

(Re)constructing Body Shaming: Popular Media Representations of Female Identities as Discursive Identity Construction

by
Kyra Roodt



*Thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree MA
in General Linguistics at Stellenbosch University*

Supervisor: Dr Lauren Mongie
Co-supervisors: Dr Kate Huddleston
Dr Marcelyn Oostendorp

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Department of General Linguistics

December 2015

DECLARATION

By submitting this thesis/dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

ABSTRACT

The study takes an analytical approach to discourse in its focus on the discursive realisation and (re)production of ideology in terms of the (re)construction of a singular female identity as portrayed by the media – specifically content generated by the online news and entertainment website, BuzzFeed.

Data was collected electronically over a period of fifteen months (January 2014 to May 2015) and subjected to a keyword search, which then determined the most relevant articles. These articles were entered into two separate corpora for analysis in order to identify the most significant ideologies related to body shaming, and broken down linguistically through the use of Wordsmith Tools.

The analysis of the data mainly drew upon the theories of Bakhtin's conceptualisation of dialogic (2004), Gee's building tasks of language (2014), van Dijk's analytical toolkit (1984), (1990) and Kress' notion of the formation of ideology (1989).

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the (re)production of ideology surrounding traditional beauty ideals as being a singular concept in order to reveal the more complex identities of women as unique individuals.

The study's findings indicate that there is a significant correlation between female empowerment in terms of associating with feminist ideals and female misogyny as one of the main sources of body shaming, with female misogyny outranking feminism with only 4,94%. Furthermore, the study revealed that overall appearance was the most commonly discussed topic throughout the corpus, being mentioned in a total of 93,83% of articles, with the face and hair of women being most frequently discussed in 23,46% of articles. Overall appearance was also the topic most commonly shamed in the corpus, closely followed by fashion, body shape and fitness.

OPSOMMING

Die studie maak gebruik van 'n analitiese benadering tot diskoers gerig op aspekte van taalwetenskap wat 'n rol speel in die realisasie van idees in terme van die rekonstruksie van 'n singulêre vroulike identiteit soos voorgeskryf deur die media – veral in die geval van inhoud gegeneer deur die aanlyn nuus en vermaakwebblad, BuzzFeed.

Data was elektronies ingesamel oor 'n periode van vyftien maande (vanaf Januarie 2014 tot Mei 2015) en onderwerp aan 'n sleutelwoord soektog, wat dan die mees relevante artikels kon identifiseer. Hierdie artikels was toe in twee aparte corpora ingeskryf vir analise, ten einde van die identifikasie van ideologieë mees relevant tot die konsep van liggaambeskaming. Die data was ook taalkundig afgebreek deur die gebruik van Wordsmith Tools.

Die analise van die data is hoofsaaklik gegrond op die teorieë van Bakhtin se konseptualisasie van dialogie (2004), Gee se boutake van taal (2014), van Dijk se metodologiese analise (1984), (1990) en Kress se teorie oor hoe ideologiese raamwerke gevorm word (1989).

Die doel van hierdie tesis was die ondersoek in terme van die reproduksie van sekere ideologieë rondom tradisionele ideale van skoonheid as 'n enkelvoudige konsep om meer te openbaar oor die komplekse identiteite van vroue as unieke individue.

Die navorsing dui op 'n beduidende korrelasie tussen die bemagtiging van vroue in terme van die assosiasie met feministiese ideale en vroue haat deur ander vroue as een van die hoofbronne van liggaambeskaaming, met vroue haat deur ander vroue geïdentifiseer as die ideologie wat die meeste voorkom in die korpus, net 4,94% meer as feminisme. Verder onthul die studie dat algehele voorkoms die mees algemeen bespreekte onderwerp was, genoem in 'n totaal van 93,83% van artikels, met die gesig en hare van vroue mees algemeen bespreek in 23,46% van artikels. Algehele voorkoms was ook die onderwerp wat mees algemeen verneder was, gevolg deur mode, liggaamsvorm en fiksheid.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Vir Ouma en Oupa.

Ek hoor julle in die winterwind en sien julle in die kosmosblomme langs die pad.

My gratitude goes to my supervisors and friends, Drs. Kate Huddleston and Lauren Mongie, for their endless reserves of patience, kindness, guidance and insight. Kate has grounded me throughout this year, and Lauren never fails to end a meeting with a quick feminist rant (or a lengthy discussion of the benefits of anything fluffy). Thank you both for your inspiration and example. I am forever in your debt.

To Dr. Marcelyn Oostendorp, thank you for your valued input and motivation. I also extend my gratitude to the NRF for the financial support granted to me.

My sincere thanks go to my parents, who made it possible for me to do what so few people have the opportunity to do. Your pride is my purpose in life.

To my godmother, Yvette Mouton, thanks for always having a glass of wine ready when the stress gets too much.

To my loving brothers, thank you for reminding me not to take life quite so seriously.

My love goes to my biggest cheerleaders Bianca Pedro, Megan Symons, Liesl Gerber, Michelle Jordaan and Monique Potgieter. You are the most unfailingly positive people I've ever met. My friends, I could not have done this without you having my back at every turn.

Finally, a shoutout to my first proofreaders and two of the most insightful individuals I've come across, Stefan Smit and Dale Harding. May the universe never split our paths.

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	i
Abstract.....	ii
Opsomming.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Chapter 1.....	1
Introduction.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Statement of the problem.....	2
1.3 Research questions.....	3
1.4 Theoretical outline.....	3
1.5 Research design.....	3
1.6 Outline of the thesis.....	4
1.7 Conclusion.....	4
Chapter 2.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	6
2.1 Introduction.....	6
2.2 Foundations of CDA.....	6
2.3 Language and power.....	8
2.4 (Re)constructing realities.....	9
2.5 The propagation of body shaming.....	12
2.6 Body shaming as a form of discursive identity construction.....	13
2.6.1 Body shaming and identity construction according to Gee’s framework of building tasks.....	14
2.6.2 Online tabloid journalism as a source of body shaming.....	17
2.7 Conclusion.....	20
Literature Review.....	21
3.2. Female self-objectification.....	21
3.3 Shame or guilt?.....	24
3.4 Other studies on the representation of the female body.....	27
3.4.1 Ojerholm and Rothblum (1999).....	27
3.4.2 Grabe, Hyde and Lindberg (2007).....	28
3.4.3 Johnston and Taylor (2008).....	29

3.4.4 Peterson, Grippo and Tantleff-Dunn (2008)	30
3.4.5 Murnen and Smolak (2009)	31
3.4.6 Conradie (2012).....	32
3.4.7 Ringrose and Renold (2012)	32
3.5 Conclusion.....	33
Chapter 4.....	35
Research Design.....	35
4.1 Introduction	35
4.2 Sampling.....	35
4.3 Profile of Buzzfeed.....	35
4.4 Procedure.....	36
4.4.1 Qualitative analysis	36
4.4.2 Quantitative analysis	36
4.5 Theoretical instruments	37
4.6 Conclusion.....	38
Chapter 5.....	39
Data and Analysis	39
5.1 Introduction	39
5.2 Most commonly discussed topics.....	39
5.3 Most commonly discussed body parts	45
5.4 Ideology in the media.....	49
5.4.1 Linguistic articulation of ideologies.....	52
5.4.1.1 Implication and presupposition	52
5.4.1.2 Metaphor and simile.....	54
5.5 The justification of body shaming in the media.....	56
5.6 Conclusion.....	57
Chapter 6.....	59
Discussion and Conclusion	59
6.1 Introduction	59
6.2 Findings of the study	59
6.2.1 Findings related to most commonly discussed topics and body parts	59
6.2.2 Findings related to primary ideologies and their linguistic articulation.....	60
6.2.3 Findings related to attribution and justification	60

6.3 Limitations of study	61
6.4 Conclusions and recommendations for further research	61
References.....	63

LIST OF GRAPHS

Graph 1: Most Commonly Discussed Topics	39
Graph 2: Most Commonly Discussed Topics – Shaming vs. Proud.....	39
Graph 3: Most Commonly Discussed Body Parts	46
Graph 4: Most Commonly Discussed Body Parts – Shaming vs. Proud.....	46
Graph 5: Most Commonly Identifiable Ideologies	50
Graph 6: Most Commonly Identifiable Ideologies – Shaming vs. Proud.....	49

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

The discursive construction of a singular, universal female identity is one that has been explored across various fields of study, including Media Studies, Online Communication (Eisenchlas 2012: 335-345) and the study of Tabloid Journalism, both in print and online. This notion is one that disregards consideration of the consequences of such a label, implying that if an individual female does not conform to specific ideologies surrounding femininity, she is not considered to be adequately female (Brokensha 2011: 56-73). These ideologies are especially based on appearance and body type rather than factors such as intelligence, morality, or other culturally specific positive character traits. The media, particularly online tabloid journalism, serves as a breeding ground for downward social comparison – the comparison of oneself to an individual supposedly beneath one's own accomplishments in terms of lifestyle, including body image and appearance – (Guimond 2006) in the form of body shaming; the public critique and appraisal of individuals for being either over- or underweight (Suls & Wills eds. 1991: 237-260).

