is dependent on how attractive it appears to others (Siibak 2009). Physical appearance is therefore considered as important, as reported by 56 percent of the girls and 31 percent of the boys. These results not only emphasise the importance of self-presentation to the adolescent, but further highlights the importance of outer appearance. The overall results from Siibak's study emphasise that young people are very conscious about their appearance and strategic in how they present themselves physically to the online world. The need to look attractive can be dangerous to body image as it then leads adolescents to experiment and use photo manipulation techniques in order to create a perfect image which is not the real version of the self (Chae, 2017).

Similar to the current study which will use a semi-structured interview to understand the effects of posting selfies on social networking sites, research by Chua and Chang (2016) also adopted an in-depth interview methodology to extract meanings from teenage girls' interviews. Their study explored the relationship between self-presentation and peer comparison on social media in the context of beauty.

A data analysis of the semi-structured interviews by Chua and Chang has revealed that the presentation of edited beauty is important for adolescents (Chua & Chang 2016). In contrast to research by Siibak (2009), the teenage girls in this study felt that inner beauty was more important than outer appearance. However, the girls did feel pressurised to look a certain way through peer standards of beauty which was socially constructed. The standard of beauty which was set, was determined by having a slender figure or having an attractive face, and if the adolescents felt that they did not meet this standard, then photo editing software was used to change appearances. In changing or altering the way they looked, it implied that the adolescent girls were not happy with their body image. Furthermore, prior to posting the selfie, backstage planning of the selfie was important for the teenage girls. They took great care to produce the perfect selfie before posting the image onto social media. The results of the research indicate that the girls' perceptions of beauty were socially constructed, causing them to engage in self-presentational behaviours to look more attractive on social media.

In the research by Siibak (2009) and Chua and Chang (2016), it becomes obvious that the selfie does indeed have a negative effect on body image. However, other studies show that the selfie could also have a positive impact on body image (Wang, Wang, Liu, Xie, Wang & Lei, 2018b). In the Chinese research by Wang et al. (2018b), 450 young adult females with a mean age of 19 years completed a survey which measured their selfie-posting behaviours, body satisfaction, positive feedback, and self-esteem. An analysis of the results revealed that posting selfies had a positive impact on body image. According to the study, the participants posted selfies which contained positive body related information, as young women have been socialised to believe that appearance is an important basis for self-presentation. When the participants posted selfies, they therefore took pride in themselves which enhanced their self-esteem.

Body image from a local perspective is similar to international findings. Research by Szabo and Allwood (2006) suggests that Western media and values have influenced South African

women, as more women are falling prey to the socially constructed perception of beauty. The findings of the research by Szabo and Allwood (2006) indicate that young South African women may be developing eating disorders as a result of body dissatisfaction as they found that adolescents are trying to obtain a certain body image by abusing laxatives and diet pills. If South African adolescents are affected by body image dissatisfaction, then this could have similar results when using the selfie on social networking sites.

Research by both Siibak (2009) and Chua and Chang (2016) suggest that body image is an important factor to consider when using social media, with the selfie being the main tool to portray the perfect image. However, there are mixed conclusions on research regarding the impact of the selfie on body image as some research highlights the negative effects of the selfie on body image (Mascheroni et al., 2015), while others highlight the positive aspects of selfie-posting on body image (Wang et al., 2018b). The current study will therefore explore what effect the selfie has on the adolescent's body image.

As confirmed by Chua and Chang (2016), perceptions of beauty are socially constructed. Taking this statement into account, there is a social comparison element between the selfie-taker and their body image. This aspect will now be further explored.

#### **2.4.2 *Body Image, Feedback, and Social Comparison on SNS***

Beginning in pre-adolescence, social comparison contributes to global self-evaluations with the main purpose to evaluate an aspect of the self (Chua & Chang, 2016). The adolescent is bombarded with body image concerns, not only from social media but also in conversations with friends with whom they have close relationships. Conversations among peers and friends establish expectations and norms which define an ideal standard of beauty, therefore confirming that body image is indeed socially constructed (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2016). When individuals rely on these externally created standards to judge themselves, the uncertainty about their abilities is reduced or in the case of the current study, the uncertainty about their physical appearance is reduced (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2016).

According to Siibak (2009), social networking sites place an emphasis on appearance, forcing adolescents to exchange feedback on each other's physical appearance. Feedback received from peers, plays an important role in the online behaviour of the adolescent and is measured

in terms of the number of likes or comments made on a selfie. Social networking sites are the ideal platform for individuals to receive feedback as the sites are designed in such a way that there is only a like button and not a dislike button. This feature therefore gives viewers more opportunities to offer positive feedback (Wang et al., 2018b). Wang et al. (2018b) further state that feedback mediates the relationship between selfie-posting and self-esteem when there is positive feedback on selfies.

Whilst a like button on social networking sites offers the opportunity for positive feedback, dissatisfaction still results when the number of likes is low. Research by Chua and Chang (2016) revealed that when posting a selfie, the quantitative feedback by means of likes on an image was associated with how well their physical appearance was received by peers. Less likes received on an image or negative feedback resulted in body image dissatisfaction. A participant from the research maintained that people viewed her as ugly if she received a low number of likes on her posted image (Chua & Chang, 2016). This finding highlights the effect that feedback has on body image.

Furthermore, research by Siibak (2009) found that having a large social network was considered to be an important aspect among adolescents, leading to more feedback which is exchanged when a selfie is posted. It can therefore be deduced that the more adolescents use social networking sites, the more likely they are to receive peer related appearance feedback. According to Ricciardeli and Yager (2016), feedback makes teenagers more aware of the difference between their own bodies in relation to the ideal body image and can serve to pressurise adolescents to conform to a certain ideal image which they may not meet.

Receiving feedback on a selfie can therefore have a negative impact on body image as highlighted by various research studies (Mascheroni et al., 2015; Chua & Chang, 2016; Ricciardeli & Yager, 2016). Apart from receiving feedback, viewing selfies of others on social media impacts body image through social comparison. In the research by Chua and Chang (2016), participants engaged in upward and downward comparison, with upward appearance causing the individuals to feel more insecure about their appearance as they viewed selfies of more attractive individuals who obtained more likes. The upward comparison created a sense of insecurity among the participants as they felt that their appearance was not good enough by comparison. The participants of the study, however, admitted

that peer comparison is unhealthy as it could lead to health problems, causing individuals to seek a certain body type which can further be harmful to their self-perception.

Similar results of social comparison and the effects on body image are highlighted in research by Kleemans, Daalmans, Carbaat, and Anschutz (2016) where 144 adolescent girls were participating in the online study to investigate the effect of manipulated or edited Instagram images of body image. The teenage girls were asked to view 10 selfies, as selfies were regarded to be the most popular trend on various social networking sites. The selfies only depicted a teenage girl and consisted of manipulated selfies and original selfies. Manipulated selfies were created by various filters and effects which are found on Instagram. The filters serve to enhance colour and intensity or remove facial impurities from the selfie. After participants viewed the selfies, the results found that the manipulated photo images were rated as more attractive than the original images. Furthermore, after exposure to the filtered images, the teenage girls were found to have lower body dissatisfaction than when having viewed the original selfies. The results of this research thus imply that when Instagram users edit their images, it can have negative consequences for those who are prone to make social comparisons. This is especially dangerous for young teenage girls who are at a crucial period of their psychosocial development and are thus more vulnerable to media influences.

Similar to the study by Chua and Chang (2016), the current study will also explore how feedback from peers through likes and comments on a selfie impacts body image. However, unlike the research by Chua and Chang (2016), the study will comprise male and female participants, and will not only be limited to female participants. It is also important to note that although the participants in the research by Chua and Chang (2016) found peer comparisons to be negative, some also found it to be positive, as it contributed to weight control and better self-presentational skills. The results of these kinds of research therefore tend to be mixed. The current research will investigate further into the effects of the selfie on body image in relation to social comparison.

### **2.4.3 *Body Dysmorphic Disorder and the Selfie***

At an extreme level, a constant preoccupation with how one looks, may lead an individual to develop Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). The media, internet, and social networking sites have become powerful sources for enhancing and receiving appreciation for one's beauty and

physical attractiveness. However, the messages received from these external sources become internalised and adopted as standards of beauty reiterating that these perceptions of body image are socially constructed (Khanna & Sharma, 2017).

The enhancement of appearance on social media is considered by adolescents to be an important factor for achieving popularity online (Khanna & Sharma, 2017). This is also confirmed in the research done by Siibak (2009) where it was found that popularity among adolescents was important on social networking sites. Adolescents in particular want to be popular on social networking sites and use their appearance as a tool to gain popularity. The selfie on social networking sites offers immediate peer feedback through likes and comments and is an indicator of popularity. However, this immediate feedback can also lead to increased body surveillance which is described as a habitual monitoring of appearance and a constant worry of how one appears to others (Khanna & Sharma, 2017). Therefore, if the individual fails to live up to the ideal beauty standard, it can result in a negative affect and anxiety and an excessive preoccupation with how one looks.

Adolescents with BDD have an excessive preoccupation with one or more imagined flaws in their outer appearance, leading to negative effects and causing problems in their occupational functioning. These individuals engage in repetitive behaviours such as constant mirror checking, excessive grooming and gaining positive feedback from others to lessen the anxiety felt from their imagined flaw (Khanna & Sharma, 2017). The case report by Khanna and Sharma (2017) highlights that excessive selfie-taking is used to manage distress related BDD.

## **2.5 Narcissism and the Selfie**

Narcissism is on the rise, affecting even less self-centred people. A study which took place in 2007 by the San Diego State University examined the increase in narcissism among university students. Prof Jean Twenge undertook the study and found that narcissism levels steadily increased during the past few decades, making the millennial generation more selfish and self-absorbed than previous generations (Firestone, 2012). The narcissistic behaviour can have a direct influence on Gen Z, who is the generational group that the current study will explore.

It is important to understand how the social networking sites affect the rise in narcissism. Social networking sites offer easy ways to participate in attention seeking and self-important behaviours as it allows individuals to actively manage the content of its profiles. In managing or controlling their online profiles, social networking users can use it to their advantage to self-present in ways to gain admiration from the online community. This is similar to a narcissist who seeks attention and admiration from others. In the online world, admiration and attention is indicated through likes and positive comments. Various researchers have found that likes and comments accumulated on a posted selfie, act as indicators of status and popularity in the online world (Chua & Chang, 2016; Mascheroni et al., 2015).

In order to achieve the admiration from others through likes and positive comments, users will manipulate and change their profile content. A classic case highlighting this need for admiration is described by a participant in the research by Chua and Chang (2016) where this participant disclosed that she was not receiving the desired responses on a selfie, which forced her to download a mobile app to generate likes on her posted selfie. Even though the likes received were self-created, the participant still felt more confident about herself as others would now view her as popular and desired. The need for popularity is a key feature of the narcissist, whether in the online or offline world (Wickel, 2015), which further perpetuates the narcissist's need to be desired. Furthermore, nine participants from Chua and Chang's research reported that they would delete their selfies on social networking sites due to the embarrassment of obtaining just a few likes. The emotion of embarrassment highlights the deep-seated insecurity and underlying feeling of inadequacy. An article by Firestone (2012) in *Psychology Today* states that narcissism is based on a fear of failure and a need to be acknowledged as the best. The participant in the research of Chua and Chang (2016) likewise demonstrated this definition of narcissism.

In contrast to research by Chua and Chang (2016) and Mascheroni et al. (2015), research by Wickel (2015) provides varied results regarding status and popularity related to narcissism on social networking sites. Wickel (2015) undertook an online survey at Elon University among 93 females from sororities to investigate why the act of taking selfies leads to an increase in narcissism and selfish behaviours. Similar to other research studies, a large number reported that popularity was determined by likes and comments which lead to an increase in narcissism. However, these participants also stated that posting selfies had nothing to do with popularity or status, but rather allowed them to keep friends and family updated on their

lives. It also gave them a platform to save memories. The results by Wickel (2015) highlight that there are various reasons for posting selfies on social networking sites that may not be related to narcissistic behaviours.

### ***2.5.1 The Relation between Narcissism, Body Image, and the Selfie***

Achieving the desired response on social networking sites through likes and positive comments is also linked to physical attractiveness. Given that a narcissist has an overly positive view of their physical appearance and given that selfies allow individuals to selectively present attractive and self-promoting content, it can be deduced that such behaviour would be more common with those high in narcissism (Wang et al., 2018a).

The most widely used instrument to measure sub-clinical narcissism is the NPI, as the instrument includes several items which directly address the fundamental aspect of physical appearance. A narcissist is not only characterised by vanity but has a high interest in their appearance. An item on the NPI that addresses this aspect is, “I like looking at myself in the mirror”. Another characteristic which the NPI addresses is the need to be the centre of attention. The items in the NPI that address this aspect are, “I really like to be the centre of attention” or “I like to display my body”. Although the current study will not utilise the NPI, it will highlight how important appearance is to the narcissistic individual and in turn, body image. Similar to the aspects of the NPI, the selfie on social networking sites exhibits the same aspects. This is illustrated in research by Mascheroni et al. (2015) who address these aspects (wanting to be the centre of attention, and displaying the body) in their study which examines how adolescents, both male and female, in three European countries develop and present their online identities in their interaction with their peers.

In the research by Mascheroni et al. (2015), a female participant stated that her friend did not receive the desired likes on social media. However, after editing, her images looked more attractive and her likes increased. This behaviour displayed by the participant is similar to the statement addressed by the NPI, “I really like to be the centre of attention”. Furthermore, according to the research by Mascheroni et al. (2015), images are also sexualised by modelling people in the media in an attempt to gain attention. The act of sexualising images is linked to the narcissist who displays their body in an attempt to be the centre of attention. This behaviour can also be related to the statement in the NPI, “I like to display my body”.

Body image is therefore considered to be very important for the narcissist and the selfie-taker.

Building on the findings of Mascheroni et al. (2015), Fox and Rooney (2015) found that when individuals display self-objectification on social media, the more time they spend on social networking sites and the more narcissistic they become. The concept of social objectification is very important in this case, as it has a direct impact on body image concerns. Daily encounters with sexual objectification across various interpersonal and social contexts lead teenage girls and women to view themselves as objects to be looked at and evaluated. The self-perspective referred to as self-objectification reflects the view that one's body belongs more to others than oneself. It therefore becomes normal for them that their bodies are commented on, evaluated, and even sexually harassed (Chrisler & McCreary, 2010). Although mainly found among women and teenage girls, self-objectification is also common among males as highlighted in the research by Fox and Rooney (2015) in which the study involved 800 men.

The research done by Fox and Rooney (2015) confirms the research of Jackson, Ervin, and Hodge (1992). Jackson et al. (1992) involved 307 undergraduate students from the Michigan State University who completed the NPI and body self-relations questionnaire (BSRQ). The results of the study found that the NPI total scores were strongly related to BSRQ, which puts an emphasis on physical attractiveness. However, more narcissistic individuals evaluated their physical appearance, fitness, and sexuality more favourably than less narcissistic individuals. In terms of gender, there were no gender differences on any of the narcissism sub-scales. However, differences were obtained for measures of body image as females engaged in more appearance-related behaviours than males. The study did not include the social networking aspect but since physical appearance on social networking sites is considered to be very important, it can be deduced that social networking sites can exacerbate narcissism in individuals. This deduction is confirmed by Buffardi and Campbell (2008) as they state that social networking sites reinforce and create narcissism, as these sites offer an easy outlet to display vanity and self-promotion, and acquire large numbers of superficial friendships which are characteristic of narcissism.

However, in contrast to research by Fox and Rooney (2015) and Jackson, Ervin, and Hodge (1992) is the research study by Dutta et al. (2016) that analysed the attitudes toward selfie-

taking, body image acceptance and narcissistic personality traits among adolescents in Mumbai, India. The 250 adolescents were interviewed, using a questionnaire, assessing attitudes towards selfie-taking, body image acceptance, and NPI. The analysis of the data found that 16.5 percent of youths clicked four or more selfies per day, illustrating the preoccupation with one's physical appearance. Addressing body image acceptance, there was a statistically significant difference between scores for males and females, with females experiencing higher levels of body image dissatisfaction. Most importantly, despite the similarities with a narcissist and selfie-taker, the NPI scores between genders were statistically insignificant, and therefore narcissism was not related to body image dissatisfaction. The study found a need for further studies in diverse populations in order to give impetus to the findings.

Based on the information regarding narcissism and body image, the current study will measure narcissism and body image through a semi-structured questionnaire that will tap into the characteristic traits of a narcissist. Likes and positive comments will be assessed on a selfie and the study will explore how participants feel about receiving less likes on an image compared to receiving more likes. Furthermore, it will be explored if any strategies are used when capturing a selfie to obtain more likes such as photo manipulation or selfie-editing. The act of editing selfies will be further explored through the interviewing of the participants and viewing selfies to determine body image issues. The data analysis of the current research will involve identifying common themes in the narrative of each participant – this will be explained in detail in chapter 4.

### ***2.5.2 Differentiating between Narcissism and Self-Esteem***

The relation between narcissism and self-esteem is complex and there has been a misconception to combine high self-esteem with narcissism. However, viewing these two constructs as interchangeable, leads to the concern that pursuing self-esteem may cause harm if it leads to narcissism (Hermann, 2016).

A common characteristic of narcissism and self-esteem is that individuals who are high in both constructs hold overly positive views of the self. However, the relation between the two constructs is regarded to be relatively weak. The weak association between narcissism and self-esteem is due to the fact that individuals with a high self-esteem vary to different degrees

in their levels of narcissism, and individuals with a low self-esteem rarely report high levels of narcissism (Hermann, 2016).

An important difference between narcissism and self-esteem is the difference in positive self-views. Self-esteem is an evaluative construct where an individual's level of self-esteem reflects how that person views themselves. In this case it would seem that narcissism would be positively and strongly related to self-esteem due to a positive regard. However, in contrast to self-esteem, narcissism possesses motivational properties as well as evaluative demands. Narcissistic individuals not only hold extremely positive self-views, but they also want others to think highly of them (Hermann, 2016).

Research by Wickel (2015) highlights the key factors of what is considered important for the narcissist when posting a selfie onto social media, and further highlights the need for positive regard. The study has found that selfies are posted not only to obtain a high number of likes, but also that the spectators could notice their impressive lifestyle. The participants wanted to look attractive in photos and wanted to be perceived as such by others. Furthermore, they believed that others wanted to know what they were doing, and they posted selfies to make others jealous. These various reasons for posting selfies do not only highlight a motivational element to increase positive self-views, but also highlight that individuals want to be perceived by others in high regard. However, other participants in the research stated that posting selfies make them feel good about themselves as it boosts their confidence. Although this may seem to increase self-esteem, Wickel (2015) states that participants are still partaking in selfish behaviours as they are relying on social networking sites to feel good about themselves. This indicates the self-important behaviours associated with narcissism and not self-esteem.

A further difference between narcissism and self-esteem is that narcissistic individuals believe that they are superior to others on agentic traits such as competence, intelligence, and uniqueness, whereas individuals with a high self-esteem are satisfied with themselves and do not hold themselves as superior to others. Self-esteem is evaluative of how people feel about themselves and thus there is no need for superiority. While both constructs entail positive views, they are qualitatively different (Hermann, 2016).

Furthermore, self-esteem represents an attitude built on accomplishments mastered over time, leading to individuals feeling good about themselves, whereas narcissism is based on a fear of failure, of weakness, and an unhealthy drive to be regarded as the best. Although a narcissist feels that they are better than others, they are not truly satisfied with themselves. Research by Chua and Chang (2016) highlighted that participants were editing their selfies due to a lack of confidence of their physical appearance. The need to be regarded as attractive by others and to be held in high regard (determined by likes) was of key importance. The results highlight that although participants wanted to be regarded as more attractive than others, they were in reality not truly happy with themselves, more specifically with their physical appearance.

An opposing view to the statement of Wickel (2015) that people who are using social networking sites to feel good about themselves, are associated with narcissism, is a recent survey undertaken by fitness product review website FitRated (2018). The survey was conducted among 1,000 Americans who identified themselves using one of three categories: 1) Non-user: Zero time is spent on social media and zero selfies are taken; 2) regular user: Two or more hours per day are spent on social media and one or two selfies per month are taken; and 3) avid user: Spend three or more hours per day on social media and take three or more selfies per month. The results of the survey revealed that the more time spent on social media, the more focus was placed on physical appearance and more comparisons were made with others. Regular and avid social media users in the survey stated that taking more selfies resulted in higher self-esteem and higher satisfaction with their overall appearance (Malacoff, 2018). However, the real problem arises when individuals place a high value on validation from their peers, instead of focusing on how they actually feel about the image. When emphasis is placed on the validation from peers, this is when the selfie can affect self-esteem negatively (Chua & Chang, 2016). Validation from peers is important to the narcissist. One may therefore deduce that when the validation from peers is essential to the individual, it could also be a sign of narcissism.

The aim of the current research is to determine whether posting selfies on social media has a positive or negative effect on an adolescent's self-esteem. In exploring this research question, the study also aims to answer whether the selfie has an effect on an adolescent's personality, specifically narcissism. In understanding the differences between narcissism and self-esteem

as discussed, the narratives of the participants will be analysed to determine if narcissism is found among participants or in fact if the selfie does assist in increasing self-esteem.

## **2.6 Understanding the Adolescent**

The search for an identity is a major challenge that adolescents face as they seek answers to the question, “Who am I?” (Erikson, 1968). In an ever-changing world, the adolescent needs to have direction of where they are going and most importantly how they fit into the larger part of society. This is the prominent task in Erikson’s fifth stage of the psychosocial stages of development, called identity versus role confusion (Erikson, 1950). The term “identity” refers to both a persistent sameness with oneself and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others (Erikson, 1956). Obtaining this “identity” can be difficult as the adolescent is confronted with various demands from physical to cognitive changes, the demands of approaching adulthood and the various external changes in their environment.

According to Erikson (1950), individuals are confronted with a crisis at every psychosocial stage of development, with each stage challenging their individual identity. The successful resolution or achievement of a particular “crisis” will then lead to a successful development of the personality. The adolescent in particular is confronted with the psychosocial stages of identity versus role confusion with the former being a successful resolution of the crisis and the latter being a negative resolution of the crisis. However, both identity and role confusion need to be experienced by the adolescent in order to develop themselves.

In answering the question, “Who am I?”, the adolescent finds a dependency on their peers while distancing themselves from the parental bond which has existed for many years. The older generation no longer prove to be effective role models in the identity search process (Erikson, 1959). Instead, peer groups serve in providing a reference point for developing a sense of identity as they provide information about the world outside the family and themselves (Santrock, 2001). The social feedback received by peers provides the adolescent with a better understanding and perception of themselves (Erikson, 1959).

## **2.6.1 *Adolescence and the Need to Belong***

Adolescence marks the period of identity formation with belongingness forming a crucial aspect of the identity search process. This can take place in both the online and offline world. The next heading will first discuss the need to belong as a fundamental human motivation, then the need to belong as an important aspect to the adolescent, and thereafter the need to belong in relation to social networking sites and the selfie.

### **2.6.1.1 *The Need to Belong.***

The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation which is vital to one's psychological wellbeing as it makes people feel connected and accepted as a member of a group (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). If people believe that social networking sites offer the same feelings of connectedness, then these sites can be a vehicle to facilitate belongingness. Social networking sites enable the user to form new friendships and to also keep in touch with old and current friends, therefore facilitating the need to belong or fit in.

According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the need to belong operates in a variety of social settings. The adolescent will have a sense of belonging in many facets of their lives as they join various groups. However, a large part of belongingness starts in the school setting, as this is where a considerable amount of their time is spent. A sense of belonging and a feeling of connectedness to the school environment is critical when adolescents reach high school. Allen and Kern (2017) state that belongingness is a major factor that contributes positively to the adolescent's psychological development which further affects the adolescent in the school setting in terms of academic performance. Apart from impacting academic performance, Allen and Kern (2017) state that a sense of belonging is the degree to which students feel accepted, supported, and respected by others in the school environment, while a lack of belongingness leads the adolescent to feeling alienated, disengaged, and socially isolated.

As highlighted by Allen and Kern (2017) and also confirmed by Baumeister and Leary (1995), the need to belong also has an affective component, meaning that a lack of belonging can result in feelings of loneliness. The selfie aids in collaboration and networking (Meikle, 2016) and is used as a tool to facilitate belonging on social networking sites. Therefore, if the desired effect of the selfie is not met, this could also lead to a negative experience. This is

highlighted in research by Mascheroni et al. (2015), where the selfie is regarded as a tool to enhance popularity and in doing so, to create a sense of belonging. When participants do not feel popular enough, it results in negative feelings.

A third criterion of belongingness is that the need to belong can have negative consequences if not satisfied, or if individuals are socially deprived. From a general perspective of belonging, Savin-Williams and Berndt (1990) state that adolescents who are accepted by their peers are found to have a better self-image, while in contrast, those rejected by peers are linked to behaviours which are harmful, such as delinquency. A lack of belongingness or early rejection of it also has long-term effects as highlighted by a study by Bagwell, Newcomb, and Bukowski (1990). In their twelve-year follow-up investigation, 30 young adults with a mean age of 23, who had a stable, reciprocal best friend in the fifth grade, and 30 young adults who had no friends, completed measures of adjustment in multiple domains. In this research, acceptance (the need to belong) and rejection (rejection from peer groups) are important concepts, central to the adolescent.

Acceptance and rejection from peers are therefore found to have unique implications for adaptive development. The results of the research by Bagwell et al. (1990) show that pre-adolescents with stable friendships have higher levels of self-worth in adulthood, while in contrast, those rejected by their peers or those who have an absence of friendship, are associated with psychopathological symptoms in adulthood. The research points to the importance of belonging in the early stages of an individual's life. A lack of belonging, leading to ill effects, can be related to the selfie in that if the selfie does not meet the desired effect, then individuals could start with self-harm. For example, Chua and Chang (2016) found that when the participants compared their selfies to that of more attractive others, it made them feel vulnerable and dissatisfied, which in turn led to feelings of not fitting in. These feelings further led to the females doing self-harming.

Lastly, belongingness entails that people should strive to achieve a minimum quality and quantity of social contact and once this is reached, the motivation for belonging should decrease (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). According to these authors, the formation of relationships made further to this, would be less satisfying. However, in contrast to the selfie, specifically among adolescents, having more friends is considered more important (Mascheroni et al., 2015).

Belongingness can therefore be related to the selfie. However, it is also important to understand how the need to belong or fit in is related to the adolescent in general. Erikson's psychosocial theory, specifically the fifth stage (identity versus role confusion), is crucial as the adolescent transitions into adult life (Erikson, 1968). Belongingness is regarded to be the foundation of identity formation as the adolescent tries to fit into the socio-cultural world. This sense of belonging, however, does not start in adolescence, but already starts to develop in the primary environment which is the home of the person. A psychosocial dilemma results when the adolescent has to combine the belongingness of childhood with new social roles in adolescence. Adolescents then develop a greater need for independence by moving away from their parents and moving into the socio-cultural context to form friendships and relationships. Similar to the home environment, as the adolescent grows older, the outside interactions provide the adolescent with a sense of belongingness (Erikson, 1968).

If the adolescent successfully forms a stable identity, it leads to fidelity (Erikson, 1968) which involves constructing a sense of identity and finding the appropriate social environment to which they belong. Fidelity further encompasses genuineness and sincerity among newly formed relationships. If fidelity is not achieved, the adolescent will remain confused about the role they should play as adults (Rageliene, 2016). For the adolescent, the social agents in the identity formation process are peers. According to systematic research compiled by Rageliene (2016), adolescents' identity development is positively associated with peer attachment as well as less negative feelings such as loneliness. However, Rageliene (2016) discovered that there is a lack of studies which analyse links between adolescent relationships with peers and identity development, using Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

Peers play an important role in the life of the adolescent, as they are the medium with which adolescents can participate in new activities and new experiences. Through discussions with peers, adolescents not only understand themselves better, but begin the construction of their identity through adoption of values and norms of their peer group (Rageliene, 2016). Furthermore, the author states that when approval is obtained from these discussions with their peers, it further enhances identity. Similarly, Savin-Williams et al. (1990) adds that the emotional support offered by friends, contributes to the adolescent's creation of an identity, and by means of self-disclosure a deep understanding of the self and the other is created.

However, according to Harter (1999), a distinction needs to be made between friends and peers. Harter (1999) states that feedback from peers is more important than feedback from friends because peers will provide real truthful feedback and not just support, which is provided by friends. Adolescents want to be accepted by peer groups and crowds, therefore the feedback received from these groups is essential for the adolescent to experience belonging. Demo and Savin-Williams (1992) further provide reasons as to why peers are more important than friends. According to them, adolescents tend to choose friends that are similar to them, thus receiving information which validates their self-system. Information received from peers challenges this self-system due to their differences.

### ***2.6.1.2 Peer Pressure Resulting from a Need to Belong.***

According to Merten (1997), popularity among adolescents is an indicator of a social standing. Adolescents are regarded to have achieved prominence and social status if they are popular. With the progression of adolescence, perceived social acceptance becomes an important marker of social success as this reflects the adolescents' success in their own defined social milieu (Allen & Antonishak, 2008). According to these authors, an adolescent is influenced by peer pressure (direct attempts to change attitudes or behaviours in another person) in order to achieve this social standing. The need to belong and to obtain social acceptance is highlighted in a study by Allen and Antonishak (2008). The study was undertaken in the USA with 164 adolescents recruited from public middle schools. The results of the study found that many teenagers are consumed by how well they are liked and accepted by their peers.

### ***2.6.1.3 Gender Differences and a Need to Belong.***

In a study by Eder (1985), friendships with popular girls were important for specific adolescent females. Furthermore, popular girls tended to avoid interactions with students of a lower status, leading to strong feelings of resentment and dislike. In terms of gender differences, Eder (1985) states that young females have more of a need to be socially accepted than males. In early adolescence, the teenage girl has more of a desire to be accepted and the opinions of peers take priority. Unlike adolescent males, Eder (1985) states that females focus more on interpersonal relationships.

Through the challenges of peer pressure and the pressing “need to belong”, the adolescent’s search for identity still needs to be achieved. If the adolescent is unable to achieve this, it can result in role confusion or identity diffusion. According to Erikson (1968), when an identity is poorly formed, it can lead to delinquent behaviour patterns. In a state of role confusion, the adolescent will be unable to resolve the “crisis” of this stage and will also possibly carry deficits to next psychosocial stages.

#### ***2.6.1.4 The Selfie in Relation to the Need to Belong.***

Due to the adolescent who is seeking approval and social acceptance, the selfie becomes an important platform where social acceptance can be easily achieved. In research done by Mascheroni et al. (2016) as well as Chua and Chang (2016), it was found that social inclusion was important to adolescents. Social inclusion in both research studies was determined by a large number of likes or positive comments on a selfie. In order to fit in or belong, the adolescent, through careful selection and controlling of a selfie, would self-present their ideal self to the online world, thereby creating feelings of liberation and empowerment.

#### ***2.6.2 Adolescence and Body Image***

Adolescence marks the period of heightened physical changes in height, weight, and body composition, which is due to the onset of puberty (Webb, Zimmer-Gembeck, Waters, Farrell, Nesdale & Downey, 2017). It is also during this stage that the adolescent experiences an increase of concern with physical attractiveness and appearance. These physical changes together with an appearance-oriented culture create an adolescent who is overly concerned with body image (Webb et al., 2017). It is important to note that puberty occurs earlier in females than in males. Therefore, girls (who mature earlier) perceive themselves differently in comparison with females and males. The comparison with both genders makes them more vulnerable and doubly concerned with how they are portrayed to the social world (Webb et al., 2017).

Webb et al. (2017) describe the concept of appearance-based rejection sensitivity which is a bias that involves anxious concerns about expectations to a perceived social rejection of physical appearance. When an adolescent is sensitive about appearance-based rejection, they experience negative feelings about appearance, and these feelings are related to fears about

being accepted or rejected by others. These fears further emphasise the need for human psychological connection and belonging.

Appearance concerns arise not only due to physical changes but also as a result of identity development where the need for belonging and fitting in is important. Attractiveness and appearance can play a significant role in the adolescent's fitting in, as it brings about a higher social status in the peer group. However, this can then lead to an even greater preoccupation with appearance as adolescents will strive to fit in. Research by Siibak (2009) provides evidence of how important appearance is to the adolescent and the importance of the need to belong. In the Estonian research among 11 to 18-year-olds, a questionnaire survey was carried out to examine the reasons why young people join social networking sites. In the analysis of data, adolescents felt that, to become popular on social networking sites, eight aspects were very important. All aspects were related to appearance, with the top three being good looks, photoshop editing, and having a large social network. Having a large social network is correlated to how popular a person is on social networking sites. Even though there is no direct relationship with online friends or a high level of quality relationships, having hundreds of friends is believed to be a valuable asset which fulfils the need for belonging.

The study by Siibak (2009) further highlights how important peers are in constructing a body image, which is regarded as the norm to the adolescent. Bell, Cassarly, and Dunbar (2018) describe this process as the objectification of the body where the body is ascribed a status which is strongly constructed by social norms or in this case by the peers of the adolescent. The adolescent implicitly accepts that there is only one standard body image which their bodies are to be measured against. Furthermore, Bell et al. (2018) describes how the adolescent compares their appearance to peers to decide whether their image is socially acceptable. The concept of the social comparison theory will be described further in chapter 3. Chua and Chang (2016) highlight in their research how processes of comparison and objectification work to influence body image among adolescents. The research study among 24 adolescent females found that participants were in conflict between their understanding of beauty and their perceptions of socially promoted conceptions of beauty. The participants conformed to the peer standards of beauty and followed peer norms which then guided their self-presentation. This highlights the play of objectification among adolescents. Furthermore, the participants engaged in upward and downward comparison among their peers. One parti-

participant disclosed that she needed to meet a certain level of attractiveness when she compared herself to her friends. The comparison was done in order for her to feel better about herself.

Both the research studies by Siibak (2009) and Chua and Chang (2016) describe the influence of social networking sites on the body image of adolescents. However, it is important to note that the influence of peers occurs even in a general setting and not only on social networking sites. During the teenage years, the time spent with friends and peers increases as time is spent both in and outside of school. The more time spent with peers, the greater the concern is on body image and peer acceptance (Webb et al., 2017). More time and interaction with peers can also lead to peer appearance teasing, which further influences adolescent appearance concerns and leads to social pressure to conform.

From a South African perspective, Mchiza (2017) highlights body image dissatisfaction among adolescents. South Africa is a multi-cultural country and therefore adolescents from different backgrounds may have varied preferences for body size and image. However, Mchiza (2017) states that South African adolescents are heavily influenced by the Western cultures and therefore body dissatisfaction results as the Western culture emphasises thinness. Mchiza (2017) refers to a recent national survey done on adolescents. The South African National Health and Nutrition survey demonstrates that females aged 10 to 14 years have a negative body image. A large number of 68 percent maintain that they are overweight and 17 percent are attempting to diet. Although the survey has incorporated pre- and early adolescents, the results are alarming in knowing that body dissatisfaction starts from an early age and could become more pronounced as identity construction takes place.

### ***2.6.3 Adolescence and Narcissism***

Narcissism among adolescents is reflected in various research studies (Chua & Chang, 2016; Mascheroni et al., 2015; Siibak, 2009). It is important to explore why adolescents display narcissistic tendencies at an early age. A reason described by Pickhardt (2016) in an online article on Psychology Today, states that the beginning of puberty plays a role in the development of narcissistic tendencies. Sexual maturity arises as puberty causes changes in appearance and thus more time is devoted to self-evaluation and also preparation of the self to the outside world. If puberty brings about an increase in the self-evaluation of physical appearance, it would therefore be logical to assume that body image can have a direct link to

narcissism, as narcissism is concerned with physical appearance. As can be deduced from various research studies (Chua & Chang, 2016) adolescents are overly concerned about appearance which is a characteristic of a narcissist (Wang et al., 2018a). Furthermore, the adolescent is often ill-equipped to master and integrate the changes of puberty and is therefore concerned with the need to fit in and belong, in order to adapt to the changes (Erikson, 1968).

However, research by Twenge et al. (2012) highlights the generational differences between college students from three generational groups. Although this research by Twenge et al. does not focus on Gen Z, it provides insight into the changes over time. Their research suggests that narcissistic traits may be due to socio-cultural effects over time and not necessarily due to puberty as Pickhardt (2016) has suggested. Twenge et al. (2012) looked at generational changes in the sense of community, with specific interest in extrinsic and intrinsic values. Intrinsic values refer to one's actualisation and growth such as self-acceptance, affiliation, and community, while extrinsic values focus on money, fame, and appearance. Extrinsic values are very much similar to narcissistic traits (Wang et al., 2018b). The research by Twenge et al. (2012) compared the Boomer generational group (born 1943-1961), Gen X (born 1961-1981), and the Millennial generational group (born 1982-1999).

Three aspects were measured among the three generational groups, i.e., life goals, concern for others, and civic orientation which refers to a sense of community. The analysis of the data found that the younger generation did not strongly value a sense of community in comparison to the Boomer generation. The younger generation viewed goals concerned with fame, money, and appearance as more important than self-acceptance, affiliation, and community. Furthermore, the younger generation showed less interest towards collective or personal change and instead showed more of an interest to themselves. This stance taken by the younger generation can be viewed as Generation "Me", where the extrinsic materialistic culture emphasises money and image as more valued. These results are similar to the narcissistic individual where image and fame are valued over empathy and concern for others (Wang et al., 2018b). Research by Siibak (2009) highlights that fame and image are important to the adolescent on social networking sites. The analysis of the research shows that popularity on social networking sites is determined by appearance and also a large number of friends on these sites. However, in contrast to the research of Twenge et al. (2012), other researchers posit that generational differences do not exist, and any change of reference

is an illusion caused by older people's shifting frame of reference or mistaking development changes for generational changes (Trzesniewski & Donnellan, 2010). These authors believed that the young people are very similar to those in the 1970s.

Twenge et al. (2012) focused on Millennials as the earliest generation, while in the current study, the focus is on Gen Z. These authors state that Gen Z could return to more intrinsic values, or extrinsic values could continue as long as cultural forces such as media or education remain consistent in their message. However, from various research studies, there is evidence that Gen Z is still very extrinsic in their values (Chua & Chang, 2016; Mascheroni et al., 2015).

With reference to the current research, the selfie, together with social networking use, have the possibility to exacerbate narcissism in the adolescent. In the USA, Carpenter (2012) conducted a survey, measuring self-promoting behaviours on Facebook (posting status updates and images of oneself) as well as anti-social behaviours (seeking social support, becoming angry when people do not comment on one's statuses). The study comprised 294 participants with 74.1% consisting of the younger generation. The survey comprised subscales of the NPI, measuring grandiose exhibitionism (GE) and entitlement/exploitativeness (EE). GE includes traits such as self-absorption, vanity, superiority, and exhibitionist tendencies, while EE includes a sense of deserving respect and manipulating and taking advantage of others. An analysis of the results showed that individuals were rated higher on GE and in self-promoting behaviours, thus further highlighting the importance of appearance. These individuals were found to have more friends on Facebook (highlighting the need for fame or fitting in) and tagged themselves more often on photos and status updates. Similar characteristics to that of GE were also identified in research studies involving adolescents (Chua & Chang, 2016; Mascheroni et al., 2015; Siibak, 2009).

#### **2.6.4 *Adolescence and Self-Esteem***

Adolescence is considered to be a major rollercoaster with developmental changes playing a role in affecting self-esteem. There are various stages in a lifespan from childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and late adulthood. Taking these life stages into account, an important finding by Robins, Trzesniewski, Tracy, Gosling, and Potter (2002) was that there was a sharp decline in adolescent's self-esteem, as compared to the two life stages before and after,

which are childhood and adulthood. This is an important finding for the current research as the focus is on adolescents' self-esteem in relation to the selfie on social networking sites.

The research study done by Robins et al. (2002) examined the trajectory of self-esteem across one's lifespan. Self-esteem was examined in ages from nine to 90, using a cross-sectional data collected from over 300,000 individuals on the internet. The decline of self-esteem found during adolescence was the same for every demographic sub-group and was attributed to various factors such as puberty, cognitive changes, as well as social changes associated with the transition from primary school to high school.

Furthermore, gender differences provide factors that might underlie the decline associated in adolescence. Both male and female adolescents displayed similar self-esteem levels in childhood. However, with the onset of adolescence, a considerable gap emerged which was significant for every sub-group in the research study. The gap which emerged was stronger for females than for males, as the physical changes which occurred during puberty had a more profound effect on girls than on boys.

#### ***2.6.4.1 Body Image and Self-Esteem in Adolescence.***

As adolescents find themselves in the identity search process, self-awareness, self-consciousness, and introspection of oneself increase, leading to a preoccupation with self-image and a focus on physical appearance. The concern for social connections is further reflected in their struggle to control their image which they convey to others.

The relationship between body image dissatisfaction and self-esteem is highlighted in a longitudinal study by Tiggemann (2005) where 300 adolescent girls from Australia between grades 8 and 10 participated in the study and were then invited to participate again two years later. The questionnaires were matched across time to note the changes with body dissatisfaction and self-esteem.

An analysis of the research found that girls who were heavier in weight and who also perceived themselves as heavier, were associated with a decrease in self-esteem over the two-year period. It is interesting to note that at the age of 14 there was no relation between the body mass index and self-esteem, but two years later, at age 16, heavier girls had a lower

self-esteem. There were many factors that could have contributed to the changes in self-esteem in later adolescence. Tiggemann (2005) states that the adolescents may have received more negative social feedback, although a heightened self-awareness may have led them to be more critical.

There were similar findings in an Italian research done by Gatti, Ionio, Traficante, and Confalonieri (2014). The research was not longitudinal in nature like that of Tiggemann (2005), but the aim was similar in that the study wanted to better understand whether body image perception and satisfaction influence self-esteem among adolescents. The study incorporated 242 adolescents (both male and female) between the ages of 11 and 17. The researchers in the study administered questionnaires and utilised the “Drawing Me” test to obtain data on body image and self-esteem. The “Drawing Me” test gave the students the chance to draw how they felt about their bodies. This graphic representation provided further information to the researchers regarding how adolescents felt about their bodies.

An analysis of the results from the research of Gatti et al. (2014) found that girls are more dissatisfied with their body images, specifically with their weight and appearance, and that it influences their self-esteem. This increased their chances of engaging in dysfunctional eating behaviours. Boys on the other hand were influenced by their height and the opinion of others based on their bodily appearance. These factors influenced their self-esteem levels. The final outcome of the study was that body dissatisfaction leads to low self-esteem with girls worrying more than boys about body image.

#### ***2.6.4.2 Social and Psychological Effects of Self-Esteem in Adolescence.***

As described by various research studies such as Chua and Chang (2016) and Mascheroni et al., (2015), the peer group plays a critical role in influencing the adolescent. The various developmental changes that are faced by adolescents revolve around their social environment. The relationship that adolescents have with their peers acts as a source of social support, but this relationship can also be a source of interpersonal stress. Interpersonal stress can result when one tries to maintain and build relationships which are struggling to materialise, thus affecting the need to belong, which is critical for adolescents’ identity formation. Social support can therefore impact self-esteem. However, in the context of social relationships, it is

important to discover whether self-esteem is a cause of social support or a consequence thereof.

A four-year Australian longitudinal research study undertaken by Marshall, Parker, Ciarrochi, and Heaven (2014), highlights how self-esteem influences an adolescent's worldview. The study includes a five-wave design to clarify the directional nature of the relations between adolescent self-esteem and their perceptions regarding social support. The findings suggest that, how adolescents feel about themselves, influences their perception of social support quality as well as social support network size. In this regard the consequence model which suggests that positive social support produces higher self-esteem was not supported. Instead, self-esteem was regarded as a cause of social support. Contrasting to this were the results of the research by Asendorpf and Van Aken (2003), where they also carried out a longitudinal study among teenagers, but in this research the consequence model was supported, finding that relationship quality predicted self-esteem among adolescents. If the research studies by Marshall et al. (2014) and Asendorpf and Van Aken (2003) were both related to studies on social networking sites and the selfie, then the results of the research by the latter would concur with that of the former. In various research studies such as Siibak (2009) and Chua and Chang (2016), the adolescent girls felt negative about themselves when they did not receive the expected social support on social networking sites. This result therefore shows that self-esteem is a consequence of social support. The current research differs from both these research studies in that it is not longitudinal in nature and the main focus is not on social support systems. However, the results from both studies provide important information regarding social support systems and self-esteem in adolescents.

#### ***2.6.4.3 Social Media, the Selfie and Self-Esteem among Adolescents.***

There are mixed research results regarding the effect of social networking sites on adolescents' self-esteem. Research by Valkenburg and Peter (2009) has found an increase in self-esteem when adolescents use social networking sites. According to these researchers, adolescents join Facebook because they have friends who are already members. They therefore do not join to meet strangers. For them, Facebook connects adolescents as they facilitate communication and interaction with each other. According to these authors, social networking sites through the use of profiles (selfies) and friend networks enhance the way in which adolescents share information about themselves and their lives. These positive interactions

lead to an improved self-esteem. According to Erikson (1950), peers form an important aspect in the adolescent's life. The need to connect with friends is therefore bigger than the need to connect with parents.

In contrast to this research by Valkenburg and Peter (2009), earlier research by Valkenburg, Peter, and Schouten (2006) shows that adolescents not only use social networking sites to connect with peers but also to make new friends as well as engaging in romantic relationships. This aspect also highlights the adolescent's need to belong. This need to belong can impact the adolescent's self-esteem on social networking sites. In the Dutch research by Valkenberg et al. (2006) among 881 adolescents, it was found that feedback on profile pictures impacted self-esteem. Negative feedback which was experienced by 5.6 percent of participants led to a decrease in self-esteem, while positive feedback experienced by 78 percent caused an increase in self-esteem. The feedback from their online community thus affected their identity construction which is an important aspect in the world of the adolescent. As Erikson (1968) stated, peers become important sources in the identity construction process as they help the adolescent to identify their "real me". The community, which in this case would be the online community, provides recognition and contribution to an individual's sense of self. Taking this statement into account, the feedback as highlighted by Valkenberg et al. (2006) impacts their sense of self. The results of the research by Valkenberg et al. (2006) are already echoed by Harter (1999) who states that peer acceptance and interpersonal feedback on the self are important predictors of self-esteem and wellbeing in adolescence.

Despite the positive and negative aspects of social networking sites on self-esteem, there is also research which yields no significant relation between online activity and psychological wellbeing (Gross, Juvonen & Gable, 2002).

The feedback obtained on a selfie can thus be regarded as a critical factor in the increase or decrease of self-esteem (Valkenberg et al., 2006). It is this feedback which drives adolescents to the quest for perfection through self-presentation online (Chua & Chang, 2016). As stated by Erikson (1968), adolescents must be able to separate themselves from this dependency on their peers in order for them to attain a mature identity. In the case of online behaviours, adolescents must separate themselves from the feedback obtained on their selfies. Failure to

do so will lead to a pre-occupation to obtain self-worth from peers which in turn can be self-destructive.

## **2.7 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter explored relevant literature on the selfie and the relation between the selfie and self-esteem, body image, and narcissism among adolescents. To have a better understanding of the selfie, the chapter described the stages prior to the selfie phenomenon which includes the rise of the internet, social media, and social networking sites. Reasons were explored as to why people capture selfies and the possible psychological effects thereof.

The current research will explore the adolescent and the psychological effect of the selfie on them, when it is posted onto social media. It is therefore important to explore the psychology of the adolescent and their relationship with body image, narcissism, and self-esteem. This chapter explored these relationships and the possible psychological effects that these constructs have on the individual.

The following chapter will discuss the theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the research study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

This chapter will describe the theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the study. The aim of the two frameworks is to make the research more meaningful, giving purpose to the research, and ensuring the generalisability and rigor of the findings (Adom, Hussein & Agyem, 2018).

The theoretical framework to be explored is based on an existing theory in the field of inquiry which is related to the main aims of the study, while the conceptual framework presents a holistic way of viewing the problem under study through the exploration of concepts, research, and important theories (Adom et al., 2018).

The theoretical and conceptual framework will now be discussed.

#### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

In this phenomenological study of adolescents' selfie perceptions, I will apply the theoretical framework of social constructionism. This section will first discuss modernism and then postmodernism which saw the rise of social constructionism. Constructionism and social constructionism will then be discussed and contrasted, and thereafter the social construction of reality by Berger and Luckmann (1967) will be discussed in relation to the current study.

##### ***3.1.1 Understanding Modernism and Postmodernism***

Modernism can be described as a philosophical movement dating back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Three assumptions are considered to be important to modernism which are reductionism, linear causality, and neutral objectivity. Reductionism refers to compartmentalising a complex phenomenon, objectively analysing the individual parts to better understand these parts holistically, and how they fit together (Gergen, 2009). Linear causality is a keystone in the reductionist approach and is an interaction between elements where there is a direct link between one phenomenon that is the "cause" and another phenomenon that is the "effect", with the cause always preceding the effect. By tracing cause and effect events in

history, an individual will then have a better understanding of the current phenomenon (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). The process of linear causality, like the reductionist view, results in a simplistic view of the individual in which behaviour is objectively studied. Through the process of reductionism and linear causality, knowledge is provided that is an accurate presentation of objective reality leading to a reality, a truth which is independent of our thinking (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). Modernism thus encourages a quest for “truth” or “reality”.

However, unlike modernism which focuses on objective principles, postmodernism saw a move towards social consciousness focusing on multiple belief systems and perspectives (Gonzalez, Biever & Gardener, 1994). Postmodernism holds the basic premise that a true reality does not exist, as people possess multiple realities and selves that are socially constructed in the context of varied cultures and changing relationships (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). According to the postmodern view, the individual is embedded in their historical context, but is also influenced by present relationships with a linguistic focus on the social construction of reality (Becvar & Becvar, 2003). The role of language is thus the medium in which individuals learn and construct their reality and without this, there is no conversation, and without conversation there would be no knowledge created about the world.

Constructionism and social constructionism have its origins in the philosophical stance of postmodernism, as these two frameworks saw a move away from the limitations of modernism. Constructionism and social constructionism are similar in that both approaches assume that people cannot directly perceive an objective reality, but they rather construct their view of the world, based on knowledge that they already possess. Although this similarity exists, a distinction still needs to be made as these approaches also have their differences (Burr, 2015). The next section will differentiate between constructionism and social constructionism.

### ***3.1.2 Constructionism and Social Constructionism***

Constructionism focuses on an individual who constructs their reality from beliefs formed about the self and the world, where people create their own meaning and construct their own “rules” and “mental models” through experience, thus implying that all stories are equally valid and that no single “truth” or interpretation really exists (Burr, 2015).

Constructionism, however, lacks the social aspect in the creation of meaning and therefore this approach was expanded to include the social and cultural role in influencing the way in which the individual perceives their world, thus leading to the postmodern theoretical stance known as social constructionism (Dickerson & Zimmerman, 1996).

Social constructionism focuses on reality being collectively created through human experience. Reality is therefore socially constructed, leaving no room for objective reality (Burr, 2015). What we know about the world is not learned from scratch, but is rather related to knowledge that already exists, having been shaped socially and culturally. New ideas are combined with old ideas through social engagements, leading to a new experience. Taking this statement into account, from a social constructionism perspective, an individual's world will always be subjective, as experience will be interpreted through different pre-existing frameworks of understanding, and each individual will therefore develop their own unique truth, influenced by their culture. With individuals having their own version of truth, it suggests that social constructionism allows for multiple realities, as no two individuals will have exactly the same view of the world. Social constructionism prefers stories based on a lived experience rather than on expert knowledge.

Social constructionism views people as existing through language which is sustained and generated through social interaction. Meaning through language is thus found in understanding how ideas and attitudes are developed over time within a social community context. The aim of social constructionism is therefore to deconstruct individual stories and examine these stories to make alternative choices available, thus encouraging individuals to tell their own stories. Influenced by social constructionism, sociologists Berger and Luckmann (1967) introduced the term "social construction" to social sciences. The work of these sociologists will now be discussed as the interpretative framework for the current study.

### ***3.1.3 The Social Construction of Reality by Berger and Luckmann***

Berger and Luckmann (1967) introduced the term "social constructionism" to social sciences and were influenced by the social phenomenological approach of philosopher and social phenomenologist, Alfred Schutz (1899-1959). According to De Jesus, Capalbo, Merighi, De Oliveira, Tocantins, Rodrigues, and Ciuffo (2013), the structure of reality as explained by Schutz's social phenomenology, emphasises the social relationship as a key factor in the

interpretation of meanings of the individual's world. Similarly, the main idea highlighted by Berger and Luckmann (1967) is that the knowledge which we possess about the world is created by the interaction inside our environment.

The "reality of everyday life" is an important concept in social constructionism where everyday life as the social world was inhabited by individuals who were structured prior to our existence. This definition of everyday life therefore implies that the world is objectified through human subjectivity (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The everyday world presents itself as an intersubjective world and it would not exist without communication and interaction with other individuals. An intersubjective world can be described as men and women co-existing, not only in the physical sense, but also with a similar consciousness, allowing individuals from different backgrounds to function and interact. A lack of this intersubjectivity, social order, and interaction would result in a breakdown, hence instability (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

The objective reality of everyday life, according to Berger and Luckmann (1967), is formed through habituation, referring to an action that is regularly repeated and eventually develops into a pattern. As described by Berger and Luckmann (1967:71), "Habituation further implies that the action in question may be performed again in future, in the same manner and with the same economical effort". In other words, when individuals produce an action repeatedly, whether social or non-social, it becomes a habit and is thus typified. The term "typification", also created by Schutz (1970), refers to the process of creating common definitions and is based on common actions that have been acted out in the past.

Once the creation of the "habit" is shared by society, it then becomes embedded in individuals, resulting in what Berger and Luckmann (1967) term, an "institution". An institution does not develop from nothing as it first needs to be constructed by a habitual process which is then shared by members of society. The social world therefore influences people, resulting in habituation and thus institutionalisation. The intersubjective world further enables human institutions and culture to produce stability. As individuals play their roles, they participate in the social reality which is made meaningful and subjectively plausible to all its members. The process by which this is achieved is referred to as legitimation (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

The need for legitimation arises when the objectified institution has to be transmitted from one generation to another. Berger and Luckmann (1967) state that legitimation restores this broken link by “explaining” and “justifying”, as it not only tells the individual why they should perform a specific action and not another one, but it also tells individuals why things are the way they are.

The creation of an objective reality and an institution can further be explained as a process of externalisation, objectification, and internalisation (Berger & Luckmann 1967). These three concepts highlight how people create society and how people are created by society.

As discussed above, an institutional world already exists and is experienced as an objective reality in externalisation. People with varied perspectives interact with each other, access knowledge of others, share knowledge, and make their subjective knowledge known. Simply stated, when people externalise, they are acting to the world. For example, they may have an idea and by externalising the idea, they are telling their story. In this case, the story enters the social realm and produces a life of its own.

Objectivation refers to how institutions are created, how people form a standard social construction (typification) for the activities in which they engage, and how people habitualise these typifications into their institutionalised roles. Simply stated again, when individuals externalise their ideas, it becomes an object of consciousness for them in society and develops a factual existence of truth (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). The institution is therefore external to the individual and cannot be removed. To understand the institutional world, individuals must go out and learn what they would like to know.

The final process is internalisation and refers to how subjective reality arises. The process of internalisation is completed through intergenerational transmission. Internalisation means “[t]he immediate apprehension or interpretation of an objective event as expressing meaning, that is, as a manifestation of another’s subjective processes which thereby becomes subjectively meaningful to myself” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967:129). In this case, future generations will be born into a world where the idea already exists. Thus, the individual is now acquiring the knowledge and a social identity associated with the institutional role, subjectively crystallising society, identity, and reality.

For reality to be subjectively meaningful to individuals, they must become members of society through primary and secondary socialisation. Socialisation can be divided into two parts: Primary socialisation which is considered to be the most important, begins in childhood where the child is actively involved in internalising information from their environment and constructing their own interpretations of the world. It is at this stage that one becomes a member of society. In the process of primary socialisation, one does not choose significant others, but they are rather imposed on the individual, creating imposed “stocks of knowledge”. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), “stocks of knowledge” are what we collected from our experience in our everyday world through our shared social reality which is based on an intersubjective stock of knowledge. In secondary socialisation, the individual is already a socialised member, but is now introduced to new sectors of the objective world of society (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Information acquired through secondary socialisation is acquired in a more conscious way.

In order for the process of socialisation and internalisation to take place, everyday life must be maintained through language which is the most important medium for face-to-face interaction. Without language, functioning in a complex system would be impossible (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Language becomes an essential part of our existence which is reflected in the following passage: “The common objectifications of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic signification. Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life” (Berger & Luckmann, 1967:37). Our beliefs about the world are thus social inventions.

#### ***3.1.4 The Social Construction of Reality in Relation to the Current Study***

Relating the adolescent to the interpretative framework of social constructionism, the adolescent is regarded as a by-product of social forces, experienced in their everyday world. The social forces referred to are the cultural and historical interchanges among people. These interchanges involve the adolescent, their significant others, the society to which they belong, and the social interactions involved. The interchanges are described by Berger and Luckmann (1967) as the intersubjective everyday world. The everyday world of the adolescent will be explored during the interview process where open-ended questions through the interviewing process will facilitate the exploration of the adolescent’s world in relation to the selfie. In this

way, the participant will be free to describe their own experiences. Social constructionism was the most applicable interpretative framework as the study is phenomenological in nature.

For the adolescent, the selfie developed from an institution and thus became objective reality. In becoming an objective reality, the selfie becomes a given of what one should do when using social networking sites. This idea of the selfie will then be passed down to adolescents in the future. Adolescents internalise the concept of the selfie and through socialisation, they make the selfie subjectively meaningful to themselves.

An important aspect in the socialisation process as outlined by Berger and Luckmann (1967) is that of conversation. The construction of reality would not be possible without conversation, as new conversations produce new realities. Therefore, when an adolescent receives feedback from peers on a selfie, it will play an important role in how they construct their reality with the presentation of the selfie. Constructionism is further relevant for the current study in order to understand the multiple realities and personal stories that make up adolescents' experiences of the selfie. Multiple realities of each individual convey that each adolescent will experience the selfie differently from another.

Social constructionism is further well suited to the current study, as the study is qualitative in nature. It is important to note that in this study, adolescents who come to the interview are already socialised within their context, having created a particular meaning of the selfie. These meanings will then be actively shared throughout the interview process with further realities created through conversation during each interview. The adolescent's understanding of the world is therefore not a product of the objective observation of the world, but of the social process and interactions in which people constantly engage with each other. The interview process therefore facilitates multiple realities.

In understanding that multiple realities exist, the current study will explore how each adolescent socially constructs self-esteem in the context of posting selfies. According to Hewitt (2002), self-esteem is a socially constructed emotion viewed within a social system where various expectations for appropriate behaviour are formed through a constant pattern of routines, norms, roles, and scripts for how people should behave. Similarly related to the social construction of reality by Berger and Luckmann, self-esteem can thus be regarded as a habit created into an institution through the intersubjectivity of everyday world (Berger &

Luckmann, 1967). The socially constructed concept of self-esteem, which can either be high or low, arises at different times and places under the influence of role requirements, embedded in a Western societal culture (Hewitt, 2002), thus confirming the cultural and historical impact that the society has on the construction of the self, as stated by Berger and Luckmann (1967). According to Hewitt (2002), self-esteem is influenced by aspects such as status, relationships, success or failure of socially prescribed goals, as well as the actual or imagined evaluative judgement of others. Taking this statement into account, the selfie will therefore have an impact on self-esteem as relationships, socially prescribed goals, and judgements by others are affected by the selfie (Chua & Chang, 2016). Self-esteem is therefore dependent upon the situation, as well as the demands of the situation, suggesting that people manage their self-esteem in the same ways that they would manage other emotions (Hewitt, 2002).

However, in order for self-esteem to be considered as socially constructed, the process of socialisation becomes important. According to Berger and Luckmann (1967), internalisation of an institution will take place through socialisation. Socialisation takes place among individuals who define, describe, and evaluate themselves in terms of a group and apply these group norms to their behaviour (Hewitt, 2002). An adolescent therefore, belonging to a social networking group, would behave in a similar way to others on social networking sites, aiding in socialisation. In this process of socialisation, the adolescent would then learn the values, norms, and required behaviours which would permit them to participate as members in an everyday world.

Given that self-esteem is socially constructed in an everyday world, the conceptual framework will now discuss the impact on self-esteem in relation to the selfie in a socially constructed world.

### **3.2 Conceptual Framework**

There are various social factors which can be related to the selfie and selfie-posting. These social factors impact self-esteem and lead to secondary emotional responses which can be psychologically harmful to the adolescent.

### **3.2.1 Self-Objectification**

The objectification theory states that when exposure to sexually objectifying cultural messages, specifically by women, takes place, they are socialised into adopting an external viewer's perspective of their own bodies, perceiving themselves as objects (Bell et al., 2018). A theory which is a precursor to self-objectification is the looking glass self which was created by Charles Cooley in 1902. This theory states that the self is developed through social construction and is reflected by how others view that individual (Cooley, 1902). Social media has played a key role in creating a number of mirrors through likes and positive comments on individuals' selfies. The feedback received on a posted selfie aids to the construction of the self and through the mirroring of others' comments, the individual sees themselves as valued and attractive and will thus continue to produce the behaviour of capturing objectified images (Bell et al., 2018).

The selfie can result in self-objectification when individuals capture and post selfies displaying body parts as a way to self-present and to show peers who they are as individuals (Tiggemann & Slater, 2015). In agreement, Bell et al. (2018) state that many objectified selfies posted on social media are ways to present the self positively. Self-presentation is thus an important aspect in self-objectification to establish a positive self-image.

Baumeister (1982) provides two self-presentational motives. The first motive is the need to please the audience or in this case, the social networking users. The second motive as to why individuals self-present is to move closer to the ideal self. The ideal self represents the self that the individual would most like to be. Individuals are not only motivated to become the ideal self but to show others that this is who they are. These two motives work together in order for the individual to be liked and to increase their self-esteem (Baumeister, 1982). According to Bell et al. (2018), individuals who self-objectify on social networking sites will fulfil both these objectives. This is particularly important for the adolescent who self-objectifies, as they are in the process of identity construction and thus have a stronger desire to be liked. Furthermore, similar to self-objectification, Baumeister and Jones (1978) discuss ingratiation as a reason why individuals self-present. Ingratiation can be defined in terms of convincing another individual of one's attractive qualities, leading individuals to self-present by making themselves look better. Editing of the selfie allows for ingratiation to take place, thus enhancing the objectified image.

On social networking sites, responses to a viewed selfie are indicating that one is liked or perhaps not liked. The like feature on Instagram and Facebook is quantifiable and an unambiguous measure of positive audience feedback (Bell et al., 2018). Social reward through likes on social networking sites, specifically for younger people, is a strong motivator to continue with a specific behaviour. Taking this statement into account, it can be deduced that receiving more likes on an objectified image serves as a social reward and will increase the likelihood of the individual capturing and posting similar images in future. This is confirmed by research undertaken by Bell et al. (2018) which involved 86 young adult women with a mean age of 19 years. The analysis of participants' selfies found that the images were sexually suggestive exposing arms, cleavage, abs, or legs. More likes received on these objectified images compared to non-objectified images include a higher frequency of posting objectified images on social media. This research by Bell et al. (2018) did not comprise adolescents, which is what the current study comprises. However, adolescence is a time of transitions and identity formation as well as increased self-consciousness and a pre-occupation with appearance. Thus, this stage of development is more likely to be prone to self-objectification.

Objectified selfies can also result in mental health problems as highlighted by researchers Tiggemann and Slater (2015). The study by Tiggemann and Slater (2015) was undertaken in Australia where 204 pre-adolescent girls captured self-objectified selfies and posted these images onto social networking sites. These self-objectified images were associated with body shame, dieting as well as depressive symptoms. The two studies by Tiggemann and Slater (2015) and Bell et al. (2018) both comprised females. However, males are also subject to self-objectification. The male physique is portrayed in an objectified way which is illustrated in bare chested male models in magazines and adverts which in turn do have a direct impact on males making them more insecure about how they look (Tiggemann & Slater, 2015). An earlier study by Tiggemann and Slater (2015) found that self-objectification is a relevant concept with psychological consequences for adolescent females and males, although females still formed the majority when it comes to self-objectification.

The chronic comparison of one's own body with cultural standards of beauty is a recipe for shame. Social comparison is regarded as a self-improvement tool, as individuals compare themselves to similar others (Chua & Chang, 2016) and identify with favourable and unfavourable discrepancies (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). The adolescent is most prone to comparing the self with other adolescents whether in the offline or online world. A comparison

between the self and other adolescents' information about the self is provided, which includes capabilities as well as characteristics. Comparing the self with other individuals' self-objectified images therefore provides the adolescent with information on how to behave and what is socially acceptable.

The social comparison theory by Leon Festinger (1954) highlights two ways in which social comparison is applied. Adolescents will engage in an upward comparison when they compare themselves to individuals who are better than they are. Although this could serve to threaten the self, it also creates pressure for a continued advancement. In the case of self-objectification, the adolescent's upward comparison will take place when they compare the self with individuals who have more followers, more likes, or more positive comments. The need to fit in will arise, thus creating pressure to have the same status. In contrast, downward comparison refers to comparing the self with those who are inferior or worse off than the self. This behaviour serves to protect the self and makes one feel better about the self which leads to a positive self-image. In this regard, when teenagers notice an individual on a social networking site with less likes and positive comments on a selfie, it makes the adolescent viewing the selfie feel better about themselves.

From the discussion above, self-objectification is prominent in the selfie, aiding in self-presentation behaviours due to social comparison with others on social media. Although individuals receive an immediate reward through positive feedback, there are long-term effects associated with posting objectified images. The selfie can therefore be psychologically harmful to the individual when images are objectified.

### **3.2.2 *Cyberbullying***

Cyberbullying can be defined as a form of bullying which takes place when using modern technology such as mobile phones and computers, with social networking sites being the primary platform for cyberbullying (Berne, Frisen & King, 2014). According to Field (2018), cyberbullying takes place when there is an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim and where there is repeated aggression and harm done to an individual using electronic devices.

A form of cyberbullying which has a direct relation with the selfie is appearance-related cyberbullying which is directed at one's physical appearance. Appearance-related cyberbullying is directed at one's style which could include aspects like clothing, hairstyle, or aspects like weight or even the shape of one's nose (Berne et al. 2014).

For the adolescent in particular, body image and overall appearance are important. Adolescents do not only strive for popularity, but also for acceptance from their peers (Berne et al. 2014). As discussed previously, social networking sites exacerbate the need for popularity and acceptance through self-presentation and social comparison. Therefore, the risk of appearance-related cyberbullying increases.

Cassidy, Jackson, and Brown (2009) produced one of the first studies to find a link with appearance-related cyberbullying. Their Canadian study focused on middle school students aged 11 to 15 years, as this group of individuals are more inclined to partake in online bullying behaviour and cyberspace victimisation. The study incorporated both male and female participants who were asked open-ended and closed-ended questions regarding cyberbullying. In answering open-ended questions, 95 percent of the participants claimed that students are more likely to be cyberbullied due to their physical appearance and unpopularity. As discussed by Berne et al. (2014), these two aspects are important to adolescents, particularly in their identity formation. In the closed-ended questions, 34 percent of the participating students claimed that they were harassed because of their physical appearance (specifically weight and size).

This research suggests that the selfie can be a vehicle which facilitates cyberbullying. The main aim of the selfie is to visually present the self, thus showcasing one's appearance, which is then posted onto social media, which in turn places individuals at risk for appearance-related cyberbullying (Barry et al. 2017). This is confirmed by the Swedish research done by Berne et al. (2014) where 27 adolescents, both male and female, participated in focus groups where information was gathered on appearance and cyberbullying. One of the themes that was highlighted, is that girls in particular seek attention on social networking sites through their appearance, therefore increasing the possibility of appearance-related cyberbullying. The participants related that appearance is the most important aspect in the online world where receiving likes on an image and obtaining acknowledgement are important for females. This behaviour puts them at risk to be bullied. The promotion of appearance was more

important for girls than for boys. Furthermore, it was found that mainly females try to live up to appearance ideals, hence increasing the possibility of appearance-related cyberbullying. The girls in the focus group explained that there is an ideal appearance regarding how one should look. This appearance ideal has been socially constructed through the media and commercials. Society has also made the adolescents believe that boys need to be lean and muscular while girls need to be thin (Berne et al. 2014). When the girls received likes and positive comments, they felt that they were close to this ideal.

The selfie is not only responsible for showcasing appearance but allowing girls to move close to their appearance ideal by editing their images (Chua & Chang, 2016). From this we can deduce that the selfie puts adolescents at risk for cyberbullying. The girls in the research by Berne et al. (2014) reasoned that if they shared a selfie which met their ideals, they would receive appreciation. They were also very much aware that they were placing themselves at risk for appearance-related cyberbullying.

The study by Berne et al. (2014) highlighted that females are more susceptible to cyberbullying due to having a focus on appearance. However, in the focus groups, girls and boys were separated, which could be regarded as a limitation to the research. Perhaps mixing both genders would have yielded different results. However, that research filled a gap in the literature by addressing appearance-related cyberbullying among adolescents.

Given that appearance is important and puts adolescents at risk for appearance-related cyberbullying, the question that needs to be asked is, “What does this do for one’s self-esteem regarding body image?” Research by Frisen, Berne, and Lunde (2014) focused on body esteem (how people feel about their appearance) in relation to cyberbullying by administering a questionnaire to 572 girls and 577 boys. An analysis of the data found that victims of cyberbullying reported a poor body esteem compared to those who were not bullied. Poor body esteem was also found to have adverse consequences such as eating disorders.

To be cyberbullied because of one’s body image, creates the urge for the adolescent to seek perfection in order to obtain appreciation. However, the psychological consequences can be extreme, resulting in suicidal ideation and even suicide. In a large study of 20,406 adolescents, the negative effects of cyberbullying were bigger than the effects of traditional bullying in terms of suicide attempts (Schneider, O’Donnell, Stueve & Coulter, 2012). The cyber-

bullied students were three to four times more likely to attempt suicide than non-bullied students. According to Field (2018), cyberbullying is regarded as more severe than traditional bullying, as the negative comments are seen by a wider audience, and it can be viewed repeatedly and even shared.

The secondary responses of cyberbullying such as eating disorders (Frisen et al., 2014) and suicide ideation (Schneider et al., 2012) are detrimental to the adolescent who is in the process of identity construction. Technology and the selfie can thus be harmful in this way and can potentially harm one's self-esteem.

### **3.2.3 *Perfectionism and Narcissism***

The concept of perfectionism can be described as having unrealistically high standards and striving to be faultless (Smith, Sherry, Chen, Saklofske, Flett & Hewitt, 2016). A widely researched model of perfectionism (trait perfectionism) is proposed by Hewitt and Flett (1991) who posit three forms of perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism refers to individuals demanding perfection of themselves. Other oriented perfectionism refers to a demanding perfection of others, while socially prescribed perfectionism refers to others demanding perfection of themselves. Supplementing this concept of trait perfectionism are the studies done by Flett, Hewitt, Blankstein, and Gray (1998) and Hewitt, Flett, Sherry, Habke, Parkin, Lam, McMurtry, Eidger, Fairlie, and Stein (2003) who propose perfectionistic self-presentation and perfectionistic cognitions.

Perfectionistic self-presentation (PSP) is broken into three elements. The first is perfectionistic self-promotion which refers to promoting a perfect image to others. Non-disclosure of imperfections refers to a concern about verbally disclosing an imperfection to others, and lastly, non-display of imperfection refers to a concern over behavioural displays of imperfection to others. PSP involves a social expression of perfectionism and can therefore be expressed on social media where self-presentation is already dominant among adolescents (Chae, 2017). As we are aware, the selfie is used as a self-presentational tool (Chae, 2017) with the aim of presenting a perfect image (Chua & Chang, 2016). One can therefore deduce that a level of PSP exists. Furthermore, adolescents will go to the extent of removing selfies if they are not perfect or if they do not receive the responses that they hoped for (Chua & Chang, 2016).

Perfectionistic cognition takes place privately on an interpersonal level and involves automatic thoughts that would be typical of a perfectionist, such as self-criticism and thoughts involving the discrepancy between the actual and ideal self. This is similar to the adolescents who take selfies as they are self-critical of their appearance, if they do not receive the acknowledgment that they expect on social media. Furthermore, due to the discrepancy between the actual and ideal self on social media, adolescents will even succumb to self-harming out of frustration (Chua & Chang, 2016).

Given that the selfie urges one to be perfect on social networking sites to obtain the desired response, the issue of narcissism arises. According to Morf and Rhodewalt (2001), a narcissist engages in strategic self-regulatory behaviours as a means of building and maintaining a positive image. A positive image is desired in order to be validated and admired. Self-enhancement therefore becomes the primary goal for the narcissist (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001).

There is therefore a relationship between narcissism and perfectionism. Morf and Rhodewalt (2001) describe perfectionism as an interpersonal strategy used as a means of protecting and enhancing a narcissistic self-esteem. Ronningstam (2010) theorised that a narcissist's grandiose self-concept comprises a sense of worthlessness which creates the urge to portray an image of perfection in order to gain respect and admiration, while Flett, Sherry, Hewitt, and Nepon (2014) found that a perfectionistic self-presentation and cognition display a strong association with grandiosity and vulnerability.

According to Smith et al. (2016), narcissistic grandiosity and vulnerability differ in expression. Grandiosity is the pursuit of interpersonal power and control with a high need of self-importance and a sense of entitlement, while vulnerability comprises defensiveness and insecurity, leading to feelings of worthlessness and negative effect. A research study by Paramboukis, Skues, and Wise (2016) was done on the relationship between narcissism, self-esteem, and Instagram usage. The study found a subtle difference between grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism after 200 individuals completed an online survey. Although both types of narcissism engage in attention seeking behaviours, vulnerable narcissism is more likely to obtain positive feedback for validation in order to boost self-esteem, while individuals with grandiose narcissism already have a high self-esteem. Similarly, Smith et al. (2016) analysed 30 research studies that explored the relation between narcissism and

perfection. The meta-analysis showed a clear link between perfection and narcissism and suggested that grandiose narcissists strive towards unrealistic demands from others and promote an image of perfection. Vulnerable narcissists promote an image of infallibility, while hiding imperfections in response to the perceptions of others. Vulnerable narcissists thus seem to have a low self-esteem (Paramboukis et al., 2016) and are more likely to use selfies in order to gain approval.

So, what does the link between perfection and narcissism mean for the adolescent selfie-taker? Social media is playing a key role to increase our need to meet cultural modes of perfection. Adolescents who already possess popularity on social media will strive to maintain this status of popularity while those adolescents who do not have the same popularity, have to self-enhance in order to meet society's idea of perfection (Wickel, 2015). According to Wickel (2015), this need for validation that adolescents possess, only leads to inflated vanity and hence narcissism. It can therefore be deduced that the more perfect the selfie that is posted in order to receive attention and validation, the more narcissistic does the individual become in constantly trying to meet this perfection.

Furthermore, similar to the selfie-taker who is concerned about their physical appearance, the narcissist is also concerned about physical appearance and how they appear to others (Smith et al., 2016). The perfectionist in turn is overly concerned about their appearance which is highlighted in research by Fitzpatrick, Sherry, Hartling, Hewitt, Flett, and Sherry (2011). In their research, there was a link found between perfectionistic self-presentation and considering cosmetic surgery. The concern with self-presentation elevated the need for cosmetic surgery as perfectionists display self-scrutiny, a need for approval, as well as unrealistic expectations which are similar to those of the selfie-taker, and force individuals to be more self-aware of their appearance due to the number of images that were taken.

The selfie can therefore increase perfectionism and narcissism which is further highlighted in research undertaken by Swansea University. The University completed a four-month study which assessed the use of social media (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat) among 74 individuals aged 18 to 34. Those who used social media excessively through posting visual images, displayed a 25 percent increase in narcissistic traits. Those who had verbal postings did not show the same increase. This sample can be taken as representative of the population. Therefore, 20 percent of people may be at risk of developing narcissistic traits

associated with their excessive visual social media cues (Reed, Birçek, Osborne, Viganò & Truzoli, 2018).

Apart from the selfie that increases perfectionism and narcissism, it is also true that individuals who are already narcissistic are more likely to post more selfies. The adolescent who is already a narcissist, regards social media as an outlet to present the self and obtain feedback from others (Singh & Tripathi, 2016). These individuals are more likely to post selfies, as a narcissist spends more time editing images and selecting the most attractive images for social media (Kapidzic, 2013) which often tends to be more revealing (De Wall, Buffardi, Bonser & Campbell, 2011), further suggesting sexual objectification among the narcissists.

The effects of perfectionism and narcissism also lead to secondary responses which affect individuals on a psychological level. According to Curran and Hill (2019), socially prescribed perfectionism is linked to anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. In socially prescribed perfectionism, individuals believe that their social context is excessively demanding. They believe that because others will judge them harshly, they should display perfection to secure approval. This is similar to the selfie-taker in that they do not want to be judged harshly by others on social media and will even go as far as deleting a selfie, should it not receive the desired responses (Chua & Chang, 2016).

According to Curran and Hill (2019), anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation are linked to this form of perfectionism. Furthermore, self-oriented perfectionism is also linked to depression and eating disorders. Self-oriented perfectionism occurs when individuals attach an importance to being perfect and hold unrealistic expectations of themselves. Given that perfectionism psychologically impacts individuals, it is also disturbing to note that perfectionism has increased by at least 33 percent from 1989 to 2016, as stated in research by Curran and Hill (2019) when they studied more than 40,000 college students.

#### **3.2.4 *Self-Identity, Social Media, and the Selfie***

The self-concept or identity provides answers to the question, “Who am I?” and is formed through competence and resolution of life phase conflicts as outlined by the developmental stages by Erikson (1950). It is through our life experiences and relationships that our identity is formed, highlighting the identity as a social force, reacting to the behaviour and per-

ceptions of others (Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012). In the case of the current research, social media are a community with which the individual constantly interacts and in turn influence their social identity (Fullwood et al., 2016).

Social identity forms part of the self-concept, as the self interacts with various contexts, taking into account its values and norms (Oyserman et al., 2012). A social identity is fulfilled when individuals belong to various groups which are sources of pride and self-esteem, creating a sense of belonging to the world which is critical for the adolescent who struggles to find their place in society and the answer to the question, “Who am I?” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In terms of our social identity, Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposes that there are three mental processes involved when evaluating others as part of the in-group (belongingness) and out-group (lack of belonging), which in turn directly affects identity. The first mental process is categorisation in which individuals assign others to different categories in order to understand the social environment and to tell us something about that person. In the online world, people can be categorised as popular or unpopular, which is shown through likes on a selfie or followers on a profile. The second mental process is social identification, which takes place when an individual adopts the identity of the group leading to an increase in self-esteem. The last mental phase is social comparison: Once we become part of a group, we then compare ourselves to others in order to maintain self-esteem. Similarly, in the online world we identify with popular individuals and produce behaviour similar to them in order to obtain the desired response. We then engage in social comparison with others to maintain our self-esteem. By receiving this acknowledgment that is similar to other popular individuals on social media, our sense of belonging is satisfied, and this impacts our social identity.

According to Oyserman et al. (2012), one of the basic goals of self-concept is to feel good about the self and to evaluate the self positively. Thus, the individual will engage in self-presentation, not only to create and maintain positivity, but to aid in group belongingness. Self-presentation is used as a tactic to present the ideal self. Baumeister (1982) highlights two self-presentational motives. As individuals we are motivated to self-present to please the public or audience or in this case, the online community. The second motive is the need to move closer to the ideal or desired self. Although we construct the ideal self, the audience plays a role in controlling the rewards offered to the individual in the form of likes and

positive comments. In order to obtain these rewards frequently, the individual will self-present in accordance with the values of the audience. This behaviour serves to increase their self-esteem, as the individual through self-presentation now feels desired and liked by others (Baumeister, 1982) and hence part of the in-group.

In relating Baumeister's motives of self-presentation to the online world, self-construction can take place more freely on social networking sites, as the online community does not see the actual self, but rather the ideal self (Baumeister, 1982). The online world therefore allows the adolescent greater freedom to experiment with construction and re-construction of the self (Fullwood et al., 2016). The construction of the self is especially important for the adolescent who is still in the process of finding themselves in the identity search process.