The media has therefore proven to be one of the most substantial players in societal perceptions of female identity; constructing women with certain body types as sexual objects to be admired and imitated, thereby stripping women of any identity and focusing attention solely on physical appearance. Additionally, one may add that the media plays on and tends to propagate other forms of female oppression, including sexist humour, often based on a woman's appearance (Izgarjan et al 2014: 807).

Fairclough (cited in Wodak & Meyer 2001: 6) argues that the media generally positions itself as a neutral entity, reporting events without letting opinion get in the way of fact. This, however, has been proven to be untrue for all forms of mass media. Online tabloid journalism, which includes link aggregating websites such as the BuzzFeed group, is so prevalent in contemporary society that it has become a social norm to accept articles or online posts as truth. This seems to be problematized by the lack of critical thought in terms of who the writer is, which ideological frameworks are at play and what truth-value, if at all, is present in the content of the text. Because of this, the media has been a major influence in the development (or confirmation) of shared knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and thought patterns about notions such

as the characteristics that play a key part in the formation of an individual's self-identity. These characteristics, including socio-cultural factors, history, and experiences, are the foremost features of individuals that are lost when that individual becomes objectified.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Given the media's prominent role in the discursive reproduction of societal attitudes, and the particular role that tabloid journalism has been demonstrated to play in (re)constructing attitudes about women's appearances, this study aims to conduct a discourse analysis of the ways in which women are represented in a popular online news media company, BuzzFeed, as well as the ideologies that underlie such representations, in order to illustrate the media's role as an active participant in the act of body shaming.

The key question of this research paper, then, can be summarised as follows: how does online tabloid journalism portray women and contribute to the idea of a singular female identity? Of course, this is a rather broad question. Specifically, this study will question the nature of discursive identity construction, the articulation of ideology regarding feminine identity as well as the justification (or lack thereof) of body shaming in the content of articles generated by BuzzFeed, an online social news and entertainment website founded in 2006 by Jonah Peretti, committed to the distribution of updates on genres ranging from DIY projects to celebrity gossip.

This study hypothesises that discourse, which may be defined as either verbal or written expression of ideas in a specific context (Gee 2014: 19), plays an important role in the (re)construction of ideology, and is thus of utmost importance for the purposes of acquiring an awareness of the media's effect on the body image of individuals. The hypothesis of this study is hence focused on the discursive (re)construction of female identity through the media; in other words, how the media is involved in categorising women lexically in terms of their appearance and the inequality between the sexes that presents itself when this happens (van Dijk 1984: 113). Inequality here refers to the notion that the media tends to be much more concerned with the bodies of women compared to those of men, implying that women are typically objectified more often than men. This objectification then leads to the sub-conscious act of stripping these women of any identity traits other than that of body image, resulting in women being portrayed and therefore perceived as the lesser of the two sexes.

1.3 Research questions

- i) What is the nature of the discourse that is found in the media's construction of women's bodies?
- ii) Which parts of women's bodies are typically discussed in the media?
- iii) Which ideologies, if any, can be identified in the media's construction of women's bodies?
- iv) How are these ideologies articulated linguistically?
- v) How is the objectification of women's bodies justified in the media, if at all?

1.4 Theoretical outline

This study will make use of two separate theoretical frameworks, both equally valuable to the purpose of the study. Core aspects of Van Dijk's theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be utilised in terms of the analysis of the discursive (re)production of ideology, whereas the rest of the study will rely on a variety of key concepts from Gee's theory of Discourse Analysis in order to explore the building tasks that enable the (masking of) the propagation of beauty ideology. These building tasks relate to the discursive realisation of ideology by demonstrating how language works, specifically in terms of micro discourse. Furthermore, Bakhtin's (2004: 12-49) conceptualisation of the dialogic relationship between discourse and society will be essential to understanding the theory upon which the foundation of the study lies, especially in terms of the influence of shared knowledge and attitudes when it comes to the notion of femininity. Elements of Gee's (2014: 21-33) analysis of building tasks together with van Dijk (1991, 1998)'s methodological toolkit will be used as a part of this study's analytical methodology, and will therefore be discussed in the theoretical framework, in order to identify particular concepts that will be most useful to the analysis of the data selected for this study.

1.5 Research design

Data will be gathered electronically from BuzzFeed's online archive on Facebook, a popular media website. Articles from a period of roughly 18 months (2014 to May 2015) will be selected on the basis of any mention of physical appearance. These articles will then be converted into text files to form a corpus and subsequently examined in terms of the ideological positioning of the content thereof. The data collected will also be subject to breakdown in terms

of lexical tokens through the use of Wordsmith Tools, a program that allows researchers to view specific word-constellations either alphabetically or by the frequency in which they occur. Concordances will then be run on the corpus in order to analyse any word or phrase related to physical appearance through an objective lens in order to statistically verify the validity of the findings. Once collected in a corpus and sorted through the use of Wordsmith Tools, the data will be analysed not only quantitatively but also qualitatively in terms of the characteristics of the discourse and the ideological positioning that is identifiable in these characteristics.

1.6 Outline of the thesis

The first chapter of this study intends to identify and explain the act under investigation, namely body shaming. Furthermore, this chapter provides an introductory background to the reader in order to demonstrate the relevance of the study, acknowledging specific theoretical frameworks and identifying pertinent research questions. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed overview of specific theoretical models and analytical tools taken from Critical Discourse Analysis, the framework selected for this study.

In Chapter 3, a discussion of critical responses to body shaming will follow a summary of body shaming as a form of discursive identity construction. Furthermore, this chapter will give an overview of other studies that have been done on the representation of the body in the media, and also provide some context in terms of tabloid journalism as a source of body shaming.

Chapter 4 will provide a discussion of the study's methodology, and Chapter 5 will give a quantitative overview of the data acquired as well as a detailed critical analysis thereof.

Chapter 6 will offer a discussion of the findings of the study, along with examples to illustrate which ideologies and thematic features were most prominent in the data.

Finally, in Chapter 7, a summary of the study's findings will form a conclusion and make suggestions for further research.

1.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an outline and introduction for the thesis, stating the main research questions to be addressed in terms of the discursive (re)construction of female identities in

online news media. The following chapter will provide a discussion of the theoretical framework utilised for the foundation of my research.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of Critical Discourse Analysis as a contextual background for the analysis of the discursive construction of identity, advocating the dialogic relationship between language and society. In essence, this relationship implies that all beliefs and attitudes are (re)constructed or challenged through language. An amalgamation of concepts from the related subdisciplines of DA (Discourse Analysis) and CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) will therefore be useful to this study, as it will apply itself to the examination of written utterances and the underlying ideology thereof in the online context where the discursive construction of identity takes place; in other words, the use of specific language to hypothesise the ideal individual. The study will primarily make use of Gee's Building Tasks as a foundation for analysis, while incorporating some concepts taken from the theories of van Dijk (1984, 1990, 1998), Wodak and Meyer (2001), Kress (1989) as well as Bakhtin (2004), all of which are discussed below.

2.2 Foundations of CDA

Based on these theoretical points of departure, this analysis will therefore make use of CDA to examine how the media controls what kind of texts are generated, and the discursive manipulation that results from obscuring the propagation of ideology. Important to note is the fact that CDA stems from prevalent social concerns rather than simple theoretical problems, and involves "[choosing] the perspective of those who suffer most" and then applying a critical analysis to the discourse surrounding these social concerns (Van Dijk 1986: 4). CDA has come a long way since its conceptualisation in the 1970s, where the analysis of texts started to lead to an awareness of the influence of language in developing power relationships in society (Wodak & Meyer 2001: 5). This origin story then forms the backbone of this study as the examination of online tabloid media as a source of abusive language use – such as the language used to shame individuals – and consequently also the identity construction of not only their subjects but also their readership.

According to Wodak & Meyer (2001: 1-3), Critical Discourse Analysis is situated upon three basic premises. Firstly, discourse is defined by power relationships, such as those that are thrown into imbalance when women become objectified and therefore lesser human beings

than men. Secondly, these power relationships are historically recognised and respected. Thirdly, these relationships are in turn legitimised by the reigning ideology of those in power – in this case, the media. Van Dijk (1984: 107) posits that ideology, which he defines as “social representations in our minds (such as socially shared knowledge, beliefs [and] attitudes)” serve as a bridge between “micro-level interactions” in individuals’ everyday lives and “societal macro-structures”, in other words the larger discourse of which the micro-level interactions form part. This can be argued as the fundamental objective of CDA; the exploration of the relationship between discourse and society.

Additionally, Kress (1989 cited in Wodak and Meyer 2001: 5) identifies four key assumptions underlying the theory, including the notion that (i) language is a social phenomenon; (ii) institutions and social groups (rather than only the individual) have specific meanings and values that are expressed in systematic ways; (iii) texts are the relevant units of language in communication; and (iv) readers or hearers are active participants in the interpretation of texts. Therefore, because language is social and functions just as well in institutions or – in the case of this study – discourse communities that have their own meanings and ideologies, it is important to note that a response to such a group’s constructed text is inevitable, whether it be the internalisation of negative attitudes about an individual’s body image or a defensive strategy through which these attitudes are projected onto others. According to Kress’s (1989 cited in Wodak & Meyer 2001: 5) assumptions as well as van Dijk’s (1984: 108) characterisation of social power as a product of being “reproduced by its discursive enactment and legitimation”, readers of BuzzFeed’s posts (with BuzzFeed being the more powerful group) are likely to be influenced by the ideologies postulated within the texts and therefore propagate these in some form of discursive identity construction. This then leaves society with the opportunity for social change; the reader can accept the ideology of a given text and construct their own self-identity by considering those characteristics in the text that they do not possess, thereby perceiving themselves as lesser than individuals who do possess those characteristics. Alternatively, the reader can reject the ideology of the text and stimulate the opportunity for social change by not propagating said ideology, but rather considering an alternative course of action by not allowing the ideology in question to determine their identity.