When we self-present on social media, a negative public evaluation takes place which can threaten the identity. In research done by Baumeister and Jones (1978), participants felt more obligated to be consistent with their reputations when public evaluations took place, whereas they did not conform that closely to the private evaluations. The findings of this study are important when it is related to the online world, as the online world is considered to be "public". Individuals will thus be motivated to conform to comments on their selfie, especially when the comments are negative in nature.

As discussed above, identity formation is a central developmental task for the adolescent. When an adolescent reaches identity achievement, a sense of wellbeing and a secure identity is experienced. This individual is then more confident in knowing their place and their direction in life. When this identity formation is disturbed, it can lead to what Erikson (1950) terms as role confusion, where individuals are not sure who they are and what they like. They feel disappointed and confused about their place in life, instead of having personal cohesiveness. According to Fullwood et al. (2016), adolescents who make more diverse self-presentations and present an online self which is inconsistent with the offline self, will possess a less stable self-concept. It is these adolescents that are constantly reconstructing the self and at the same time pleasing the audience or online community.

Online self-presentation can thus aid in identity construction. On the other hand, it can become maladaptive if this is the only way that the identity process takes place. Exploration still forms an important part of identity development. Adolescents who are able to answer the

question, “Who am I?”, have achieved an identity and do not feel the need to self-present in various ways. These individuals are more confident and present a version of the self where the actual and ideal self are congruent, thus producing a high self-esteem and stable self-concept (Fullwood et al., 2016).

### **3.2.5 Social Media and ADHD**

Attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a condition involving a persistent difficulty in sustaining attention, linked with hyperactivity and impulsivity (Ra, Cho & Stone, 2018). The onset of ADHD is originally thought to take place in childhood. There has, however, been recent evidence which demonstrates that it can also develop during adolescence or adulthood, being associated with adverse health and social outcomes (Caye, Rocha, Anselmi, Murray, Menezes, Barros, Goncalves, Wehrmeister, Jensen, Steinhausen, Swanson, Kieling & Rhode, 2016). In terms of social media, a meta-analysis of studies conducted from 1987 to 2011 found that the traditional forms of media were associated with ADHD related outcomes (Nikkelen, Valkenburg, Huizinga & Bushman, 2014). However, since then, technology has evolved and is now constantly available to individuals, providing greater stimulation.

Individuals who have ADHD, may be more prone to using social media. According to an online blog by Bailey (2018), social media sites are designed as such for people who have trouble focusing for long periods of time. Some of the downside effects of social media for those with ADHD, include a lack of productivity, as individuals can spend many hours on social media without achieving anything. Furthermore, the more time spent on social media, the more they are exposed to the selfie, especially teenagers. According to Bailey (2018), ADHD individuals engage in social comparison behaviours and then depend on likes from others as a form of self-validation which in turn affects their self-esteem. The use of social media can then lead the individual with ADHD to experience other issues associated with excess social media use, such as body image concerns and social comparison behaviours.

However, it also needs to be explored if social media can create or cause ADHD symptoms. A recent Californian research by Ra et al. (2018) explored this question by using data from a survey which was undertaken in 2015 to evaluate the digital habits and behaviours of more than 2,500 adolescents aged 15 and 16, over a period of two years. The study by Ra et al.

(2018) provides valuable information to previous studies that explored ADHD and social media, as their study provides longitudinal evidence using a five-wave prospective design and comprehensive assessment across a wide continuum of digital media exposure, including numerous platforms among youth.

The study done by Ra et al. (2018) found that none of the adolescents were classified as having ADHD related symptoms at the start of the study according to criteria outlined by the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. However, in the follow-up measurements, which were taken every six months, an increasing number of adolescents showed ADHD related symptoms which significantly correlated with frequent social media use. At least half of the teens indicated that they checked their social media multiple times.

The results of that study are concerning, as adolescents are spending more time on social media, specifically updating selfies, viewing their likes and comments on their image and self-presenting in a particular way, in order to portray a certain image (Chua & Chang, 2016). The amount of time spent on social media can thus possibly lead to symptoms of ADHD as highlighted by the research of Ra et al. (2018).

### **3.3 Summary of Chapter**

Chapter 3 explored the theoretical and conceptual framework guiding the research. The social construction of reality by Berger and Luckmann (1967) was explored as the theoretical framework, as this theory will guide the research. The social constructionism theory was explained in relation to the aims of the current study.

The conceptual framework explored concepts of self-objectification, cyberbullying, perfectionism/narcissism, self-identity, and ADHD. These concepts impact self-esteem and lead to emotional secondary responses, which can potentially be harmful to the adolescent.

The next chapter will provide an in-depth description of the research methods to collect the data.

## Chapter 4

### Research Methodology

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains in-depth information on the research methodology that will be used in the current research. Apart from the research methodology, this chapter will provide a discussion on the epistemology and ontology of the research.

The sampling method will be described as well as the inclusion of criteria for the sample. This chapter will also cover the various ethical considerations which had to be considered to implement the research.

The data collection methods which were used in the research will be discussed, including the use of the data analysis method. This chapter will also highlight the aspects which increase the trustworthiness of the study.

#### 4.2 Methodological Approach

The approach to research involves philosophical assumptions as well as distinct methods or procedures. The broad research approach is the plan or proposal to conduct research, involving the intersection of philosophy, research designs, and specific methods. Table 4.1 describes the research framework.

**Table 4.1. Methodological approach**

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<b>Conceptual framework:</b>	Theories of the social self
<b>Paradigm:</b>	Qualitative
<b>Model for research:</b>	Interpretive study
<b>Data collection methods:</b>	Observation and semi-structured interviews
<b>Data analysis:</b>	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)
<b>Research participants:</b>	14 adolescents are included in the research
<b>Organisational structures or networks of the participants:</b>	Use of Facebook to obtain participants – obtained by means of snowball sampling

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The empirical research was conducted in an interpretive qualitative paradigm, underpinned by the construction of the social self. To understand the social self, it is important to note that we are not born with perceptions of ourselves. Rather, the perceptions we have of ourselves are constructed through our interactions with others. We therefore rely on others to provide us with a “social reality” which helps us to determine what to think, feel, and how to behave, and it is by means of this socialisation that we start to define who we are (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

The development of the self through socialisation can be identified in Cooley’s theory of the looking glass where he states that the construction of the social self involves three main elements: The way in which the individual thinks that they appear to others; the way in which the individual thinks that they are judged by others; and the way in which the individual feels about themselves and other self-conscious emotions (Cooley 1902).

Given these three elements as outlined by Cooley (1902), an individual changes their behaviour, based on how other people perceive them, even if not necessarily true. According to Cooley (1902), social interaction thus acts as a “mirror” or a “looking-glass”, since one’s sense of self and self-esteem can be boosted through building connections with others. Therefore, the self is not created in isolation, as the people around us play a pivotal role in shaping our reality and the way we think.

Similar to Cooley’s concept of the looking glass is the self-presentation theory by Goffman (1959) in which he likens the self as an actor on stage, managing impressions of the “audience” or the people around them. In this regard, Goffman (1959) states that we manipulate our setting, appearance, and demeanour to create a certain image of ourselves. The ideal image that we want to have is created by the information that we acquire from the people around us. The idea of an ideal self being portrayed to others is prominent among adolescents as they are somewhat unaware of the kind of person whom they would like to be and therefore strive to fit in and be accepted. To do this, they are modifying their performance or behaviour to suit their “audience”.

With the knowledge of the social self as identified by Cooley (1902) and Goffman (1959), the aspects of social media thus present a wide range of effects on social media users. Aiken (2016) refers to the cyber self which is defined as the version which one wishes to portray

online and to other individuals, based on the judgements of others. Social media, particularly the selfie for the adolescent, is a contributing factor to the development of the social self. The selfie allows others to judge or comment on a person, which in turn creates a certain perception of themselves and changes the way they feel about themselves.

The self is therefore constantly changing, based on the feedback that it receives by means of socialisation. Apart from social media, an individual has as many different social selves as the many different social groups they are in contact with, or more generally, as the many different social contexts that they experience.

### **4.3 Research Design**

#### ***4.3.1 Research Paradigm***

The current research adopted an interpretivist paradigm, as the focus was on the adolescent's subjective experience of the selfie. In adopting an interpretivist paradigm, hermeneutics and phenomenology were important aspects to consider, as Pietkiewicz and Smith (2011) state that hermeneutics and phenomenology form the basis of interpretative research. Hermeneutics involves the analysis of text which took place in the current research when analysing the transcribed interviews, while the phenomenological aspect of the research involved the adolescents who shared their experiences of the selfie. By using the phenomenological approach, it allowed me as a researcher to understand the perceptions, perspectives, and the experiences of the adolescents.

Naturalistic inquiry is a principle to which interpretative research adheres in that the social phenomenon must be studied within their natural setting. In the current research, I aimed to study the adolescents in their natural environment, which is social media. The social context (social media) thus became an important aspect to study as this is the primary platform to display the selfie.

Furthermore, keeping in line with the interpretative paradigm, interpretative analysis was used, as it allowed me to view and experience the phenomenon from the subjective perspectives of the participants and to further provide a "thick description" of the adolescent and the selfie. A thick description was obtained through observation and semi-structured interview-

ing. Together with the use of memoing, I was also able to document non-verbal information which ensured that the adolescents' stories were viewed in such a way that emotion and experiences were accurately depicted. It was important to use memoing, as it was impossible to remember all information throughout the research process. The technique of memoing helped to record reflective notes about ideas and concepts and their relation to each other (Groenewald, 2008). According to Groenewald (2008), memoing allows freedom of expression. Each memo that I made, contained one idea and was dated. Diagrams were also used when necessary, to explain an idea. Using memoing also added to the trustworthiness of the research.

Semi-structured interviewing allowed me to capture the words of the participants which in turn allowed me to utilise the hermeneutic circle, which is a principle of interpretative research. The hermeneutic circle refers to one's understanding of a text as a whole by way of understanding the individual parts, and to understand each individual part in light of the whole.

The research paradigm consists of three dimensions which are ontology, epistemology, and the research methodology. Defined as the existence of reality, the ontology of the current research was idealism. The ontology of idealism asserts that reality can only be known through socially constructed meanings and no reality exists independently of this. Due to our realities being socially constructed, we will then have multiple shared realities, as our realities are also mutually influencing each other. In terms of the current research, the participant's knowledge and understanding of the selfie has been created and shaped through the environment which is surrounding them.

The adolescents in the current research will each have a different social construction of the selfie. There are thus multiple realities regarding the use and effects of the selfie, as each individual has created a different understanding of this social phenomenon in their mind. Social construction can be understood in terms of the language used, meaning shared, and consciousness, which were important aspects to explore in order for me to gain access to the adolescent's reality. In this regard, the German concept of *verstehen* was practised. Interpretivist thinking places emphasis on *verstehen* which refers to people's lived experiences that occur within a particular historical and social context. In order to understand people, we need to understand their lived experiences and the things that make them who

they are. In the current research, it was important to explore and understand the adolescents' lived experiences of the selfie through open-ended questioning. Furthermore, to interpret the various realities, I had to position myself within the constructivist epistemological discourse of the research. I therefore had to instil a warm and trusting relationship between myself and the adolescents, so that they could freely describe and express their unique experiences. In creating a warm environment of trust, I was better able to observe and gather information of the adolescent's experiences through interviewing and observation. This allowed me to understand the adolescents' experiences gained through their social interaction.

Instilling trust and rapport started in the early stages of the research when recruiting the participants, and continued throughout the lifespan of the research. Trust and rapport were established by means of communication. My communication with each participant conveyed respect, understanding without judgement, empathy, and interest. Participants then felt they could share their experiences openly with me as well as their ideas and challenges in the research (Taylor, Bogdan & De Vault, 2015).

Given the ontology and epistemology of the research, the qualitative research method was deemed to be the most suitable method. Taylor et al. (2015) highlight that qualitative research is naturalistic, as it attempts to study the everyday life of different groups of people and communities in their natural settings, hence this is a reason as to why I chose this research methodology, as I wanted to understand the adolescent and the selfie in the environment of social networking sites. In exploring the adolescent and the selfie and observing the adolescent in their natural setting (social networking), I was able to make sense and interpret the phenomenon of the selfie and the meanings that the adolescent attaches to it. The current study did not aim to provide the ultimate truth about the research topic, but to explore a particular way with which to derive meaning of the phenomenon of the selfie.

In using qualitative research, an inductive data analysis was implemented to better understand the interaction of "mutually shaping influences" and to explicate the interacting realities and experiences of research and participants. My role as a researcher in this qualitative research was to make sense of the multiple realities of the adolescent in a non-interfering manner.

### **4.3.2 Research Objective**

The purpose or objective of the research was to explore the experiences of adolescents (aged 12 to 18 years) in terms of their selfie-related behaviour. As a step towards this goal, the primary objective of this research was to analyse the participants' experiences and to explore how self-esteem is affected through the posting of the selfie on the social media sites, Facebook and Instagram.

The secondary objective of the research was to further explore how the posted selfie on social media impacts the participant's perceptions on body image and the personality trait of narcissism.

### **4.3.3 Research Problem**

The advancements in technology and social networking sites since 2013 have brought to the fore the selfie phenomenon. The term "selfie" became a universal craze which is evident from the research undertaken by Selfie City (2014) where selfies were posted by individuals worldwide and collected for analysis. The evidence of the impact of the selfie can be measured by the extent in which it is studied in various countries such as India (Srivastava et al., 2018), Singapore (Chua & Chang, 2016), and various European countries such as Italy, the UK, and Spain (Mascheroni et al., 2015).

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram are the primary platforms to showcase selfies, as individuals post selfies on their private pages for the online community to view, comment, and like the image. Evidence shows that capturing and posting the selfie were proven to have some positive aspects for individuals. An online article by Robsham (2016) states that the selfie encourages identity exploration and plays an influential role in moulding a sense of self, particularly with young adults who are still in the process of discovering themselves. Robsham (2016) further states that the selfie is used as a way to create memories for people, thus diversifying the way in which they communicate.

However, despite the evidence of the positive impact of the selfie, there is also much evidence of the negative impact of the selfie on individuals, thus highlighting that a problem does exist. Evidence suggests that the selfie could have a negative effect on self-esteem

(Chua & Chang, 2016). The public nature of the selfie allows it to be scrutinised by the online community which also results in negative comments made on the image, thus affecting the selfie-taker psychologically. Furthermore, the number of likes received on an image is indicative of how popular one is or how much one is liked (Mascheroni et al., 2015). When an individual uploads a selfie on social media that does not receive a desired response, it can possibly have negative psychological effects, thus leading the individual to capture a more perfect selfie for validation. In creating a perfect selfie, individuals opt for filtering software which makes them look more attractive. The use of filtering software together with the selfie leads individuals to focus more on their looks as they scrutinise their facial features by taking numerous selfies in the attempt to capture the perfect image. This act in turn can possibly create body image issues (Dutta et al., 2016), coupled with the constant need for validation and to look “perfect”, resulting in narcissistic tendencies (Wickel, 2015). The negative effects of the selfie can silently harm individuals on a psychological level. Here it is important to note that the generational group affected most by this selfie craze is Gen Z.

Gen Z (ages 12 to 18) represents the adolescents of today who have not only grown up with the internet, but the internet and social media are embedded in their lifestyle. It is thus fair to say that these individuals will be directly affected by the selfie on a psychological level, while people around them may not even be aware of it. Furthermore, from a developmental viewpoint, adolescents are at a crucial stage of identity formation (Erikson, 1950) and social networking sites and the selfie can be detrimental to their wellbeing if we do not understand its impact and work towards a preventative solution.

There is thus a problem in society, specifically in South Africa, where research about the relation between adolescents and the selfie is very limited. In response to this problem, the current study explored the experiences of the adolescent in terms of selfie-taking and posting the image onto social media. Through the use of observation and semi-structured questionnaires, the study aims to explore how their self-esteem is affected due to body image issues and narcissistic tendencies. The findings of this research are important in assisting parents, teachers, and health care providers on the possible negative effects of the selfie among the adolescent. If we are able to understand the negative effects of the selfie, we can not only limit social media use among the adolescents, but assist them with understanding their body image issues and the importance of forming a stable identity that is not based on external validation.

#### **4.3.4 Structure of Research**

The research process starts with the initial problem which is understanding the psychological effects of posting selfies onto social media. However, this topic is far too broad, which necessitates the narrowing down of the questions to one that can be reasonably studied. In narrowing down the research question, progressive focusing was utilised. The idea of progressive focusing originated from Parlett and Hamilton (1972) who advocated an approach where researchers systematically reduce the breadth of their inquiry to give more concentrated attention to emerging issues. In using this approach, I started with a clear research question which was, *How does posting selfies onto social media affect the self-esteem of adolescents?* Modifications to this research question could be made with emerging findings from the research, thus necessitating the secondary research questions. The initial problem to be explored was self-esteem, which was then broken down into body image and narcissism, both of which directly impact self-esteem in relation to the selfie.

The idea of progressive focusing is also displayed in the qualitative data analysis as an iterative and reflexive process that begins when data are being collected, rather than after the data collection has stopped. With the use of memoing, I jotted down ideas and interpreted these ideas throughout the research. Through the analysis of data and also of memoing, I was able to adjust the data collection process itself when it began to appear that additional concepts needed to be investigated or new relations be explored.

#### **4.3.5 Research Questions**

##### **Main research question**

*How does posting selfies on social media impact an adolescent's self-esteem?* The variables of interest for the main research question centre around self-esteem. The main interest is to explore how much self-esteem is affected by other dependent variables.

##### **Sub-questions**

- What effect does the selfie have on an adolescent's body image?
- What effect does the selfie have on the personality trait of narcissism in the adolescent?

#### ***4.3.6 Selection of Participants***

To sample participants for the study, it was important to note the selection criteria (Merriam, 2009). In order to be included in the study, the first criterion of inclusion was that adolescents should fall in the age group of 12 to 18. Adolescents were chosen for this study as they formed part of the Gen Z group that was raised together with internet and technology and were thus more likely to be exposed to the selfie and social networking groups (Valesco, 2017).

The second criterion of inclusion was that the participants should belong to the social networking sites Facebook and/or Instagram. The participants were recruited via Facebook by advertising the research study on the researcher's Facebook page. Through referral and snowball sampling I was able to reach participants within the adolescent age group. Instagram and Facebook were the two social networking sites used in the criteria of inclusion because these sites were the fastest growing and most popular (Wagner et al., 2016).

The third criterion of inclusion was that the participants should take a selfie at least once a month. Wang (2016) describes a survey undertaken in 2015 among 1,000 young individuals. It was found that the average number of selfies that were taken were nine per week. The criterion of capturing at least one selfie per month is therefore adequate.

The fourth criterion of inclusion was that the participants should post the selfie on the social networking sites, Facebook and/or Instagram. This criterion is important, as the research study involved identifying the psychological effects of posting the selfie on social networking sites. Furthermore, the research involved observing past selfies which were posted on the participants' private Facebook profiles.

The sampling strategy that was used to obtain the participants was snowball sampling or referral sampling. Snowball sampling can be described as a sampling technique in which the researcher recruit's participants from their circle of acquaintances. The sample can then grow, based on referrals from the acquaintances. The criterion of inclusion also guided the researcher in selecting participants from the sample. The sample was a homogenous sample in that it focused on a particular sub-group where all members who were sampled, were similar to

each other in that they were adolescents, they captured selfies, and they posted these selfies on social networking sites to which they belonged.

The study opted for a small sample size due to the phenomenological nature of the study. According to Guest et al. (2006), six participants are recommended for a phenomenological study, while the number of participants can increase to 25. The current study comprised a sample of 14 participants and was guided by the theoretical principle of saturation which refers to sampling until no new information can be obtained (Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood, 2015).

However, a disadvantage of using snowball sampling where the trustworthiness of the research can be questioned, is that it can lead to research bias. Due to the sample being created by the judgement of the researcher, it could create problems. In the current research, however, this was avoided by adhering to the criterion of inclusion. I also displayed self-reflexivity by keeping a journal of the data collection process which helped me to eliminate biases.

#### **4.3.7 Data Collection**

The data collection methods that were used in the current research were observational methods and a semi-structured questionnaire.

##### **4.3.7.1 Observational Research.**

In order to access the participants' private Facebook pages, I had to send a friend request to each of them, especially when their page was not public. On the social networking site Instagram, I followed the participants in order to view their selfie updates. The participants were made aware in the information letter (Appendix A), informed consent form (Appendix B) and assent form (Appendix C) that I would view their Facebook and Instagram pages with an interest only towards selfies as this was the primary aim of the research. My observation of selfies which were posted, allowed me to view the comments that were received on the image. It allowed me to observe a real-life situation of how the participants edited and responded to others' comments on a selfie. This was the most natural way to view how each participant reacted to feedback on their posted selfies.

Informing the participants beforehand that an observation of their selfies on their social media page would take place, served to build trust in the research relationship, as the participants were well informed of what to expect. The observation was completed before the semi-structured interview, in order to minimise the Hawthorne effect. If the semi-structured questionnaire was completed first, then this would result in the participants becoming more aware of what I would be observing, and this would force them to alter their selfies or delete it in order to positively self-present.

The observation which took place, was a naturalistic observation which involved observing the participants' selfies without any interaction with other individuals. The observation involved viewing selfies which were posted in the last three months on the social networking sites, Facebook and Instagram. The observation per participant took two days and selfies were analysed in terms of the pose taken, the filtering used to change the image, as well as the number of likes or hearts and comments made to the selfie. Notes were taken with the intent of using that information during the structured interview. On completion of the observation, the participants were again contacted telephonically to arrange for a Skype interview at a time and date suitable for each of them separately.

According to Smit and Onwuegbuzie (2018), the observational method involves the collecting of data by looking and listening. However, in the current research, observation took place by viewing selfies of participants which were posted on their personal Facebook and Instagram pages. Although Lincoln and Guba (1985) state that observations require prolonged engagement and persistent observations in the field, in the current research there was only an observation of an image and the comments and likes associated with that image. There was no need for prolonged engagement or live observations of the individuals' activities on the social networking sites.

Using the observational method, served to better understand the context within which the adolescents were interacting, by visually analysing how often selfies were posted, what filtering software was used and the reactions to the selfies that were posted. The rich information obtained from the observation, provided more information on the topic than a semi-structured interview alone. Furthermore, participants, for example, may say that they do not use filtering software in the interview but will do the opposite in reality. Therefore, the

observations served to either support or oppose the interview, indicating (a lack of) congruency in their actions, adding trustworthiness to the data which were provided.

The first-hand experiences obtained from observing selfies allowed me to discover and question more, rather than making assumptions about the selfie context. Furthermore, by discovering more, I was able to gather information to discuss in the interview that would not, under other circumstances, be disclosed by participants.

The stance which I adopted during the observational research was that of a neutral observer. As a neutral observer I did not participate in the discussions on social media regarding the selfie. However, as a neutral observer I still needed to be aware of any presumptions (biases) that I could have possibly possessed that would have influenced the findings. In this regard it was important for me to examine my own subjectivity throughout the data collection process, apart from recording interactions and behaviours as objectively as possible. To document my biases throughout the research process, a self-reflexive journal (Appendix G) was used that allowed me to track my thoughts. Furthermore, the actual observation was documented in the form of field notes which were used to gain further information in the semi-structured interview. Appendix E (the memoing journal) provides a summary of the observations that I made for each participant's selfie. The self-reflexive journal, together with the field notes from the observations, added to the trustworthiness of the research.

#### ***4.3.7.2 Semi-Structured Interviewing.***

A semi-structured interview (Appendix F) was used to obtain rich information on the selfie from the perspective of the adolescent. The semi-structured questionnaire contained an interview guide with pre-set open-ended questions. The interview guide was developed by the researcher, with a schematic presentation of questions based on the selfie. Further information will be provided in the next section regarding the construction of the interview guide.

The questionnaire tapped into the variables, which are outlined in the research questions (self-esteem, body image, and narcissism) and was piloted with the first two participants. During the piloting of the questionnaire, the researcher was able to uncover any obstacles with the interview guide, such as the wording of a question, the flow of the questions, or the general understanding of the questions. The interview guide was then edited to make sure that the interview process was easier understood.

To interview the adolescents, a semi-structured questionnaire was the most appropriate tool to be used in order to obtain information, as it allows the researcher to not only be more prepared, but it also provides the adolescent with a set of question to answer and not to move away from the topic. The use of open-ended questions also allows freedom of expression for the adolescents to air their views on their terms, which in turn generates rich data for the research (Taylor et al., 2015). The language used by participants was also considered essential in understanding their perceptions, which were elicited through the semi-structured questionnaire.

The semi-structured questionnaire was implemented via Skype, which is a voice-over internet protocol. Skype provides the ability to interview research participants, using voice and video via a synchronous connection on the internet. Using Skype facilitated rapport building and also helped to view non-verbal communication. According to Deakin and Wakefield (2013), interviewees using Skype are more responsive and rapport is built faster than in face-to-face interviews. They are even more responsive when they have already received an e-mail before the interview takes place (Seitz, 2015).

Regarding rapport, Rowley (2012) states that the richness and rapport of the data obtained during the Skype interview may not be adequate. However, Rowley (2012) also states that participants are actually more likely to disclose more information from the comfort of their own environment. The issue of body language or nonverbal cues not only impacts rapport, but also how data are interpreted. During a Skype interview, only facial expressions – and not the other body parts such as hand movements or their sitting position – can be seen, to add to the richness of the data. Bayles (2012) states that, by not observing other parts of the body, we miss valuable communication. However, Seitz (2015) adds that, by listening carefully to the participants and viewing their facial expression, this should be sufficient data. Participants in the current research were not obligated to have their camera on during the interview and had the option of only completing the interview via audio. In this case, rapport building was harder to achieve.

Krouwel, Jolly, and Greenfield (2019) add that there is much criticism on the use of Skype for qualitative research. The challenges in using Skype for qualitative research include technical issues such as time lags on the video and disconnection of the call. Furthermore, these authors state that participants need to have the correct software and the latest version of

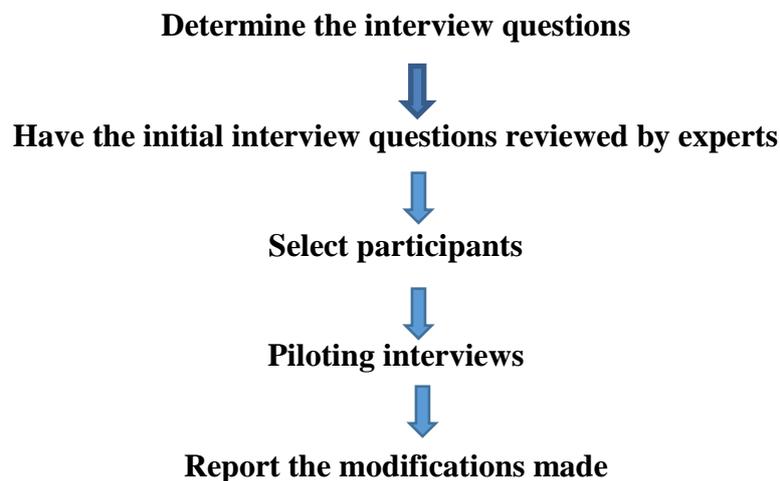
Skype. Eye contact is difficult to maintain, as eye contact on video calls requires the user to look off centre because the camera is on the edge of the screen. In light of these challenges, Krouwel et al. (2019) have compared the quality of interviewing through Skype with face-to-face interviewing and indicated that they did not experience or note any difference between the nature and character of using either interview technique.

#### **4.3.8 Research Method**

In this section, I will discuss how the questions for the questionnaire were formulated and structured to form an interview guide. I will then discuss the events that transpired prior to the interview and during the first and second (final) interview. The data analysis stage will thereafter be discussed in detail.

##### **4.3.8.1 Structuring of Interview Questions.**

To construct the interview guide, I used the steps outlined in the research conducted by Majid, Othman, Mohamed, Lim, and Yusof (2017). See figure 1 below for an outline of the steps. A description of each step will then follow.



*Figure 1. Steps in conducting a pilot study (Majid et al., 2017)*

#### 4.3.8.1.1 Determine the Interview Questions.

It was imperative for the construction of the interview guide to be developed to answer the main research question of the study, *How does posting selfies on social media impact an adolescent's self-esteem?* A starting point in constructing the questions involved brainstorming all topics and questions regarding the primary and secondary research questions. Once a list of possible related questions was created, a manual filtering system was used to remove questions and topics that were less important, and to group similar questions and topics together (Esterberg, 2002). Scholarly literature which was similar to the current research was also consulted to explore questions that were asked to participants. These questions were adapted to be used in the current research (Esterberg, 2002).

The approach used for the interview was an interview guide which provided a framework for the questions. Having an interview guide prevented me from deviating away from the topic and rather allowed me to probe and explore. According to Patton (2002), the guide provides topics within which the interviewer is free to explore, probe, and ask questions.

The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions which facilitated the expression of thoughts. Care was taken to ensure that questions concerning sensitive information or requesting more information were not asked first, ensuring that the participant could warm up in the initial stages and feel comfortable, talking further into the interview (Esterberg, 2002). For example, the interview guide begins with general questions such as “Which social networking sites do you belong too?” and “What is your age?” and then moves on to more in-depth questions focusing on the selfie. The questions in the interview guide were structured according to Patton’s question types (Patton 2002). Patton suggests that questions be formulated that elicit information on the participant’s experiences and behaviour. The table below outlines the focus questions that should be asked, according to Patton (2002). Next to each focus question is an actual question which is extracted from the interview guide.

**Table 4.2. Patton’s question types**

<b>Focus question</b>	<b>Example of question from interview guide</b>
Experience and behaviour questions – questions about what a person does or has done, aim to elicit behaviours, experiences, actions, and activities that would have been observable, had the observer been present	What tools or software are you accessing to take a selfie?
Opinion and value questions	What do you enjoy about taking selfies?
Feeling questions	How do you feel when you receive negative comments or less likes on a selfie?
Sensory questions	What does a selfie need to look like before posting it on social media?
Background/Demographic questions	What is your age? Do you belong to Facebook or Instagram or both?
Knowledge questions	There were no knowledge questions in the interview guide.

In using Patton’s (2002) focus questions, I was able to construct questions that explored the selfie in depth.

Once the questions were formulated, I then placed these questions in a particular order. Following Patton’s order of questioning, opinions and feelings questions were asked first, followed by probing questions which were asked for the interpretation of experience. Background and demographic questions were also kept to a minimum, with only two questions being asked, as Patton (2002) suggests that these types of questions can be boring.

While constructing the interview guide, it was important that I did not impose my beliefs, thoughts, and biases, as these would impact on the success and validity of the interview. The issue of self-reflexivity needs to be reiterated because during the process of constructing the interview, it was important to not use leading questions where my pre-conceived ideas would have influenced what is not worth discussing (Newton, 2010). Furthermore, when the participants’ opinions are accurately reflected as their own, it leads to the success of the

research. This interview guide further consists of guiding questions that were supplemented by probing questions which were dependent on the participants' answers. To accommodate the age group of the participants, the language used in formulating the questions was clear and simple, while care was also taken to avoid jargon, adding clarity to the interview guide. Furthermore, only one question was asked at a time, ensuring that no more than one idea could be expressed.

#### *4.3.8.1.2 Have the Initial Questions Reviewed.*

The questions in the interview guide were reviewed by my supervisor according to the relevance, wording, and language. To ensure the quality of the interview guide and to overcome any challenges such as the interview language that is used, layout of the questioning, or confusing questions, the guide was piloted with the first two participants. In this case I was able to assess the possible difficulty in understanding the questions as well as the flow and length of the interview. Some questions may prompt short answers which may not serve the function of obtaining a rich thick description needed for a qualitative research. In this regard, alterations can then be made to the interview guide. In the current research, the first two interviews served as pilot interviews. On completion of the first two interviews, I could then assess any pitfalls in the interview guide.

#### *4.3.8.1.3 Select Participants.*

##### *4.3.8.1.3.1 Conducting Research on Facebook.*

Facebook and Instagram were used to promote the research study with the aim of recruiting participants. According to Arigo, Papgoto, Harris, Lillie, and Nebeker (2018), empirical research on the effectiveness of social media is still in its early stages. There are studies, though, which highlight social media as a viable option for the recruitment of research participants. A recent study undertaken in Colorado, in the USA, used a paid advertising approach on Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat social media platforms (Ford, Albritton, Dunn, Crawford, Neuwirth & Bull, 2019). Using all three platforms, the study documented knowledge and attitudes towards retailing marijuana post legalisation. Furthermore, the study assessed the feasibility of using Instagram and Snapchat as effective additions to Facebook for youth recruitment. The study found that all three platforms are a modern, cost-effective, and

useful approach to reach the youth. An earlier study by Frandsen, Walters, and Ferguson (2014) also highlights the effectiveness of using social media as recruitment tool, where sociodemographic data and smoking characteristics were assessed with 266 participants, to investigate the effectiveness of a behavioural support programme for smoking cessation. The study found that, using targeted advertising on Facebook and Instagram, assisted with the dissemination of the study in a cost-effective manner. Recruiting participants, using the method of social media was more beneficial than using offline methods. The two studies highlight that social media advertising can indeed assist in reaching the youth.

In the study by Ford et al. (2019), targeted advertising played a crucial role in obtaining participants. Both Facebook and Instagram allow for targeted advertising where adverts can be targeted at individuals with a certain demographic such as the age, gender, or user, generating content such as selfies (Konsinki, Matz, Gosling, Popav & Stillwell, 2015). Targeted paid advertising was therefore an important method to use when recruiting participants for the current study, so as to target adolescents who had a particular interest in selfies. Targeted paid advertising outperforms traditional methods of recruitment such as postal surveys, and are more cost-efficient than Google advertising, online newsletters, and e-mails (Konsinki et al., 2015).

According to Arigo et al. (2018), it is important to choose an appropriate platform for social media which requires understanding the social media habits of the target population. In the current research, the target population was adolescents. Facebook and Instagram are popular platforms for this generational group (Ford et al., 2019). However, apart from understanding the social media habits of the target population, it was also important to understand the style, the format of the post, and how it will be presented to the audience. Facebook allows text and image posts while Instagram only allows image posts. According to Arigo et al. (2018), the best platform to use will depend on participant preference for content consumption as well as whether images, videos, or text may be more conducive. As discussed previously, adolescents prefer visual aspect in terms of images (Markello, 2005). Thus, an advert via an image was created and used for both Facebook and Instagram targeted advertising. In using a visual image to advertise the study, it helped to catch the attention of the target audience and risk has been ignored. Furthermore, the text within the advert was easy for the target audience to understand.

When using targeted advertising, it is important to choose keywords that are reflective of the interests found among the target population, or to use keywords that the researcher is exploring among the target group. Keywords used in the current research were “selfie” and “filter”. The advert was targeted at male and female adolescents in all provinces of South Africa.

Targeted advertising via Facebook provides one with insight as to which day and time the advert performs at its best. This information helped the researcher to know when to reset the advertisement parameters to obtain the best performance (cf. Arigo et al., 2018). Arigo et al. also state that when placing an advert, it is important to not reveal the full nature or give away too much information of the study, so that individuals would be more likely to respond to the advert. Taking this into account, when I used this targeted advertising for the current research, the advert’s main heading was as follows: “Do you enjoy taking selfies?” The advert therefore did not state that the objective of the research was to explore which effect the posting of selfies by adolescents had on their self-esteem. Below is the advert which was used when recruiting participants for the study via targeted advertising.



*Figure 2. Advert used when recruiting participants*

This targeted advertising was posted on public Facebook groups as well as my private Facebook and Instagram profiles. An advert posted in a public group can be posted without permission from the administrator. However, care was taken to ensure that when posting the advert on public groups, it was made clear that this was a research study which required parental consent for adolescents under the age of 18. It was important to make this statement clear, as requesting a group considered to be “vulnerable” (adolescents), can lead to the

advert being reported. It was therefore made clear when posting in groups and on personal profiles that parental consent and assent forms would be sent through as well as the ethical clearance from the university.

In using Facebook and Instagram to recruit participants for the research, information regarding the participants can also be directly collected from self-reports from the participants' Facebook profiles. For example, questions concerning demographics can be obtained directly from the Facebook profile page, while the age of the participant can be inferred from the participant's birth date. However, even though the data were available, the researcher still needed to be aware of social desirability and intentional misrepresentation (Konsinki et al., 2015). In the current study it was therefore important to ask participants questions, rather than inferring from Facebook profile data. In doing so, the trustworthiness of the research was also increased.

It is also important to note that Facebook, for example, can play a role in affecting an individual's behaviour. Facebook user experience is highly personalised by algorithms. Users are therefore more likely to interact with content suggested to them by Facebook, such as news feeds and targeted advertising (Konsinki et al., 2015). Individuals that are more interested in beauty, for example, are more likely to be concerned about their visual appearance. As stated in research by Chua and Chang (2016), individuals that are concerned about their visual appearance, are more likely to take selfies. An online article written by Papazoglou (2019) explains how Facebook and Instagram algorithms can change the way in which individuals see themselves. Papazoglou (2019) explains that when we react to newsfeeds of other people's perfect lives, then the posts from these individuals are more likely to appear on news feeds. As constantly seeing this information can dent an individual's self-esteem, online activity can affect self-esteem together with other individuals' selfies. Algorithms thus play a crucial role in the participant's experience on Facebook.

#### *4.3.8.1.3.2 Challenges and Opportunities of Using Social Media Platforms.*

One of the challenges of using Facebook and Instagram to recruit participants, is that people who are friends could be recruited into the study. This could possibly occur, as the researcher used their private Facebook pages to advertise the study (Konsinki et al., 2015). In the current research, my private Facebook and Instagram profiles were used to advertise the study. How-

ever, the use of targeted advertising countered this challenge to some extent, as it reached a larger number of people.

According to Konsinki et al. (2015), fake profiles may also be a problem. These fake profiles are, however, easily detected. Genuine users easily obtain their friends and likes over a long period of time, while fake profiles are likely to be filled with likes and friends in a single burst of activity. Attention was paid throughout the research to ensure that there were no fake profiles.

Advertising research on social media can also be a challenge as an advert may require numerous views before individuals decide to participate (Arigo et al., 2018). Arigo et al. state that it is also not clear how many views are actually required before individuals take the next step to be part of the study. Furthermore, when using targeted advertising, the social media platform can change its settings and features as well as functionality on a regular basis without notice. This can affect the implementation and engagement of the data collection.

Another challenge in using Facebook to advertise the research, particularly in public groups, is that proprietary algorithms will dictate how often posts from a group will appear in an individual's feed (Arigo et al., 2018). For example, if a group has 25,000 members, not all members in the group will see the advert. Only members who engage more with content posted in the group will view content more on their page. In this regard, receipt of the advert will not be balanced and gives researchers little control over the situation. It is for this reason that targeted advertising was used in conjunction with sharing the post on public Facebook groups.

Despite the various challenges, social media platforms provided opportunities for recruiting participants. According to Konsinki et al. (2015), Facebook provides various inexpensive tools that can be used to recruit large and diverse samples. Facebook is also used as a powerful data recording tool because it stores detailed demographic profiles and records users' actual behaviour expressed in a natural environment. Therefore, if researchers have the participant's consent, they can also record their data retrospectively. This aspect of Facebook was of particular importance during the observation aspect of the research, as past selfies had to be researched. Instagram also served the same function.

A second positive aspect of using Facebook and Instagram is that participants agreed to be part of the research due to an intrinsic motivation. As there was no financial gain, the findings of the study were of higher quality.

#### ***4.3.8.1.4 Contact with Participants.***

Interested individuals on Facebook or Instagram were asked to send a direct message to the researcher, or to contact her via the e-mail address provided on the advert. When I received the e-mail, I thanked the individual for responding and showing interest in the research and thereafter I assessed if the individual meets the three inclusive criteria for the research. It was important to assess this at the beginning, prior to research taking place, so as to prevent problems later on. The researcher therefore replied to the mail, stating that they would need to meet three criteria to participate in the research:

- Are you an adolescent (12 to 18 years old)? If you answered yes, please state your age.
- Do you belong to the social media platforms, Facebook and/or Instagram?
- Do you post selfies monthly on the social media platforms, Facebook and/or Instagram?

If an individual gave a negative answer to any of the three questions, then they were not eligible to continue in the study. Individuals who answered affirmatively on the three questions, would be eligible to continue in the study. At this stage, individuals who communicated to the researcher via Outlook, were then asked to send through their contact number or their parent's number and e-mail (if under 18 years old) as communication took place via these two avenues in going forward.

An e-mail was composed by the researcher, which was then sent to each individual (see below). The e-mail was adjusted to include parental consent and assent if needed. The e-mail is included as Appendix A (information letter), incorporating the ethical clearance from the university.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your response. Based on your answers, you meet the criteria to participate in the research study. I have attached to this e-mail an information letter which provides more information about the research. I have also attached an informed consent letter as it would be important for me to obtain written consent from you. The ethical clearance from the university is also attached as proof that I can complete the research study. Please read through all the document carefully. You can also decline participation after reading the documents. A signed consent form, e-mailed back to me, will confirm your participation. Once I have received the documents, we can move forward in the research. Please feel free to ask me any questions.*

*Kind Regards.*

*Melissa Jackpersadh*

It was also important to call the participant or the participant's parent (if under 18 years) to explain the documentation (appendix forms) which could be overwhelming as this was most probably their first encounter with a research project. The aim of the telephonic call was to explain the forms and to answer any questions regarding the research study. An environment of trust was created where the potential participant did not see the research study as overwhelming and scary, and furthermore in explaining the research to parents, thereby assuring that the parents have trust in the research process. A period of two days was allocated for the individuals (parent and adolescent) to read through the documentation and make an informed decision whether to participate or not. If the individual did not reply by the second day, a follow-up call was made.

On completion of the signed informed consent, parental consent, and assent forms, the first method of data collection could then begin.

#### *4.3.8.1.5 Observation.*

The first method of data collection in the research involved observing the selfies which were posted on the social media platforms, Facebook and/or Instagram. The observation was

naturalistic, as I observed and recorded my observations without interfering or manipulating the natural settings (Esterberg, 2002).

In the consent forms, the participants were made aware that I would observe their posted selfies on social media. It was important to be transparent with the participants regarding the time and duration of the observation, as this would reinforce trust in the research process. The participants were notified that an observation of the selfies would take place for two days, and they were told that I would be observing and making notes on the comments made to their selfies, likes on each selfie, and the pose/filters used for the selfies. Participants were made aware that the information which would be obtained from the observation, would be used in conjunction with the interview. However, a negative point in this notification process of the observation is that the participants could change their behaviour because they knew that they were being observed (Esterberg, 2002). Furthermore, Esterberg (2002) states that, in knowing that observation is taking place, responses to the demands of the situation can change. In the case of the current study, the participants may have edited past selfies or deleted content (such as comments) prior to the observation taking place. However, it was more important for the researcher to have transparency with each participant, considering the participant to be a “vulnerable” individual.

With the permission of the participants, I added each of them as a friend on Facebook or, in the case of Instagram, the participant was followed. It was important at this stage to ensure self-reflexivity and to not let my own judgements and biases of a participant’s selfies or comments on a selfie interfere with the research process. In this case, my own thoughts were noted in a self-reflexive journal. At the end of the observation, the participants were unfriended or unfollowed, with a notification to each of them that the observation had stopped.

The first two participants were used as a pilot during the observation stage. In using them as a pilot, I could assess what information was important to gather and what was not, as well as what challenges arose from the observation.

Once the observation was completed, an interview was arranged at a day and time most convenient for each participant. It was important to note that, for the adolescents under 18 years of age, the parent/guardian was informed as well, as to when the interview would take

place. At this stage, participants were reminded that Skype would be used to complete the interview with the intention of preparing the individual to download the application on their mobile device if they did not have it already installed.

#### *4.3.8.1.6 Piloting Interviews.*

The pilot study was conducted with the first two participants. Prior to the interviews, the participants were reminded that I have received consent through informed and parental consent as well as the assent form to start and record the interviews. The duration of the pilot interviews was an hour and included a social conversation which was not part of the one-hour duration. The social conversation aimed to build rapport which in turn would facilitate better responses (Majid et al., 2017).

According to Majid et al., the aim of a pilot study is to test the appropriateness of the questions and to provide the research with early suggestions on viability. Furthermore, piloting allows the researcher to obtain experience in conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews and to identify the flow of conversations, as both the pilot interviews were unique and thus invited new ways to probe and obtain answers. During the pilot interviews, the two participants were asked the same set of questions in English.

#### *4.3.8.1.7 Report Modification Made.*

The pilot study helped to improve the interview guide in terms of questions which needed to be rephrased. The sequential alignment of questions was also changed so ensure that the flow of questioning made sense to the participants. Furthermore, all the words which were confusing, were edited to ensure that the participants would easily understand the questions.

#### *4.3.8.2 First Skype Interview.*

The semi-structured interviews took place via the telecommunications application, Skype due to the ease of conducting interviews with participants who were a distance away. In this way, no financial costing was incurred. Furthermore, due to the research taking place under the Covid-19 pandemic, Skype was considered to be the safest option as it facilitated the social distancing protocol.

It was important that the interviews took place in an area where the telecommunications signal was adequate in order to prevent disruptions in the communication signal during the interviews. A quiet room was needed for the interviews, to prevent disturbances and for the participants to also feel free to talk without judgement from others who could hear the conversation. Furthermore, I needed to be alone during the interview process, to protect the participants' confidentiality. Prior to the start of each interview, the interview process was reiterated together with a brief explanation of the research study, consent and assent forms, procedures, and a description of the interview format. It was again made clear to participants that the interview would be recorded, and that they had the right to end the interview at any time when they felt uncomfortable.

The stance adopted in the interviews was friendly and non-judgemental and a warm conversational tone was maintained which served to create a sense of comfort for the adolescent participants. In conveying a sense of being present in the interview, it further helped to ease any discomfort that could be experienced. Active listening was further employed to obtain quality information from each interview. Active listening did not only include listening to the words of the participants but also paying attention to their non-verbal cues such as body language, discomfort when questions were asked, or other types of communication such as pauses in speech or the tone of their voice. It was also important to note that some participants opted to use the audio only and not the camera, which prevented me to observe their body language. It was thus very important to create rapport with the participants. This does not imply that friendships were created, as friendship building could bias data selection (Brayda, 2014).

On completion of each interview, the participant was thanked and notified that a follow-up interview would be arranged in a week's time when it was suitable for the participant.

#### **4.3.8.3     *Second Skype Interview.***

To arrange the second interviews, the participants were contacted via e-mail or by means of a telephone call. With participants under the age of 18, a parent/guardian was involved in the communication. A suitable day and time for both parties (for each participant and myself) was arranged.

The duration of the second interviews was 20 minutes, with the purpose to gain clarity on the participants' answers if there was any misunderstanding during and from the first interview. The second interviews also gave me a chance to ask follow-up questions to each participant and to also ask any new questions that arose after the transcription of the first interviews was completed.

At the end of each interview, the participant was thanked and then notified that the interview would need to be transcribed and then analysed.

The participants were also notified that, on completion of the data analysis and prior to publication, they would be able to view the findings of the study. This information was also composed in an e-mail and sent to the participants as well as their parents if they were under 18 years of age. The e-mail sent to the participants looked like this:

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_*

*Thank you for completing the interviews.*

*The information obtained from the interviews will now be transcribed. Transcribing involves typing the interview word for word, using the audio-recording which you agreed to in the consent form. Once transcription is completed, I will be able to analyse the data. On completion of the data analysis, I will provide you with the findings/results of the research before it can be published.*

*Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.*

*Kind Regards,*

*Melissa Jackpersadh*

### **4.3.9 Data Analysis**

#### **4.3.9.1 Transcription of Interviews.**

As my main focus was the evaluation, interpretation, and explanation of social phenomena, a qualitative methodology was suited to answer the research question. The exploration and analysis of the social phenomena of the selfie was guided by the main method of data collection which was the semi-structured interview.

In order to analyse the data which were obtained from the interviews, each interview was transcribed by myself. The decision to transcribe each interview was guided by the methodological assumption underpinning the research. Transcription is an important part of data analysis which takes place by listening to the video and audio recording of each interview and then typing the words verbatim. In transcribing the interview, it is important for the transcription to be detailed to capture features of talk such as emphasis on speed, tone of voice, timing, and pauses which are critical for the interpretation of data (Bailey, 2008). Davidson (2009) states that it is obviously impossible to record all features of talk and interactions during the recordings, as it can make the transcript difficult to read – therefore selectivity needs to be acknowledged. In the current research, I noted all the features which were relevant to the interviews such as pauses, nervousness, excitement, etc.

As it is impossible to represent the full complexity of human interaction on a transcript, it was important for me to closely observe the data and repeatedly listening to the recordings, which aided me in accurate transcriptions. According to Bailey (2008), this familiarity with the data and attention to what was actually said and done, can facilitate realisations or ideas which emerge during the analysis process. It was important that I became saturated in each interview transcript, moving back and forth between the recordings and the transcript. By having both a video and audio recording for some participants, I was not only able to obtain the spoken words, but also to obtain a description of the emotional context which provided a deeper lived experience of the individual.

To enhance the quality of the transcriptions, I adopted Silverman's transcription symbols (Silverman, 1993). By utilising these symbols during the transcription, it made it easier for

me to clearly understand the words of the participants. See the table below for the symbols used for the transcription.

**Table 4.3. List of Silverman’s transcription symbols**

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Description</b>
[	C2: quite a [ while Mo: [ yea	Left brackets indicate the point at which a current speaker’s talk is overlapped by another’s talk.
=	W: That I’m aware of = C: = Yes. Would you confirm that?	Equal signs, one at the end and one at the beginning, indicate no gap between the lines.
(.4)	Yes (.2) yeah	Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time in silence in tenths of a second.
(.)	To get (.) treatment	A dot in parentheses indicates a tiny gap, probably no more than one tenth of a second.
–	What’s <u>up</u> ?	Underscoring indicates some form of stress via pitch and/or amplitude.
::	O:kay?	Colons indicate prolongation of the immediately prior sound. The length of the row of colons indicates the length of the prolongation.

<b>Symbol</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Description</b>
WORD	I've GOT ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT	Capitals, except at the beginning of the lines, indicate a real loud sound relative to the surrounding talk.
.hhhhh	I feel that (.2) .h	A row of h's prefixed by a dot indicates an inhalation; without a dot, an exhalation. The length of the row of h's indicates the length of the in- or exhalation.
()	Future risks () and life ()	Empty parentheses indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said.
(word)	Would you see (there) anything positive	Parenthesized words are possible hearings.
(( ))	Confirms that ((continues))	Double parentheses contain the author's descriptions rather than transcriptions.
.,?	What do you think?	Indicate speaker's intonation.

The electronic copy of the transcripts was stored on my personal computer where a password was created preventing a third party from accessing the information. However, the transcripts were shared with my supervisor as well as a professor who completed the computer software data analysis. Furthermore, to protect confidentiality, any identifying information such as names were removed from the transcribed interview and replaced by pseudonyms.

#### **4.3.9.2 NVivo Data Analysis.**

On completion of the transcribed interviews, data analysis then took place, using computer assisted qualitative data analysis. A professor in Statistics was hired to analyse the data, using the NVivo 12 software. In using computer assisted software to analyse data, it allows the data to “speak for itself” rather than approaching the data with an existing theoretical framework (Zamawe, 2015). The aim of using the NVivo 12 software was to aid in coding and to organise emergent themes.

Using computer software for the qualitative data analysis could be disadvantageous as it could distance the researcher from the data. However, in the current research the use of the NVivo 12 software was not the only method for data analysis as IPA was also used. According to Zamawe (2015), a computer assisted qualitative data analysis needs to be linked to manual techniques so that the data could be well interrogated.

The computer software analysed the similarities among the participants for each question on the interview guide, uncovering themes and forming a “word cloud” for words that were most commonly used. Chapter 6 will include an image of the word cloud for each question and will be supported by verbatim quotes from the participants’ conversations.

#### **4.3.9.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).**

The method of data analysis which has adopted a bottom-up approach is IPA. According to Eatough and Smith (2008), the aim of IPA is to explore in detail the individuals’ lived experiences of how they make sense of their personal and social world, which in turn suggests information about their thoughts, desires, and feelings.

IPA is influenced by phenomenology and hermeneutics. Phenomenology, which was initiated by the German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, aims to understand human experience while hermeneutics, associated with Martin Heidegger, focuses on the interpretative activity. As explained by Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, and Hendry (2011), phenomenology reveals meaning, while hermeneutics interprets and explains the meaning. The researcher therefore plays a vital role in this interpretative activity as the researcher has to uncover the meaning and interpret the way in which the participants make sense of these activities. However, it is important to add that during IPA, the researcher needs to critically assess how pre-under-

standings and pre-judgements influence the research. Therefore, in the current research, the participants had to present their world to the researcher, while the researcher had to make sense of their world. This is described as the double hermeneutic.

IPA was also used as it is in line with the data collection methods of the research. Open-ended questioning was used in the semi-structured questionnaire. According to Eatough and Smith (2008), open-ended questions facilitate a focus on experience and understanding. The IPA analysis took place in various stages. Once the transcriptions were completed, an iterative process of reading and re-reading the transcripts took place. Understanding the data was important as it is emphasised by Smith and Osborn (2007) who state that the reason for reading and re-reading a transcript, is to become familiar with the experiences of the participant. In the current research, the audio- and video recordings were listened to carefully and at least twice, and the completed transcripts were then read through numerous times, until the researcher fully understood the information that was presented. To further ensure trustworthiness of the transcript, the completed transcript was checked against the audio recording to ensure that the correct information was captured.

Smith and Osborn (2007) state that there are no rules regarding what is commented upon. In this research, the left-hand margin was used to comment on the data by jotting notes and ideas. Three types of comments were made. The first comment was a descriptive comment and included a rephrasing of each participant's account. The second comment was linguistic in nature and required attentiveness to the words and expressions used by the participant. Lastly, conceptual comments were made which involved my knowledge from literature and life experience. To differentiate the comments, different highlights were used. For each transcript, a three-column table was designed where the original data were placed in the middle column (the location of the original data was also added for ease of cross-checking), while the three types of comments were placed in the last column, whereas the first column was used for the next step (Jeong & Othman, 2016). Below is an example of a table which was extracted from a transcript. At this stage my preconceptions also came to the fore. In this regard it was important to bracket preconceptions and allow the participants' data to speak for itself. My reflexive diary was used to write down the preconceptions which arose while each transcript was worked through.

**Table 4.4. IPA data analysis stage 1**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Original source and location</b>	<b>Comment</b>

In the second stage of data analysis, the notes which were made in the left-hand margin were used to produce emerging themes in the right-hand margin. These themes were then added to the table that was developed in the previous stage. The data became more focused and interpretative, as manifest coding and latent coding arose (Klenke, 2008). In manifest coding, the content of a phenomenon is already quite clear, and the themes can be easily located, whereas in latent coding, the researcher looks for hidden content that represents a higher level of abstraction. While checking the comments and the original source, I developed themes which were central to the conceptual comments, mostly in the form of a phrase, sentence, or quote. According to Creswell (2012), this is known as horizontalisation. The themes which were created, were concise and compressed while it was grounded in the actual words of the participants. It was therefore important that I did not lose the richness of what was said by each participant, while still having gathered themes and theoretical connections. During this stage of analysis, I was also guided by the research questions and literature to be certain that these themes were addressing the research questions. Below is an example of such a table, highlighting the themes for a transcript.

**Table 4.5. IPA data analysis stage 2**

<b>Subordinate theme</b>	<b>Original source and location</b>	<b>Comment</b>

The next step of data analysis involved searching for connections across emergent themes for each transcript. The connections among themes were termed “superordinate themes”. The superordinate themes were based on the subordinate themes and were also guided by the theoretical knowledge.

**Table 4.6. IPA data analysis stage 3**

<b>Superordinate theme</b>	<b>Subordinate theme</b>	<b>Original source and location</b>	<b>Comment</b>

The final step of the data analysis involved looking for patterns across cases. The superordinate themes acted as the boundaries within which the patterns of convergences and commonalities, and those of divergences and nuances across the various participants were observed. A final table of superordinate themes was formed, based on similarities across transcripts. The table below highlights the way in which superordinate themes were uncovered. The fully completed summary table can be found as an appendix at the end of this research (Appendix E). This final stage of analysis also aided in the preparation for the reporting of findings.

**Table 4.7. IPA data analysis stage 4**

<b>Superordinate theme</b>	<b>Subordinate theme</b>	<b>Original source and location</b>

#### ***4.3.10 Reporting Findings***

The vignettes approach was used to report the findings of the research. According to Reay, Azafar, Monteiro, and Glaser (2019), findings in this approach are presented through a narrative of show and tell. The narrative or descriptive aspects (the telling) is reinforced with vignettes, providing the evidence and examples for the themes discussed (the showing).

According to Reay et al. (2019), raw data aspects are considered rare, and instead authors reconstruct scenes that make readers feel that they are there. However, in the current research, raw data extracts or verbatim words were included as evidence for a theme. The verbatim extracts in the current research were presented with rich contextual descriptions which served to engage the reader at an experiential level, increasing the intensity of feeling and adding a depth of richness. In providing verbatim quotes when discussing a theme, it was

important to select quotes that were poignant and/or most representative of the research findings.

When writing the presentation of findings, a clear distinction was made between the researcher narrative and the verbatim quotes. To differentiate between the two, the verbatim quotes were placed in quotation marks and the font style changed to italics. The verbatim quotes were not embedded within my narrative but added below the theme concerned.

Apart from the textual presentation, there was also a table, providing a summary of themes and verbatim quotes. The table allowed easy access to read the findings. Tables were also provided, highlighting the frequency of a theme that was found in the transcripts per participant.

#### ***4.3.11 Assessing Trustworthiness***

##### ***4.3.11.1 Credibility.***

In order to achieve credibility and enhance the trustworthiness of the research, two methods to obtain data were used in order to gain a rich understanding of the selfie phenomenon among adolescents. Observation was the first method used in the data collection stage where the adolescents' selfies, posted on their private profiles, were observed over a period of two days. During the observation, notes were made regarding the filters used, poses taken, and also likes and comments on each selfie. The information which was obtained during the observation, would be used in the semi-structured questionnaire. The second method to obtain data was the semi-structured interview which served to capture the actual words of a participant regarding their selfies.

Credibility was further enhanced by seeking assistance from professionals who assisted in the research process, to make informed decisions. This form of peer debriefing was provided by my supervisor, who provided assistance in the decision-making process throughout the research.

Credibility was also maintained by ensuring a meticulous data management as well as analytical procedures. In the current research, the data which were obtained from the obser-

vation and interviews were documented and stored as a soft copy on my personal computer. No individual was able to gain access to the information on my computer, as the documents contained a password, only known to myself. The password for the transcribed interviews was, however, shared with the professor who assisted with the NVivo data analysis.

To ensure that confidence can be placed in the truth of the findings and hence credibility, the final analysis of data was presented first to the participants of the study. This also included their parents if they were under 18 years of age. To further enhance credibility, each participant was made aware that they could refuse to participate, as their participation was voluntary. This ensured that the study consisted only of participants who were genuinely willing to participate.

The use of memoing also enhanced the credibility of the research. According to Groenewald (2008), some research settings do not always allow for jotting notes and may also compromise credibility. However, in the current research, notes were taken through the research process including the observation and interview stages.

#### ***4.3.11.2 Dependability.***

The current research outlined each step of the research process. The sampling method was discussed in detail, highlighting the criteria of inclusion in order for the study to be replicated. The data collection (how participants were recruited for the study, observational, and interview methods) and data analysis stages (transcribing interviews, as well as the NVivo and IPA analyses) were explained in detail. By providing thorough information, dependability in the research was enhanced and could easily be repeated by another researcher.

To achieve dependability, researchers can ensure that the process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), if readers are able to examine the researcher's process, they are more able to judge the dependability of the research. It was thus important to have an audit trail which highlighted the data collection process, data analysis, and findings of the research in details. I also included examples of coding that I presented in a table, and descriptions of how I worked from individual codes to themes. Added to these, I provided a rationale for why codes were clustered together to form the basis

of each theme. In this case, the study clearly highlighted how data were collected and analysed. The trail of the audit which was included in the memoing journal, forms part of Appendix G.

Triangulation (observation and semi-structured) questionnaires enhanced the dependability, reimbursing the weak points of one approach to the data collection by using an alternate data gathering method.

#### ***4.3.11.3 Confirmability.***

The fourth factor in establishing trustworthiness is confirmability, which refers to the extent to which the findings of the study are not shaped by the researcher due to bias. This factor indicates that findings by the researcher should be based on the participants' narratives. According to Merriam (2009), to enhance dependability, a technique called audit trail is considered important. In order for an audit to take place, the researcher needs to describe in detail how the data were collected and how decisions were made throughout the research process, in order to reach the findings. Recording devices also support dependability. According to Koch (2006), the researcher must explicate all decisions which are taken about theoretical, methodological, and analytic choices. The current research developed a detailed audit trail by maintaining a log of all research activities, memos, entries in a research journal, the documentation of all data which were collected, and analysis procedures throughout the study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are six categories of information that need to be collected to inform the audit process:

1. Raw data: In the current study, all information that was collected before, during, and after the data collection, were kept in the possession of the researcher. The raw data included all the information.
2. Data reduction and analysis products: During the research process, memoing took place which highlighted how themes were created during the coding process.
3. Data reconstruction and synthesis products: Themes which were found during the data analysis stage, were also kept to ensure that the final data produced were accurate.
4. The processing of notes.
5. Materials relating to intentions and dispositions.

6. Instrument development information: The interview guide was developed by the researcher and was piloted with the first two participants. A second interview guide was developed, based on the challenges which were experienced during the pilot phase. Both interview guides were kept in possession of the researcher to highlight how the interview guide was developed to a final guide.

A second technique which enhances confirmability, is reflexivity. Reflexivity is an attitude adopted by the researcher where they must look at their own background and position to see how these could influence the research process. In the current research, I kept a reflexive journal. The purpose of the journal was to reflect on each process in the research study and to document how my interests and biases could influence the research.

#### ***4.3.11.4 Transferability.***

The sampling method used in the current research served to enhance transferability. In purposive sampling, specific information is maximised in relation to the context in which the data collection occurs. Specific information enhances transferability rather than having generalised information. In using purposive sampling, full details were provided regarding the sampling criterion. Not providing the sampling criterion will make it difficult for the reader to judge trustworthiness.

Furthermore, sampling took place until data saturation was reached. In this case, when reading and analysing the transcripts, the number of codes per interview was quantified. When no new codes arose anymore, data saturation was reached.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommend that a thick description of the research should be provided. In the current study, a robust and detailed account of the experiences during data collection was documented. Cultural and social contexts that surrounded the data were fully discussed. This includes information such as where interviews occurred, as well as other aspects of data collection that helped to provide a richer and fuller understanding of the research setting. The thick description which was provided, will allow other researchers to construct the scene that surrounds the research study and to make transferable judgements.

#### ***4.3.12 Ethical Consideration***

The use of social media to recruit participants, added certain ethics that the researcher had to consider. Social media users do have an increased openness to share their personal information. All Facebook users, for example, have control over which of their data are made available online. The data which are published, are also scrutinised by their Facebook friends and acquaintances (Konsinki et al., 2015). Intimate information is therefore unlikely to be shared, especially due to privacy settings which can be used to prevent others from viewing these types of information.

According to Konsinki et al. (2015), the boundaries of processing the data should always be agreed on with the participants. An example is Facebook likes, which can be used to infer one's personality. During the observation stage of the research, both Facebook and Instagram likes were observed and then discussed during the interviews. It was important for the participants to understand what I would be viewing when observing their selfies on their social media profiles. In providing the participants with clear details about what information was going to be extracted from their selfies, it allowed them to be treated as collaborators in the process, rather than subjects (Konsinki et al., 2015).

In using social media for the current study, it was important to display self-reflexivity online, in that the researcher's perceptions of the social media profile could not influence the way in which the researcher perceived the actual person behind the profile. This was found to be the case in research by Kramer and Winter (2008). To overcome this challenge, a self-reflexive journal was used to document any biases or thoughts which the researcher had when interacting with the participants and their social media profiles.

Autonomy was displayed by participants who were 18 years of age, as they had the freedom of choice and were able to decide if they wanted to participate in the research. The practical element of autonomy was the informed consent which was administered to the participants who were 18 years old. By consenting to the research, they consciously granted permission to participate in the research. The informed consent clearly outlined the details of the research in a language that they could easily understand, thus protecting their dignity (Dhai, 2008). Informed consent explained the purpose of the research and what would be required from the participants when participating in the research.

However, participants who were minors, were considered vulnerable individuals and had a reduced rational capacity to make a decision to participate in the research. This is according to the South African law which states that adolescents over the age of 7 and below the age of 18 are considered to be minors (Van Huyssteen, Van der Merwe & Maxwell, 2010). In this case, parents or guardians were regarded as legal gatekeepers who became the primary decision makers for the minor adolescent and who exercised the right to make proxy decisions for their child (Kruger, Ndebele & Horn, 2014). Therefore, participants below the age of 18 required assent, which served to respect the minor's sense of control in the research process and in turn demonstrated a recognition for the rights of the minor.

There is a visible difference between consent and assent. With consent, the individual is considered capable, competent, and self-determined to make a decision, while with assent, a minor's capacity and readiness to make a decision is assessed. The assent form therefore addressed the agreement between the adolescents who were younger than 18 years and the researcher. The assent form allowed the minor to agree or disagree to participate in the research, but did not act as legal consent (Kruger et al., 2014).

Similar to the consent form, the assent form was in a language which the minor adolescent would easily understand. The assent form clearly explained the research process and the aims of the research in simple language. The participants were informed about confidentiality and privacy during the research process and were further informed that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the research process at any point if they felt uncomfortable. The participants were free to ask any questions if they did not understand the research process.

In conjunction with the assent form, parental consent was also required for the adolescent participants under the age of 18. The parental consent aimed to inform the parent or guardian about the study as well as the purpose of the study. The parental consent clearly outlined the expectations of their child and further stated that there would be no harm done to their child, as participation was completely voluntary. Confidentiality and privacy were highlighted in terms of the audio recordings and transcriptions. Parents were made aware that both the researcher and her supervisor would have access to the raw information from the audio-recording and interview transcriptions, as well as anyone else who required the information, such as the professor who completed the computer data analysis. The storage and disposal of

this information was also highlighted in the consent form. Any form of identifying information would be removed and pseudonyms were used instead of actual names. The parental consent form stated that no compensation would result from the research. However, the results of the research will be provided for review. My personal contact details were provided on the consent form, if anybody would want to contact me, should they require more information on the research. The ethical clearance form from the university was also provided to the parents as confirmation of the legitimacy of the research.

It was important for both the participants and the parents to understand the research process as well as the informed consent, assent, and parental consent forms, as their understanding was an important element to increase the trustworthiness of the research. According to Applebaum and Grisso (1988), the researcher should also understand the participants' abilities to grasp the information, given their mental competence. Applebaum and Grisso (1988) outline four levels of competence:

- The ability to communicate choices.
- The ability to understand the relevant information upon which the choice is made.
- The ability to appreciate the situation according to one's own values.
- The ability to weigh various values to arrive at a decision.

The researcher adhered to these four levels, as the participants understood the information and were able to make a decision regarding their participation based on their values. Participants were not coerced into participating, as coercion would have affected the trustworthiness of the research. Furthermore, the participants were made aware that privacy and confidentiality would be adhered to, which were guided by the Protection of Personal Information Act of 2013 (POPi) of South Africa (De Bruyn, 2014). The information in the informed consent form for the adolescents aged 18 years, was the same as in the parental consent form.

Confidentiality and privacy were adhered to in the research and were guided by the POPi Act of 2013. The purpose of the Act is to ensure that all institutions in South Africa conduct themselves in a responsible manner when collecting, processing, storing, and sharing another

individual's personal information by holding themselves accountable, should they abuse the personal information in any way (De Bruyn, 2014).

According to the POPI Act, the individual whose information is collected, exercises control over it when and how they choose to share their information, as well as the type and extent of the information that they share, being provided access to their information or removal of their information if they wish. The individuals must know who has access to their information and where it will be stored (De Bruyn, 2014). Furthermore, the information which individuals provide, should be captured correctly, ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the information. The consent form which was provided, answered the concerns as highlighted in the POPI Act, as it stated the type of information that would be collected, what will happen with the information which is collected, and the disposal of the information on completion of the data collection and analysis.

The participants were afforded privacy in the research process as they could contact me either on Facebook or on my personal mobile number, once they had viewed the advertised post on social media. Facebook messenger is a private messaging service, built into Facebook. There were no public displays of communication regarding the research on social media, hence respecting the individual and protecting their privacy. Privacy and respect to participants were also ensured by using pseudonyms instead of their actual names during the data analysis stage. Furthermore, during the Skype interview with the participants, I ensured that I was alone, preventing any other individual from hearing the conversation. In this way the participant's identity was always protected.

Confidentiality protected the data that were collected during the research process. The most important and confidential data were the raw data which were collected during the recorded Skype interview. A Skype account was created solely for the research. The participants were informed when the recording had started and when the recording had ended. Each recorded interview was stored only on the researcher's personal computer and was allocated a password only known to the researcher. The recording was sent to all participants for their own viewing. The participants were also made aware that the transcribed interviews were shared with my supervisor as well as the professor who assisted in the data analysis stages. Furthermore, during the research process, I kept a reflexive journal and memos which included my thoughts and experiences throughout the research process. The journal was kept

for my personal viewing and did not contain any identifying information regarding the participants.

Privacy was also adhered to by advising participants prior to the start of each interview to select an appropriate background for the interview. According to Iacono, Symonds, and Brown (2016), participants may be unaware of what is within range of their camera and may inadvertently share something that they would rather keep private. However, some participants did not opt to be on video and in their case, this was not an issue to discuss.

The consent forms also highlighted that the details of counselling services would be provided if the study would cause any harm to participants by bringing forth any feeling of distress. It was further an ethical obligation to first present the research findings to the participants. In this instance, they were able to verify if their data were presented correctly, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the study.

#### ***4.3.13 Construct Validity***

In qualitative research, the researcher cannot adopt an objective manner, and is unable to prove the validity by using statistical procedures. Validity, in terms of the measuring instrument, needs to be highlighted through rigour and control in order for the truth to reveal itself. The trustworthiness of the semi-structured questionnaire is important in order to obtain the desired results.

With regards to the construction of validity, the aim was to ensure that the semi-structured questionnaire would obtain relevant information which was required, as set out by the research questions of the study. In the case of the current research, self-esteem was the construct, as the research aimed to explore how the selfie affects self-esteem. The construct of self-esteem was conceptualised by providing a definition in concrete and precise terms. Conceptualisation of the construct “self-esteem” was discussed in the literature review. Operationalisation of the construct took place by the use of indicators which were used to measure self-esteem. In the case of the current research, indicators were the body images and narcissism of the participants.

In order to ensure that the semi-structured questionnaire explored the concepts of body image and narcissism, the questionnaire incorporated elements from the research questions. The following questions, extracted from the semi-structured questionnaire, explored the concepts of body image and narcissism and in turn of self-esteem:

- How does a selfie need to look before posting it onto social media?
- How do you feel when you receive negative comments on a selfie or no comments at all?
- How do you feel when you receive less likes on a selfie?
- What filters do you use when taking a selfie?
- Why do you use filters?

It was therefore important for the semi-structured questionnaire to be aligned to the research questions. The questions in the semi-structured questionnaire started with “what”, “how”, or “why”, and focused on the exploration of a single concept based on the participants’ perspectives. Engaging in a pilot study further ensured the credibility of the semi-structured questionnaire.

According to Watson, Atkinson, and Rose (2007), a pilot study is important as it serves the function of helping to detect possible flaws in the measurement instrument and whether concepts are adequately operationalised. According to these authors, a pilot study helps to

- highlight ambiguities as well as difficult or unnecessary questions.
- modify questions for better understanding.
- record the time that it takes to complete the interview to determine whether it is reasonable.
- determine whether each question elicits an adequate response.

In the current research, a pilot study was carried out with the first two participants of the study. The pilot study ensured that the questions which were asked, were certainly understood by the participants that followed. By understanding the questions, the participants were better able to answer and provide the relevant information.

To further ensure the credibility of the semi-structured questionnaire, observation was used to enhance trustworthiness. Observation took place by viewing the past selfies posted by the participants, over a period of two days. The aim of the observation was to obtain information about the posted selfie, like filters being used, the pose of the selfie, and comments on the selfie. By completing the observation, the researcher was able to see how the indicators (body image and narcissism) affected the construct narcissism and therefore she could edit questions appropriately. Furthermore, observation aided in triangulation, adding more depth to the research data collection, and therefore made the study more credible.

The use of peer debriefing further aided in the credibility of the semi-structured questionnaire. The aim of peer debriefing was to ensure that the researcher was not using her biased opinion in formulating questions. This method consisted of the researcher asking a colleague to look over the study for credibility. In the current research, my supervisor completed the peer debriefing by overlooking the questionnaire. Personal bias was also prevented throughout the entire research process by making use of a reflexive journal where I was able to document thoughts or any biases that may have occurred in the research process.

#### **4.4 Summary**

This chapter reiterated the three research questions. The primary research question is, “How does posting selfies on social media impact an adolescent’s self-esteem?” and the secondary research questions could be summarised by asking, “How does the selfie impact adolescents’ body image and the personality trait of narcissism?”

The empirical research was conducted in an interpretive qualitative paradigm, underpinned by the construction of the social self. To understand if the selfie was constructed differently by each individual, it was therefore important to work from an interpretative qualitative paradigm, as the aim was to explore experiences and interpret these experiences from the participants’ viewpoints.

Fourteen participants were sampled through targeted advertising on the social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram. The researcher’s private social media page was used to advertise the study, as well as public groups on Facebook. Snowball sampling was also utilised to obtain participants who met the criteria. However, adolescents who were under 18 years of age were considered to be minors and therefore consent was required from their

parents. Furthermore, assent was also required from the minors, prior to their participation in the research.

On completion of the consent and assent forms, an observation of the participants' social media selfies was completed over a period of two days, which involved an observation of filters used, selfie poses, and comments and likes that were made on each selfie. The information that was collected from the observation was used to gather further information during the semi-structured interviews.

The semi-structured interview guide was devised by the researcher in conjunction with the supervisor of the research. The interview guide was piloted with the first two participants, assisting in the change and editing of questions. A final interview guide was then produced.

The data which were collected from the observation and semi-structured interview, were then analysed by means of a grounded theory. This chapter discussed in-depth how grounded theory took place. Table 4.3 highlights how codes were chosen.

The chapter also discusses ethics which were adhered to in the research, as well as trustworthiness as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Findings and Discussion**

This chapter will provide a discussion on the findings of the study by analysing each question asked to participants during the semi-structured interview and exploring the themes which were revealed during the analysis of each question. This chapter will explore the answer to the primary research question of the study: *Does posting selfies on social media affect an adolescent's self-esteem?* This chapter will also explore the answer to the following secondary research questions of the study: *What effect does the selfie have on an adolescent's body image?* and *What effect does the selfie have on the personality trait of narcissism in the adolescent?*

Fourteen adolescents were interviewed, using a semi-structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. In the semi-structured questionnaire, the participants were asked to respond to general questions, while the researcher probed and explored their responses to identify perceptions, opinions, and feelings about the selfie and to determine the degree of agreement that exists in the group (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Two methods were used to analyse the interviews. In the first method, I completed a manual analysis using IPA. The aim of IPA is to undertake an in-depth exploration of the lived experience of the individual and to make sense of their personal and social worlds (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Given the aim of IPA, this method of data analysis was best suited to analyse the transcribed interviews, as the research aimed to understand the experiences of adolescents and the selfie. The analysis of the data consisted of reading the transcribed interviews numerous times, as well listening to the audio-recording of each participant more than once. The interviews were coded, and produced various patterns known as themes. The recurring themes which were identified were not only an object of concern for all participants, but also conveyed meaning for the participants. The themes which were identified, were linked to the research questions. Furthermore, through the IPA analysis, the frequency of themes being mentioned, was also noted. A table highlighting the frequency of themes mentioned among each participant was also included for each question.

In the second method, the data were analysed by a professor who is qualified in statistics. A computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) known as NVivo software (version 12) was used to analyse the data. The NVivo software facilitated an accurate yet transparent data analysis process whilst also providing a reliable picture of the data (Welsh, 2002). According Welsh (2002), the NVivo software can indeed add rigour to the analysis process by allowing the researcher to conduct a quick and accurate search of a particular type. Furthermore, validity is also enhanced by ensuring that all instances of a particular usage are found. To ensure that data are thoroughly interrogated, the NVivo search needs to be combined with a manual analysis. In the current research, the NVivo analysis was linked to the IPA analysis, therefore adding to the reliability of the results.

This chapter will present the combined findings from the NVivo software data analysis and IPA analysis, by highlighting the themes which were found in each question of the semi-structured interview. Furthermore, a word cloud produced from the NVivo analysis, will illustrate the frequency of most recurring words for each question among the 14 participants. An image of the word cloud will be included when discussing each question.

## 5.1 Demographics

The demographics of the study was produced by the statistician, using SPSS (version 27). In this section, gender, age, ethnicity, type of social media used, and number of selfies posted per month are highlighted with the use of graphs.

### 5.1.1 Gender

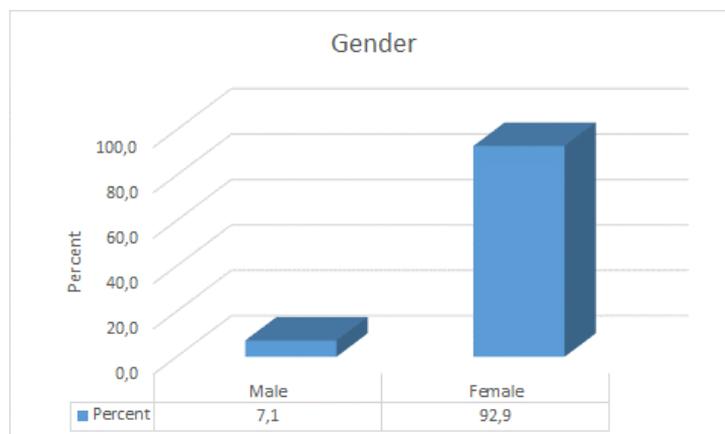


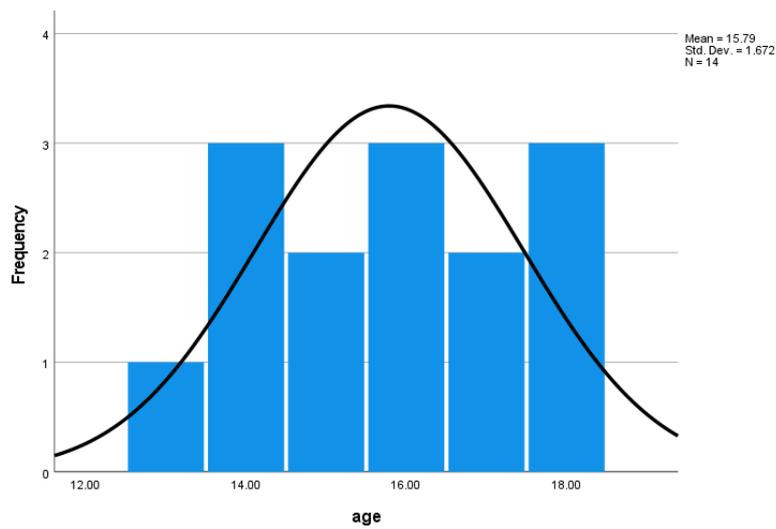
Figure 3. Gender

**Table 5.1. Gender**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Valid	Male	1	7.1	7.1	7.1
	Female	13	92.9	92.9	92.9
	Total	14	100.0	100.0	100.0

The graph highlights that female participants dominated the research study. This is a limitation of the study which will be discussed in the next chapter.

### 5.1.2 Age



*Figure 4. Age*

**Table 5.2. Age**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Valid	13.00	1	7.1	7.1	7.1
	14.00	3	21.4	21.4	28.6
	15.00	2	14.3	14.3	42.9
	16.00	3	21.4	21.4	64.3
	17.00	2	14.3	14.3	78.6
	18.00	3	21.4	21.4	100.0
Total		14	100.0	100.0	100.0

A strict criterion to participate in the study was that participants needed to be from 12 to 18 years of age. Among the 14 participants who participated in the study, the average age of the adolescents was 15.79 years.