2.3 Language and power

The connection between ideology and power, the relationship between ideology and hierarchy as well as the relationship between ideology and the discourse surrounding gender are all subject to social conventions that are normalised by more powerful groups, such as the media, which then result in power imbalances between groups; in essence, the power of ideology is able to obscure discursive manipulation and present itself as the norm (Wodak & Meyer 2001: 3). As such, body shaming is perceived as normal, acceptable behaviour because those in control of online tabloid journalism are able to manipulate the need for downward social comparison by generating texts that advocate body shaming and in that way not only justifies but also necessitates this need.

Gee (2014: 8) suggests two forms of discourse analysis for the analysis of such social problems: a descriptive discourse analysis which only concerns itself with the content of a certain text, and critical discourse analysis, that which examines the structure of language and how this structure enables the (re)production or challenge of ideology and true critical discourse analysis, that which examines “the structure of language and how this structure functions to help make meaning in specific contexts”. As an answer to the critique of CDA as a discipline mainly concerned with politics, Gee (2014: 10) asserts that “discourse analysis needs to be critical (and therefore political) because language itself – with all its underlying ideologies and philosophies – is political” and states that “in using language, social goods are always at stake”. These social goods are therefore positioned as something that may be won or lost, and in most cases represent social power. In this way, Gee (2014: 10) argues that CDA has the potential to shed light upon social problems such as body shaming, by identifying “who gets helped and who gets harmed”.

Van Dijk (1984: 113) is also convinced that, because of social power imbalances, “[m]uch of what most [more influential groups] and [less influential groups] know about each other is acquired through discourse and communication”, for example online tabloid or pop journalism. CDA, at least in terms of van Dijk’s (1984: 113) theory, can therefore be said to be concerned with dominance, control and the subsequent power discrepancies that occur as a result of discursive manipulation of ideologies.

Van Dijk (1984: 114-115) identifies six conditions that aid discursive (re)construction in terms of changing or forming new, shared knowledge in societies, either on their own or in conjunction with several others. These conditions are: (i) that the resulting social

representations can be subsumed by an ideological framework that reflects the interests of the group, (ii) that there are social representations that have similar contents and structures in terms of shared knowledge and attitudes, (iii) that these structures of the models (or ideologies) posited are similar to those of the social representations and (iv) that members are repeatedly confronted with similar models and (v) that the models are consistent with other knowledge and beliefs, that is, they are plausible and hence acceptable. Lastly, van Dijk stipulates that discursive (re)construction is further aided by the assumption that the authors of the discourse are thought to be reliable and credible. In the context of online tabloid journalism, body shaming posts fit almost all of van Dijk's suggested conditions in that articles conform to readers' need for downward social comparison and reigning ideologies regarding body image, thereby constructing itself to be in the interest of the group. Secondly, social representations are similar in content in terms of everyday talk and commentary on the bodies and appearance of others, and the articles are therefore similar to those models designed by social representations. Furthermore, readers are constantly and repeatedly confronted with similar ideological frameworks, aiding the circulation of said frameworks. Because these ideologies are so popular, they are consistent with the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes that readers already possess about body image – thereby becoming plausible and subsequently socially acceptable. Lastly, readers of BuzzFeed may not recognise that BuzzFeed.com is a social website, implying that they may not be aware of the true identity of the author of a particular post, and in their ignorance take the content of the post as objective truth rather than opinion. While it is possible that at least some BuzzFeed users are more critical than others, and therefore more sceptical of its content, it remains plausible to argue that some readers are susceptible to content regardless of its truth value. This then leads to the conclusion that although not all BuzzFeed readers may experience body shame, BuzzFeed articles as analysed in this thesis are not necessarily free of body shaming content.

2.4 (Re)constructing realities

Relating to Bakhtin's (2004: 12-49) conceptualisation of the dialogic relationship between discourse and society, as well as Kress' (1989 cited in Wodak and Meyer 2001: 5) assumptions regarding individuals' ideological frameworks, Gee (2014: 21) emphasises that when uttering or writing a sentence, the individual performing the task is "actively [designing] [his or her] language" with the distinct purpose of achieving that which they "want or hope to [do]". Gee (2014: 21) further posits that writers (or speakers) carry out two essential tasks in terms of

discursive manipulation. The first task is “recipient design”, which has to do with considering one’s audience, be it readers or listeners. BuzzFeed would presumably have knowledge about their intended audience based on extensive market research on its most regular users, and would therefore design their texts based on how the audience would expect them to write (by including *gifs* or current slang, for example).

The second task that Gee (2014: 21) identifies is that of “position design”, which is concerned with how the writer of a text would like his or her audience to “be, think, feel and behave”. This implies that the writer of a BuzzFeed article wants the reader to “assume a particular identity”, tempting them to don a persona that suits the groups’ interest – in this case, BuzzFeed would presumably desire the reader to assume an identity where BuzzFeed’s articles are believed to be not only truthful but also helpful. This particular task is important when it comes to “seeing interactive communication through the lens of socially meaningful identities”, or the identities writers want their readers to assume (Gee 2014: 25).

As opposed to the tasks of the writer, Gee (2014: 21-22) identifies two key responsibilities for the reader. The first of these tasks is “situating meaning”. Based on the context in which the discourse is taking place, the reader is tasked with giving meaning to “words, phrases, clauses and sentences, and groups of these” in order to make sense of what is being said in terms of “the world as it is actively created, construed, and constructed in and through language and interaction” (Gee 2014: 21). Fundamentally, this concept has to do with the reader being able to distinguish which meaning (of a range of possible meanings a sentence or word might have) is appropriate in that context.

The reader’s second task is response design, which is based on the notion that readers “need to prepare a response to what [they] are reading [...] based on how writers have done their jobs” and how well readers have performed the task of situating meaning (Gee 2014: 22). This is necessary because interpretation is not a passive undertaking and requires some intellectual if not verbal response, and ties into Kress’ (1989 cited in Wodak and Meyer) understanding of readers being active recipients of texts, rather than passive ones. Again, this links with the notion of seizing a socially meaningful identity when it comes to actively engaging in discourse, particularly in terms of critically thinking about texts that may contain obscured meaning.

In terms of the notion of a ‘constructed’ reality, Gee (2014: 31) writes that “[i]n the broadest sense, we make meaning by using language to say things that, in actual contexts of use, amount, too, to doing things and being things. These things we do and are (identities) thereby come to

exist in the world [through language] and, in turn, they bring about other things in the world". He likens this construction of reality to "building things through language", and from this conceptualisation identifies seven "building tasks" of language (Gee 2014: 32). These are "significance", "practices (activities)", "identities", "relationships", "politics (or the distribution of social goods)", "connections" and finally, "sign systems and knowledge" (Gee 2014: 32).

Firstly, Gee delineates the meaning of "significant" here as a technical term used in order to determine how or if a word or phrase is being used in order to make certain concepts significant to a reader or not. Secondly, the term "practice" denotes a particular "socially recognised and institutionally or culturally supported endeavour" that usually follows an action (Gee 2014: 32). For example, reading an article that shames the body of an individual is an action, whereas the spread of that ideology by means of discussion of the bodies of people around us – and that being a socially accepted behaviour – is a practice or institution. Linking with the notion of practices or institutions is that of identity; Gee (2014: 33) asserts that individuals in society use language "to get recognised as taking on a certain identity or role" and in that way build an identity on the spot, based on the context of the discourse. Significantly in terms of the study, it is noted that individuals often perform their identities in such a way as to "attribute a certain identity to others, an identity that we explicitly or implicitly compare or contrast to our own" (Gee 2014: 33). This links with the notion of forming one's identity through Othering, or constructing a particular identity for another as a tactic for constructing a distinctly different or almost incredibly similar identity for oneself (Brokensha 2011: 58). In this study, Gee's (2014: 33) "identity building task" is a significant concept in terms of determining which characteristic(s) a specific piece of writing is attributing to others and in which ways this aids the writer's agenda.

Gee's (2014: 33) fourth building task is that of "relationships", used here in order to demonstrate that language is used to indicate a particular type of relationship between individuals, and is important in terms of recognising what sort of relationship a text is seeking to build with its readership. Social relationships are also significant when it comes to politics or "the distribution of social goods" (Gee 2014: 33). This concept is predominantly concerned with perspective and ideological positioning; implying that there is a "right, normal, good, correct, appropriate or acceptable" way of thinking, acting and speaking. If the media then perpetuates the notion of a singular female identity that is characterised by a certain set of physical features, it then perpetuates body shaming as an acceptable form of behaviour, thereby

making it a social norm that people will (re)produce (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 3). Politics is therefore also concerned with power, as those in power are most influential in terms of what constitutes acceptable behaviour. Furthermore, Gee (2014: 35) asserts that language is used in order to build connections or relevance between certain things, suggesting that language can then either “connect or disconnect things, [making] one thing relevant or irrelevant to another”. One strategy for making connections is coherence; if things appear to be linguistically coherent, they will automatically be perceived to be connected. This is relevant in terms of this study when it comes to data analysis where something as arbitrary as hair, for example, may be found to be connected to wealth, socio-economic inequalities and race.