### 5.1.3 Ethnicity

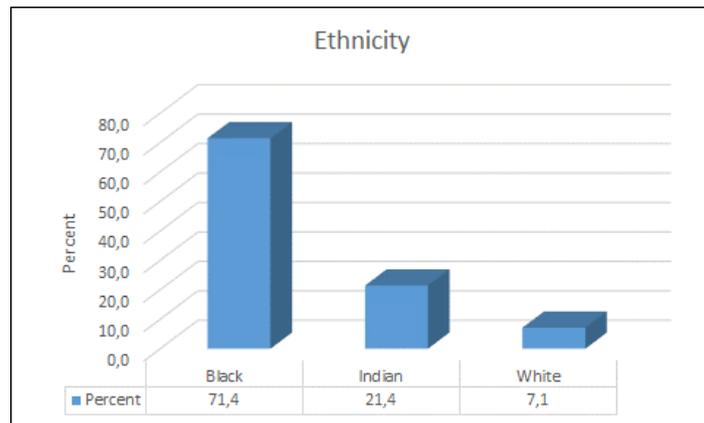


Figure 5. Ethnicity

Table 5.3. Ethnicity

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Black	10	71.4	71.4	71.4
	Indian	3	21.4	21.4	92.9
	White	1	7.2	7.2	100.0
	Total	14	100.0	100.0	

The sample was dominated by the black race group (71.4 %) followed by the Indian group (21.4%).

### 5.1.4 Type of Social Media

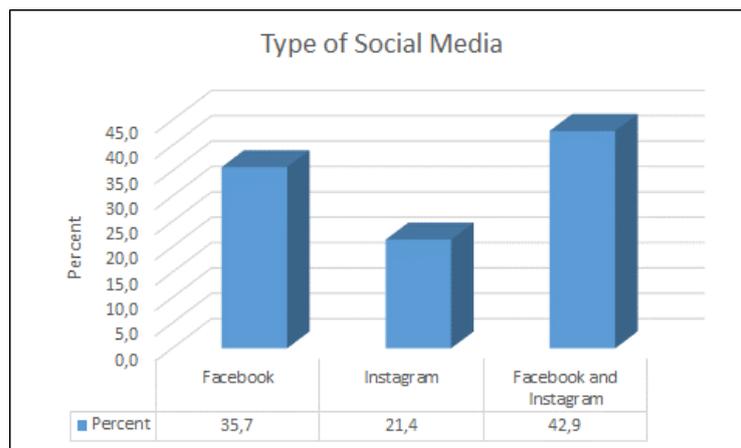


Figure 6. Type of social media

Table 5.4. Type of social media

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Facebook	5	35.7	35.7	35.7
	Instagram	3	21.4	21.4	57.1
	Facebook and Instagram	6	42.9	42.9	7.2
Total		14	100.0	100.0	100.0

The modal type of social media was Facebook and Instagram (42.9 %).

### 5.1.5 Number of Selfies Taken per Month

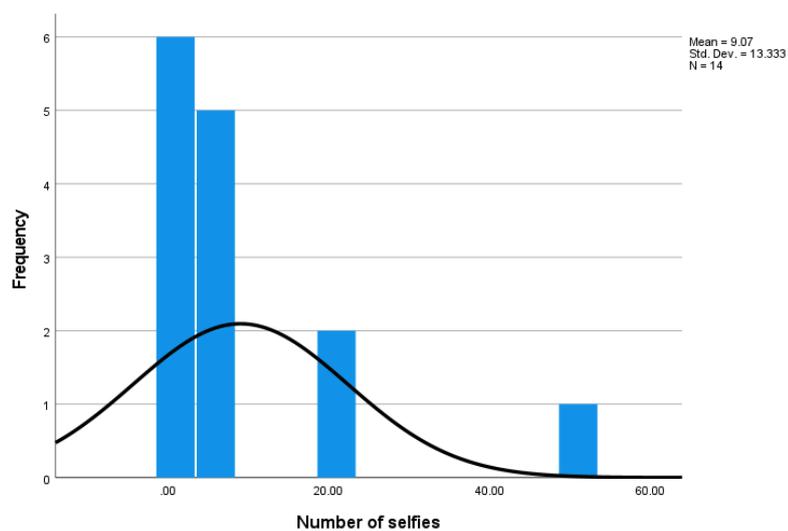


Figure 7. Number of selfies

**Table 5.5. Number of selfies Part 1**

		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid percent</b>	<b>Cumulative percent</b>
Valid	1.00	3	21.4	21.4	21.4
	2.00	1	7.1	7.1	28.5
	3.00	2	14.3	14.3	42.8
	4.00	1	7.1	7.1	49.9
	5.00	2	14.3	14.3	64.2
	6.00	2	14.3	14.3	78.5
	20.00	2	14.3	14.3	92.8
	50.00	1	7.2	7.2	100.0
	Total	14	100.0	100.0	

**Table 5.6. Number of selfies Part 2**

	<b>No of selfies</b>
Mean	9.0714
Median	4.5000
Mode	1.00
Std. deviation	13.33281
Variance	177.764
Range	49.00
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	50.00

The average number of selfies taken per month was 9.0714 with a range of 49. There was a high variability in the number of selfies taken per month, since the standard deviation is 13.333, which is high.

### 5.1.6 Descriptive Statistics

**Table 5.7. Descriptive Statistics**

	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Social media</b>	<b>No of selfies</b>
Mean	1.9286	15.7857	1.4286	2.0714	9.0714
Median	2.0000	16.0000	1.0000	2.0000	4.5000
Mode	2.00	14.00	1.00	3.00	1.00
Std. deviation	.26726	1.67233	.85163	.91687	13.33281
Variance	.071	2.797	.725	.841	177.764
Range	1.00	5.00	3.00	2.00	49.00
Minimum	1.00	13.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Maximum	2.00	18.00	4.00	3.00	50.00

We will consider the mean, mode, median, sample variance, and sample standard deviation. The mean or the arithmetic mean is the sum of all the values divided by the sample size; the mode is the most frequent response given by the participants; the median is the middle most value when the data (per variable/question) are arranged from highest to lowest; the sample variance is the degree or quantity by which the observations vary from each other; and the sample standard deviation is the square root of the sample variance. From the table above, the majority of the questions have a mode of 1, while some of the questions have modes of 2 or 3, which translates to the responses in accordance with the questionnaire/interviews. The standard deviations are consistently almost 1 and this indicates good consistency between the observations due to the low variability, except for the variable of the number of selfies taken due to the high variability in the values. The mean and median values are consistent with modal values. The descriptive statistics will also serve to confirm the graphical statistics.

## 5.2 Content Analysis

This section will focus on the open-ended questions asked in the interviews. The themes which were found, will be listed below for each question. Each theme will be discussed and supported by literature. Verbatim narratives from each participant will be used as evidence when discussing the themes.

### 5.2.1 What Does a Selfie Need to Look like, before Posting it onto Social Media?

(Researcher notes: Elaborate for the participant – type of pose? Face or full body selfie?)

#### 5.2.1.1 The Face Selfie.

The results reveal that there was a varied choice between the selfies taken, as eight of the 14 participants (57%) preferred the face only, while four of them (29%) preferred the full body selfie. A smaller number of two participants (14%) preferred both the face and the full body selfies. Below is the word cloud which highlights keywords that were mentioned by participants who highlighted capturing selfies of the face only:



Figure 8. Word cloud: The face selfie

Some of the sub-themes associated with the face selfie include that it is chosen above body selfies due to body insecurities, the contours of the face, sparkly attractive eyes, and full smiles. The extracts from the interviews are listed below.

Participant 1 prefers the face selfie as it shows off her eyes which she feels are an attractive feature. In contrast, she does not capture full body selfies due to insecurities about her body image. The participant expresses body image concerns.

P1: “Hmmm, I definitely like to put a selfie that shows my eyes (laughs). Like you know, sparkly eyes but not fully body...just face...because of insecurities”.

Similarly, participant 10 also experiences body image concerns related to her nose, but still prefers a face selfie. However, she attempts to make her nose appear smaller in the pictures.

*P10: "When I take a selfie...I usually take my face...and I try to get my nose to look smaller because I have a big nose and I am insecure about my nose".*

Participant 11 prefers face selfies and pouts when capturing a selfie, as it contours the face more and therefore adds more definition and structure to the face.

*P11: "I think it just contours your face more".*

Participants 4, 7, and 12 agree that the face selfie is preferred over a full body selfie.

*P4: "I take selfies just of my face and then I pose".*

*P7: "It's up to you...how you take your selfie. It's like for me...I just take a picture of my face".*

*P12: "First thing to do is to prepare my hair...fixing my face...posing".*

It is no surprise that face selfies are more popular than full body selfies (Senft & Baym, 2015). Furthermore, the image of the face is an important aspect when posting a Facebook profile photo which introduces people to your page (Zaho, Grasmuck & Martin, 2008).

While the majority of participants captured face selfies, fewer participants were taking full body selfies. The developmental stage of adolescence may be characterised as a period of many changes including physical maturation.

Physical maturation in adolescence brings to the fore internalisation of socially acceptable body ideals which arise due to media ideas and peer comparison. Apart from having an attractive face, a slim figure is also considered attractive or more socially acceptable. This was also a finding by Chua and Chang (2016), where participants felt that a slim figure is important when posting selfies on social media. The findings in the current study can possibly suggest that some participants have weight concerns, hence the reason why they

prefer posting face selfies to full body selfies. Face selfies are also easier to manipulate through filtering software to make one appear more attractive in comparison to full body selfies which are not as easy to manipulate.

### 5.2.1.2 *The Body Selfie.*

The sub-themes associated with the full body selfies include a focused feeling of confidence. These selfies lend themselves for views to applications like WhatsApp and Instagram. The word cloud below indicates occurring words associated with full body selfies:



Figure 9. Word cloud: *The body selfie*

Participants 3, 5, 9, and 13 expressed body confidence, as they felt comfortable with posting selfies on social media that displayed their full body. However, it is important to note that the participants that took full body selfies all possessed different body sizes.

P3: *“Uhhmm...in most cases I take full body pictures because I love myself”.*

P5: *“Yes. And a full body photo...so people know who they are talking too”.*

P9: *“Hmmm...maybe it can be both”.*

P13: *“Okay...me I take...most of my pics are of my face...then there are few pics that I take my full body”.*

**5.2.2 Can You Describe Your Preparation before Taking a Selfie which Will Be Posted on Social Media?**

(Researcher note: Elaborate/Probe for the participant: Does the participant use make-up, straighten hair, choose a certain lighting, focus on background?)

This question was aimed at exploring how participants prepare themselves before taking a selfie to be posted on a social media platform. Preparation could include manipulating the physical appearance or the overall appearance of the selfie. The themes which emerged were angles, background, pouting, hair and make-up, use of clothing, and lighting. Each of these themes will be discussed together with verbatim extracts from the transcribed interviews.

The IPA analysis also revealed the number of times that each of these themes were mentioned by participants in their interviews. This is illustrated in the table below.

**Table 5.8. Preparations for taking a selfie**

Participant number	Themes:					
	Angles	Background	Pouting	Hair and make-up	Clothing	Lighting
<b>P1</b>	1	0	0	1	0	1
<b>P2</b>	1	0	1	1	1	1
<b>P3</b>	1	3	1	1	2	3
<b>P4</b>	0	1	1	0	0	0
<b>P5</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0
<b>P6</b>	0	2	0	0	0	1
<b>P7</b>	0	2	1	0	3	2
<b>P8</b>	0	3	0	0	1	1
<b>P9</b>	1	0	1	0	0	0
<b>P10</b>	2	1	0	2	1	1
<b>P11</b>	1	1	1	2	1	1
<b>P12</b>	0	2	0	2	0	1
<b>P13</b>	1	1	0	2	1	1
<b>P14</b>	0	1	1	0	1	0

The word cloud below produced by the NVivo data analysis, highlights occurring keywords used by participants when answering this question. Some keywords were “weather”, “sun”, “weight”, and “look”.



Figure 10. Word cloud: Preparations for taking a selfie

#### 5.2.2.1 Angles.

The angle of the mobile camera plays a role in hiding weight insecurities as well as making the participant look slimmer and thereby enhancing the selfie quality extensively. This technique has been learned and passed on from one participant to another via their friends. The use of an angle when taking a selfie is dependent on the weather to obtain the maximum light, effects, and contrast. The word cloud produced from the NVivo analysis highlights recurring words such as “angle”, “picture”, “slimmer”, and “insecurities”.

Participants 1, 10, and 11 emphasise that certain angles enhance their physical appearance. Participant 1 states that a camera should not be held directly in front of her, as it will not be flattering. Instead, holding the camera at an angle, makes her look more appealing. Similarly, participant 10 angles her face to the left as she feels her left side is more flattering. Participant 11 also refers to having a “best side” which is used for selfies.

*P1: “Also the picture mustn’t be taken from here (pretending to hold a phone right in front of her face), but it must be taken from up and an angle”.*

P10: *“When I take a selfie...I usually take my face...and I try to get my nose to look smaller because I have a big nose and I am insecure about my nose...I usually take selfies on the left side because I feel the left side is better”.*

P11: *“It’s like how my face looks...my features...and how much of my face is actually showing...is like...my best side”.*

Participant 14 states how negative feedback from online peers serves to educate her on future angles to use when taking selfies. Based on the feedback, she adjusts her angle to achieve the most flattering selfie.

P14: *“Yes...yes...there is certain pose...certain angles that I use because...when you use...the certain pose that you don’t use...people maybe may ask questions or shame, or no, it doesn’t look good, so there must always be that type of angle that you use when taking pictures”.*

Participant 9 states that she takes many selfies from different angles before posting the best selfie for social media.

P9: *“Hmmm...many selfies...from different angles”.*

Participant 3, on the other hand, is also aware of what angles look good on other people, such as her friends.

P3: *“Uhhmm...I...I...I take the cell phone and look at the angles like and ask someone to stand on that place and then I take his or her picture and say no...this is not a place for you to take a picture”.*

Hess (2015) states that selfie-takers have a preference to continuously capture selfies until they obtain the perfect image. Similarly, Palermo (2014) notes that a good camera and flattering facial angles contribute to a good selfie. The participants in the study confirm the statements of Hess and Palermo, using words like “different angles”, “best side”, and “type of angle”, which suggest that they have tried various angles and are now more aware of what

looks appealing. The feedback from peers on the posted selfie also makes participants more aware and conscious of what angles to use when capturing selfies.

Goffman’s self-presentation strategy suggests that when presenting the best side of the self, backstage and frontstage are considered important (Goffman 1959). Backstage can be likened to the preparation of the selfie, while frontstage can be likened to the actual posting of the selfie on social media. When in backstage, individuals are closest to the real self and are not presenting a façade as there is no audience to present to. Similarly, when participants are attempting various angles and finding their best side, they are doing so in the backstage. Exploring various angles for the perfect selfie can thus be regarded as a self-presentational technique with the aim of enhancing body image.

#### **5.2.2.2 Background.**

The use of the perfect background is definitely amenable for taking out post-worthy selfies. Some of the participants even indicated that they would travel away from their place of residence to find a picture-perfect background that will include brighter colours and even flowers. One of the participants commented that she would travel as far as Scottsville (an area in Pietermaritzburg, far away from her home) in order to capture beautiful selfies. The word cloud highlighted some occurring words such as “background”, “beautiful”, “flowers”, “setting”, and “perfect”. The word cloud is summarised below, based on recurring responses of the participants:



*Figure 11. Word cloud: Background*

The crux of this finding entails the need and use of the most suitable or picturesque background in order to take the best selfie.

Participants 3 and 8 describe the lengths to which they would go to obtain a perfect selfie. Both participants state that they will travel to another place that is aesthetically pleasing. Participant 14, on the other hand, goes outside her house to take selfies and uses flowers to create an impression to those viewing her selfie.

P3: *“...as well as the background is not nice for me to take a picture yes so we move from that place to another”.*

P8: *“I usually go to Scottsville...where my dad works...there’s a lot of areas with flowers over there”.*

P14: *“...I go outside...I take flowers...to create that casual look...all of that”.*

On the other hand, four participants narrated that they always stand next to something presentable. From the responses it is evident that the participants are very conscious of what is behind them, as they feel that it influences their selfies.

P4: *“Just make sure that my background is perfect...something white”.*

P6: *“If it’s not like blurry...and the background seems pretty stable and presentable”.*

P11: *“...a really nice background...maybe a wall...or a very blank thing...and you know”.*

P12: *“sometimes the background is important like when I’m taking a picture...I like to stand next to a clean wall, not a dirty wall...yes”.*

Participant 14 tried to recreate her own photo-shoot by using a towel behind her to make the selfie look more presentable.

P14: *“(Laughs) – so I like photoshoots a lot...so you usually see that in photoshoots they have backgrounds...so because I don’t have that much money to go to photoshoots...I usually take something that I can use to make a background...like a towel...maybe nice one...put it so it can make a background and shoot”.*

Participant 7 also felt that the background is important, but she made sure that there is no other individual standing behind her and potentially ruining her selfie. This is commonly known by adolescents as “photo bombing” a picture.

*P7: “I just check if nobody is photo bombing my photo...that’s step one...then I check if everything is on point...like my face...my smile”.*

Participant 10 also related how filtering software is used to change the background and make it more appealing.

*P10: “I don’t know how to explain it...but it changes like the whole colour of you and your background”.*

Goffman’s dramaturgical model of social life, also called his self-presentation theory, argues that before an individual faces the audience in the frontstage and commences their performance, various elements need to be considered, such as setting, appearance, and manner (Goffman 1959). The setting can be likened to the background which was mentioned by participants as an important aspect for a selfie. According to Goffman (1959), setting includes scenery, props, and also location. These elements were echoed by the participants of the study as they referred to “area with flowers” and “I take flowers” (which implies the props used), and “I go to Scottsville”, “I go outside”, and “I move to another place” (which implies a change in location and scenery when capturing a selfie for social media). Choosing a perfect background is therefore a self-presentational technique which participants use to create the perfect selfie.

### **5.2.2.3 Pouting (Specific Pose).**

The NVivo data analysis showed that three of the 14 participants indicated that the modal pose for a selfie was pouting whilst two of the participants indicated that sticking out their tongues when taking a selfie was their preferential pose. Similar findings were also shown in the IPA analysis, where four of the participants preferred pouting, while two of them preferred to stick their tongues out. Participants 2, 4, 9, and 11 prefer to pout for a selfie. Participants 9 and 4 both state that pouting not only looks beautiful, but they feel that when they pout, they also appear more beautiful.

P2: *“Ya...I just like mostly pouting...it must not be smiling”.*

P4: *“A pout...because I see myself as more beautiful”.*

P9: *“It just looks beautiful”.*

P11: *“...usually I pout...and you know sometimes I throw in the peace sign there”.*

Participants 3 and 14 stick their tongues out for selfies. Participant 3 claims that sticking the tongue out symbolises happiness and joy. However, participant 14 relates that she sticks her tongue out in selfies because the pose is considered to be popular. This statement not only suggests the influence of friends but also the need to fit in.

P3: *“(Laughs) – tongue out...as well as...what...my legs...putting my legs...uhmmm...I usually take pictures with my friends so we usually go on putting a leg on my other friend...on his back”.*

P3: *“(Laughs) – It’s crazy...it’s crazy, I know...but I don’t know...it...it symbolises happiness and joy...ya”.*

P15: *“The one that uses your tongue...(laughs)”.*

P15: *“Sometimes it needs to be a pose...a nice one...the popular one”.*

Furthermore, these poses play an important role on body image. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “pout” can be described as follows: “Push one’s lips or one’s bottom lip forward as an expression of petulant annoyance or in order to make oneself look sexually attractive” (Lexico, 2021). Similarly, sticking the tongue out for a pose can also have sexual undertones.

Self-objectification occurs when girls who are constantly exposed to sexually objectifying cultural messages are socialised into adopting an external viewer’s perspective of their own bodies and perceive themselves as objects (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn & Thompson, 2011). In the current study, the participants were exposed to other peers, celebrities, and social media

influencers who possibly portrayed themselves in sexual ways on social media and the participants followed suit. According to Aubrey and Frisby (2011), content analyses of media imagery showed that females are depicted in ways that place emphasis on their body parts which can be achieved through wearing revealing clothing or adopting seductive, sexy, and suggestive poses.

Given these findings from researchers (Calogero et al. 2011) as well as Aubrey and Frisby (2011), it is concerning that the self-presentation technique of posing by sticking the tongue out or pouting can be perceived by online peers as sexually suggestive. The participants in the study were motivated to engage in self-presentation to convey their ideal self and in turn please their peers on social media (Baumeister, 1982). According to Sherman, Payton, Hernandez, Greenfield, and Dapretto (2016), presenting oneself on social media with these suggestive poses can have negative effects on the individual. Social reward is a massive motivator of behaviour among young people and therefore receiving more likes on an image where they are displaying suggestive poses serves as a positive reinforcement and can therefore lead to a higher selfie posting frequency of these types of images which can further increase a consciousness of the body image.

#### **5.2.2.4 *Hair and Make-Up.***

The use of make-up included using rouge (blush), ensuring that the lips are glittery, the use of eyeliner, using dark tones or light tones depending on the nature of the selfies, using lipstick and mascara. The NVivo data analysis revealed that nine participants mentioned the washing and combing of their hair before taking a selfie.

The issue of preparation of the participant's hair is definitely a key finding in the preparation before taking a selfie. The issue of hair preparation came through very strongly, particularly with the black female participants. The exact nature of the preparation included washing the hair, combing the hair, setting the hair, and straightening the hair. This could be due to the stigma attached to black females as having neat and clean hair. The research also revealed that some of the participants (four of the 14) did not have to prepare themselves with make-up or hair activities due to the presence of filters, since the filters are used to induce a certain look and this does not warrant the need for any form of preparation.

The word cloud below identified occurring words such as “wash”, “hair”, and “beautiful” as well as words like “eyeliner”, “glittery”, “tones”, and “rouges”, suggesting the importance of make-up. The word cloud is summarised as follows:



Figure 12. Word cloud: Hair and make-up

Participant 11 narrated that she does not like to comb her hair, but that she makes sure she combs her hair for the selfie. This statement places emphasis on the detail and level of preparation involved when capturing a selfie for social media. Similarly, participant 10 detailed that she takes selfies on the day when she goes out because her hair is washed and set and she has make-up on. This statement indicates that capturing a selfie to be posted on social media is an event which cannot be done on any random day.

*P11: “...and then it’s the hair obviously...I actually have to comb my hair...I don’t like combing it, but I do...and then some facial touches here and there...eyeliner if I can get it”.*

*P10: “Generally...errr...I do it after I wash my hair...cause I wash and set my hair...so I errr...usually go out the day I take my selfies...like I have some lipstick on and mascara on”.*

Participant 3 emphasised her lips as an attractive, stand out feature for her selfie, while participants 12 and 14 focused on their hair as well as using blush to create light and dark tones.

P3: *“...make-up and I make sure that my lips are glittery because it is beautiful”.*

P12: *“First thing to do is to prepare my hair...fixing my face...posing...like putting on some rouges”.*

P14: *“...then I prepare my face...maybe do dark tones or light tones...then do my hair”.*

Participant 5 preferred the social networking platform, Instagram. The participant felt that selfies posted on Instagram deserve more attention than selfies posted on other social networking sites. She was also quite direct in relating that when she has make-up on and her hair is fixed, it boosts her self-esteem.

P5: *“But if it was a post for Instagram then I would put make-up on and do my hair...to boost up my confidence, I guess, a bit more so that I look better on my photos”.*

Some participants preferred to use filtering software which adds make-up to the selfie. Participant 1 preferred natural selfies but stated that she uses a filter which gives her the illusion of light make-up. Participants 12 and 10 shared the same sentiments in that the filtering software adds make-up onto the face.

P1: *“I still like to keep it natural. I like using the tint for make-up. It also makes the picture much brighter”.*

P12: *“Sometimes filters can add brightness...make-up or whatever”.*

P10: *“Some of them make my nose smaller...some of them give you lipstick”.*

In contrast, participants 6 and 2 did not like make-up and preferred a natural look. They felt that the natural look was the best and in having a natural look the selfie did not need much effort. According to these participants, a natural selfie showed the true self.

P6: *“Errr...I think the lighting one is quite valid, but I like photos without make-up and just showcasing who you really are...so errr...ya...I don't think there is much effort behind a selfie”.*

P2: *“No, I just had one most that day when I used make-up. I just did it that day because I felt like it, but I am not a fan of make-up”.*

Again, Goffman’s self-presentation theory of frontstage and backstage performance is relevant (Goffman 1959). While frontstage performance refers to our performance in front of people (related to posting the selfie on social media for people to view), backstage performance refers to the place where there is no audience, just the performer who can be themselves and not “act” (related to the preparation before posting the selfie on social media). In line with Goffman’s theory of backstage, the participants prepared themselves backstage in terms of their hair and make-up. In this environment they could be themselves and not worry if nobody is seeing them in their natural state with bad skin or untidy hair. The actions that take place in the backstage are something that peers will never see. Instead, they see a perfectly presented selfie.

Hair and make-up are therefore a self-presentational tool which is confirmed by Chua and Chang (2016) who explored how adolescent girls viewed beauty on social media. One of the findings was that beauty involves the use of make-up which adds to a girl’s physical perfection. Make-up, hair, and clothing were also heavily influenced by the pop culture, as it defined what was considered to be beautiful. To fit in and look beautiful, young girls will mimic make-up trends, hairstyles, and clothing, and present their images to peers online by means of the selfie. According to Chua and Chang (2016), these self-presentational methods suggest underlying feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem related to body image and appearance, having an impact on one’s overall self-esteem.

#### **5.2.2.5 Use of Clothing.**

The use of clothing as a form of preparation for selfies is one of the key findings of the research which serves to make participants more attractive and likeable. The general perception of the participants was that there needs to be a change of outfits before a selfie can be captured. This sentiment was echoed by 6 participants and came to be a priority for those participants who preferred the full body selfies. The IPA analysis found that the use of clothing was important for 8 participants. The preferred clothing can range from casual,

going-out-for-the-night, to large, baggy clothing. The word cloud below summarises the salient findings of the role of clothing in taking selfies:



Figure 13. Word cloud: Use of clothing

Participant 2 specified that she prepares her outfit in advance, thus indicating that taking a selfie is thought out and planned. Participant 14 agreed, relating that taking a selfie must be planned by creating a mood and this will influence how she dresses.

P2: *“Errr...mostly I have to prepare my outfit before”.*

P14: *“...so firstly what I do is create a mood meaning maybe I dress up...maybe casual...or maybe night out”.*

Participant 3 used figure belts when taking a selfie. Using a figure belt gives the illusion that the waist is smaller than what it really is. This statement also points to body image concerns.

P3: *“...and even the clothes I’m wearing...I even wear big clothes but make them look nice...I use figure belts and what not”.*

Participant 7 emphasised dress code and pointed out that when she takes a selfie, she dresses according to the style called “scru scru” (a term for a certain type of dress code used among adolescents) which consists of tights and oversized shirts and jackets. This also points to the need to fit in and be popular, as influenced by friends.

P7: *“How I dress...it has to be on point because I don’t like taking selfies and not dressed as proper as I should be...like there’s this style for now...people say we the 2000s...so we dress like ‘scru scru’ kids”.*

Participants 8, 10, 11, and 14 also emphasise the need to wear attractive clothing before capturing a selfie for social media. Participant 8 and 10 use words such as ‘nice’ and ‘decent’ highlighting that not just any clothes from their closet will do but rather clothes which they view as smart. Participant 11 sees looks at her clothing first before taking a selfie and changes the outfit should it not be attractive enough for the ‘selfie’. Participant 14 also highlights clothing as important in relation to her body. When taking a full body selfie, she chooses attractive clothing which in turn makes her body stand out.

P8: *“Ya.... bath...wear nice things”.*

P10: *“And I wear something decent as well”.*

P11: *“I think the first thing is clothes....so change the outfit if I don’t like them”.*

P14: *“Okay...if I am taking a full body, I usually look at my outfit sometimes”.*

Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, and Michelman (1999) note that dress code goes far beyond the physical structure of clothing and has the ability to communicate various statements about people and their social situation. Given these findings, the participants in the current study curated well-presented selfies in terms of dress code, as they were aware that friends will view their selfies online and will make judgements on how they look. Individuals thus put sufficient thought into the content of the posted selfie and have others’ reactions in mind when posting, which leads to a motivation to construct their identity.

Shumaker, Loranger, and Dori (2017) surveyed and interviewed 228 undergrad female students to explore the use of clothing as a form of communication on Instagram. The qualitative research found that Instagram users communicated experiences through dress code, thus indicating that their dress code on the selfie could tell a story. This was a similarity found in the current study as participant 13 mentioned that she wanted to convey a certain mood to people viewing her selfie. Her dress code was a way in which she could achieve this.

The study by Shumaker et al. (2017) also found that the term “feelings” was a recurring theme as participants felt good about themselves after dressing appropriately for a selfie. This was also the case for the participants in the study as they all dressed to feel good and look good. The term “lifestyle” was also a theme indicated by Shumaker et al. (2017), as participants conveyed their type of lifestyle via dress code. In the current study, participant 7, for example, highlighted how she would dress like a *scru scru* kid, which indicated her interest in dressing hip and trendy according to her age group.

The themes which were highlighted by Schumaker et al. (2017), indicate how dress code aids in self-presentation, and motivates individuals to create an impression to achieve positive feedback. From a theoretical perspective, Goffman’s theory of self-presentation describes appearance as important for performance (Goffman,1959). One aspect of appearance is the use of clothing which functions to portray to the audience the performer’s social statuses. The participants in the study chose to wear something nice when capturing a selfie, in order to create a certain impression on the individual’s viewing of the selfie.

Goffmann (1956) coined the term “impression management” which describes how the individual presents themselves in a certain role and controls the impression that they make, thereby influencing the opinions formed by the audience. Impression management comprises of two processes which are impression motivation and impression construction (Leary & Kowalski, 1990).

Impression motivation refers to when people are motivated to control how others see them and impression construction refers to when people determine the kind of impression that they want to make and choose how to personally create that particular impression. In this study, impression motivation took place as the participants wanted to control how others see them. The participants wanted to look attractive through their dress code and thus constructed an impression through wearing attractive clothing or wearing clothing that is considered “cool” for their age group. It is clear from the quotes that participants wanted to create a good impression of themselves to their peers on social media.

#### **5.2.2.6 Lighting.**

Both the NVivo and IPA data analyses revealed that lighting was the most important factor among the participants when capturing the selfie. The use of lighting when capturing selfies was much preferred by more than a half of the participants, i.e., 8 of the 14 (57%), as a tool to create the most suitable selfies. The research shows that these participants preferred direct sunshine, or to be placed near a curtain where soft light enters, providing the best medium of lighting to capture their selfies. All of the participants agreed that light enhances and improves the picture quality of the selfies. It is also interesting to note that four of the participants that preferred face selfies, placed great emphasis on the use of lighting when creating their selfies. The obvious reason for that was that the lighting enhanced their facial quality and was able to contribute towards a higher quality of facial selfies. The word cloud highlights keywords such as “lighting”, “sun”, “weather”, “picture”, “see”, and “perfectly” – these words emphasise the importance of lighting during the creation of a selfie. The findings from the word cloud are summarised as follows:



Figure 14. Word cloud: Lighting

Participant 1 argued that soft lighting makes one look better and preferred soft lighting over direct lighting. Participant 7 was in agreement, as she used curtains to obtain soft lighting. In this case, the curtains served to diffuse the hard sunlight, creating a soft, more appealing light that was suitable for a selfie.

P1: “Gosh yes...definitely lighting is very important...you know that soft lighting”.

P7: “I just check the lighting...if it’s not good I just go to the curtain”.

Participants 2, 3, and 10 were in agreement that the sun provides the best lighting as it adds a natural glow, called “sun-kissed”. It is important to note that not just any type of sun will do for a selfie but rather participants stated ‘the right sun’, ‘sun needs to be out a bit’ or ‘when there is a lot of sun’. Each participant felt that they needed a certain amount of sun to capture the perfect selfie.

*P2: “...and also the lighting so I usually take it when there is a lot of sun outside so I can have...uhmmm...what’s it called...sun kissed”.*

*P3: “As well as the sun...is it the right sun for me to take a picture...the weather I should say...the weather”.*

*P10: “...and the sun needs to be out a bit, so I have decent lighting”.*

Participants 12 and 14 further added that filtering software creates lighting by making the selfie brighter, while participant 8 also stressed the importance of lighting.

*P8: “Ya...so if there’s no lighting, you can’t see the picture perfectly”.*

*P12: “The filters can add the brightness on the picture”.*

*P14: “...filters are where you make your photo brighter...or darker...or you add colours”.*

According to Dutta et al. (2016), selfies which are posted on social networking sites are strategically chosen by individuals to best represent themselves. Lighting is used as a self-presentational tool to present a more attractive and brighter physical image and picture as a whole. An online article by Guinness (2020) provides tips on how to use lighting to obtain the best selfie. Guinness (2020) claims that natural light which is soft and diffused is always better, and adds that good lighting accentuates an individual’s features and also helps to smooth out blemishes.

Furthermore, the importance of lighting in selfies is seen by producing products such as the selfie ring light. An online article by Teenvogue magazine describes the selfie ring light as a device that “delivers professional lighting conditions in photos and videos” (Garcia, 2021).

The article is directed at teenagers, influencing them to buy the device to capture beautiful images. The self-presentational tool of lighting is therefore regarded to have an impact on overall body image, making an individual more physically attractive.

### 5.2.3 *What Tools or Software Are You Accessing to Take a Selfie?*

(Probe: Describe the filtering software used.)

This question explores the filters that participants used to enhance their selfies. The results show that 9 of the participants used Snapchat while 7 of them used the cameras on their phone or someone else’s phone (such as their parents’ phones) to use the inbuilt filters, since these filters would suffice. Other filters used, include Inshot, Barley, Mood circles, and CSMM film. Some of the responses given verbatim include:

P4: *“...Inshot. I use that a lot. Oh, and also Snapchat...everyone loves Snapchat”.*

P2: *“Snapchat, but they don’t have it anymore...it was a VHS filter. And now if Instagram I just use...because there is a lot of them...so there is one called Barley...and then...I am just looking at them right now...uhmmm...some of them are called Mood circles. These are the ones I saved because I like them and how they look...another one is called CSMM film and another called Orange”.*

P5: *“I use Snapchat and sometimes I use the original camera”.*

It must be stated that all of the filter apps mentioned above, are used to enhance a selfie in terms of making the participants more appealing and beautiful, and giving them the ability to attract more views or likes. The applications that are used are shown in the table below. The IPA analysis also revealed the number of times each theme was mentioned by the participants.

**Table 5.9. Tools and software used to take a selfie**

Participant Number	Themes:		
	Face alteration	Complexion	Weight

Participant Number	Themes:		
	Face alteration	Complexion	Weight
P1	1	0	1
P2	0	1	0
P3	0	0	1
P4	2	1	0
P5	1	0	0
P6	0	0	0
P7	1	1	0
P8	0	0	0
P9	0	0	0
P10	1	0	0
P11	1	0	0
P12	1	1	0
P13	2	1	2
P14	1	2	0

### 5.2.3.1 *Facial Alterations.*

All the participants used the application, primarily because it made them look beautiful. The issues of pimples, marks, and facial spots were also highlighted in the responses: Five of the participants felt that the applications make their skin and face look shiny and visually desirable. One of the participants also noted that the application could reduce the size of her nose and hence is advantageous to use. These findings were also made in the IPA analysis. The crux of the findings points to the fact the applications were used to make the appearance of the selfies more vivacious. This stems from pre-determined images of the self in the minds of the participants.

The word cloud is summarised below:



Figure 15. Word cloud: Facial alterations

Participants 1, 4, 5, 11, 13 and 14 all made references to their skins. They all stated that they had bad skins, consisting of blemishes and pimples. The filtering software would alter their appearances, making them look more attractive with a smoother and clearer skin. Participant 14 was direct in claiming that the original camera shows all the imperfections, which necessitated the filtering software that she uses.

P1: *“Well...I wouldn’t say I don’t use it because I still do, but I think I use for like...like...with me I used to have very bad skin...only now.... like in these past four months it started to clear up but with filters it allows you to have smooth skin”.*

P4: *“Because my face gets pimples”.*

P5: *“I would use the filter where it would make my skin look a bit better”.*

P11: *“I usually use Snapchat when my face is full of pimples...because I have blemishes...because you can’t see them when you use Snapchat”.*

P13: *“Yes...it’s take a lot of time...you also don’t want to see the pimples and all of that...it takes a lot of time so I try my best to hide...you know...not show the pimples ...you know...show the black marks and all of that”.*

P14: *“Because my face...(laughs)...I’m a teenager...I have pimples and the original camera shows all of this”.*

Participant 10 was the only participant who mentioned an aspect of the face other than blemishes. She pointed out that some filtering software applications, among others, make her nose appear smaller, which is preferred.

*P10: "Some of them make my nose smaller...some of them give you lipstick...it clears your skin...it makes your eyes look better".*

Both participants 3 and 12 made a direct reference to how filtering software changes their appearance. They both agreed that after using filtering software, they look completely different from how they are naturally.

*P3: "Filters make the picture look out of this world...like you are someone...even the president would go for...trust me...(laughs) and then when he sees me he will be like NOOOO....this is not the one for me".*

*P12: "Yes...When you see me...I'm not the same as the picture told you...yes".*

The ability to manipulate one's appearance with selfie filters is appealing and not only suggests play and self-exploration, but also identity work (Bakshi, Shamma & Gilbert, 2014). Bakshi et al. argue that photos involving faces are 38 percent more likely to receive likes and 32 percent more likely to receive comments while photos that are filtered are 21 percent more likely to be viewed and 45 percent more likely to be commented on. It is therefore not uncommon for adolescents to report that they have edited their selfies, particularly the face, in order to present an ideal appearance, in line with the study by Mascheroni et al. (2015). Adolescents in this study were more conscious of their facial imperfections due to the numerous selfies that they captured. The imperfections with the face mainly consisted of blemishes and pimples while less common were issues with the nose and face structure. The need to edit selfies to almost perfect pictures brought to the surface two root factors that underpinned the edited self-presentations which are insecurity and a low self-esteem. These similar findings were also present among the adolescent females in the study by Chua and Chang (2016), where they altered their facial features to appear more beautiful.

According to Goffman's self-presentation theory (Goffman 1959), the personal façade is modified in order to impress the audience. An individual's appearance forms part of their personal façade. From the above quotes it is evident that the participants were unhappy with

the pimples and blemishes on their face, as well as the structure of their face, which is directly related to their body image. The participants then modified their appearance by using filtering software which made their appearance smoother and clearer by removing the blemishes from the selfie. The participants were therefore presenting an idealised version of themselves to their peers on social media.

### 5.2.3.2 *Complexion.*

The aspect of complexion surfaced when the participants used filters that altered their complexion from being dark to light. The IPA and NVivo data analyses revealed that seven participants had issues with their complexion, which revealed the stigma associated with dark skin i.e., dark skinned people are not beautiful. The filters thus assisted them in not only adjusting the brightness of their face, but also the overall selfie.

The word cloud below undergirds the abovementioned findings:



Figure 16. Word cloud: *Complexion*

The participants responded as follows: Participant 4 stated that she uses the black and white filter. When questioned why she uses this filter, she stated that, apart from hiding her pimples, it also hides her dark skin colour which she finds unattractive.

P4: *“Because it doesn’t show my pimples and my skin colour”.*

P4: *“Because I’m black...(laughs)”.*

Participant 14 also did not like her dark skin and stated in the quote below that she would prefer to be lighter. The participant related that she used filters on the social media platform, called Snapchat. The filters on Snapchat make her appear brighter than she actually is. However, in the same vein, she also stated that if someone she knows, sees her picture, she feels embarrassed as they would know that her picture is edited.

*P14: “In my own words I can say that it changes the person...if I take a picture using Snapchat...okay fine I can see that it’s me but most of the things on my face are invisible...pimples...ya...it makes me...ya ’cos I’m dark so in the picture I don’t want to be dark...but lighter”.*

*P14: “I’m a little bit ashamed if it’s from somebody I know ’cos he or she knows me and he or she can see the difference”.*

Participant 13 seemed to be unhappy with her skin colour even though she is light skinned. There is therefore a need to look lighter.

*P13: “You know...I don’t have a particular reason...but I can say...you want to look more lighter...yes I am light but I want to look lighter”.*

Participants 12, 2, and 7 agreed that filters help to change their skin colour, making them more attractive. Attractiveness for these participants was defined as the skin being ‘brighter’ and in turn lighter. This was one of the reasons why they used filters.

*P12: “Yes...I use ama-filters because of the brightness and it makes you lighter”.*

*P2: “Well, filters...I like them because they make me look nicer in a way...more brighter and light”.*

*P7: “...skin looks a bit lighter and it would give the effect that I am wearing a bit of make-up”.*

Elias and Gill (2018) argue that filtering software creates racialised bodies by offering skin “brightening”, “lightening”, or “whitening” as a standard, thus reinforcing ideas about skin colour and desirability. A recently unpublished research study by Chirove (2019), explores

the male and female understanding of being light skinned as a black South African. The results of the study show that people who are born light skinned have a more positive feeling about their lighter complexion as it is more preferred in society. Furthermore, they are easily sought after by the opposite sex. It is not surprising then that the participants that mentioned having a lighter complexion, were black participants.

Given the findings from the study by Chirove (2019), the three participants mentioned above, also agreed that lighter skin is better than darker skin. The lighter skin was preferred, since the participants manipulated the images by using filtering software. Images were brighter, giving the illusion that they were actually lighter skinned.

### 5.2.3.3 *Weight.*

The abovementioned filters also have the ability to make the participants look slimmer and thinner. Three of the participants felt that the application made them appear slimmer with smaller stomachs, showing that one appears physically smaller and have lost weight. The issue of weight can also impact on an individual's self-confidence and was highlighted in the need for the participants to become socially accepted by the online community and NOT to be ostracised or made fun off by cyberbullies. The selfie becomes a platform in which one's body size can be manipulated to prevent showing the "unattractive" side to one's online community. The word cloud is summarised as follows:



*Figure 17. Word cloud: Weight*

Participant 1 felt that her body weight is undesirable and referred to this as an insecurity. In order to appear slimmer to her online community, she held her phone at an angle to capture a selfie.

P1: *“(Laughs)...it definitely makes you look slimmer. Like for me I have weight insecurities so...like...it definitely makes you look better (referring to taking a picture an at angle)”*.

P1: *“...hmmm, I definitely like to put a selfie that shows my eyes (laughs). Like you know sparkly eyes but not fully body...just face...because of insecurities”*.

Although participant 3 was quite confident, the quote below suggests an insecurity with her weight as she wore larger clothes but made them more attractive by using figure belts which gave the illusion that she is slimmer than she really is.

P3: *“...I even wear big clothes but make them look nice...I use figure belts and what not”*.

Participant 14 stated that she would rather post pictures of her face than full body as she prefers to avoid negative comments. The quote below not only highlights an insecurity, but also the fear of being judged, or the selfie not being liked, due to weight issues.

P14: *“You know, people like to judge so I avoid those judgemental comments...because people have so many harsh things to say and it’s just like tough, you know”*.

The thin ideal refers to the pressures from society for women to be thin. The tripartite model, discussed by Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe, and Tantleff-Dunn (1999), makes predictions about how the thin ideal impacts body image. According to the model, peers, parents, and media shape how adolescents feel about themselves through social comparison processes and internalisation of the thin ideal. Some of the female participants in the current study felt the pressure of the thin ideal and thus would hide their body or use filters to make their body appear smaller.

Body image concerns become more salient in adolescence due to the onset of puberty, and combined with social media, it becomes a breeding ground for the thin ideal internalisation. This is often unrealistic, but due to this, adolescents need to fit in and will often succumb to these body image pressures. The peer pressure often comes from the individual’s peers. McLean, Jarman, and Rodgers (2019) delved into selfie practices and its relation to wellbeing

and body confidence among adolescents. The research found that simply by viewing other selfies online, appears to have a negative impact on the adolescent’s body confidence.

Given the physical changes associated with adolescence and the peer pressure from friends and the media, adolescents become more conscious of the way they look. The selfie becomes a platform in which their body size can be manipulated to prevent showing the “unattractive” side to their online community. For some participants, the issue of weight, therefore, highlights body image concerns.

#### 5.2.4 Why Do You Use filters?

This question aimed to explore why individuals decide to use a filter when posting a selfie on social media. Two themes surfaced using the NVivo and IPA analyses. The themes were “enhancing physical appearance” and “improving the quality of the selfie”. The table below was produced from the manual data analysis, and highlights the number of times each theme was mentioned by the participants.

**Table 5.10. Reasons for filtering of selfies**

Participant number	Themes:	
	Editing physical appearance	Improving quality of selfie
<b>P1</b>	1	1
<b>P2</b>	1	1
<b>P3</b>	1	1
<b>P4</b>	1	0
<b>P5</b>	1	0
<b>P6</b>	1	0
<b>P7</b>	1	1
<b>P8</b>	0	1
<b>P9</b>	0	1
<b>P10</b>	1	1

<b>P11</b>	1	1
<b>P12</b>	1	1
<b>P13</b>	1	0
<b>P14</b>	1	0

#### 5.2.4.1 Enhancing Physical Appearance.

The research shows that 11 participants indicated that they use filters to enhance their physical appearance, which pertains to their facial colour, clear skin, brighter eyes, brighter clothes, and looking slimmer and trim. These factors point in the direction that the participants needed to feel more confident as this would automatically boost their confidence and attract more likes or views. This was also exposing the prevalent stigmas attached to pimples, clean skin, being thin, and looking appealing to others, so that acceptance by others would be possible. This also points to the lack of golden standards in society that make a young person acceptable or not. Ultimately, this may also point towards a child’s upbringing in the home, their prevailing culture, and their emotional and social intelligence.

The results also summarise the hierarchical code of the theme/node which was produced from the NVivo analysis. One immediately observes the facial alteration and complexion accounts for the majority of the responses captured. The word cloud below also highlights recurring words among participants such as “beautiful”, “skin”, “looks”, “face”, etc.

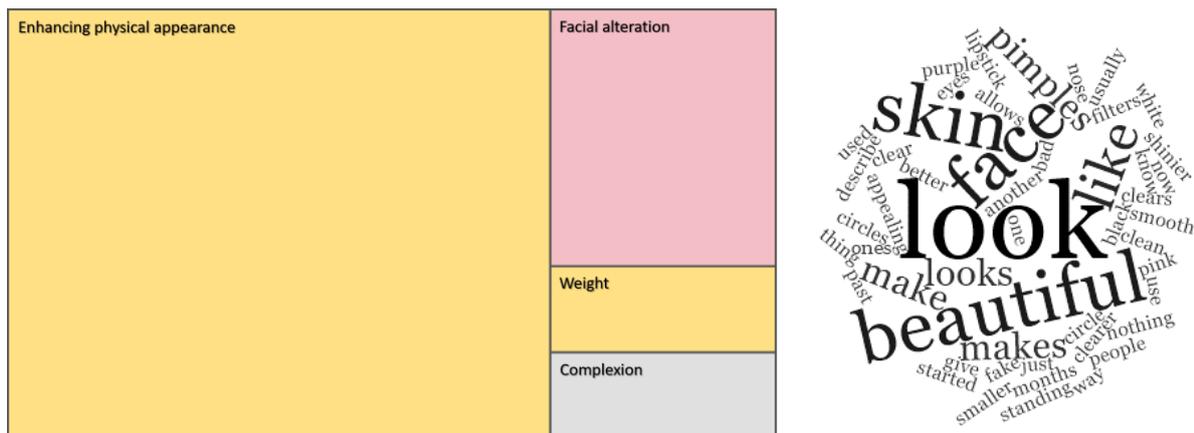


Figure 18. Word cloud: Enhancing physical appearance

Participants 1, 4, 5, and 11 made references to their skin. This was a finding from the previous question where skin was important to them as they would alter their face to look more

appealing. The participants note bad skin in terms of pimples which can be typical of an adolescent due to physical maturation. Similarly, in this question, participants related that they used filtering software to make their skin look more appealing by smoothing it out.

*P1: "...with me I used to have very bad skin...only now...like in these past four months it started to clear up but with filters it allows you to have smooth skin".*

*P4: "Because my face gets pimples".*

*P5: "I would use the filter where it would make my skin look a bit better and it would give the effect that I am wearing a bit of make-up".*

*P11: "Ya...because it makes the face quite clear hey".*

Three participants detailed that they used filters to add make-up on their face which in turn enhanced their appearance. Make-up was also a theme emerging from the previous question.

*P10: "And the other one gives you a little lipstick".*

*P12: "...there is a need of using that filter because it will add make-up in your picture".*

*P14: "Maybe another reason is because I don't use make-up...so the filters usually add the make-up".*

Participant 3 averred that an original camera does not add any beauty to a picture. Instead, she opted to use filters which took her selfie to another level.

*P3: "I feel like it's there to...to...to...to make your picture look more beautiful. Because you can't just take a picture with an original camera and then say this picture is beautiful...no".*

This quote also suggests feelings of insecurities and low self-esteem as the participant stated that she wanted to portray her idealised self to peers online, instead of her actual self. Participant 13 also felt that filters assist in creating the idealised self.

*P13: “...when people look at your picture...you want them to see the person you are in your mind...not the person you are physically because some people don’t like their physical appearance...they use filters to create a person they have in mind”.*

Participant 2 asserted that filters make her look “nicer”, thus indicating how filters enhance the image. Participant 7, on the other hand, related that she likes to see how different filters make her look. With that, she indicated that she is aware that some filters might make her look better than others.

*P2: “Well, filters...I like them because they make me look nicer in a way”.*

*P7: “...I just wanna see how I look in different filters”.*

On the other hand, participant 6 added that she often used filters during her early adolescence to enhance her appearance but has now deleted the application.

*P6: “I guess when I was younger maybe...just starting high school...I played around with Snapchat and used those filters, but I got bored with it and just deleted it”.*

Enhancing physical appearance through filtering software among adolescents has been widely documented (Mclean et al., 2019; Dhir, Pallesen, Torsheim & Andreassen, 2016; Chua & Chang, 2016). Mascheroni et al. (2015) found that it is not uncommon for the adolescent to report editing the social network profile picture of their face to present an ideal appearance. The face is therefore an important aspect of the adolescent which was also found in the current research where adolescents mainly captured selfies of the face.

Using filtering software to enhance facial features and other physical aspects is used among adolescents to achieve an ideal self-presentation which in turn impresses their peers (Chua & Chang, 2016). The reason of wanting to look beautiful and wanting to be liked, suggests narcissistic characteristics as highlighted by Wickel (2015). Enhancing the physical appearance through filters therefore increases the social acceptance that the individual will receive from peers online and in turn improves self-confidence, popularity, and self-esteem. Social acceptance through many likes on an edited selfie reinforces beauty ideals, leading the adolescents to “filter” selfies on a regular basis. Consequently, if the adolescents do not

obtain the social acceptance they wish to obtain, this can further perpetuate dissatisfaction with how they look. The theme of enhancing physical appearance again brings to the fore the concerns surrounding body image.

#### 5.2.4.2 *Improving the Quality of the Selfie.*

Improving the quality of the selfie was a recurring theme among participants when asked the question, “Why do you use filters?” Participants specified that they use filters to enhance the brightness and colour of the selfie so that it is accepted by everyone who views the image. One of the participants even went on to say that the filter is present to ensure that the selfie which was taken, has the “WOW!” factor.

The word cloud below, produced by the NVivo analysis, highlights recurring words such as “brightness”, “blue”, “colour”, and “enhance”:



Figure 19. Word cloud: Improving the quality of the selfie

Participants 1 and 12 asserted that filters enhance the quality of the selfie by making the image brighter.

P1: “It also makes the picture much brighter and...ya”.

P12: “...when you are taking a picture in a place that is dark...there is a need for that filter”.

Participants 7, 8, and 10 mentioned how filters change the colour of the selfie. These participants believe that changing the colour of the selfie enhances the image and makes it more appealing to those who view it.

*P7: “It’s more like more enjoyment when you use those filters...you feel like...I don’t know how to explain this but it’s always going to be like in this photo I’m like this and in this photo I’m like this and if you compare these two photos...it still is the same just a different colour”.*

*P8: “No...I just put like different colours. Most of the time I do that”.*

*P10: “I don’t know how to explain it...but it changes like the whole colour of you and your background...it’s like a full filter”.*

Participant 2 mentioned a new application where one can add music to their selfie. She felt that this would enhance the image by telling a story to the person viewing the image.

*P2: “I think it is a software update where you can use a lot of filters just like the one I posted on Thursday where I was able to use a filter but also play music at the same time...so most of them is because of those reasons”.*

### **5.2.5 What Is Perceived as a “Good” Selfie to You?**

This question explored why participants chose a specific selfie to post on social media or what they perceived as a “good” selfie to post on social media. All participants mentioned that they capture numerous selfies before posting the selfie on Facebook or Instagram. The starting point was therefore to find out why participants choose that specific selfie to post from the numerous selfies being taken. The NVivo and IPA analyses revealed similar results.

#### **5.2.5.1 Captures the Essence of the Person.**

The research shows that all of the participants exhibited a very narcissistic perception as to what is considered a “good” selfie. This is centred around looking beautiful, capturing the

best pose, best face, and best clarity for the selfie. However, two of the participants agreed that a good selfie is one with a genuine smile and looking genuinely happy. The subthemes that occurred in the research include beauty, a beautiful face, being genuinely happy, a great smile, and the clarity of the background of a good selfie.

The table below was produced by an IPA analysis and indicates the number of times that “capturing the essence of the person” was mentioned by each participant.

**Table 5.11. Capturing the essence of the person**

<b>Participant number</b>	<b>Theme: Capturing essence of person</b>
<b>P1</b>	2
<b>P2</b>	2
<b>P3</b>	3
<b>P4</b>	2
<b>P5</b>	2
<b>P6</b>	1
<b>P7</b>	2
<b>P8</b>	1
<b>P9</b>	2
<b>P10</b>	2
<b>P11</b>	2
<b>P12</b>	2
<b>P13</b>	2
<b>P14</b>	2

The word cloud that gives us a picture of the responses, looks like this:



While participants 12, 8, and 10 also focused on how they physically look, they also made mention of the clarity of the picture and the background which they considered as being important when posting a selfie.

*P12: “I choose the most beautiful and when I’m taking a picture, I want a clean wall...and when I’m choosing a picture, I want to see what’s wrong...but it will be only that picture where there is nothing wrong on it...then I choose that picture”.*

*P8: “Clarity...no things at the back...background is clear...no one disturbing you...make sure that you look pretty so that your picture doesn’t get ruined”.*

*P10: “It’s clearer than the rest...my face looks good”.*

Participants 7 and 13 indicated that a good selfie is the one that really depicts who they are, where everything is perfect, and that they really enjoyed capturing the image.

*P7: “Because to me I feel that’s the ONE...that’s the ONE...this is the one I enjoyed taking...in all of those photo’s...this is the one...so I feel like people need to see that”.*

*P13: “...when you take a selfie, you also see what’s wrong with it...oh this is showing...not that one...oh that is showing not that one...but there is that one pic where everything is perfect...so that’s the one pic that you put up to show everyone”.*

Participants 1 and 6, on the other hand, perceived a good selfie to be one where you smile without any pretence. In this picture you are simply yourself.

*P1: “I think it’s definitely when you can see a genuine smile. Like you know...a big wide smile. There is no duck face or anything fake, but you can see the person is genuinely happy”.*

*P6: “Probably just a smile...like a simple smile”.*

The quotes by the participants emphasise how important it is to appear physically attractive for a selfie that will be posted on social media. Taking such an image, should capture the

essence of who they *think* they are, rather than who they really are. The words spoken by the participants bring to the fore the issue of impression management and narcissism.

Self-promotion is a strategy of impression management to promote one's strengths, accomplishments, and importance. In the case of the selfie, physical appearance is one way to promote the self, while the impression is managed by choosing the selfie for social media that ticks all the boxes. However, this behaviour is strongly linked to narcissism. Research by Hart, Adams, and Burton (2016) indicates that narcissists endorse self-promotion as a means to make a good impression. In agreement with the findings by Hart et al. (2016), a Korean research study found a relation between narcissism and Instagram users' self-promoting behaviours (Moon et al., 2016). After a total of 212 active Instagram users have completed an online survey, the results showed that those who were high in narcissism tended to post selfies and self-presented their images. Most importantly, the research found that they rated their Instagram images as more physically attractive. These are similar findings to the current research where participants felt that a good selfie is one where they are perfect and beautiful.

However, despite the fact that the majority of the participants were focusing on their physical appearance, two of them only focused on a smile, in particular a genuine smile. These statements suggested wanting to be themselves and not putting forward a façade.

#### ***5.2.6 How Do You Feel when You Receive Positive Comments and a Large Number of Likes on a Selfie?***

The aim of this question was to explore the feelings and thoughts of the participants when peers on Facebook and Instagram commented and liked the selfies that they posted on social media. Participants were also asked the sub-questions, "How often do you check your selfie to view the likes and comments?". In addition, they were asked how often they take selfies which were directly related to this question. Both the NVivo data analysis and the IPA analysis revealed the same results.

The major themes that emerged from receiving positive comments and a large number of likes include happiness and confidence, a constant checking of selfies, social popularity, and a high frequency of capturing every month. The table below is produced from the IPA data

analysis and highlights the number of times that each theme was mentioned among participants. The themes are discussed below.

**Table 5.12. Positive comments on a selfie**

<b>Participant number</b>	<b>High frequency of selfie capturing</b>	<b>Happiness and confidence</b>	<b>Constant checking of selfies</b>	<b>Popularity</b>
P1	1	1	1	0
P2	1	1	1	1
P3	1	1	1	2
P4	1	1	1	1
P5	1	1	1	1
P6	1	1	1	0
P7	1	1	1	1
P8	1	1	0	1
P9	1	1	1	1
P10	1	1	1	0
P11	1	1	1	1
P12	1	1	1	1
P13	1	1	1	1
P14	1	1	1	1

#### **5.2.6.1 *Happiness and Confidence.***

The results show that 100% of the participants felt happy and very confident when they received positive comments and a large number of likes. There were feelings of exuberance, and these likes and positive comments were viewed as confidence boosters. The participants also noted that the positive feedback that was given, encouraged them to take more selfies. The feelings of happiness and confidence were the fuel behind the perpetuation of taking more selfies and posting them.

The word cloud from the NVivo data analysis looks like this:



Figure 21. Word cloud: Happiness and confidence

Participants 1, 4, 9, 10, and 14 used words such as “heart-warming”, “happy”, and “excited” to explain their feelings when they received positive comments and a large number of likes on a selfie. Participant 10 expressed how her confidence is elevated by the feedback she receives. Participant 9 also states that she trusts herself meaning that her confidence is also boosted from these positive comments. The positive feedback clearly makes the girls feel good about themselves and is reason for them to continue capturing selfies.

P1: *“Well I think for me...when it comes from people I know...it is very heart-warming ...to know they took the time to like my picture”.*

P4: *“I get excited”.*

P9: *“It makes me feel happy because I trust myself”.*

P10: *“Well, I feel good about myself (laughs). Like...some people...like they boost my self-esteem...sort off”,*

P14: *“Happy...(laughs)”.*

Participants 11 and 12 also expressed happiness and emphasised how positive feedback on their physical appearance makes them feel good about themselves. However, participant 12 averred that she feels happier when people comment on her unfiltered image than when they

react on her filtered image. These feelings experienced by participant 12 suggest a sort of “shame” when people comment on her “filtered” image, as they know it is not the real her.

*P11: “I feel very happy but most of the time I post because I want to look good”.*

*P12: “I feel happy...like when I am posting the picture there are people that are going to tell me that I’m beautiful...whatever and so on...I feel happy because I am using original camera and I’m beautiful but when I’m using Snapchat there is something that will say no...you are not the original person when they’re saying you’re beautiful. When they say I’m beautiful on the picture that I take Snapchat picture...they are not saying to me...which means they are saying to the Snapchat”.*

While participants 2, 3, and 13 also expressed happiness and feelings of confidence when positive comments and a large number of likes were received on a selfie, it is interesting to note that they also experienced doubt regarding the selfies that were posted. Participant 2 questioned if her peers really liked her picture or if they liked it because they know her, while participant 13 stated that she often goes back to the picture to check if it was really as attractive as people thought. Participant 3, on the other hand, first posts her selfie on the social platform, WhatsApp. If she receives less feedback on WhatsApp, this prevents her from posting that selfie on Instagram. Participant 3 would thus doubt herself based on feedback on her selfie from other social media.

*P2: “Well, I feel happy most of the time but sometimes I feel they’re just doing it because they my friends and they know me so it like...mmmh...okay”.*

*P3: “Oooh...If I didn’t...okay let me just put it like this...if I posted a picture on WhatsApp and no one complimented me...and I...I...feel bad...I get discouraged if I didn’t get any comments on WhatsApp...uhmmm...the compliments that I get on WhatsApp force me to post the picture on Instagram”.*

*P13: “It makes me feel good...but you never know if what people are saying is the truth...they might like the pic but really don’t...but when they like the pic...I go back to the pic...and I’m like...okay okay its good...it’s good...So you do feel good...it brings that confidence in you...you trust yourself a little bit more you know”.*

Only participant 5 mentioned that she does not care about the comments or likes on the selfie, although she does feel happy when she receives positive feedback.

P5: *“Well, I will feel good...but it is not something I am posting to get those comments or likes”.*

#### 5.2.6.2 *Constant Checking of Views.*

This study also found that the majority of the participants i.e., 13 of the 14 went back and check for the number of views on their selfies. This is indicative of wanting to solicit responses from their friends and the public. The general perception is that of curiosity and wanting to be accepted by immediate friends, family, and the public at large. The frequency of a daily checking of views regarding the number of likes and comments ranged between five and 50 times. The word cloud produced from the NVivo analysis is as follows:



Figure 22. Word cloud: *Constant checking of views*

Participants 7, 10, and 14 stated the number of times per day that they logged onto social media to view their selfie. The frequency ranges between seven and 10 times per day.

P7: *“No...I would probably check...every after 30 minutes (on checking a picture)”.*

P14: *” Maybe I will go 10 times a day. Yes”.*

P10: *“After I post...I generally just check about 7 times that day how much of likes I have or how much comments I have and will just scroll through it”.*

Participants 3, 12, and 14 asserted that they would frequently log onto social media to view the posted selfie. These participants expressed an urge to see what people are saying about them. Participant 12 went on to say that even if there is “one dot” (referring to a notification on Instagram and Facebook), she would have an urge to open it.

*P3: “Yes...too many times...to see who has seen it...who has liked it...yes. Even on WhatsApp...I go read a text and then go back to my status to see who has looked at it”.*

*P12: “I go many times. I’m using Facebook right...so you can see when someone comments or send pictures; there will be that dot there...if there is only one dot, I will go to that picture...I want to see what’s happening”.*

*P14: “Yes...I do...I do...to check what people are saying...the comments they are making...just to see what if they like the picture or not”.*

The constant need to check selfies after it has been posted, fulfils the need for approval and validation, as the adolescents are eager to view the number of likes that they have obtained, as well as the feedback from people who are appreciating their appearance. According to Nash, Johansson, and Yogeewaran (2019), a narcissist not only reports frequent selfie-posting, but also high levels of self-reported attractiveness and positive feelings when posting selfies. Furthermore, a narcissist enjoys validation from social connections (Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001), which is the driving force in constantly checking their social media for feedback. The characteristics of narcissism highlighted by Nash et al. (2019), as well as Morf and Rhodewalt (2001), accord with the characteristics found among the 14 participants of my study. The validation which participants receive from their peers only serves to reinforce their sense of self-importance, which acts as a further impetus to continue posting attractive selfies.

According to Rhodewalt and Morf (1995), a narcissist will seek for support and validation during periods of stress. These feelings will increase when the narcissistic individual experiences an “ego threat” or when their self-concept is challenged by social rejection. Social rejection can be experienced on social media when the selfie does not receive likes or positive comments. This can be as reason as to why it was important for the participants

mentioned above, to constantly view their selfies for positive feedback – to eliminate a possible social rejection and to reduce feelings of stress. Furthermore, the need for affirmation fosters a massive social media dependency that manifests as anxiety or smart-phone stress (Hawk, Van den Eijnden, Van Lissa & Ter Bogt, 2019). Hawk et al. also link this type of behaviour to narcissism.

Nash et al. (2019) use event related potentials to examine if posting a selfie and receiving validation from others through likes on social media can reduce psychological distress. Their study found that viewing the feedback (high number of likes) can definitely reduce psychological distress. It is clear that participant 3 experienced some psychological distress which dissipated once she was able to view the feedback on the selfie that was posted on social media.

*P3: “Yes...I’m one of those who go to check...if they’ve seen it or liked it...regularly...trust me I do. I even get pressured by not having data to be able to see who has liked my picture”.*

*P3: “Even at my home they say I’m going to be depressed...trust me...I get p\*ssed if I don’t get money to buy data because I want to see who has liked my picture. I LOVE taking pictures”.*

### **5.2.6.3 Social Popularity.**

The need to be socially accepted and to be popular was strongly exhibited by 11 participants. The insecurity of being rejected by people and friends also highlighted the plight and effects of the puberty stage of the participants. There is always a need to be acceptable by people who form part of one’s social circles, especially for adolescents who require support and care of all who proclaim to love and care for them.

The word cloud confirms the aforementioned findings:



Figure 23. Word cloud: Social popularity

Participants 7, 8, and 5 indicated that they feel well-known and people know who they are. This feeling also adds to their confidence. These statements implied that they enjoy the feeling of popularity.

P7: *“I just feel like people really know who I am now...and they enjoy what I do and I enjoy what I do...because they commenting on my photo and I get so many likes...ya”.*

P8: *“I feel well-known and a lot of positivity”.*

P5: *“Yes – I think with our generation we look at popularity a lot and if you have more followers on social media...you often feel more popular and confident”.*

The number of likes received are indicative of how popular one is. Participant 10 was aware of what people like about her looks. Therefore, she used this to obtain more likes or to gain more popularity the next time she posted a selfie.

P10: *“And to get more likes on one picture...like usually I get more likes on pictures where I smile with my teeth....so I’m like okay...people like when I smile”.*

However, participants 5, 6, and 8 were not concerned about the number of likes they receive on an image, which indicates that they did not have a need to experience popularity.

*P5: “Well, I will feel good...but it is not something I am posting to get those comments or likes”.*

*P6: “I feel...pretty good about it...but I wouldn’t say it would determine how I would perceive myself...it just makes me feel supported I guess”.*

*P8: “No, because you don’t have to put attention to what people are saying. You have to do what you feel is right”.*

Li, Chang, Chua, and Loh (2018) administered a survey to 296 adolescents in Singapore. The survey found that peer feedback through likes and comments serve as indicators of popularity, therefore value was placed on how many likes were received on a selfie. Similarly, research done by Wickel (2015) found that the majority of participants post selfies on social media to gain a maximum number of likes and comments per selfie. According to Wickel (2015), this incessant need for adoration from others is an indicator of narcissism and the need for social popularity. These feelings are characteristic of the adolescent who feels the need to fit in and belong among peers (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

However, seeking social popularity via social media can have adverse effects on self-esteem. A study by Meeus, Beulleus, and Eggermont (2019) examined the role of social media in building the self-esteem of younger adolescents. The researchers administered a cross-sectional survey and found that adolescents’ online popularity which was received through likes, was positively related to self-esteem. However, although these appraisals are positively related to self-esteem, it increases the dependence on social approval which paradoxically is related to a decreased self-esteem.

#### **5.2.6.4 High Frequency of Selfie Capturing.**

The frequency of taking selfies by the participants included capturing selfies from five times to as many as 50 times a month. Participants related that they captured a number of selfies before posting the perfect image on social media. This also hints on the desire to check



and mood, and lastly, many offline selfies were taken with the intention to post the perfect selfie on social media.

It was found among all participants that they captured more offline selfies than they actually post on social media. The offline selfies ranged between five for some participants to at least 50 for others. All participants agreed that they capture many selfies and choose the most attractive one to present themselves positively, before they post on social media. The capture of multiple selfies and the choice of the most attractive one suggest a level of narcissism among the participants.

Participant 3 related that she takes at least 50 offline selfies. In line with the factors of offline selfies in the research by Srivastava et al. (2018), participant 3 mirrored the self by checking to see how attractive she looks in her selfie. The offline selfies were also taken with the intention to post the perfect one.

*P3: “Maybe out of 50 pictures also...I choose maybe three...that’s the hardest work for taking pictures...you can’t just say, oh this is the picture...this is me...and I love this picture and post it...no. You should choose...I give myself time...once I’m done with taking pictures then I go sit down and I look all of my pictures and choose the right one”.*

Participant 11 stated that she takes at least 100 offline selfies in a month.

*P11: “I’d say a 100 probably”.*

Participant 14 confirmed that she takes selfies and deletes the ones she does not like. Her main reason for taking many offline selfies was to choose the perfect one for social media.

*P14: OMG...a lot of pictures...a lot of pictures...a lot...a lot...to get that picture to say this is the one I think is okay...maybe I take about seven or eight...ya”.*

*P7: “A LOT...A LOT! And then I delete some and then I retake”.*

### **5.2.7 How Do You Feel when You Receive Less Likes and Comments on a Selfie?**

### 5.2.7.1 *Feelings of Rejection.*

The main themes found under this heading was sadness and rejection, which were experienced by 11 participants. The feeling of rejection left the participants questioning the reasons why their selfies did not receive the expected feedback. Hence, there was a lack of emotional maturity shown by the participants and the inability to handle rejection or non-acceptance by the public. Participants were left feeling very upset and confused as to why just a few comments were solicited. The table below was produced from an IPA analysis and highlights the number of times a “feeling of rejection” was mentioned by participants.

**Table 5.13. Feelings of rejection**

<b>Participant number</b>	<b>Theme: Feelings of rejection</b>
P1	0
P2	0
P3	1
P4	1
P5	1
P6	0
P7	1
P8	0
P9	1
P10	1
P11	1
P12	1
P13	1
P14	1

The word cloud that underpins the findings looks as follows:



P13: *“You know...I feel like it was not good you know...like maybe I should have tried this one...sometimes I even just try to take it down and put another one...which one I look more good on...which one will reflect what I want people to see”.*

Participants 4, 5, and 9 also experienced sadness, with participant 9 further emphasising that she felt like she meant nothing to people – that she was a nothing. These words suggest the negative impact on self-esteem. This was also echoed by participant 5 who felt that “reassurance” from friends is important, especially for adolescents.

P4: *“I feel sad”.*

P5: *“uhmmm...I think for every teenager they would feel a bit down because they often turn to social media to get reassurance from other people, so if you don't you don't get those likes, you would feel a bit down”.*

P9: *“I feel like I'm nothing to people”.*

The six participants below deleted their selfie from social media due to the image not receiving enough likes and positive comments. Deleting a selfie from social media suggests that participants experienced a threat to the self which is characteristic of narcissistic behaviour. Participants had a feeling of sadness because of people not liking the selfie, and hence deleted it. The sadness felt also seems to be due to feeling that they aren't attractive enough. Participant 3 and 7 include negative self-talk by saying ‘this picture is ugly’ or ‘that's a shame for me.’

P3: *“Yes I did...not that I did...I DO...I DO...each and every time...even on WhatsApp...on WhatsApp I have 750 contacts...so I don't get maybe less than 200 views a day...so if I got like maybe...30 likes...on WhatsApp...then maybe it's not me...why are others not complimenting this picture...which means this picture is ugly...so no...I shouldn't post the picture. Then I delete it and I won't post it on Instagram”.*

P4: *“I will feel sad that they didn't like it...so I will remove it”.*



P2: *“I mean I do feel a little sad for like half of that day or maybe like 20 minutes to an hour that I am not getting the response that I would have wanted to get, but at the end of the day as long as I like my picture it’s fine”.*

P6: *“Uhhh...when I have less likes...I don’t feel that I am that brought down by it...the reason that I do post is to maybe add to my timeline and maybe one day to go back and look at it and just reminisce about that time”.*

P8: *“No, never feel sad”.*

It is important to understand the role of social/peer rejection, particularly among adolescents who exert a great deal of energy forming peer relations, which aids in developing a sense of belonging (Jiang, Zhang, Ke, Hawk & Qiu, 2015). When adolescents experience social rejection, it can lead to emotional maladjustment and decreased self-esteem (Damon, Lerner & Eisenberg, 2006). An interesting finding of social rejection among peers is that materialism (the importance that people place on possessions to obtain happiness) is related to interpersonal insecurity. Mead, Baumeister, Stillman, Rawn, and Vohs (2011) found that being socially excluded can lead to people buying expensive goods to enhance their self-appeal. This can have an impact on the overall self-esteem, as once adolescents are rejected by peers, they experience self-doubt and will be more likely to spend money to feel better about their impaired self-esteem (Jiang et al., 2015). In the current study, some participants who relied heavily on self-presentation when capturing and posting selfies, mentioned what they would do better in the next selfie to prevent less likes. They mentioned that to look better in the next selfie, could entail using better make-up, better clothing, and having a phone with better camera quality. The participants thus placed emphasis on extrinsic aspirations. We can deduce that the participants in the study displayed signs of low self-esteem, due to their feelings mentioned when social/peer rejection took place.

The participants in the study had negative thoughts about their own appearances, based on the feedback of less likes, leading to six participants deleting their selfies. These feelings and behaviours are strongly characteristic of a narcissist who values their appearance (Wickel, 2015). Furthermore, one can deduce that a narcissist would strongly feel threatened in the face of rejection, while the feeling of adoration is strongly favoured (Wickel, 2015). Firestone

(2012) argues that narcissism is based on the fear of failure and the need to be acknowledged as the best. In the online world, social rejection can be likened to a fear of failure. Once again, Rhodewalt's and Morf's concept of ego threat can be applied (Rhodewalt & Morf 1995). When participants do not receive the feedback that they expected to receive on a selfie, a negative feeling is experienced, and they opt to delete the selfie completely from social media.

An online article by Roehl (2019) describes deleted content on social media as “phantom posts” where the selfie is posted and then soon afterwards deleted. The article refers to a research study by a non-profit organisation called HopeLab, where data were collected from over 1,300 adolescents and young adults aged between 14 and 22 years. The participants were asked about various emotions regarding isolation and being socially excluded. They were further asked about their social media habits and how using social media made them feel. This study found that many participants experienced insecurities of not being good enough and thus sought validation from outside sources such as social media. However, seeking validation on social media can create even more negative feelings. The teens stated that if the picture did not achieve many likes, they felt the need to delete the picture. One of the teenagers felt worried about looking ugly on social media and to prevent these negative feelings, deleted the image. This resulted in the teenager feeling lonely, once the picture was deleted.

A similar result with reference to feelings of insecurity occurred in the research of Chua and Chang (2016) where they interviewed 24 adolescent females in Singapore. Nine of the 24 participants stated that they would delete their selfies with fewer likes out of embarrassment or social rejection.

### ***5.2.8 What Do You Enjoy about Taking Selfies?***

This open-ended question aimed to explore what participants enjoyed about capturing selfies. Two themes emerged from this question. Both the NVivo data analysis and IPA analysis yielded the same results. Participants enjoyed taking selfies to enhance their appearance and also felt that posting selfies on social media served as an online memory book. The table below was produced from the IPA analysis and highlights the number of times the theme was mentioned by each participant.

**Table 5.15. Enjoyment of taking selfies**

<b>Participant number</b>	<b>Themes</b>	
	<b>Enhancing appearance</b>	<b>Memory and nostalgia</b>
P1	0	1
P2	1	0
P3	1	1
P4	1	0
P5	1	1
P6	0	0
P7	1	1
P8	1	0
P9	1	0
P10	1	0
P11	1	0
P12	1	0
P13	1	1
P14	1	0

#### **5.2.8.1 *Enhancing Self-Image.***

This research found that 12 of the 14 participants agreed that taking selfies enhances one's self-image and shows off one's beauty for others to appreciate. This points in the direction that the selfie is an avenue for the expression of one's self-worth and is the sum of one's beauty and appearance. The whole act of dressing up, putting on make-up, and finding the correct background along with using filters, is deemed to be an exciting and rewarding process for the participants. These results were found in both the NVivo and IPA data analyses.



Participants 5 and 11 mentioned that they enjoyed taking selfies. They were themselves, although it took them out of their comfort zones. In essence, the selfies allowed the participants to express who they really are.

P5: *“Uhhmm...I enjoy that...it takes me out of my comfort zone...because at home I am not wearing make-up and my hair isn't done and I am in my hoodies and I am comfortable...but when I am taking a selfie...I feel better and put myself in that positive mind to take out that photo”.*

P11: *“Usually when I take selfies...I want to be alone...because I feel it a bit weird to take pictures in front of others...it does look weird if you are the only one taking a selfie and everyone is just staring at you...the thing I like about selfies...is I just get to be me...because there are a lot of selfies that I take...that I like...that are very nice...I don't post them”.*

Participant 9, on the other hand, expressed that she enjoyed taking selfies as she wanted to show people how she looks. There is a sense of competition in her statement.

P9: *“Because some people don't want to see us happy...and then we show them things about us”.*

Participants placed an emphasis on capturing selfies that appear more attractive, by using filtering software and other self-presentational methods such as dressing up, fixing hair and make-up, and posing in a particular way. According to Willingham (2018), the biggest problem with manipulating an image is that you see a better version of you staring back, and this can cement an ideal image of what you should look like.

Enhancing the selfie through filters can be damaging to the individual for two reasons. First, beauty filters provide a new reality of society's beauty standards. Beauty as defined by society adds pressure on young women to look a certain way, making them feel that if they do not meet these standards, then they are not considered beautiful (Willingham, 2018). Second, using filtering apps helps us construct who we would like to be or what we would like to look like, thus creating an idealised version of the self. Creating an idealised version of the self on social media can, however, make individuals feel unhappy with how they actually look.

According to Hong, Jahng, Lee, and Wise (2020), creating an idealised version of the self is regarded as deceptive, as individuals are conveying an impression of the self by controlling information that they disclose on social media. Refraining to disclose some aspects of the self is a self-presentational strategy which aims to obtain validation from peers and friends. Hong et al. (2020) claim that this behaviour is frequently found among social media users who post selfies and edit their images to create a positively presented self which helps to fit in with their peers, and also to appear more favourable to strangers.

Furthermore, the visual nature of Instagram lends itself to individuals being forced to enhance their appearance, as Instagram is a platform for posting and sharing images (Fardouly, Willburger & Vartanian, 2018). The more attractive the image, the more it will be liked and shared. Chua and Chang (2016) found how Instagram allowed adolescents to beautify their selfies by applying a range of enhancement filters. This function changed how adolescents presented themselves online and how the peer portrayal of idealised beauty can affect individuals emotionally and psychologically.

At the more extreme level, there is also a link with selfie activities and cosmetic surgery. A research study was undertaken by Wang, Chu, Nie, Gu, and Lei (2021) among 767 Chinese adolescents. The adolescents completed a selfie editing, facial dissatisfaction, and cosmetic surgery consideration at baseline, and then did a follow-up within 6 months. Results showed that, over time, initial selfie-editing and facial dissatisfaction positively predicted cosmetic surgery considerations among teens.

Whilst the enhancement of their appearance was something that participants in the current study enjoyed when capturing selfies, which further made them feel better about themselves, there were also underlying issues of self-esteem. Furthermore, when these selfies were posted on social media, it could make them feel worse when the feedback that they received on the enhanced images did not meet their expectation.

#### **5.2.8.2 *Memory and Nostalgia.***

The issue of feeling nostalgic, invoking a memory and noticing one's change and growth of appearance, undergirds the aforementioned theme. We found that five of the 14 participants

felt this way and highlighted this issue. The participants also noted that the selfie can invoke associative memory and a sense of “feeling good” by looking back on the selfies and pictures taken by the participants. The responses quoted verbatim substantiate the results and the theme. The word cloud shows the results below:

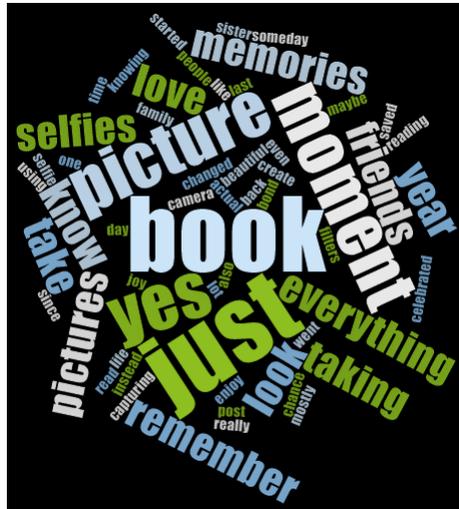


Figure 27. Word cloud: Memory and nostalgia

The participants below stated that posting selfies on social media served as a scrapbook. They felt that they could look back on these selfies and remember the moment when they took it. The feelings associated with this were very nostalgic and feel good.