Lastly, Gee identifies “sign systems and knowledge” as another important building task. The notion behind sign systems and knowledge is a complicated one. Firstly, it is vital to understand that a sign system is not necessarily language, but that language is one type of sign system. Signs might be anything from jargon to everyday language, images to equations. Individuals use sign systems such as language in order to “create, change, sustain, and revise language itself and other ways of making knowledge claims about the world” through discursive realisation (Gee 2014: 35). That is to say, we reconstruct discursive norms by challenging dominant ideological frames, thus reconstructing social reality. This is evident in BuzzFeed posts, as the language of the articles tends to change in accordance with the prevalent trends in language use in society, thereby illustrating how language impacts reality. Therefore, it is significant to this study to note the ways in which people use language to change or make claims about the world and people around them.

2.5 The propagation of body shaming

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this study will utilise Discourse Analysis in its consideration of the ways in which female identity is constructed through a set of descriptions of an ideal female body, a concept that originates from the impact of more powerful groups on the shared beliefs or attitudes of less powerful groups. The specific focus here is on the act of body shaming; the ways in which it is propagated and how (through discursive (re)construction) it becomes a societal norm through exchanges on a micro-level, which in turn influence the ideologies of discourse communities.

Van Dijk (1990: 169) makes reference to specific “categories of prejudice”, naming Origin, Appearance, Socio-Cultural Norms and Values as well as Personality as the main areas of

“prejudiced attitude schemata”. The act of body shaming falls neatly into each of these categories: a woman’s genes (at least in part determined by where she comes from) will have an effect on her body shape; which is directly linked to what people think about her appearance as well as the assumptions that are then made about said woman’s lifestyle.

These categories serve as opportunities for Othering to take place, where the identity of an individual is determined by what that individual perceives as ‘other’ or ‘different to what I am’. Brokensha’s (2011) study that focused on Othering draws attention to an “us/them dichotomy” which emphasises the idea of the Other as different to ‘us’ in terms of shaping individual identities – this concept was originally formulated by van Dijk as “the ideological square” (van Dijk 1998: 25). Specifically, this contrast is formed by specific syntactic structures and lexical choices such as ‘ours/theirs’ or highlighting a particular woman as ‘she’ versus the reader’s perception of their own identity, their ‘me’. Importantly, ‘us’ is generally seen in a much more positive light than ‘them’. In other words, readers of an article that perpetuates body shaming will see a woman and define themselves by what they do not have in common with this individual. Victims of body shaming are therefore often branded as Others, and perhaps this difference is part of what makes these women so interesting to tabloid journalists.

On a more macro level, one may argue that body shaming, in addition to being a form of downward social comparison, also has a negative effect on the overall body image of women in general, becoming more so with each shaming article posted. This macro level of social comparison may be directly linked to micro-examples of body shaming in individual discourse as a result of the propagation of group ideology.

2.6 Body shaming as a form of discursive identity construction

If one is to understand the concept of body shaming to its fullest extent, including the psychological impact it may have upon both its subjects and its readers, it is of utmost importance to examine the root causes thereof. Framed in this study as a form of discursive identity construction, body shaming – the act along with the response thereto – may be seen as one determining factor when it comes to the formation of an individual woman’s self-perception in terms of her own identity, as well as being one of the formative categories in which society places women. In other words, conforming to Gee’s (2014: 21) conceptualisation of the writer’s task of “position design” (the desire of the writer to persuade his or her audience to take on a particular persona), this study proposes that body shaming is one of a number of

strategies that the media utilises in order to construct the notion of a singular feminine identity; an ideology shared by the majority as perpetuated by the more powerful group – in this case online tabloid journalism.

Thus, in addition to this construction of the Self, this study proposes that the reader also constructs the identity of Others through discursive realisation, or the construction of reality (in terms of their own world views) through the use of language. Unlike traditional forms of print media, readers of online media are not merely passive recipients of texts (and therefore ideologies) as the context of the text allows the reader to comment on it, post it on a blog, share it via social media or email it to another reader – regardless of whether the content of the text is true or not. Further, readers approach texts with their own ideological background, which consists of beliefs, attitudes and experiences that influence their interpretation of the text, as well as their acceptance or rejection thereof. One may argue that language and identity are therefore dialogic concepts, as what we say often determines or at least illustrates one side of who we are and, in turn, who we are influences what we say and how we say it. Reality, therefore, is a concept made up by the words we give it but also by how we experience it.

2.6.1 Body shaming and identity construction according to Gee's framework of building tasks

If one examines body shaming as a form of discursive identity construction in terms of Gee's (2014: 34) "building tasks", the abovementioned hypothesis appears to hold water. Consider the following: implicitly, BuzzFeed uses particular words, phrases or sentences in a predetermined fashion with consideration towards their target readership – as posited by Gee's formulation of "recipient design" – in order to signal that a particular article or post is significant to the reader, often by conforming to the typical "us vs. them" dichotomy as posited by van Dijk (cited in Brokensha 2011). This is the first building task.

Secondly, by perpetuating the ideology of a single, perfect feminine image, BuzzFeed (along with other forms of popular media) is engaging in the formation of a social practice or institution that regards body shaming as "a culturally supported endeavour" (Gee 2014: 34). The practice of body shaming has become "[similar to a] beauty contest as a popular ritual, a highly formulaic performance, which serves to negotiate, dramatise, and manage social interactions" (Nuttall and Michael 2000: 348).

Gee's (2014: 33) third building task - that of identity construction - may be regarded as most significant to this study, as this particular concept is mainly concerned with the ways in which discourse may be charged with the role of the development of particular identities through the discursive realisation of ideology. As Gee (2014: 33) argues that individuals make use of language not only to construct their own identity but also the identities of others, it is of value to the study to consider how this concept relates to the act of body shaming; this is evident in how women define themselves not necessarily by who they are or what they look like but rather by who they are not and what they don't look like. Society has naturalised the shaming of women by other women not only in terms of micro-level interactions, but also within the broader discourse of Othering.

Body shaming in and of itself is a common form of Othering, especially when it comes to the writers and readership of online tabloid journalism, "a capitalist enterprise that vulgarises women" (Nuttall and Michael 2000: 353). According to Nuttall and Michael (2000: 347), ideology surrounding beauty standards "ultimately involves nothing less than a definition of an empowered 'we'", but it is important that this empowerment is not necessarily positive – empowerment may be found in body shaming, but only for the perpetrator, and most often this is only a form of projection. Through the comparison of one's own body to the body of another, with consideration of the fact that body shaming has become a popular social norm, women define who they are by how they look: if they measure up to society's expectation of what is beautiful (an idea which changes constantly) they will perceive themselves to be adequately feminine and therefore develop a positive body image and self-esteem. This manner of forming one's identity is not, however, a healthy one. By conforming to society's fickle ideologies (moreover, ideologies determined and perpetuated by those in power), women will be given a particular identity by others who perceive them based on only a first impression. These women are therefore often Othered by means of slut-shaming or other derogatory comments regarding their physical appearance in terms of body shape, the state of their hair or make-up and even what they choose to wear. Of course, the act of body shaming and its repercussions go both ways.

If a woman compares herself to reigning ideology and finds that she does not fit into its demarcated conditions for beauty, she develops a negative body image and low self-esteem which in turn may result in the perpetuation of body shaming aimed towards those who do, thereby illustrating that social comparison (be it upward as in this case or downward as previously mentioned) is a powerful tool in terms of the formation of the female identity. It is

therefore surprising that women, regardless of body type, police each other – not just in terms of fat shaming but essentially shaming women for any feature that is different from features that they themselves possess. Furthermore, these women may also find themselves to be victims of body shaming by other members of society – again, based on image alone – because of the way in which language is used (in terms of derogatory comments) when it comes to identity formation.

It is therefore not difficult to recognise that the notion of a singular female identity, as constructed by popular online media, is a highly problematic one. Women are seen only in terms of the way they look, regardless of education or intelligence, personality or actions. The propagation of the ideology of this single, perfect woman objectifies women and therefore strips them of identity by not acknowledging important factors such as a woman's connection with her culture, race, religion or spirituality, gender identification, and sexual preferences, and how this along with the relevant attitudes and beliefs may influence the development of a particular woman's self-conception.

The sable Africans view with pity and contempt the marked deformity of the Europeans, whose mouths are compressed, their noses pinched, their cheeks shrunk, their hair rendered lank and flimsy, their bodies lengthened and emaciated, and their skin unnaturally bleached by shade and seclusion, and the baneful influence of a cold humid climate... Who shall decide which party is right, or which is wrong; whether the black or white model be, according to the laws of nature, the most perfect specimen of a woman?