P3: *“I think I’ve covered everything about loving the picture...taking picture makes you feel good and even create memories because you look at the picture someday and say I was here at that time...everything was beautiful...that moment and everything...that joy”.*

P6: *“Uhhmm...I think I enjoy...again...knowing that I can one day look back it and have saved that moment”.*

P7: *“It’s all about fun...it’s like looking at yourself in the mirror but capturing those moments...those fun moments that you won’t get again”.*

P13: *“I enjoy taking selfies because it is just memories you know...there are some pictures that you take and just post them...and people do really love them you know...and*

*when you take a selfie you just capturing that moment when you are with your family, with your friends”.*

The participants in the study specified that posting selfies on social media serves as a memory in that one day they would look back at the image and remember the moment. Facebook is one social media platform that has made it very convenient for people to view past content which they posted. In 2018, Facebook launched a page called “memories” where one can reflect on the memories that they shared with family and friends. Facebook automatically presents one with content being posted on a particular day, which will then invoke memories and perhaps feelings that one experienced in the image (Perez, 2018). It is for this reason that the participants felt that selfies posted on social media could serve as a memory book.

However, the researchers Orekh, Sergeyvera, and Bogomiagkova (2016) argue that the traditional aspect of taking a picture for a memory is lost, especially once the image is posted on social media. These researchers relate that the function of images in the current day is to communicate and shape personality. Capturing a selfie involves creating a social identity where social approval through likes reflects the correspondence of socially acceptable norms and a personal lifestyle presented on the internet by the selfie-taker. This process of social identity construction makes images highly staged and self-presented, thus losing the authenticity of the moment or memory. Similar to the participants in the current study, the participants in the research study by Wickel (2015) are also in agreement that selfies create memories. However, one has to question how authentic these memories really are.

### ***5.2.9 How Has Viewing Your Friends’ Selfies Influenced You when Taking Selfies?***

This question aimed to explore how friends impact participants online when taking selfies. The NVivo data analysis and IPA data analysis yielded the same results. Two themes were identified, namely social/friend comparison and learning from friends. The table below was produced from the IPA data analysis and highlights the number of times that participants mentioned the themes.

**Table 5.16. Influence of friends’ selfies**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Themes:</b>
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<b>number</b>	<b>Social comparison with friends</b>	<b>Learning from friends</b>
P1	2	1
P2	2	1
P3	4	1
P4	1	1
P5	2	1
P6	1	1
P7	3	1
P8	0	0
P9	1	1
P10	1	1
P11	2	1
P12	2	1
P13	2	1
P14	2	1

### ***5.2.9.1 Social Comparison and Friend Comparison.***

We found that 13 of the 14 participants showed social comparison with their friends, whilst only one participant showed comparison with a celebrity. The comparison with the friends surrounded primarily around issues of likes, who is more beautiful, and those with the better poses, etc. It must also be mentioned that two participants showed great maturity in the sense that they were not in fierce rivalry with their friends, but rather complimentary of their peers' beauty and quality of their pictures.

The word cloud looks like this:

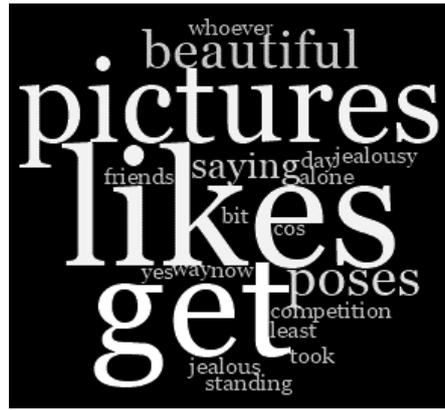


Figure 28. Word cloud: Social comparison and friend comparison

Participant 3 wants to emulate her friends by taking selfies similar to theirs however her words have an undertone of jealousy even though she states she is not jealous. She states she wants to look better than her friends. This feeling also comes across strongly from participant 7 who states that her friends are in a competition with selfies on Facebook. This competition also strongly suggests the need to look better than the other to gain more likes. Participant 9 also suggests she becomes jealous when she compares herself to her friends. It is also quite apparent that participants 9 friends become jealous when she gets more likes than them. Participant 11 and 14 compliment their friends and want to look like them.

Some of the responses from the participants include the following:

P3: *“Countless times...COUNTLESS TIMES...like you’ve seen...I don’t have an iphone so I make it a fact that I get someone who has iphone...because I want to take that picture that I saw...that my friends took...I want that picture...I want to look nicer than you...why her...why not me...but then I compliment her...I shouldn’t be jealous of her because she’s also my friend and I love it when I see her being beautiful”.*

P7: *“Yes...I do...my friends and I are in this competition...we made this competition ourself...whoever gets the most likes...in a selfie posted on Facebook in a month...like...everyday...and she’s going to get something from all of us...like our squad from all of us...my friends are always like...Weeeh...your posts are boring...’cos you don’t have filters...you don’t have this camera”.*

P9: *“Yes...I want to look the same, that’s why I get jealous”.*

P7: *“They saying no...’cos I got the most likes in that photo...they were saying don’t do that pose...that’s our pose...and I was like...hey don’t say that...”*

P11: *“Honestly...my friends have great poses...so I take those...so I think oh...the next time I take a selfie...I’m going to try what they doing...they look so good in selfies”*

P14: *“...sometimes I feel she is more beautiful than me in pictures...yes”*

The social comparison theory by Festinger (1954) describes upward and downward social comparison. Upward comparison refers to comparing the self with people who are superior, while downward comparison refers to comparing the self with those who are inferior to the self.

Thirteen participants from the study exhibited upward comparison in that they compared themselves to their friends who looked more attractive, posed better, or who had overall more appealing selfies. The participants wanted to emulate their friends’ selfies, thus showing signs of self-improvement.

A previous study explored the use of social comparison appraisals in adolescents’ lives with the emphasis on enhancement appraisals which can be used to counter threats to the self. The study was conducted before the selfie craze started to rise. However, the results of the study can be related to the current-day selfie-taking among adolescents, as enhancement appraisals such as manipulating selfies and controlling pictures on social media all serve to counter threats to the self (Kraye, Ingledew & Iphofen, 2008). The results of the study which involved 20 participants, suggested that social comparison processes aid in identity development. The results also highlighted that friends acted as comparison targets, as they played an important role in making sense of social information. This was also true for the results in the current study as the participants’ friends on social media aided in selfie behaviour change. Friends therefore were the reference targets, given the need to fit in and belong to the peer group and be accepted.

Similar results were yielded in the research done by Chua and Chang (2016), where the adolescent girls compared themselves to their peers on social media. The girls in the research

did not feel that they were as beautiful as their online friends. Peer comparison, more specifically upward comparison, is driven by the desire to gain the same validation as one's friends. This desire can be directly linked to underlying issues of low self-esteem and insecurity (Chua & Chang, 2016). Similarly, some of the participants in the current study displayed a low self-esteem and insecurity, as they expressed how they wanted to look as beautiful as, or more beautiful than their friends. They also expressed how they wanted to recreate poses that they had seen their friends use in selfies. A study by Vogel, Rose, Roberts, and Eckles (2014) also found that there were negative effects associated with self-esteem. The study found that participants who used Facebook more often, displayed a low self-esteem, and this was mediated by more exposure to upward comparison. Furthermore, their self-esteem was also lower when their comparison target contained upward comparison information.

In contrast to Vogel et al. (2014) and Chua and Chang (2016), Collins (1996) claims that upward comparison can motivate an individual to self-enhance when there is an assimilation (similarity) with the target. For example, in Germany a survey was administered to 385 Instagram users to investigate whether social comparisons on Instagram can be beneficial for users' wellbeing (Meier & Schafer, 2018). The result of the study was that there was a positive effect and inspiration when engaging in upward comparison. However, the comparison was based on activities such as travelling, sports, or cooking. The study therefore suggested that Instagram users can improve short-term affective outcomes by following content that would inspire them to pursue new activities. However, it was also important to note that benign envy, which was an emotional outcome of assimilative upward comparison, mediated the relation between social comparison and inspiration, therefore also suggesting an element of narcissism.

One of the main traits of narcissism is superiority and therefore people who are high on narcissism tend to compare their personal situation to that of others and they often feel bad when they are outperformed by others. Therefore, a narcissist would react quite negative-ly to upward comparison standards (Lange, Crusius & Hagemeyer, 2016).

According to Lange et al., a reaction to upward comparison is envy, and even though this emotion can often be maladaptive, it also serves as a functional response to manage intra-personal needs. Envy not only makes people aware of their shortcomings, but also pushes

them to do something about that shortcoming. Envy therefore is a response when there is an increased difference between the self and the person who is being envied.

Lange et al. (2016) discuss two types of envy. Benign envy is direct at improving the self by becoming as successful as the person who is been envied. There are therefore positive thoughts associated with the person being envied which is a driving factor to be better than them by improving the self. In contrast, malicious envy consists of resentful thoughts towards the envied person as well as the intention of bringing them down because they are superior. Lange et al. posit that both types of envy are ways in which people who are high in narcissistic admiration or rivalry, respond to threatening upward comparisons.

In the current study, four participants displayed benign envy in that they noticed the positive aspects about their friends' selfies (in terms of physical appearance, dress code, or pose) and they were driven to look like them or better than them. None of the participants exhibited malicious envy. The study by Lange et al. (2016) not only found that narcissists have an enhanced propensity to be envious, but narcissistic admiration predicted benign envy. Based on this study, we can deduce that some participants exhibited narcissistic admiration/benign envy.

#### **5.2.9.2 *Learning from Friends.***

Thirteen of the 14 participants claimed to learn various aspect of taking a selfie from their friends. These aspects predominantly include the poses done by their friends such as covering their hands, sitting on a chair, or pouting and smiling in a certain way, the set-up which includes the lighting and background, and finally the filters used by the friends. These were aspects passed on by them to the participants.

The associated word cloud is summarised below:

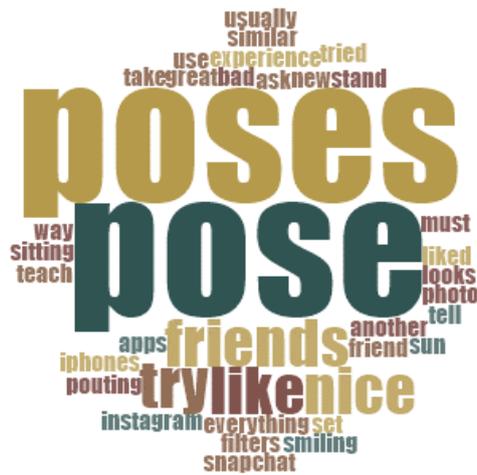


Figure 29. Word cloud: Learning from friends

Participants 4, 5, 11, 12, and 14 mentioned how viewing their friends’ selfies served to teach them how to create better selfies. These participants learned from friends how to do more appealing poses.

P4: *“My friend posted a picture...she was pouting...and then I liked it...and then I tried that pose...my picture came out perfect”.*

P5: *“Often I would see if my friends have a few more followers than me and I’d look at how they posting and how they posing. Then often a week later...I will take a photo and do similar poses”.*

P11: *“Honestly...my friends have great poses...so I take those...so I think oh...the next time I take a selfie...I’m going to try what they doing...they look so good in selfies”.*

P12: *“When I like the post...I will also do it”.*

P14: *“Yes I do...usually I see new posts from my friends...new poses...how I must pose...how I must take a picture and how I must do things”.*

Participants 6 and 10, on the other hand, also learned from friends, but instead of poses or physical appearances, these participants viewed their friends’ backgrounds and then tried to recreate a similar background.

P6: *“Uhhmm...I don't think it's influenced me like...per se...maybe if I see the way they've taken it out and I've liked it...I'd want to...errr.... try and recreate”.*

P10: *“Like sometimes the way they...it doesn't necessarily have to be selfies but sometimes pictures...like the set-up...like sometimes they take it outside...or the way they sitting or smiling...or their poses are nice...so I like it...and I'm like...okay I am going to try this”.*

Participants 1 and 3 received direct feedback from their friends when taking a selfie. Their friends taught them what to do and what not to do when taking a selfie.

P13: *“Oh yes...yes...I do look at their pictures and say...oh this pose looks nice...and then I go try it and then they say...oh no friend...you must do it like this...so they correct me...or they say you look good too...I do a lot of times...the three of us do post a lot of pictures...and we do give tips on how to pose”.*

P1: *“Like my one friend knows how to take good selfies and she will tell me how to stand and what to do. So ya...I think they definitely play a big role”.*

One of the main consequences of social comparison with friends' selfies is learning how to take better selfies. Ashuri, Dvir-Gvisman, and Halperin (2018) found that when individuals make the decision to share personal information on social media, they take into account the anticipated gains or the possibility of potential loss. Gains can include the feeling of belongingness or social connectedness and identity formation, while losses include feelings of jealousy and envy.

According to Ashuri et al. (2018), disclosing information about the self on social media is largely related to observing others' behaviour on social media and the loss and gains that they experience. These researchers discuss how the four dimensions of observational learning by Bandura (1977) serve to foster a disclosure on social networking sites. The four dimensions are attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation.

Attention refers to behaviour that is learned when one pays sufficient attention to the relevant information. Retention refers to storing the information that is processed. With reproduction, the behaviour is reproduced, while motivation describes if the behaviour that is produced will depend on rewards or punishments being received (Bandura, 1977).

The dimensions of observational learning by Bandura (1977) can explain how the participants in the study learned how to take better selfies from viewing their friends' selfies on social media. The participants in this study compared themselves to friends in terms of poses and beauty. Furthermore, they also paid attention to the rewards that their friends received through likes, being an indicator of popularity. Observing these elements of the selfie, the participants recreated their friends' selfies. The feedback that friends received on their selfies was thus a factor in determining if the participants would pay attention and reproduce the behaviour. Participant 5 mentioned how she would recreate poses from friends who had more followers, indicating that she would pay attention to content from popular and liked friends.

One can also deduce that adolescents would be more likely to engage in observational learning on social media due to their need to belong and fit in (Erikson, 1950). Friends thus played an important role in influencing these participants when taking selfies.

### **5.3 Summary**

The IPA analysis and computer software analysis, NVivo (version 12) were linked to provide an in-depth analysis of the study's findings. During IPA and NVivo analysis the role of the researcher was important as an interpretivist stance was adopted for the research. Care was taken to bracket personal biases thus not affecting themes covered. To achieve this a self-reflexive journal was used which assisted with reflexivity thus adding to the trustworthiness (Patnaik, 20130). The data from analysis was presented in the same format as the semi-structured questionnaire and the various themes were identified for that particular question.

It was found that the majority of the participants preferred face selfies in comparison to full body selfies. This finding was no surprise as the selfie is meant to include the face. However, it was revealing that participants took into consideration various elements when preparing for a selfie, such as the positioning of the body, posing, hair and make-up, clothing, and other aspects such as background and lighting which affect the overall look of the selfie. Capturing

a selfie is therefore not an impromptu act, but rather planned and well thought of in advance. A theme also found was that a high frequency of selfies was captured before posting on social media, thus supporting the idea that the selfies were rehearsed before allowing others to view it.

Participants posted selfies on social media which were positively self-presented, often hiding their physical insecurities such as imperfections with the face, complexion (skin colour), and weight. Filtering software was therefore used to present an idealised, perfect version of the self. It was further found that participants enjoyed editing their selfies because it allowed them to enhance their appearance and improve the overall quality of the image – once again highlighting the importance of making a good impression.

It was not only important for participants to look attractive in their selfies but to also experience the feelings of popularity through a large number of likes and positive comments on the image which fulfilled the underlying need to fit in and belong. This was important for the majority of the participants as the feeling of belonging and being liked created feelings of happiness and a building of confidence. However, the feeling of popularity often led to participants wanting to check their selfie numerous times to view the feedback.

The feedback that participants expected, was not always met and they reported feelings of rejection which would eventually lead to some individuals deleting the selfie from social media. However, these feelings also spurred them on to capture more appealing selfies. Friends were used as comparison targets, or they learned from friends how to pose better or appear more attractive.

Despite the various themes found related to body image, narcissism, and emphasis placed on self-presentation, the participants enjoyed capturing selfies as it was a way for them to create memories. The next chapter will provide a more in-depth discussion on the findings and conclusions of the study.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Findings, Conclusions, and Implications**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide a summary of the study. The summary section will review the problem statement and discuss the aim of the study by restating the research questions. This section will discuss the type of information which was collected and the method in which it was collected. The main findings of the study from the statistical and IPA analyses will be discussed and the conclusion of the study stated. Recommendations will be provided and will consist of practical suggestions for issues raised in the research. The chapter will also provide the limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research.

#### **6.2 Summary of the Study**

Smartphone developmental changes over the past decade have led to more people using the device as a social accessory (Goswami & Singh, 2016). The global usage of the smartphone, particularly among adolescents, has seen a considerable increase (Young, 2017), thereby giving adolescents more accessibility to the internet and in turn, social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram.

Social networking sites do not only allow instant communication with the online community, but also allows one to share text and image content that can be liked, commented on or shared by others (Frith, 2017). These platforms of networking and communication are ideal for the adolescent who, according to Baumeister and Leary (1995), have a desire to fit in and belong to social groups to avoid feelings of alienation and social isolation (Allen & Kern, 2017). Furthermore, Erikson (1950) describes the importance of identity formation in adolescence. Feedback from peers provides a reference point for developing a sense of identity and this can easily be obtained on social media platforms. Given this information about the adolescent from Erikson (1950), as well as Baumeister and Leary (1995), social networking platforms can have benefits of fulfilling the need to belong. Despite these advantages, the use of social networking sites is also met with a variety of disadvantages.

The selfie is described as an image of the self, captured by an individual using a smartphone, of particularly the face (Kaur & Vig, 2016). Having gained popularity on social media, the selfie is one way for adolescents to create an online identity and find acceptance among peers. The selfie benefits the adolescent in that it allows networking, creativity, and communication, while at the same time boosting confidence through positive comments and a large number of likes which are obtained on the image (Barry et al., 2017), thus serving to fulfil belongingness and acceptance.

Despite the various benefits of the selfie, it can paradoxically have adverse effects on an individual's emotional state and identity formation. The likes and comments obtained when posting a selfie, are linked to physical attractiveness (Wang et al., 2018a) and popularity (Siibak, 2009), and have been indicated by multiple studies to have negative effects on body image (Chua & Chang, 2016; Mascheroni et al., 2015). Given the importance of likes and positive comments on a selfie, the adolescent self-presents in a positive manner in order to make an impression to the online community in an attempt to acquire likes and positive comments.

Filtering software is used in order to achieve this goal. However, using filtering software has shown to negatively impact how adolescents feel about their body image (Kleemans et al., 2016) as many adolescents use filters to alter their appearances and the general appearance of their selfies (Chua & Chang, 2016). Furthermore, Krayer et al. (2008) describes how the adolescent compares their appearance to peers to decide whether their image is socially acceptable, thus highlighting the powerful role of social comparison on social media in impacting adolescent self-esteem.

The emphasis placed on physical appearance as well as the use of filtering software culminates to the adolescent feeling more conscious of how they look, which is regarded to have a direct link to narcissistic characteristics (Wang et al., 2018a). This can be potentially dangerous for the adolescent who seeks to form a stable identity, but is instead using the selfie to obtain approval on their appearance with the perfect selfie (Dutta et al., 2016). If this approval is not met, there is an even bigger urge to obtain societal approval, thus fulfilling the need to belong.

Given the increased use of social media sites and the popularity of the selfie, a potential problem exists among adolescents in that the selfie can possibly affect self-esteem in a negative way. The current study explored the aspects that affect self-esteem when posting a selfie on social media.

The study answered the primary research question:

*How does posting selfies on social media impact an adolescent's self-esteem?*

The problem statement of the research study highlights that among teens, the selfie can negatively affect the overall self-esteem of the adolescent. Self-esteem is an important concept in the identity formation of the adolescent (Erikson, 1950). In order to answer the main research question, two secondary questions were formulated to gain a deeper understanding of how self-esteem is affected by the selfie.

The study answered the two secondary questions:

*What effect does the selfie have on an adolescent's body image?*

Prior to the selfie coming into existence, the adolescent already had a pre-occupation with physical appearance due to the changes in their physical development. The addition of the selfie thus added an increased concern over appearance as the selfie itself places emphasis on physical appearance (Chae, 2017; Chua & Chang, 2016). It was therefore important to delve deeper into adolescents' perception of body image in relation to the selfie.

*What effect does the selfie have on the personality trait of narcissism in the adolescent?*

The selfie is regarded to increase narcissistic tendencies not only through filtering software (Chua & Chang, 2016), but also through a desire to gain popularity (Wickel, 2015) through likes and positive comments. This in turn has a direct link with the body image and overall self-esteem. It was therefore important to gain a richer understanding as to how the selfie can potentially increase narcissism in adolescents.

To adequately answer the study's research questions, snowball or referral sampling was used to select adolescent participants. This method of sampling was chosen and best suited, given

the current situation of the Covid-19 pandemic as it was easy to obtain participants based on referrals while still maintaining the Covid-19 protocol. Criteria of inclusion to participate in the study were an adolescent age (12 to 18 years), capturing selfies and posting a selfie on either Instagram and/or Facebook social networking sites regularly.

Fourteen participants were selected for the research study and were interviewed, using a semi-structured questionnaire. The literature review was the basis for the development of the semi-structured questionnaire which was developed by the researcher. The questionnaire was constructed with the aim of delving deeper into understanding the specific research questions. To ensure that the questionnaire yielded the information required, it was piloted with the first two participants. According to Majid et al. (2017) results from a pilot study can help to identify actual and potential problems of the research study.

Prior to the interview taking place, parental consent and assent forms (if the participant was under 18 years of age) and consent forms (for participants 18 years of age) were completed. Once the documentation was signed to give consent for participation, the interviews were arranged via Skype. Skype was used as it helped to maintain the Covid protocol of social distancing. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and analysed manually, using an interpretative data analysis (IPA) as well as computer assisted software, NVivo (statistical analysis). Using both manual and computer assisted software analysis techniques, fostered greater reliability of the data and provided richer results.

### **6.3 Findings**

The study revealed that the participants preferred to capture selfies of the face, compared to full body selfies. This is not a surprising finding, as the main use for the selfie is for profile pictures which highlight the face (Senft & Baym, 2015). The main reason why participants preferred face selfies is due to insecurities around weight/body size. The majority of the participants in the study was female and research suggests that females are more concerned about their body weight (Chua & Chang, 2016). This finding immediately highlights insecurities with body image among females.

The participants were asked to describe what they thought a selfie needed to look like prior to posting on social media. The question was further elaborated to explore if the participants

focused on physical aspects such as appearance or external factors such as the setting. A finding was that participants relied on a high degree of self-presentation related to body image. This was evident in their need to choose attractive and presentable clothing. Dress code was more than just physical, and served to tell a story about the participants and create a certain mood which they hoped others would feel. Furthermore, clothing was also chosen to enhance the body image (to make them look smaller, and by using figure belts) and also used as a way to fit in with the crowd by dressing trendy or cool as defined by the adolescent society.

Participants self-presented positively by means of their hair and make-up. Using make-up and fixing the hair before capturing the selfie, served to create a well-presented impression to others. Make-up was also used to accentuate physical features such as the lips or eyes while it was preferred for hair to be washed and neatly set. It was interesting to note that five participants felt that a selfie specifically for Instagram deserves a beautiful image where they made effort with their faces and hair. Instagram was considered the place for beautiful selfies.

On completion of adjusting the hair and make-up, participants focused on the background. It was important for them to stand in front of a background that would be appealing to the people who would view the image. The background for participants varied from a beautiful garden with flowers to a neat clean wall. The background also served to tell a story to the viewer. Lighting was also an important factor for the majority of the participants. The type of lighting varied, as some participants preferred sunlight, while others preferred filtering soft-ware lighting. Irrespective of the type of lighting – participants felt that good lighting enhanced their facial features and brightened their appearance.

Once the participants were “made up” and an appropriate background and lighting were chosen, they could focus on how they appeared for their selfie through poses and positioning of their body (angles). The theme of angles was prominent for half of the participants. Angles included the positioning of the phone to achieve a slimming figure, the best angle to the face to appear more appealing and to hide unattractive features, or the positioning of the body to achieve a thinner waistline. While achieving the best angle, half of the participants opted for a specific pose such as pouting (protruding the lips in a sexually suggestive manner) or sticking out the tongue. These poses were preferred among participants as they felt that it looked attractive, and it was also popular among friends to do so.

Hair and make-up, clothing, pouting, and angles all aided in enhancing the physical appearance and overall body image. While the background and lighting were external to the person, these factors played a big role in enhancing the physical appearance of the selfie. In a study by Fullwood et al. (2016), self-concept clarity was tested to see how it would be associated with an adolescent's inclination to experiment with online self-presentation. Adolescents that possessed a less stable sense of self-report, experimented with online self-presentation more often and presented an idealised version of the self. In contrast, adolescents with a stable self-concept, presented an online self which was more consistent with who they were offline. This research points to the fact that a high degree of self-presentation is indicative of a low self-esteem. One can therefore deduce that the current participants also experienced low self-esteem as they presented idealised versions of the self. However, Fullwood et al. (2016) also indicate that self-presentation can aid in self-discovery. The adolescents' level of preparation also points to narcissism as research suggests that narcissistic individuals are preoccupied with their appearance (Bunker & Gwalani, 2018).

The participants used filtering software to enhance their self-presentation, narcissism, and body image. The majority of the participants agreed that filtering software was used to alter (improve) their face. This included removing blemishes and pimples and even making the facial structure more appealing. It is not surprising that altering the face was widely used, as the face forms an important part of the selfie. Furthermore, the adolescent's age is met with physical changes due to puberty, making teens more aware of how they look.

Complexion was an issue for six participants. The participants were guided by societal expectations in terms of what is considered attractive or how a socially acceptable skin colour looks. Three black participants directly commented that they wished to be lighter, and this forced them to use filters, while three other participants indicated that they used filters to appear brighter, but did not necessarily indicate an unhappiness with their complexion. The third theme found in this question was the issue of weight, which was found among three participants.

Insecurities and low self-esteem were evident, causing the need to alter the face, wanting to be light skinned, and avoiding full body selfies, due to weight concerns. The themes which were identified, were not unique, as research has shown similar results among adolescents in the online world of the selfie. An early study by Elliot (1982) investigated the effect of self-

esteem on the tendency to convey a false impression to others by hiding behind a façade. The study included adolescents being in a crucial time in the development of the self-concept. The results of the study revealed that individuals with a lower self-esteem presented a false front. These individuals also possessed a vulnerability as they were more aware of their own shortcomings and loathed criticism from others. They were more self-conscious and displayed a fantasy or rather an idealised version of who they wanted to be. This is similar to the participants in the current study who were presenting a false front by altering their shortcomings. One can deduce that the participants again showed signs of low self-esteem, based on their similarities to Elliot's findings (Elliot 1982).

Twelve participants used filters for visual appeal, suggesting a high level of self-presentation and body image concerns. Visual appeal was also related to enhancing the quality of the selfie by using different filters to change the colour of the image or make the image brighter. These concerns were all about their body image, implying a need to look superior on social media – also suggesting a vulnerable narcissism (Paramboukis et al., 2016).

The findings further revealed that participants felt that a good selfie was one that captures who they are. These feelings were contradictory of what they actually posted on social media, as they captured an edited and therefore positively self-presented image, hence an image which was not really a true reflection of who they are. A finding from this question was that participants also exhibited narcissistic traits in that they wanted to form a positive impression on others. They would manage this impression by controlling how they looked, how they posed, and where they stood. Furthermore, a good selfie to participants was one that flaunted their beauty as they indicated that selfies where they looked perfect would be the only ones posted on social media.

To explore the feelings associated with feedback from peers, the participants were asked how they felt when they received positive comments and a large number of likes on a selfie. The themes from this question again revealed narcissism among the majority of the participants. They felt feelings of happiness when others commented on and liked their selfies. Popularity was also strongly tied to this feeling of adoration as at least eleven participants enjoyed the popularity which they received – this feeling would spur them on to capture more beautiful selfies.

Furthermore, participants captured many images before posting the perfect one on social media. The high frequency of capturing images among all participants indicates the need to present a positive image to others. There was also an incessant need among thirteen participants to constantly view the feedback on their posted selfies, once again highlighting the need for positive feedback – typical of a narcissist (Paramboukis et al., 2016) – the need to be recognised, and to have a large circle of friends (Wickel, 2015; Nash et al., 2019). The need to look beautiful and to capture a large number of selfies before posting one on social media, were the two sub-themes which indicated the emphasis that was placed on the physical appearance, which is a key characteristic of a narcissist (Bunker & Gwalani, 2018). The need for adoration and having a large circle of friends are highlighted in a study by Wickel (2015) as a characteristic that predicates narcissism. The participants in the study by Wickel (2015) found that the number of likes and comments on a selfie indicate one's popularity.

Participants were then asked how they felt when they received less likes and comments on a selfie. Based on the previous question, it was not surprising that 11 of the participants would feel rejected by their peers online. This finding was also not surprising as adolescents have a desire to fit in. To be rejected, would bring on feelings of unhappiness and self-esteem issues among them (Barry et al., 2017). Feelings of rejection led to six participants deleting the selfie from social media as they felt that they were either not attractive or not likable. The act of deleting the selfie indicated clear self-esteem issues which was also a finding from other research studies.

Participants were asked what they enjoyed about capturing selfies. Once again, the themes found were narcissistic and based on appearance. Twelve participants enjoyed taking selfies to enhance their appearance by using filtering software. They also saw it as a medium to express themselves. While expressing oneself can be beneficial to a participant, these selfies were not truly expressing an authentic self, as the images consisted of a high degree of self-presentation. Participants also indicated that they enjoyed taking selfies, as it is a memory which can be saved and looked at, at a later stage. Whilst this may be true, the authenticity of the moment is lost as most selfies are highly staged, so the memory that was saved was staged. The finding from this question highlights body image concerns and narcissism among the participants.

Lastly, participants were asked how influenced they are by friends when they take selfies. This question revealed that 13 participants compared their selfies with those of friends and through observing others' selfies, they learned how to improve their own. All participants exhibited an upward comparison, which served to make them feel worse about themselves. However, at the same time, upward comparison has a motivational function as it serves to push participants to take better selfies. Though, one has to question if this actually made them feel better about themselves, as looking better than their friends through filtering their images, did not reveal the true self. This question highlighted narcissism in the participants as they wanted to look better than their friends. It is also important to note that social comparison was met with feelings of envy – a characteristic of a narcissist (Lange et al., 2016). According to Lange et al. (2016), envy makes one aware of their shortcomings and acts as a functional response to situations. In this study, it created the urge for participants to use filtering software and other methods of self-presentation to look just as or even more attractive than their friends. Lange et al. further argue that individuals who are high in narcissism, utilise envy in threatening upward comparisons. Social comparison, according to Krayer et al. (2008), aids in identity development as it provides a reference point to what is more liked or what gains more attention on social media. The adolescents emulated this behaviour with the hope of fitting in or being accepted by peers. Added to this, the need to look as beautiful as their friends can be linked to underlying issues of low self-esteem and insecurity (Chua & Chang, 2016).

#### **6.4 Conclusions**

The research was undertaken to investigate the posting of selfies by adolescents on social media. Adolescents were chosen as the age to explore, as the developmental stage which they find themselves in is critical for identity formation (Erikson, 1950). According to Erikson (1950), if people successfully deal with the challenges at a particular developmental stage, then they will emerge from that stage with psychological strengths that will benefit them for the rest of their lives. In contrast, failure to deal effectively with conflicts, can lead to a lack of essential skills needed for a strong sense of self. Tsang, Hui, and Law (2012) also identified the importance of identity formation and claimed that a clear well-developed identity with a high self-esteem can aid in positive development throughout adolescence, leading to the rest of one's life. They indicated that it is important to incorporate significant

others in the adolescent's life in order to offer effective exposure that will provide the adolescent with the necessary support, which in turn will develop a healthy identity.

Erikson's theory as well as the research by Tsang et al. (2012) indicate why it is so important to explore how the selfie influences the adolescent's self-esteem, as the selfie posted on social media can either be beneficial or harmful to identity formation. The current study thus aimed to explore how the selfie posted on social media affects an adolescent's self-esteem with particular focus on body image and narcissism.

The research study concludes that the selfie does indeed negatively affect an adolescent's self-esteem by increasing body image concerns and narcissistic behaviour. In the online world, the adolescent portrays different identities to suit the expectations of peers, which pictures the appeal of social media to teenagers. When an adolescent experiences social exclusion, this type of platform becomes ideal to not only aid in self-discovery, but to fulfil the need to belong.

Whilst posting selfies on social media seems relatively harmless, the current study and previous studies (Chua & Chang, 2016; Mascheroni et al., 2015) highlight deep seated issues which affect the overall self-esteem of the participant. The impact on physical appearance ranges from not only looking attractive, but the overall presentation of the image. The selfie is thought out and planned with multiple images captured before that one perfect image is obtained for the world to see. This background preparation is when teens are able to notice their own shortcomings and they then plan how to overcome these shortcomings through altering the image. It is at this stage, before any feedback is actually obtained from friends, that the image is already receiving criticism from the selfie-taker themselves, as they find themselves unhappy with their nose, facial structure, skin, weight, or other aspects of their body image. Their underlying low self-esteem is concealed by a perfect image which they think makes them feel confident, but instead might be doing the very opposite. Narcissistic behaviour is very much intertwined in the preparation phase of the selfie as the majority of participants wanted to present an image where they are liked. The only way to obtain that adoration from others (Wang et al., 2018b), is to edit the imperfections of their physical appearance and to create an image which communicates beauty and likeability.

The amount of time spent, not only on the preparation of the selfie, but also on viewing the picture once posted online, makes one more aware of the appearance and thus more conscious about the self. The feelings of insecurity then become perpetuated by the feedback received from peers, which is a crucial aspect of the entire selfie process. Everyone wants to be liked or to have nice things said about them, especially the adolescent who uses feedback to gauge their belongingness among peers (Erikson, 1950). This feedback was an important factor in making the participants in this study feel either good or sad about their body image. Based on the need to be liked, it was no surprise that feelings of sadness arose when negative comments or less likes were received on an image, especially when the participants felt that their selfie was really good. Furthermore, once the image is posted on social media, there seems to be a vicious cycle of narcissism where the teenager is constantly viewing the image to see what people are saying about their appearance or their image as a whole, and latching onto the number of likes which is indicative of popularity. This happiness and confidence that they obtain from others' feedback is typical of the narcissist (Wang et al., 2018a). However, as strong as narcissism may appear, once the image is posted, the combined feelings of insecurity and body image concerns create a vulnerable narcissist who expresses self-doubt, is sensitive when evaluated by others, thus exhibiting a low self-esteem as a whole (Brailovskaia, Rohmann, Bierhoff & Margraf, 2020).

Social comparison, in particular upward social comparison, was definitely a thief of joy for the participants in this study. Comparing the self with peers who were more beautiful and more appealing in selfies, made participants even more aware of their own inadequacies which led to feelings of envy for some of them. This ego threat experienced by participants and feelings of envy motivated them to make themselves more attractive or to imitate their peers by posing in the same way. Unfortunately, the comparison also added fuel to the fire in making participants more aware of their shortcomings.

The study concludes that, whilst the participants experienced feelings of confidence building and attractiveness when posting a selfie, the actual fact is that the selfie creates individuals who are not only more conscious of their appearance, but also conscious of how others view their appearance. It creates individuals who are highly sensitive to feedback concerning their looks, individuals who have a desire to be liked, and who rely on others' opinions to build a sense of self.

## 6.5 Recommendations

The findings in the research raise concerns of the adolescent's emotional wellbeing in society. However, the findings are also able to transform how the selfie is viewed among the youth and other individuals such as parents, guardians, and teachers. The youth are the leaders of the future and to have confident leaders who value intrinsic characteristics such as leadership, motivation, goal setting, and community, we need to identify what are currently the aspects in the youth that can potentially be preventing them from becoming individuals that possess these characteristics. Unfortunately, social media and in particular the selfie, place an emphasis on extrinsic qualities of appearance and fame, which are not considered ideal characteristics for potential leaders of tomorrow. This statement is confirmed by Twenge et al. (2012) who compared high school students with Gen X and baby boomers, and found that money, image, and fame are more important to today's generation than community, affiliation, and self-acceptance.

Practical solutions need to be reviewed to ensure that the adolescents in our community are independent and confident, who feel secure in who they are and do not rely on peer approval to impact their self-worth, which was a finding in the current study. How can we go about creating this mentality in a society where adolescents are already soaked in social media? A recommendation is to start with parents and to make them more aware of the developmental stage of the adolescent and the impact of the selfie on their teens. According to Kamenetz (2019), at least 53 percent of teenagers in the United States own a smartphone by the age of 11, exposing them to taking selfies from a young age and posting it on the internet and social media. Parents are handing their children mobile devices and are unaware of the silent negative effects on their children's self-esteem. In agreement with my recommendation, Teran, Yan, & Aubrey (2020) assert that parents and guardians need to be aware of red flags on their teenagers' phones, which include a variety of selfie editing apps or a phone gallery with dozens of selfies. This behaviour from the teen can indicate a selfie obsessed teenager which warrants a talk regarding the issue.

Another recommendation is to provide workshops for parents, particularly for those who have children entering the adolescence phase. Identifying the problem at an early stage can help parents to play an active role in monitoring social media usage. Content being posted on social media can also assist parents in understanding the world of their adolescent. Teran et

al. (2020) agrees that having conversations regarding the selfie and social media usage at a very early age is one of the ways in which the problem can be avoided in the future. Furthermore, having these conversations early can prevent a sudden attack on adolescent autonomy.

Parental involvement will not only assist in protecting the emotional wellbeing of the adolescent, but also their safety so as to simultaneously protecting their teen from sexual predators on social media. Furthermore, if parents are aware of the effects of the selfie on one's self-esteem, they can play a bigger role in building their child's self-esteem, motivating them to be independent and not to rely on feedback from others to create a concept of who they are as people. Workshops can therefore give parents the skills and tools to help their teen on their journey of identity exploration.

Another recommendation is to also make teachers aware of the problem as teenagers spend more time in school than they do with their parents. It is important in this instance that teachers should play a supportive role to learners in terms of their emotional wellbeing, and not only an academic role. In this regard there needs to be an increase in teacher sensitivity, which is indicated by a teacher's awareness of and responsiveness to learner cues including distress and emotional problems (Ruzek, Hafen, Allen, Gregory, Mikami & Pianta, 2016). The importance of teachers' emotional support has been well documented (Ruzek et al., 2016), as they are able to play a significant role in identifying possible emotional distress related to social media in students.

Whilst many schools do have school counsellors, very often learners would prefer to speak to someone whom they trust and would rather approach their class teacher than their parents. It is therefore important for all teachers to understand the developmental stage of the adolescent and how the effects of the selfie can impact them in the school environment. Even though the selfie may be posted online, when learners are in each other's presence, posted selfies can become a point of discussion, leaving open an avenue for bullying, teasing, and other types of behaviour that impact self-esteem. Teachers therefore need to be aware of learners displaying self-esteem issues and play a role of encouragement to the learners.

Furthermore, information should be provided directly to teenagers about social media pressures. Apart from parents and teachers playing a large role in teens' emotional development,

life orientation classes in schools can also play a role in educating adolescents about social media and its impact on self-esteem. These types of classes need to focus on intrinsic qualities which are more valuable than extrinsic qualities which social networking sites thrive on.

## **6.6 Limitations**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the sampling method of snowball or referral sampling was used. Using this sampling method allowed me to easily obtain participants for the research whilst observing the necessary Covid protocol of social distancing. The government regulation regarding lockdown made it impossible to access participants, and furthermore schools were closed during this time. Whilst using this sampling method was an advantage in the time of Covid-19, it was also met with disadvantages which can be considered a limitation of the study. Sampling from a particular network of peers can lead to bias and furthermore it is not possible to determine the actual pattern of distribution of the population (Sharma, 2016).