(Burke in Nuttall and Michael 2000: 344)

Gee's (2014: 34) fourth building task, relationship formation, is significant because of the power relations involved when it comes to the construction of relationships between individuals. Within this framework, body shaming can be viewed as one strategy through which to influence relationships between groups, profiting from the rifts that form rather than spreading positive messages about the differences between women that make them unique, "spectacularising dissent, and emphasising fractures and conflict of interest in a community" (Nuttall and Michael 2000: 347). Furthermore, this concept is also important in terms of the relationship between men and women; firstly, men are conditioned to believe and therefore act according to the currently dominant ideology as to what constitutes beauty, adding to the Othering of women who do not fit the norm. Secondly, the significance of relationship formation lies in the power imbalance that results from the media's persistent shaming of women's bodies rather than men's. Therefore, women are on the receiving end of body

shaming whereas men are left to develop their identities with tools that exceed that of physical appearance. This term then naturally also relates to Gee's (2014: 35) notion of the distribution of social goods because of this and other power imbalances between men and women. As affirmed by Nuttall and Michael (2000: 345), "standards of beauty function as a peculiarly dense transfer point for relations of power", resulting in a more socially (and therefore discursively) constructed definition of beauty, "focused as much on the reaction of the audience as on the nature of the beautiful object [or individual] itself".

When it comes to Gee (2014: 35)'s fifth building task, that of forming connections, body shaming becomes intertwined with ideology concerning the determination of what constitutes beauty, adding to the notion of body shaming as a form of discursive identity construction by means of providing society with particular discourses with which to classify and acknowledge women based solely on popular dogmatic frames of reference. Instead of using language as a form of liberation, the media uses language against women, "[binding them] by the gaze, by the limited definitions of independence, choice, and self-expression" (Nuttall and Michael 2000: 361). In other words, women are constantly being defined by those who look at them, causing them to doubt themselves and subsequently buy into the notion of an ideal and flawless feminine norm.

By perpetuating these ideologies through the use of language associated with what is or is not considered beautiful, BuzzFeed is reaffirming Gee's (2014: 35) notion of what lies behind the relationship between sign systems and knowledge; namely that language influences knowledge and vice versa. As language is a type of sign system, and websites such as BuzzFeed exploit language to conform to their task of position design, language is utilised in order to reflect and perpetuate social norms in ways that reiterate the gendered distribution of power – discursively (re)constructing shared attitudes and beliefs in a way that does not benefit it.

2.6.2 Online tabloid journalism as a source of body shaming

Researching tabloid journalism as a source of information, as a starting point for this section, has proven to yield a substantial amount of debate regarding not only the morality of tabloidization, but also the validity of online tabloids such as BuzzFeed as a reliable form of press. While some intellectuals assert that tabloid journalism "lower[s] the standards of public discourse" (Ornerbring and Johnson 2004: 84), other researchers are adamant that tabloid journalism is a cultural phenomenon deserving of study in its own right, rather than being debased as "exemplars of the lamentable debasement of popular taste" (Sparks 1991: 64) and

that it is the duty of academics to “transcend the futile moralism” which is prevalent in many of these debates (Grisprud 1992: 84).

Tabloid journalism has become all the more established in the online context in the last ten years, which makes websites such as BuzzFeed prime candidates for analysis in terms of the linguistic strategies used in order to manipulate the discursive construction of identity. These websites do not significantly differ from traditional tabloid newspapers, as much of the content, aims and approaches to journalism remain the same in both contexts; as put by Greenslade (2004 in Johansson 2007: 13):

Tabloids are illiberal, reactionary, negative, pessimistic and infected with a sentimentality, which appeals to the readers’ emotions rather than their intellect. They play to the gallery. They whip up the mob. They appeal to the basest of human instincts. Contentious features of the tabloids include the typically sensationalist and personalised news style, and the blurring of boundaries between private and public, politics and entertainment, but also their populist and partisan political interventions, their celebrity-orientated and sexualised news agenda.

In terms of the writing style of tabloids in terms of personalisation, BuzzFeed acts in the same way that Conradie (2012, discussed below) categorises popular lifestyle media, as the voice of these texts positions itself as a friend to the reader, offering advice and support by way of constructing this identity, and one might argue that the reader in turn assumes the identity of a target in need of advice.

When it comes to tabloids’ focus on celebrities and content of a sexualised nature, it is important to consider the target audience of this form of media (Greenslade 2004). Grisprud (1992: 92) observes that the majority of people favour entertainment over politics, “and this may be understood as a choice made on the basis of some sort of recognition of their social conditions”. It is possible that the popularity of online tabloids as a choice of reading material is also aided by new technologies, which enable readers to gain instant access to a vast amount of online news outlets, such as popular online sites like BuzzFeed (Johansson 2007: 32).

The use of language in tabloids has also been described in terms of the simplification, personalisation and dramatization of material “in ways that seriously obscure its public information content [...] thereby replacing reason with emotion and analysis with sensation, [reducing] citizen’s ability to understand the world” (Johansson 2007: 38). The language used in tabloids, it can be argued, is therefore intentionally obscure, ambiguous and misleading – a valuable strategy when it comes to the manipulation of shared knowledge, attitudes and beliefs

of society about a range of different topics. This manipulation is further supported by the use of language in headlines as a distinctly powerful instrument in terms of developing a tabloid's style and vernacular, which is done specifically with the aim of appealing to readers. (Johansson 2007: 32).

Based on Galtung and Ruge's (1965: 64-65) study on the ways in which events become classified as news, Harcup and O'Neill (2001: 268) critically evaluate these criteria, which include: "frequency" or the timing of an event, "threshold" (referring here to intensity), "unambiguity", "meaningfulness", "consonance" in terms of pre-reporting an expected event such as the marriage between two well-known individuals, "unexpectedness", "continuity" – in other words the phenomenon of an item staying newsworthy over a period of time, receiving more coverage even in the case of lesser intensity. Other criteria comprise of "composition" in terms of how well a story fits with the overall structure of the broadcast, "reference to elite nations or elite people", "reference to something negative" and "reference to persons" – which fits well with Scollon's (1997: 384) focus on attribution theory, which he defines as a linguistic strategy that "one might use to indicate who is responsible for saying something". This last category, that of "reference to persons", therefore makes sense in terms of being a useful strategy in tabloid media to create the opportunity for plausible deniability, attributing particular phrases (mostly of a damaging nature) to external sources or, alternatively, not attributing these phrases to anyone at all, utilising the obscure, unnamed "source" as the writer's informant.

Harcup and O'Neill (2001: 268-269) has identified the following areas of Galtung and Ruge's (1965: 64-65) criteria for newsworthiness as problematic in terms of a critical analysis of tabloid discourse, used here in terms of its practical application to content generated by BuzzFeed's writers: (i) In terms of "frequency", this category does not explain stories about popular developments, speculation or even "the absence of events". (ii) The category of "threshold" is open to subjective analysis and is therefore not a coherent enough criterion for news. (iii) In terms of "unambiguity", most – if not all – forms of media negate this 'standard', especially in the case of BuzzFeed, where meaning and ideology is intentionally reported ambiguously. (iv) "Meaningfulness" is argued to be a concept that is again subject to interpretation and varies over time, as is the case with (v) "unexpectedness". (vi) In terms of mentions of "elite nations", the classification of a nation as 'elite' becomes problematic, mostly in terms of how this categorisation may influence an individual's worldview. (vii) The newsworthiness category of the mention of "elite people" is also problematic because it does

not distinguish pop stars from business moguls or royalty – this category is therefore particularly relevant to BuzzFeed, which uses arbitrary celebrity gossip as one of their most popular genres (Harcup and O’Neill 2001: 268-269).

As with all things that are popular, it is necessary to evaluate the agendas underlying the phenomenon, as well as the effects of tabloids on their readership. Johansson (2007: 32) posits that one of the reasons that online tabloids have become so prevalent is the competition between news outlets, which exerts pressure on journalists to generate more content in shorter amounts of time, resulting in a compromise in terms of the truth-value of articles as well as the quality of the content, which explains why so many BuzzFeed articles are often more entertainment than news related. Because of this, the concept of newsworthiness appears to have been altered to include the everyday lives of celebrities, subsequently potentially excluding content of a more socio-political or socio-economic nature.

Importantly, the inclusion of celebrity ‘news’ plays on the reader’s need for social comparison, thereby playing a major role in the self-perception of the readers in terms of the conformation to popular beauty ideals, as celebrities are most commonly discussed in the media in terms of their appearance (Breeze 2009: 1578-3820). Celebrities, perceived by society as the epitome of these ideals, therefore influence the construction of female identity by means of comparison – which in turn leads to body shaming (either by the individual themselves or through shame let out by attacking others). The advice that overruns online tabloids may also be identified as a key factor in identity construction, as readers assume the identity of women desperately in need of advice in order to better suit societal norms of beauty, being led to believe that if they follow said advice, they will be less likely to be shamed for their appearance.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of the theoretical framework that will inform this study. This overview included an exposition of the foundations upon which CDA as a theoretical framework is grounded, with specific focus on the relationships between language, power and ideology. Furthermore, the (re)construction of realities through the propagation of body shaming was explored in an attempt to shed light on body shaming as a form of discursive identity construction, an event shaped by online entertainment media.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of existing studies that have topicalised body shaming. The aim of this overview is to provide the reader with details of these studies within the framework of female self-objectification and the effect of the external gaze of the Other. Furthermore, this chapter will explore self-conscious emotions such as shame and guilt that result from objectification through body shaming.

3.2. Female self-objectification

In accordance with Nuttall and Micheal's (2000: 361) observation that women are often defined by an external gaze, Calogero (cited in McKay 2013: 53) asserts that female self-objectification, as opposed to the objectification that occurs when women are victims of body shaming by other individuals, occurs "when the objectifying gaze is turned inward, such that women view themselves through the perspective of an observer and engage in chronic self-surveillance", as evidenced by the excessive diet and gym culture that has originated out of fear of body shaming. Female self-objectification and internalised oppression, therefore, are essentially synonyms, as both concepts describe the inability of women to live out their true selves, "accepting the negative societal beliefs and stereotypes about themselves [...] perpetuated not simply through force, but through the subjugation and transformation of the minds of the oppressed" (Zurbriggen 2013: 192). As body shaming can be considered to be a social act, McKay (2013: 53) observes that constant exposure to such objectification results in women internalising the idea of themselves as no more than an assemblage of body parts to be judged by others. In order to illustrate the process of self-objectification, McKay (2013: 54) also notes a particular individual's experience of objectification:

It is a fine spring day, and with utter lack of self-consciousness, I am bouncing down the street. Suddenly I hear men's voices. Catcalls and whistles fill the air. These noises are clearly sexual in intent and they are meant for me; they come from across the street. I freeze. As Sartre would say, I have been pertified by the gaze of the Other. My face flushes and my motions become stiff and self-conscious. The body which only a moment before I inhabited with such ease now floods my consciousness. I have been made into an object. While it is true that for these men I am nothing but, let us say, "a nice piece of ass", there is more involved in this encounter than this mere fragmented perception of me. They could, after all, have enjoyed me in silence... I could have

passed without having been turned to stone. But I must be made to know that I am “a nice piece of ass”: I must be made to see myself as they see me.

(Bartkey 1990 in McKay 2013: 54)

This use of language is therefore demonstrated as intentionally designed to be used to assert control over women, occurring not only in “interpersonal or social encounters”, but mainly through media exposure that has the potential to turn cat-calling and other objectifying behaviour (as extensions of body shaming) into an acceptable social practice. McKay (2013: 54) identifies gender roles as a primary cause of female self-objectification as “women are socialised to accept the less invasive forms of sexualisation [such as catcalling] as normal and perhaps even desirable, indicators that they are fulfilling expected social norms”. This ties in with Fredrickson and Roberts’ (1997 in Zurbriggen 2013: 196) assertion that women have started to perceive themselves as highly sexualised objects, resulting in the “[formation of] a self-consciousness characterised by habitual monitoring of the body’s outward appearance” instead of developing a sense of self-approval regardless of body image.

Objectification, as the term itself suggests, involves the diminishment of a person into an object with no true resemblance to other human beings. Nussbaum (1995 cited in McKay 2013: 56) recognises seven features of objectification, defined as follows: “instrumentality” refers to using a woman as a mere “tool for the objectifier’s purpose”. Secondly, “denial of autonomy” encapsulates the perception and treatment of a woman as dependent and therefore lacking in independence. “Inertness” also links with the denial of autonomy as it refers to the treatment of a woman as if she does not possess any agency or will of her own.

The perception of women as being “interchangeable with other objects” is known as “fungibility”, linking with two other features of objectification: “violability” and “ownership”, where violability refers to the treatment of women with the notion that no boundaries exist between women and their objectifiers and that they may therefore be violated without repercussions, and ownership being the idea that women are things that can be owned, and therefore bought and sold as any other commodity. Lastly, Nussbaum (1995 cited in McKay 2013: 56) identifies “denial of subjectivity” as the concluding feature of objectification; the disregard for a woman’s feelings or experiences as an individual.

Langton (2009 cited in McKay 2013: 57) suggests three more features to be added to Nussbaum’s (1995) list, those being the reduction of a woman to only her body, the reduction to appearance (which ties in with the first additional feature) and silencing – treating women

as if they have no voice of their own. Naturally, then, if these are all indicators of the treatment of women from adolescence, these features are all instrumental to the development of a woman's self-identity and subsequently the psychological demons of self-objectification.

LeMoncheck (1985 cited in Zurbriggen 2013: 190) argues that the defining element of sexual objectification is the "transformation of women from fully human and deserving of the human rights of well-being and freedom to people of a lesser status, without the full moral stature of a complete human being". Adding to this, Zurbriggen (2013: 191) quotes the American Psychological Association's Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of the term 'sexualisation'. She writes that "[a] person is sexualised if any of the following occur: (i) a person is valued only or primarily for their sexual appeal, rather than for other qualities, (ii) the judgement of sexual attractiveness is based solely on physical appearance and this is defined according to a very narrow (and nearly impossible to achieve) standard, (iii) a person is treated as a sexual object, for the use and enjoyment of someone else, rather than a real person with thoughts, feelings, and desires of their own, and (iv) sexuality is inappropriately imposed, as in a non-sexual setting (e.g. the workplace) or upon very young children".

The female body as a highly sexualised concept is one that is intertwined with the act of body shaming, as McKay (2013: 54) suggests. Victims of body shaming might perceive themselves to be lesser than women who conform to modern-day ideals of beauty, and therefore less desirable to potential sexual partners. The question remains thus; why do women define themselves by the gaze of others? Perhaps the answer lies in Cooley's (1902 cited in Zurbriggen 2013: 190) definition of "the looking glass self", which once again makes the claim that individuals construct their sense of Self "as a reflection of how [they] are seen by others. More recently, scholars such as Du Bois (2013 cited in Zurbriggen 2013: 190) expand on Cooley's initial theory by renaming the phenomena "double consciousness", a term that denotes the idea that individuals such as victims of body shaming have "no true self-consciousness" and are therefore only able to see themselves through the eyes of others, living with a false sense of who they are.

Zurbriggen (2013: 192) also notes some key theories regarding female objectification, describing amongst others the concepts of infra-humanisation, dehumanisation as well as dehumanised perception. Infra-humanisation aims to explain objectification in terms of two distinct groups; one in which people are seen as fully human and another in which others are

seen as lesser beings. These groups originate from the distinction between primary and secondary emotions (Ekman 1992 cited in Zurbriggen 2013: 192). According to this distinction, only human beings have secondary (or higher-order) emotions, while animals have only primary emotions. Objectification, then, occurs when individuals are conceptualised to have only primary emotions (instead of primary and secondary emotions) and therefore become “less than human” (Zurbriggen 2013: 192). The theory behind the concept of dehumanisation (as distinct from infra-humanisation and dehumanised perception), however, is somewhat more concerned with objectification in terms of the way in which “[i]ndividuals denied their human nature are not simply seen as sub-human – they are seen as alien [...], stripping the target of their humanity, mind and moral standing” (Zurbriggen 2013: 192).

According to Harris and Fiske (2009 cited in Zurbriggen 2013: 192), it is reasonable to assume that objectified individuals are sometimes viewed with “a dehumanised perception, [or] a cognitive bias in which the perceiver’s normal social cognition about a target person is not spontaneously engaged”, implying that the objectifier fails to perceive the objectified individual as a person with thoughts and feelings. This theory then links itself with Nussbaum’s (1995) features of objectification, which all share the foundational concept of a person treated without regard for their humanity. The internalisation of these negative ideologies, with the additional pressures put on women by the media, often results in “a focus on appearance and a lack of focus on agency”, leaving women disempowered not only by their objectifiers but also, essentially, by themselves (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997 cited in Zurbriggen 2013: 196).

3.3 Shame or guilt?

A study by Womersley, May and Swartz (2011: 876) describes shame as “pervasive and contagious, [an emotion that] is ashamed of itself.” Furthermore, they assert that:

[s]hame activates shame, [and] the mystifying dualism [thereof] is that it is at once an isolating, intimately intrapsychic phenomenon seeking concealment and yet remains deeply embedded in a visual and public interpersonal space where the self is violently and unexpectedly exposed to the critical gaze of the Other”.

(Womersly et al 2011: 876)

Womersley et al (2011: 876) also suggests that the origin and experience of shame never lies entirely within either the Self or the Other, but rather in the “interpersonal bridge binding the

two”. This theory therefore relates to the notions of constructing identity through the perception of others and subsequently also self-objectification and self-surveillance.

According to Grabe, Hyde and Lindberg (2007: 165), the self-surveillance resulting from female self-objectification is “an adaptive strategy”, but alas not one that serves women. Perpetual self-surveillance in turn “creates the experiential consequences of self-objectification, which include shame and anxiety regarding the body” (Grabe et al 2007: 165). In terms of the internalisation of shame and guilt, Tangney, Stuewig and Mashek (2007: 2) assert that:

[s]hame, guilt, embarrassment and pride are members of a family of ‘self-conscious emotions’ that are evoked by self-reflection and self-evaluation. This self-evaluation may be implicit or explicit, consciously experienced or transpiring beneath the radar of our awareness. But importantly, the self is the object of these self-conscious emotions. As the self reflects upon the self, moral self-conscious emotions provide immediate punishment (or reinforcement) of behaviour.