A third limitation of the study arose from the medium used to collect data. The telecommunication application, Skype, was used to interview the participants. Using this application was convenient as it allowed me to social distance from the participants and it also allowed me to easily access the participants who stayed far away. However, to use the application, the participants needed to be in an area with good signal strength and most importantly, they were required to have access to data. Both these aspects proved to be a challenge as there were some individuals who wanted to be part of the study but did not have access to data. Furthermore, some individuals did not have the Skype application and were not prepared to download it. King and Horrocks (2010) also advise researchers to be wary of technical glitches in sound and video transmission. Although technology may have drastically improved since 2010, I still had difficulty in this regard.

## **6.7 Suggestions for Future Research**

In the review of literature and in the research that was studied, several gaps were identified for further research. Future researchers should give a thought to it, indicating what should be studied, and also arguing why it is important. They should also provide a rationale for why the additional research should be done.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown measures in the country, snowball or referral sampling was used to sample participants. A limitation of using this type of sampling was that the majority of participants happened to be females. Multiple research studies suggest that females are more prone to body image and self-esteem issues (Chua & Chang, 2016; Mascheroni et al., 2015; McLean et al., 2019). Therefore the findings of the study might have been skewed in this regard as the majority of participants were females. Taking this into account, a suggestion for future research is to include adolescent males to differentiate selfie behaviour from females and to explore the effects on their self-esteem.

A further suggestion for future research is to conduct a study on how the new social media platform called TikTok affects the self-esteem of teenagers. The online article by Mzekandaba (2020) describes key findings from the South African Social Media Landscape 2020 report. The report argues that the social media app, TikTok which became a craze in 2019 is widely used among teenagers as young as 13 years with more than a million users in South Africa alone. The app allows its users to share 60-second short videos as well as images with friends, family, and the entire world (Mzekandaba, 2020). Knowing that a video can be shared for the entire world to view, places more scrutiny on appearance and self-presentation in order to obtain likes and an even larger following. Given that adolescents as young as 13 years are using this app, it will be beneficial to explore how selfies and videos posted on this platform affect teenagers.

Older adolescent participants also indicated that they captured more selfies during their early teens. Given this information, a suggestion for future research is to conduct a longitudinal qualitative study. Conducting a longitudinal qualitative study about the selfie will answer how one's lived experiences change over time (Calman, Brunton & Molassiotis, 2013). Identifying reasons why young adolescents may be more prone to selfie-taking can also help to identify solutions.

## **6.8 Summary**

Over the years, there has been technological advancements in the smartphone device (Sarwar & Soomro, 2013) which in turn gave a large rise to the global smartphone usage with an even bigger increase in usage among adolescents (Porter et al., 2016; Young, 2017). An increase in smartphone usage among adolescents has left open doors for teens to access and explore a variety of social media networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram.

The purpose of the research study was to explore the effects of the selfie on an adolescent's self-esteem. The selfie has experienced a considerable increase in usage since 2013 (Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017) and is mainly shared on social media platforms. The photographic image of the self, once shared on either Facebook or Instagram, aids in playing a key role in shaping a visual culture (Markello, 2005) and becoming a conversational tool (Eckel et al., 2018). Markello (2005) states that the visual culture is reshaping personal identities and our relationships with others, which is a key reason as to why the adolescent age group was chosen to explore in this research study. The search for an identity is a major challenge faced by adolescents (Erikson, 1968) as they seek to understand who they are while at the same time are confronted with the demands from physical and cognitive changes, the demands of an approaching adulthood, and various external changes in their environment. Belongingness forms a crucial aspect of identity formation, as it creates feelings of acceptance and support (Allen & Kern, 2017). The selfie is therefore an easy way for the teen to fit in with peers. It is a platform where they can easily be liked and accepted by others by either remaining authentic or by changing their images to meet the approval of peers.

In order to explore self-esteem, the study focused on body image and the adolescent, as well as narcissism and the adolescent. The selfie cannot be spoken of without referring to body image. The selfie is a visual display of the face (Markello, 2005) and sometimes the full body. Taking an image of the self and posting it on a platform where instant feedback is received, can no doubt affect one's body image and how one feels about the self. It can further perpetuate increased self-consciousness and concerns of how one appears to other people. These feelings can create a rather narcissistic personality. The purpose of the study was therefore to explore both body image and narcissism in relation to the selfie.

In order to explore self-esteem, body image, and narcissism in relation to the selfie, a qualitative research was undertaken to understand how adolescents experience the selfie on social media. Fourteen participants were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. The interviews were transcribed and analysed, using both the manual IPA and computer assisted software (NVivo software). The IPA analysis was completed by the researcher while the computer assisted software analysis was completed by a qualified professor in statistics.

A finding from the study is that self-presentation was important to participants. Participants wanted to portray a positive and physically appealing image to friends online. In order to

portray a positive image, a large amount of background preparation would take place prior to posting the image on social media. The background preparation included fixing hair and make-up and choosing the best clothing. The preparation also included adjusting the body numerous times to achieve an image that displays the best side. This also included pouting – adjusting the face to pose for a selfie. Furthermore, background and lighting were important to participants which further aided in enhancing the image. Participants opted for a beautiful background such as a garden, or if this was not available, then they would opt for a clean and neat background such as a wall. Lighting not only served to make the images brighter, but also made the appearance of the participant brighter and more attractive. These aspects all served to present the self positively.

A second finding of the study, related to self-presentation and body image, is that participants used filtering software to enhance their appearances. Reasons for using filtering software were an unhappiness with blemishes and pimples on the face, an unhappiness with skin colour, and an unhappiness with body mass (weight). This finding has highlighted underlying feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. Coupled with body image concerns, this finding also highlights narcissism as the participants had a need to look physically attractive and would prepare their image and alter their appearance to appear so. Having the ability to edit their physical appearance was also a reason why participants enjoyed capturing selfies for social media.

A third finding from the research study is that narcissism was a strong trait among these participants. They enjoyed the adoration that they received from peers' feedback once their selfies were posted on social media. The feeling of popularity made them feel happy and confident. Whilst these feelings of happiness may seem good, paradoxically it further perpetuated feelings of insecurity as participants checked their posted selfies numerous times to view feedback, and increased their selfie capturing to obtain a perfect image.

A fourth finding indicates low self-esteem among participants as they experienced feelings of rejection if they did not receive validation and positive feedback from peers. This would often lead them to completely delete their selfie from social media.

A fifth finding is that in this study, friends were very influential regarding the selfie. Upward social comparison took place among all participants and served to make them feel worse

about themselves, often leading them to focus more on their appearance and attempt in capturing more attractive selfies. Social comparison was served to teach students on how to capture selfies like their friends.

In conclusion, the findings suggest that participants displayed low self-esteem in relation to the selfie. There was a deep concern about body image and how they appeared to friends online, leading them to alter their appearances. The altering of their appearances included spending a large amount of time preparing the self in the background in order to present a perfect image to the online world. While participants used this time to make themselves look more attractive, it only served to make them more conscious of their appearance. Participants were also very narcissistic – their need for attractiveness and positive feedback from others is characteristic of a narcissist. Typical of a narcissist that loathes negative feedback, the participants avoided negative feedback by deleting a selfie. Low self-esteem was also highlighted through self-comparison. Participants compared themselves with friends who were more attractive, thus making them aware of their own shortcomings. Furthermore, this behaviour also increased learning from friends. Participants imitated friends, hoping to look more attractive or obtain more likes.

I hope that the findings of this research will foster an awareness among society regarding issues related to the selfie. I do hope that this information can enlighten parents, teachers, and adolescents themselves.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Final Conclusions**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to provide a summary of the study and to evaluate and interpret the overall study. The chapter will begin by recapitulating the purpose of the study and its findings, while clearly stating the answer to the main research question.

The chapter will discuss the findings of the study in relation to previous research. Limitations of the research will be discussed where the research boundaries will be reflected on. The chapter will also delve into the implications of the findings and will provide recommendations and plans for potential future research. Furthermore, the chapter will also discuss how the research findings can possibly contribute to society and will then conclude with a final word.

#### **7.2 A Recapitulation of the Purpose and Findings**

The purpose of the research study was to explore how an adolescent's self-esteem is affected when selfies are posted on social media platforms. To explore the purpose of the study, the research questions were outlined as follows:

*1) How does posting selfies on social media impact an adolescent's self-esteem?*

This was the primary research question. Self-esteem is an important concept in the identity formation of adolescents (Erikson, 1950). In order to answer the main research question, two secondary questions were formulated to gain a deeper understanding of how self-esteem is affected by the selfie.

*1a) What effect does the selfie have on an adolescent's body image?*

Prior to the selfie coming into existence, the adolescent already had a pre-occupation with physical appearance due to the changes in their physical development. The addition of the selfie thus added an increased concern about appearance as the selfie itself places emphasis on physical appearance (Chae, 2017; Chua & Chang, 2016). It

was therefore important to delve deeper into the adolescent's perception of body image in relation to the selfie.

*1b) What effect does the selfie have on the personality trait of narcissism in the adolescent?*

The selfie increases narcissistic tendencies, not only through filtering software (Chua & Chang, 2016), but also through a desire to gain popularity through likes and positive comments (Wickel, 2015). This in turn has a direct link with body image and overall self-esteem. It was therefore important to gain a richer understanding as to how the selfie can potentially increase narcissism in adolescents.

Given the research questions, the thesis had the aim of exploring if the selfie impacts the adolescent's body image negatively or positively, and if the personality trait of narcissism increases when posting selfies on social media. In exploring the secondary research questions, the research intended to answer the overall primary research question.

What I found was that adolescents have a preoccupation with not only wanting to feel a sense of belonging, but more importantly, they seem to love the attention which comes from wanting to be liked and complimented by their peers, particularly in the online environment where they could easily create a façade which is likeable to others. This finding came across rather strongly as participants had the tendency to focus on a visual self-presentation of the selfie to achieve the goal of likeability. The themes that emerged, conveyed a strong sense of visual self-presentation, including lighting and background which were external to the participants' self, while clothing and body image (weight, skin colour, and face) were part of the person. The findings suggest that wanting to be liked and complimented was a strong motivational factor for selfie posting behaviour on social media as it was a major perceived influence, not only on how they looked, but also on the persona that they put forward to the rest of the online community.

The participants showed a preference for the altering and editing of selfies and constructing novel, attractive images which would have the aim of gaining online attention through likes and positive comments. It was a ridiculous thought for the participants to capture and post a selfie without considering the aesthetic appeal that it would have on other people. The participants' behaviour prior to posting the selfie suggests an excessive consciousness of how

they will appear to others, and thus participants began to mould themselves to a version of what they thought would be liked by the online community. The findings from the research which were related to background preparation of enhancing the selfie and enhancing body image further suggest very evident feelings of low self-esteem and insecurity among participants which came through strongly with their excessive self-presentation. At this early stage of preparing the selfie, the participants employed self-presentational tools which would convince their peers online that they are worthy to have their social status increased. The behaviour prior to posting the selfie on social media thus suggests a strategic endeavour as they are not portraying the genuine self. Narcissism is strongly intertwined at this stage by expressing feelings of wanting to be liked, and feeling a sense of superiority through their physical appearance.

Once the selfie was posted on social media, the findings further revealed that the behaviour exhibited by participants, raised concerns if they were liked or beautiful enough. The feelings experienced after posting a selfie were the driving force in determining whether that image was removed from social media or kept on for others to see. Themes indicated that the participants had the tendency to constantly check their selfie to view feedback and likes, thus indicating their need to feel popular. A feeling of happiness and confidence was experienced when the goal of popularity was achieved. However, it was also evident that the participants seemed to also experience anxiety as they eagerly awaited to view feedback obtained on their posted selfie – with some participants even admitting logging into social media over ten times a day.

It is important to note that not receiving the desired feedback led to feelings of worthlessness, therefore further emphasising that wanting to be liked and to receive compliments from others, typical of a vulnerable narcissist, were directly related to their self-worth.

The findings further suggest that participants exhibited a feeling of superiority as they wanted to look as good, if not better than their friends online. Comparing the self to friends who were more attractive, seemed to almost create a sense of competition where they would learn from them and copy poses all in an attempt to gain more likes to be as likeable as their friends. The need to be liked and reassured through the selfie led to a feeling of benign envy among friends.

Given the findings, one can deduce that the selfie is used as a tool to grab the attention of others. Even though participants have stated that the selfie is used as a memory book on social media, more evidence points to the fact that likeability is important, and feelings of exclusion and worthlessness are felt if likeability is not met.

The feeling of wanting to be liked and going to certain measures to attain this, and the feeling of exclusion and worthlessness, are all feelings that fall under the main umbrella of self-esteem. Self-esteem is the individual's evaluation of their self-worth, as the words that participants used to describe how they felt when they did not receive feedback from peers is indicative of a low self-esteem.

The behaviour by participants before and after the selfie posting on social media, therefore answers the main research question of the study: The selfie does in fact negatively affect the adolescent's self-esteem.

### **7.3 Relation to Previous Research**

In chapter 3, the social construction theory of Berger and Luckmann was discussed where they argue that society is created by humans and human interaction. In the current study it was found that through interaction with peers and through conversation, the participants not only found meaning in the selfie, but changed the way in which they constructed their idea of the selfie, based on their interactions with others. For example, participants learned about the selfie through observing friends on social media and also from feedback received from peers. This knowledge from others helped them to construct new meanings to the selfie by creating novel selfies with interesting and fun backgrounds.

A theme which arose in the analysis of the study was that participants have captured many selfies before posting one on social media. This kind of action becomes a habit, according to Berger and Luckmann (1967). This was perhaps a reason why participants found difficulty in answering the question, "Why do you take selfies?" Participants were not sure why they took selfies. For them it was just a habit and selfie-taking becoming the norm in society.

Through the habitualisation of capturing selfies, the findings of the current study revealed that physical appeal is an important aspect to posting selfies on social media and is largely

determined by what they thought was beautiful, based on peer upward comparison. These findings are consistent with similar previous research done by Chua and Chang (2016), where girls focused on their physical image such as facial features and body mass, and used filtering software to perfect how they looked. Similarly, the adolescent females in the study by Chua and Chang (2016) understood beauty from a standard set by their peers and would therefore mould themselves according to this standard to be more likeable. Similar findings were also revealed in research by Macheroni et al. (2015) and Siibak (2009) where adolescent girls in particular felt empowered when they were able to control their online appearance because they could meet the demands of the social pressure when it came to beauty. Previous and current research findings are thus in agreement that the presentation of the body image through clothing, hair, make-up, and weight is important and invokes strategic measures in how one presents the online self. However, it is important to note that it is not only body image appeal that was a similarity between the current study and previous studies, but also the comparison with friends and learning how to take selfies like friends.

Using Goffman's dramaturgical vocabulary, backstage behaviour (the preparation work involved which is invisible to others) was an important stage in planning a likeable persona. Managing one's impression made to others was the overall finding in the current study. The backstage planning before the selfie is posted, is also a finding in the research by Chua and Chang (2016), Mascheroni et al. (2015), and Siibak (2009). In this way all participants could please their audience (online community) by matching their performance to the audience's expectations and preferences.

However, while visual appeal was important through self-presentation tactics, a finding in the current research that can potentially build on the research studies by Chua and Chang (2016) and Mascheroni et al. (2015), is that the background and lighting which had high importance to all participants in the current study, were not mentioned in these research studies as findings. Research by Siibak (2009), however, supports this finding, as participants in that study rated that capturing a selfie in a beautiful surrounding as the second most important reason for selecting a selfie for social media. This finding in the current research and in the research of Siibak (2009) is important, as it places emphasis on the extent of self-presentation that adolescents will succumb to in order to obtain a visually appealing image.

Using Goffman's dramaturgical vocabulary, frontstage preparation (the actual posting of the selfie on social media), reveals that feedback from peers and the positive feeling of being liked is a determining factor in continued selfie posting behaviour. Participants anxiously awaited feedback and felt happy when positive comments were received and unhappy when negative comments were received. Positive feedback indicated popularity and determined whether the image would be deleted or not, based on the number of likes obtained. Similarly, research by Chua and Chang (2016) found that quantitative measures of feedback from peers served to increase feelings of popularity and self-worth, while the inverse was also true, as negative or less feedback served to make them feel unworthy. This also applies to the research of Siibak (2009) and Mascheroni et al. (2015). However, at odds with other research studies is that the current study found that participants had a sense of urgency to constantly check their social media to view feedback. This was a theme not found in previous studies. The anticipation for feedback is an important factor in also understanding narcissistic behaviour as it points to how participants eagerly await the adoration from others which in turn serves to make them feel good about themselves and boost their self-esteem.

Research by Wickel (2015) supports the finding in the current study, by stating that adolescents check their social networking profile quite regularly to view the feedback that they receive on a selfie. Although my findings were compatible with research by Wickel (2015), there are areas in which it differs, in that envy was apparent among participants as their desire to look as beautiful as their friends was met with a kind of jealousy. Research by Wickel (2015) does not mention that envy can be associated with narcissism among participants who post selfies on social media.

Research by Chua and Chang (2016) indicates that the adolescent girls displayed underlying feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem while adolescent girls in the study by Mascheroni et al. (2015) and participants in the study by Siibak (2009) also exhibited traits of low self-esteem by displaying an ideal self on social media. The current research was no different, as the majority of the participants displayed low self-esteem through their attempts to hide insecurities and feelings of worthlessness when negative comments were received.

While the current research corresponds with previous research, it also points out new areas to explore, which can build on previous similar research.

## **7.4 Limitations of Research/Anticipation of Criticism**

This section will be broken down into two subsections and will describe the limitations of the study during the data collection stage and further problems resulting from the research design.

### **7.4.1 *Problems during Data Collection***

The Covid-19 pandemic posed a challenge with regards to sampling. The study initially opted for purposive sampling with the intention of approaching schools to recruit participants for the study. However, the schools were closed due to lockdown measures and could not be accessed. Snowball sampling was then the selected sampling method as it was convenient to obtain participants for the study based on referrals. Using this sampling method, though, resulted in more females participating in the study and only one male participating. Having more females than males in the study could have possibly biased the results as females are more prone to body image concerns than males. Using a different sampling method such as purposive sampling may have possibly yielded a more representative sample in terms of gender.

A second limitation of the research was the sample size. According to Smith and Osborn (2007), sample size depends on factors such as richness of individual cases, the level of commitment to the case study, the level of analysis and reporting, and the constraints under which one has to operate. In the current research study, the sample size consisted of 14 participants. However, a larger sample could have yielded more male participants, but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this was almost impossible.

A third limitation was the use of the telecommunications application, Skype, which posed problems that proved to be a limitation in the smooth running of the data collection process. Skype was not a preferred communication tool for adolescents, as the majority of applicants did not have the application downloaded on their phones. Participants then had to download the application which posed a challenge, as downloading the application required data which participants did not really have. I then had to wait for them to download the application before the interview could take place, which delayed the process. A further limitation of Skype was the distortion in signal which occurred from time to time, leading to questions that

had to be repeated. In this regard, answering the question for the second time was often shortened by the participant.

#### **7.4.2 *Problems Resulting from Research Design***

The study used a semi-structured interview for data collection which went hand in hand with the qualitative research design. The open-ended questions which are characteristic of qualitative research were also a possible limitation to the study, as some participants were able to answer a question in great detail while other participants were not able to do this. Hyman and Sierra (2016) refer to this as participant articulateness and refer to responses to open-ended questions being weighted unintentionally by how articulate a participant actually was. Some participants in the study had to be probed in order to obtain an answer. Participant articulateness could have influenced the research results as more information regarding the selfie could have been obtained from those participants who spoke more than the others. Using a mixed-method research design by combining a survey with the open-ended questionnaire, could have prevented this influence on results as the strength of one research method would compensate for the weakness of the other.

#### **7.5 *Implication of Findings***

The findings of the study support the argument for a change in parental involvement when it comes to social media and mobile phone usage. Parents are handing their teenagers mobile devices, regarding it as harmless to their emotional wellbeing when instead it is silently affecting the adolescent. Smartphone and social media usage are increasing the gap between identity and role confusion. Erikson (1950) identified these factors as important to find a resolution in order to form a stable identity.

An online report by the Pew Research Centre claims that parents are the biggest source of influence on their adolescent child's understanding of appropriate digital behaviour. As parents, they should talk to their child and provide them with concrete steps to monitor their online activities, including viewing their social media profiles and friending them on social media (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell & Zickuhr, 2011). Lenhart et al. confirm that, while parents in the United States speak to their children about social media activities, they do not take hands on the approach to actively restrict or monitor their child. With parents not playing

an active role in restricting the adolescents' social media activities, it opens the opportunity for the adolescents to post content that are not beneficial to their wellbeing.

The study also suggested actions for parents to monitor their child's emotional wellbeing and possible changes in behaviour. For example, participants in the study noted how they would travel to different areas to take pictures, or the amount of preparation required before taking a picture. While these types of behaviour may be considered normal for a teen who places emphasis on physical appeal, it might be important to note the extent to which this is done because of the impact it can have on their emotional self. The participants in the study indicated that they used filtering software to hide their insecurities, or that they felt worthless in not receiving enough positive comments and likes. It becomes important for parents to recognise these feelings and to instil values for their teens. Intrinsic values such as community, affiliation, and self-acceptance are more important than extrinsic values such as fame, appearance, and money.

A further suggestion by the research is that education is needed regarding the effects of social media on the self, and the school environment can be an ideal place in which to educate adolescents, especially in Life Orientation classes that are intended to educate teens on life skills.

## **7.6 Recommendations**

A suggestion for future research is to conduct a study on how the new social media platform, TikTok affects the self-esteem of teenagers. The online article by Mzekandaba (2020) describes key findings from the South African Social Media Landscape 2020 report. The report relates that TikTok, which became a craze in 2019, is widely used among teenagers as young as 13, with over a million users in South Africa alone. The app allows its users to share 60-second short videos as well as images with friends, family, and the entire world (Mzekandaba, 2020). Knowing that a video can be shared for the entire world to view, places more scrutiny on appearance and self-presentation in order to obtain likes and an even larger following. Given that adolescents as young as 13 years are using this app, it could be beneficial to explore how selfies and videos posted on this platform affects teenagers.

Older adolescent participants also stated how they captured more selfies during their early teens. Given this information, a suggestion for future research is to conduct a longitudinal qualitative study. Conducting a longitudinal qualitative study about the selfie, will answer how one's lived experience changes over time (Calman et al., 2013). Identifying reasons why young adolescents may be more prone to selfie-taking can also help to identify solutions.

The current study consisted of a majority of female participants. This is also the case in similar previous research studies (Chua & Chang, 2016; Siibak, 2009; Wickel, 2015). A recommendation for future research is to understand how the selfie affects the self-esteem of male adolescents.

A fourth recommendation is to undertake a comparative study whereby adolescents who are not on social media and do not take selfies are compared with adolescents who take selfies and post on social media. In this way, one would be able to compare the differences between the two groups and make an inference. A comparative study could determine whether the selfie does in fact create increased narcissistic behaviours and body image issues.

A final recommendation would be to use mixed methods in the research study, hence both quantitative and qualitative methods. It is recommended to administer a survey, combined with a semi-structured interview. Using both an interview guide and a survey could increase the reliability of the data.

## **7.7 Contributions**

### **7.7.1 *Theoretical Contribution***

The current study explored how the selfie, posted on social media, can potentially affect the self-esteem of the adolescent. Whilst the study had many similarities with research studies such as those of Chua and Chang (2016), Mascheroni et al. (2015), Siibak (2009), and Wickel (2015), it was also distinctive in that it explored the selfie in relation to both body image and narcissism, unlike previous similar studies that focused on either narcissism or body image. Furthermore, the themes identified in the study brought to the fore distinctive elements that increase narcissism (such as constant selfie checking, popularity, feelings associated with selfie posting), and body image concerns which included a variety of self-presentational

tactics. Not only does the current study add to previous research studies, but it also increases the understanding of the psychological impact of the selfie on adolescents.

### **7.7.2 Practical Contribution**

The findings of the study contribute to understanding today's adolescent. Whilst parents are aware that their teens enjoy social media usage, they are oblivious as to the reasons why they enjoy social media. The study therefore aims to educate parents on the relation between their teenagers and social media usage, in particular selfie-posting.

Teachers can also benefit from this study in understanding the relation between teens and selfie-posting behaviour. In particular, cyberbullying can occur due to selfie-posting on social media. Cyberbullying has shown to have huge effects on the academic, social, and emotional performance of an adolescent (Ferrara, Ianniello, Villani & Corsello, 2018). The study will help teachers to understand the dynamics of the adolescent and social media, and how this plays out in a school environment.

The study can also contribute to enhancing adolescents' understanding of the self in relation to social media. Given that adolescents are at a stage of identity formation, learning about the self and the psychological impact of social media and the selfie will prove to be beneficial. Previous research has shown that educating teens on social media risks is very important (Vanderhoven, Schellens & Valck, 2014).

## **7.8 Final Word**

Social media has indeed made its print on society, with Gen Z being the age group who only knows a world of technology. It is this generational group that has grown up with internet connectivity, social media and social networking sites. This socially constructed world of social media and internet connectivity is considered normal for the adolescent, and it is for this reason that it is very difficult to separate the adolescent from this environment. Self-presentation, narcissistic behaviour, and a focus on physical appearance are considered normal and also important. This research study has highlighted the harmful effects to psychological health. It therefore becomes crucial to change this way of thinking and to change behaviour in the adolescent to instil intrinsic qualities and values. I do hope that the findings

of the research can add value to the society and make an impact on how teenagers view social media and the selfie.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Information Sheet**

**Title of Thesis: The effect of posting selfies on an adolescent's self-esteem**

Dear prospective Participant

My name is Melissa Jackpersadh and I am undertaking a research study under the supervision of Prof Van der Merwe, in the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa (UNISA), towards the Doctoral Degree in Psychology. We are inviting you to participate in a study titled, "The effect of posting selfies on an adolescent's self-esteem".

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

The purpose of the study is to explore the effects of the selfie on the adolescent's self-esteem. The study will explore both the positive and negative effects of the selfie.

#### **WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?**

You are invited to participate in this study as you meet the requirements. The requirements of the study are that you should be an adolescent in the age group of 12 to 18 years, you should use Facebook and/or Instagram, and you should capture and post a selfie on Facebook and/or Instagram on a monthly basis.

#### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

Your participation will involve accepting me as a friend on Facebook or allowing me to follow you on Instagram, so that I can view your selfies. You will then participate in an interview via Skype. The duration of this interview will be an hour and will be recorded for data analysis purposes. A second interview will also be conducted if necessary to answer questions that might not have been answered previously. Both interviews will be recorded for the purpose of analysis.

**CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?**

Yes, participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to give your consent to participation. If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

**ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?**

No, nothing of which I am aware of.

**WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Yes, at all times. Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers that you have given. Your answers will receive a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. Your responses may be reviewed by people who are responsible for making sure that this research is done properly, including members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study. Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles, and/or conference proceedings. Your privacy will be protected in any publication of the information, like a report of the study that may be submitted for publication, but no individual participants will be identifiable in such a report.

**HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet. For future research or academic purposes, electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Any future use of the stored data will be subject to the approval of the Research Ethics Review, if and when applicable.

Hard copies will be shredded, while electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software program.

### **WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

Participants will not receive any remuneration, monetary reward, or incentives for participating in the study.

### **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?**

This study has received a written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Psychology, as well as the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Human Sciences, and the Research Permission Subcommittee of Unisa. A copy of the letters of approval can be obtained from the researcher if you wish to see it.

### **HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Melissa Jackpersadh on 071 172 7097 or e-mail me at [melissa.valoo@yahoo.com](mailto:melissa.valoo@yahoo.com). The findings will also be accessible on the Unisa repository system by searching with the title of the study indicated above on <http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/14514>. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact me. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact the supervisor, Prof Van der Merwe on [vdmerp1@unisa.ac.za](mailto:vdmerp1@unisa.ac.za). Alternatively, contact the research ethics chairperson of the Ethics Committee, Department of Psychology, Prof Kruger at 012 429 6235.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

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Researcher: Melissa Jackpersadh

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Supervisor: Prof P Van der Merwe

## **Appendix B**

### **Informed Consent**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research, has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read the information sheet (or I have been informed about the content of the information sheet). I therefore do understand the study as explained in the information sheet.

I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I do understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware of the fact that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications, and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree with the recording of the audio responses.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant's name and surname \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

Participant's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's name and surname \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

Researcher's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C**

### **Assent Form**

#### **Title of research: The effect of posting selfies on an adolescent's self-esteem**

You are requested to participate in a research study conducted by Melissa Jackpersadh, supervised by Prof Van Der Merwe of the Department of Psychology at the University of South Africa (UNISA). You were selected as a possible participant of the study because you are an adolescent that belongs to the social media groups, Facebook and/or Instagram, and you capture and post selfies on these social networking sites on a monthly basis.

Your parents have given permission for you to be part of this research study. Therefore I want to tell you all about it so that you can decide if you want to be part of it. If you don't understand, please ask questions. You can choose to be in the study, not be in the study, or to take more time to decide.

#### **1. Why is this study done?**

In this study, I want to explore in more detail if taking a selfie and posting it on social media impacts a teenager's personality.

#### **2. What will happen if I take part in this study?**

Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. Your parents have already given their permission for you to take part in this study if you would like to. However, even if your parents have already said "yes", you can still decide not to do it.

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I will ask you the following:

I will ask your permission to "follow" you on Instagram or "friend request" you on Facebook. I will then inspect the selfies that you have posted. I will make notes on this observation. I will then arrange for an interview with you. During the interview, I will ask you questions on the selfies that you have posted on social media. A second interview may be arranged if I

need to obtain further information from you. The interviews will be recorded because I would need to analyse the information that you have given me.

**3. How long will I be in the research study?**

The entire process of observing your selfies and completing the interview may take two months. During the first month I will observe the selfies that you have posted. This will take 3 days. In the next month I will arrange an interview with you which will take an hour at most. If need be, a follow-up interview will be arranged with you which will take about 20 minutes.

**4. Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?**

If you feel any discomfort during my observation of your selfies or during the interview, you may decide to end your participation in the research study.

**5. Are there any potential benefits if I participate?**

You will not personally benefit from the study. However, your participation in this research will help me to understand more on how selfies affect teenagers, and this information can help parents, teachers, and health care providers.

**6. Will I receive any payment if I participate in the study?**

You will receive no payment for your participation.

**7. Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that will identify you, will remain confidential. Confidentiality will only be disclosed with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of changing your name, so that nobody will know who you are.

**8. What are my rights if I take part in this study?**

You may withdraw from taking part in this study at any time. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may leave the study at any time without consequences of any kind. You are not waiving your legal rights if you choose to be in this research study. You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

**9. What will happen to the information that I provide?**

The information that you provide will be kept in my possession and shared with my supervisor. There will be no other person who will have access to the information that you have share.

**10. Who can answer questions that I might have about this study?**

If you have further questions about the study, you can discuss these questions with me.

**I understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in the study. I have been given a copy of this form.**

**Name of participant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of participant** \_\_\_\_\_

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

**SIGNATURE OF THE PERSON WHO OBTAINING THE ASSENT**

**In my judgement, the participant has voluntarily and knowingly agreed to participate in this research study.**

**Name of person obtaining assent** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

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

## **Appendix D**

### **Parental Consent**

**TITLE: The effect of posting selfies on an adolescent's self-esteem**

#### **1. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this form is to provide you (as the parent/s of a prospective research study participant) with information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to let your child participate in this research study. The person performing the research will describe the study to you and answer all your questions. Read the information below and ask any questions which you might have before deciding whether or not to give your permission for your child to take part. If you decide to let your child be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your permission.

If you agree, your child will be asked to participate in a research study about the impact of selfies on adolescents. The purpose of the study is to explore the psychological effects of the selfie on the self-esteem, personality, and body image of the adolescent.

#### **2. What is my child going to be asked to do?**

If you allow your child to participate in the study, they will be asked to do the following:

- Allow me permission to “follow” them on Instagram or “friend request” them on Facebook, only to observe (over a period of two days) and analyse the past selfies which they have posted.
- Complete a semi-structured interview via Skype which includes questions on selfie-related behaviour.
- Complete a follow-up interview to finalise information.
- Permission will be requested to record these interviews, purely for data analysis purposes.

This study will take 2 months: During the first month, observation of the selfies on social media will take place for a period of two days. During the second month, the interviews will

be arranged. The first interview will take an hour, while the follow-up interview, if necessary, will be approximately 20 minutes.

**3. What are the risks involved in this study?**

There are no foreseeable risks to participating in the study.

**4. What are the possible benefits of the study?**

There are no direct benefits of the study to the participant. However, as your child participates in this study, they will contribute to research which is currently limited in the country. The information provided will contribute to a better understanding of the selfie, which can assist parents, teachers, and healthcare providers.

**5. Does my child have to participate?**

No, your child's participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time. You can also agree to allow your child to be in the study now and change your mind later without any penalty.

**6. What if my child does not want to participate?**

In addition to your permission, your child must agree to participate in the study. If your child does not want to participate, they will not be included in the study and there will be no penalty. If your child initially agrees to be in the study, they can change their mind later without any penalty.

**7. Will there be any compensation?**

Neither you nor your child will receive any type of payment by participating in this study.

**8. How will my child’s privacy and confidentiality be protected if they participate in this research study?**

Your child’s privacy will be protected by the following:

- The researcher will not comment on selfies or make it known that they are participating in this research.
- Pseudonyms will be used to protect the privacy of your child.
- Your child’s interview will be recorded with their permission. Any audio recordings will be stored safely and only the research team will have access to the recordings. Recordings will be kept until the data analysis is finalised. No identifying information will be in the audio recording.

**9. Who can I contact with questions about the study?**

Please contact Melissa Jackpersadh on 071 172 7097, or e-mail melissa.valoo@yahoo.com, should you have any questions about the research. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact the supervisor, Prof Van der Merwe at vdmerp1@unisa.ac.za.

Parent’s name and surname \_\_\_\_\_ (please print)

Parent’s signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Parent’s contact number \_\_\_\_\_

Parent’s e-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher’s name and surname \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher’s signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E

### Summary of Themes

Themes were identified for each question in the semi-structured questionnaire. Below is the summary of themes for each question asked on the questionnaire.

Questions asked according to semi-structured interview	Themes and sub-themes
1. What does a selfie need to look like, before posting it on social media?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face selfie</li> <li>• Body selfie</li> </ul>
2. Can you describe your preparation before taking a selfie which will be posted on social media?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angles</li> <li>• Background</li> <li>• Pouting</li> <li>• Hair and make-up</li> <li>• Clothing</li> <li>• Lighting</li> </ul>
3. What tools or software are you accessing to take a selfie?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face alteration</li> <li>• Complexion</li> <li>• Weight</li> </ul>
4. Why do you use filters?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Editing physical appearance</li> <li>• Improving the quality of the selfie</li> </ul>
5. What is perceived as a “good” selfie to you?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capturing the essence of the person</li> </ul>
6. How do you feel when you receive positive comments and a large number of likes on a selfie?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High frequency of selfie capturing</li> <li>• Happiness and confidence</li> <li>• Constant checking of selfies</li> <li>• Popularity</li> </ul>
7. How do you feel when you receive less likes and comments on a selfie?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling of rejection</li> </ul>
8. What do you enjoy about taking selfies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancing appearance</li> <li>• Memory and nostalgia</li> </ul>
9. How has viewing your friends’ selfies influences you when taking selfies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social comparison with friends</li> <li>• Learning from friends</li> </ul>

## **Appendix F**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

1. What is your age?
  
2. What social media platforms are you accessing?  
Probe: Access Instagram and why?  
Probe: Access Facebook and why?
  
3. How many selfies do you post on social media in a month's time?  
Probe: Are more selfies taken and perhaps not posted on social media?
  
4. What does a selfie need to look like before posting it onto social media?  
Elaborate to the participant: Type of pose? Is the selfie just of the face or the full body?
  
5. Can you describe your preparation before taking a selfie which will be posted on social media?  
Elaborate to the participant: Does the participant use make-up, straighten hair, choose a certain lighting?
  
6. How many selfies do you usually capture before you are satisfied with the selfie which is suitable for Facebook?
  
7. What tools or software are you accessing to take a selfie?  
Probe: Describe the filtering software used.  
Probe: Describe apps used.
  
8. Why do you use filters?
  
9. What do you perceive as a "good" selfie?

Elaborate to the participant: What makes you look at your selfie and say this is the one that I want to post?

10. How do you feel when you receive positive comments and a large number of likes on a selfie?

11. How do you feel when you receive less likes and comments on a selfie?

Probe: Have you ever deleted a selfie from social media because it did not receive the likes that you have expected?

Probe: Do you find yourself checking your social media more often than usual to check if you are receiving more likes?

12. What do you enjoy about taking selfies?

## **Appendix G**

### **Extract from Memo Journal**

#### **14 December 2020**

*Transcribed four interviews manually. This took a whole today. I feel it was good to do transcribing manually because it made me more familiar with what the participants had to say. Had to listen to recordings a few times. Very time consuming today.*

#### **15 December 2020**

*Four more interviews transcribed today. Two interviews did not seem as lengthy as yesterday. Not much disclosure from these participants even with probing.*

#### **17 December 2020**

*Transcribed five interviews today. Took up a lot of time. Constantly have to go back on recording to make sure right words are transcribed.*

#### **21 December 2020**

*Started IPA analysis today with three transcripts. A lot of reading. Made sure to read twice and make mental notes. On the third read, noted down comments and potential themes. Noted similarities but also discrepancies with themes, but still have 11 interviews to go. Took a few hours today.*

#### **23 December 2020**

*Three interviews analysed today. Somehow seemed to go a little faster today.*

#### **30 December 2020**

*Four interviews analysed today. Very lengthy.*

**3 January 2021**

*IPA stage 1 data analysis took place for each question. I compiled a table and wrote down the themes that I found when reading the data. I quoted verbatim the source and location (page number) for each participant. A table was produced for each question. I only managed to do three questions today. Very lengthy process.*

## **Appendix H**

### **Extract from Self-Reflexive Journal**

#### **23 November 2020**

*Observation took place with participant 11 today. Observation took place on Instagram only. She does not seem to post a lot – seems like only one or two posts a month. Selfies on social media look very rehearsed, well-presented. Good participant for the study. Filters are definitely used. Her replies to the comments on the selfie seem to me like she enjoys the attention. Poses by the participant also accentuate features. These personal observations and thoughts must not influence the line of questioning in the interview.*

#### **24 November 2020**

*Observation took place with participant 12. Wow, she really seems to love selfies, unlike the previous observation. Does she love herself? A lot of comments and replies to her selfies. It seems like she may be popular among her friends. There are filters only on images. Pictures also seem to be sexually suggestive.*

#### **25 November 2020**

*Observation took place with participant 13 on Facebook. She seems very extroverted judging from her pictures, but this should not influence how I approach the interview with her. It seems like she posts quite often on social media. It seems more like face selfies – I am not sure if this is because of a weight problem.*

#### **27 November 2020**

*My final observation today with participant 14. Her selfies seem very reserved compared to others. She does not take a lot of selfies. She looks shy.*

## **2 December 2020**

*An interview took place with participants 11 and 12 at different times – so, different interviews. Participant 12 was very outgoing and had a lot to say. Feeling good about the interviews. I had to remain neutral – observation cannot influence thought about participant. Interviews went very well. Participant 11 had to probe a lot more though.*

## **3 December 2020**

*An interview took place with participant 13. The participant is very outgoing. Lots of talking. Really no need to probe as participant disclosed so much. It seems in line with her observation. Interview was very successful.*

# Appendix I

## Turnitin Report

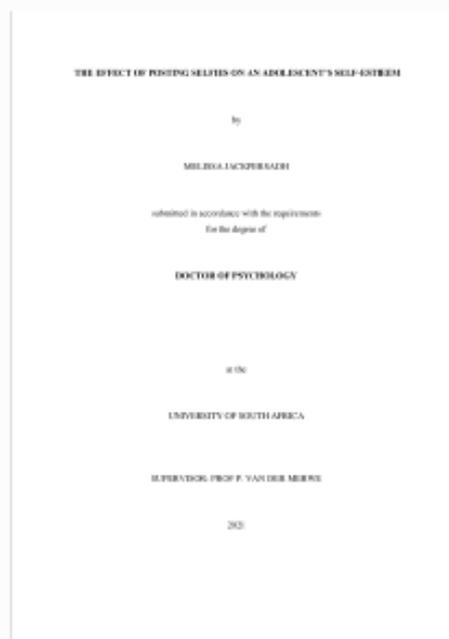


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