(Tangney et al 2007: 2)

Tangney et al’s (2007: 2) conceptualisation of “self-conscious emotions” has a place in this study because of its relation to female self-objectification and the ways in which women internalise negative attitudes about themselves, causing women’s self-perception to become distorted. Women therefore tend to blame themselves for the characteristics they possess that society proclaims to be ‘bad’ and feel shame when they do not possess ideological traits of beauty as professed by the media. Note that these emotions do not necessarily relate to actual behaviour, but in the case of this study have more to do with self-perception and identity formation. In other words, women may not have actually done anything wrong for them to feel shame – it is the perception they have of themselves (as a result of the gaze of the Other) that causes these emotions. Whereas both shame and guilt are emotions tied to body shaming, both on the giving and receiving ends, it is important to distinguish between these two emotions in order to gain a complete understanding of them and how they function in terms of identity construction.

According to Tangney et al (2007: 3), the differentiation between shame and guilt traditionally falls within one of three distinct categories. These categories are: “(i) a distinction based on types of eliciting events, (ii) a distinction based on the public versus private nature of the transgression [or perceived transgression], and (iii) a distinction based on the degree to which the person construes the emotion-eliciting event as a failure of self or behaviour”. Furthermore, both shame and guilt are considered negative moral emotions, and Tangney et al (2007: 5) posit

that “both can cause intrapsychic pain” but at the same time recognises shame as the more painful emotion “because one’s core self – not simply one’s behaviour – is at stake”. Significantly, feelings of shame are characteristically followed by a sense of worthlessness and disempowerment. Shame also has to do with how an individual believes he or she would appear to others, which again suggests that the discursive construction of identity is very much linked to the notion of Othering. Tangney et al (2007: 5) suggest that guilt is “typically a less devastating, less painful experience because the object of condemnation is a specific behaviour rather than the entire self”, implying that shame is the more destructive emotion overall, and that shame “offers little opportunity for redemption” when an individual’s self-perception is “defective at the core”. Therefore, one may posit that when it comes to the representation of women in the media, the psychological factor at hand is shame rather than guilt.

When it comes to dealing with self-conscious emotions such as shame (and guilt), Tangney et al (2007: 11) quote Elison et al’s (2006) development of Nathanson’s (1992) Compass of Shame theory, listing five strategies or styles of coping. These strategies are “attacking the self” or the assessment and consequent criticism of the Self through “inward-directed anger and blame”, resulting in a more negative self-perception including feelings such as self-disgust. The tendency of an individual to “hide or withdraw when shamed”, eliciting avoidance behaviour, followed by a negative impact on the individual’s social life and self-esteem as a result of the internalisation of (in the case of this study) false beliefs and attitudes about themselves is known as “withdrawal”, whereas “avoidance” refers to the negation of a negatively charged emotional event, and primarily involves “emotional distancing”. Possibly the most significant strategy for this study is that of “attacking the other”, which has to do with an individual’s display of “outward-directed anger and blame”, with a high possibility of perpetuating acts such as body shaming as a defence mechanism. Lastly, Elison et al (2006) recognise “adaption” as a strategy of coping with shame. Of all the abovementioned strategies, this particular strategy appears to be the healthiest for the individual when appropriately used, as it is involved with the acknowledgement of shame and the “motivation to apologise and/or make amends”. In the case of this study, this strategy will only be appropriate in terms of the acknowledgement of shame, which could then lead to an individual’s realisation that while they feel shamed, it is not necessarily because of anything they did wrong but more as a result of internalisation, which can then be addressed. Tangney et al (2007: 11) suggest that of the abovementioned strategies, ‘withdrawal’ and ‘attack self’ are the ones most likely to correlate

with feelings of shame, signifying a potentially very negative influence on an individual's perception of Self and self-identification.

3.4 Other studies on the representation of the female body

The remainder of this chapter will provide an overview of several other studies that have topicalised the representation of the female body, focusing on the methodologies and findings of these studies, in order to relate the present study to a larger body of work that has investigated concepts such as the construction of femininity in the media, slut-shaming, the effects of gender and shame on body-image, as well as the relationship between objectification and power.

3.4.1 Ojerholm and Rothblum (1999)

Ojerholm and Rothblum's (1999) study, *The Relationships of Body Image, Feminism and Sexual Orientation in College Women*, aimed to investigate the female preoccupation and obsession with body image, specifically body weight. The study was also concerned with individuals' attitudes and beliefs towards people who are considered 'fat' by societal norms. This study addressed the following questions: (i) What do women believe about their own body image and what attitudes do they hold in terms of the bodies of others? (ii) Do beliefs regarding feminism or sexual orientation have an impact on ideas surrounding body image? (iii) Is it possible to draw on liberalism in terms of the LGBT movement in order to stop the oppression that leads to and results from body shaming?

Female university students from the USA and Canada were asked to participate in the study by anonymously completing questionnaires concerning factors such as their own body image, their attitudes about weight in others, their own feminist identification, their attitudes towards other women, their own sexual identity as well as their attitudes towards lesbians and gay men (Ojerholm and Rothblum 1999: 434-435). Demographic data such as age, ethnic background/race, religious affiliation, location, height and weight as well as socio-economic status was also taken into account. The complete number of completed questionnaires totalled 1334, upon which a statistical analysis was done in order to reach a conclusion.

This study found that individual attitudes towards the three key variables (weight, feminism, lesbians and gay men) were correlated, but not as statistically significant as hypothesised (Ojerholm and Rothblum 1999: 443). Additionally, the relationship between a positive own

body image and attitudes regarding weight in others was also found to be insignificant, illustrating that “the association between personal identity and attitudes about others is stronger in the case of feminism and sexual orientation than it is for weight” (Ojerholm and Rothblum 1999: 444).

In conclusion, Ojerholm and Rothblum (1999: 445) assert that because attitudes towards oppressed groups – identifying attitudes towards women, sexual orientation and body image as the main factors to be considered – are interconnected, it may be beneficial for these groups to “form coalitions in order to decrease the incidence of prejudice and discrimination”. Ojerholm and Rothblum’s study (1999) is particularly significant to my own, as their study was the first to directly measure different attitudes towards body image, thereby leading the way for research on body shaming and the effects thereof.

3.4.2 Grabe, Hyde and Lindberg (2007)

In the study *Body Objectification and Depression in Adolescents: the role of gender, shame, and rumination* by Grabe et al (2007), emphasis was placed on the role of body shaming and contemplation (or internalisation of negative attitudes about body image) in terms of the relationship between self-objectification and depression in teenagers. Grabe et al’s (2007) primary research question can be framed as follows: to what extent does objectification in the sense of body shaming and self-reflectivity have an influence on the self-esteem of adolescents, and which gender is affected most negatively?

Grabe et al’s (2007) longitudinal study comprised of a total of 299 adolescents, with 158 females and 141 males. Data was collected at the children’s completion of the fifth and seventh grades respectively, with the mean age of the participants being 11.24 years. Participants were chosen out of a variety of ethnic groups, with 89.4% being White, 3.4% American Indian/Alaskan Native, 2.8% Asian American, 2.2% African American, 1.7% Hispanic, and 0.6% classified as Other (Grabe et al 2007: 166) With signed parental consent, as well as adolescent assent, participants were asked to complete a variety of measures electronically during an in-home visit of approximately one hour in duration. This method was chosen as “computer administration of sensitive measures has been demonstrated to yield more extensive and accurate reporting by adolescents than traditionally administered questionnaires” (Grabe et al 2007: 167).

Grabe et al (2007) found that, according to the results of their analyses, “girls’ chronic preoccupation with monitoring their bodies contributes to gender differences in depression”, reporting that 13-year old girls indicated much higher levels of self-surveillance, body shame and depressive symptoms than the male participants in the study. Furthermore, Grabe et al (2007: 170) assert that there is a major correlation between self-surveillance and depression among girls, but that the same is not true for boys. They do, however, concede that boys “are not necessarily free from the risk of depression when they internalise an observer’s perspective of themselves” (Grabe et al 2007: 170). Overall, the study concluded that body shaming and self-reflectivity (or “rumination”) at least partially explains the link between female self-objectification and depression in women.

3.4.3 Johnston and Taylor (2008)

The media surfaced yet again in Johnston and Taylor’s (2008) study *Feminist Consumerism and Fat Activists: a comparative study of grassroots activism and the Dove “Real Beauty” Campaign* as one of the key focuses of the study. Johnston and Taylor (2008: 941) were particularly interested in conflicting ideologies when it comes to advertising, examining the ways in which consumerist discourse and “grassroots fat-activists” differ in their approaches to challenging feminine beauty ideology.

This study questioned the underlying ideals of beauty in two separate contexts, the Dove “Real Beauty” Campaign and the activist movement called Pretty, Porky and Pissed Off – one of Canada’s “most popular queer cabaret acts to challenge misogynist attitudes about fat women and sexuality”, with a target focus on how these ideologies differ, if at all (Johnston and Taylor 2008: 942). Johnston and Taylor’s study made use of a CDA approach in which the content of the abovementioned campaigns are evaluated in terms of the underlying ideologies to determine which campaign most successfully contests traditional ideals of feminine beauty.

While Johnston and Taylor’s study conceded that the Dove “Real Beauty” Campaign does offer some valid critique against notions of a singular set of beauty ideals, the campaign still “systematically reproduces and legitimises the [shared beliefs and attitudes that society possesses regarding] beauty ideology in women’s everyday lives” in an attempt to continue to grow the capital acquired through the successful application of feminist consumerism (2008: 961). Because of this, the study concludes that the framing of the advertisement – the resistance of feminist consumerism in the media – is undermined and therefore women cannot

“meaningfully address [...] inequalities linked with beauty ideals”. Although the study commends activist movements such as PPPO (Pretty, Porky and Pissed Off) for its “more substantive attack on beauty standards that mocked these norms and offered a radical, intersectional critique” that identifies socio-political as well as socio-economic factors at the core of women’s harmful relationships with food, beauty and their own bodies, the study also notes the problems with the nature of this type of activism – “the limits of the local” – implying a less successful campaign in international terms (Johnston and Taylor 2008: 962). This makes sense when one considers the fact that beauty ideals tend to be relatively culture-specific.

3.4.4 Peterson, Grippo and Tantleff-Dunn (2008)

Peterson, Grippo and Tantleff-Dunn’s study *Empowerment and Powerlessness: a closer look at the relationship between feminism, body image and eating disturbance* was similar to Murnen and Smolak’s study in terms of focus, but Peterson et al’s study appears to be much more concerned with the power relations involved in female self-objectification and internalisation within the scope of a feminist identity. The most prominent research question in Peterson et al’s study was whether empowerment, such as that gained by adopting a feminist stance towards reigning ideologies about body image, has any value as a factor in reducing female self-objectification.

Peterson et al made use of a total of 267 female undergraduate participants for the purpose of their study, with the mean age of the participants being 20.6 years. The average Body Mass Index of these participants was 22.8 – slightly higher than the norm of 18 – and participants consisted of the following ethnicities: 70.3% European American, 14.5% Hispanic, 6.5% African American, 3.6% Asian American and 5.1% who identified themselves as Other. Variables such as eating attitudes, empowerment, feminist identity and general attitudes towards appearance were considered and subsequently measured by a selection of scales and questionnaires, including the Eating Attitude Test, Empowerment Scale, Feminist Identity Composite as well as the Physical Appearance State and Trait Anxiety Scale, among others.

Peterson et al’s study determined that empowerment is a key factor relating to body image and eating disturbances. As opposed to Murnen and Smolak’s (2009) findings, Peterson et al (2008: 644) concluded that women felt more empowered in relation to eating habits than to feminist identity, indicating that feminism was not a significant factor in relation to power. However, this study also notes that experiences of objectification are conducive to “feelings of

powerlessness [and a lack of control] over the external evaluations of their body”, and this lack of control may have a significant effect on an individual’s eating habits in an attempt to regain power and control, “sometimes to a disordered level” (Peterson et al 2008: 646).

3.4.5 Murnen and Smolak (2009)

In their study titled *Are Feminist Women Protected From Body Image Problems? A Meta-Analytic Review of Relevant Research*, Murnen and Smolak (2009: 186) hypothesized that women who identify as feminists will experience less negative body image issues and rather display a positive sense of self “due to a heightened ability to critique cultural pressures related to thinness [and body shaming]”. Murnen and Smolak’s (2009) study aimed to answer the following research questions: (i) Is feminist identity correlated with positive attitudes regarding the body? (ii) Is it true that individuals who identify as feminists have a more critical understanding of the thinness ideology perpetuated by society, and are therefore less prone to adopt the psychological pressure related to eating disorders? (iii) Finally, do feminists have more immunity against the internalisation of the “thin media ideal”? (Murnen and Smolak 2009).

Three separate databases, Psychinfo, ERIC and Dissertation Abstracts, were searched with the term “feminist” in order to acquire a better understanding of the body of literature related to feminism. The titles and abstracts that presented themselves throughout this search was then narrowed down to those which linked the concept of feminism to any aspect of body image, self-esteem or eating disorders. Following this, thirty different studies from a variety of authors who appeared to have empirical or theoretical interest in this topic were examined in order to acquire relevant data for analysis. This analysis aimed to identify certain variables that may have a statistically significant influence on a woman’s self-perception, specifically in relation to body image.

This study suggests that, as one of the variables in determining a predisposition to the development of an eating disorder, feminism is worth further examination, as “the association between feminist identity and body shame is one of the strongest [and therefore most significant] ‘protective’ effects” to be found in the researchers’ meta-analysis (Murnen and Smolak 2009: 195).

In conclusion, Murnen and Smolak (2009) propose that “the development of a feminist consciousness can help girls and women to develop critical consciousness in order to resist or

reinterpret sexist [and therefore oppressive] experiences”, and that feminism is an effective medium through which to encourage individuals to group together “in collective action to expose and eradicate forces that threaten to disrupt body satisfaction and healthy eating” (Murnen and Smolak 2009: 195).

3.4.6 Conradie (2012)

Conradie’s (2012) study, *Constructing Femininity: A critical discourse analysis of Cosmo*, was interested in the ways the media – specifically the lifestyle magazine “Cosmopolitan” – play a role in “the linguistic construction of gender ideology”. The main research questions of this study were as follows: (i) How do magazines such as “Cosmo” balance the interests of the reader with the ability to attract advertisers? (ii) What kind of ideological positioning is at stake in terms of successfully performing this task?

Conradie’s study investigated the underlying linguistic patterns found in a single article from “Cosmo”, applying a combination of Fairclough’s as well as Kitis and Milapides’ (2003, 1997 cited in Conradie 2012: 406) respective frameworks of critical discourse analysis in a qualitative manner. The article in question, ‘Feeling Anxious?’, was chosen on the basis that “it represents an example of “Cosmo’s” propensity for giving advice” (Conradie 2012: 406). Conradie (2012: 410) asserts that the advice given by “Cosmo” seeks to position itself as the reader’s “friend” by assuming to relate to “the variety of pressures and dangerous expectations [surrounding the concept of femininity]”. The analysis of the article demonstrated the ideological assumption and discursive manipulation of female identity, illustrating how “Cosmo” constructs female identity as “a challenge and a task that must be achieved with careful attention to a variety of threats” (Conradie 2012: 410). Significantly, “Cosmo” addressed its readership as a singular group, implying that all the differentiating characteristics of each individual female is not important or relevant to the content of the magazine’s articles.

3.4.7 Ringrose and Renold (2012)

Ringrose and Renold’s (2012) study *Slut Shaming, Girl Power and ‘Sexualisation’: thinking through the politics of the international SlutWalks with teen girls* was primarily concerned with one particular response to body shaming, namely the phenomenon of ‘SlutWalks’; these walks are intended to raise awareness of the negative effects of the gaze of the Other, and Ringrose

and Renold (2012) suggest that these performances are engaging with “postfeminist media contexts [and successfully] managing [to de-sexualise] protectionist discourse in schools”. SlutWalks are fundamentally against the idea of victim-blaming, especially when it comes to the gendered power imbalances involved in the abuse of women as a result of women being perceived as the weaker sex, and protests the problematic societal notion that “women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimised” (Ringrose and Renold 2012: 333). The main research question of this study was framed as follows: are SlutWalks adult-centric or does the involvement of teen girls’ offer the possibility of social change in terms of the sexualisation discourse in their everyday lives?

Throughout this study, Ringrose and Renold (2012: 334) investigated several SlutWalks in Britain, focusing on the feminist discourse that makes itself evident in many of the posters, t-shirts and other spaces in these campaigns against the abuse of power towards women. Interestingly, many men also participate in these events, showing a form of solidarity with victims. Ringrose and Renold also visited some schools (although the study does not specify which schools, how many were visited or whether these schools were public or private institutions) that housed several “girl-power” groups whose aim was to shed light on the issue of the empowerment of women. An opportunity for questions to be asked followed this presentation, with Ringrose and Renold actively engaging with the students, particularly raising the issue of SlutWalks and the “more positive aspects of girls’ sexuality” (Ringrose and Renold 2012: 337).

As part of their findings, Ringrose and Renold (2012: 337) assert that “the mobilising power [of the term] ‘slut’ has been spectacularly borne out through the recent international SlutWalks”, but at the same time acknowledge that the re-signification of the word possesses certain “age-bound dynamics” and that in the context of schools, girls are advised against participating in such activism – if not entirely prohibited from doing so.

Naturally, this is problematic when it comes to attempting a movement towards changing ideological societal beliefs and attitudes when it comes to the reconstruction of the identity of females when young girls perceive themselves to be lacking in agency in such matters.

3.5 Conclusion

While each of the studies under scrutiny have their own individual interests, it is fair to say that they overlap in most cases, examining the relationships between women’s self-perception and

factors such as the media, the unhealthy internalisation of the gaze of the Other and the effects thereof, as well as the ways in which attitudes towards feminism, empowerment and activist movements influence female self-objectification.

Most of these studies pointed towards eating disorders and body dysmorphia as one of the most negative effects of female objectification, whether it be at their own hand or through the perceptions of themselves by others (Ojerholm and Rothblum 1999, Johnston and Taylor 2008, Peterson et al 2008, Murnen and Smolak 2009 and Grabe et al 2007). Furthermore, Grabe et al (2007) identify depression as another contributing factor (and result) of women's negative self-esteem. Ringrose and Renold (2012) note that there exists an age-bound limitation when it comes to empowering women to consider female beauty ideals in a more critical way, and this becomes additionally problematized by Johnston and Taylor's (2008) study which indicates that misogynistic attitudes towards women are not effectively addressed on a local scale, but need to become important globally.

All of the studies reviewed here concluded that positive attitudes and associations with feminism is one of the principal factors that may contribute to women's resistance to societal expectations of beauty, and some even suggested that unification of less powerful groups (oppressed minorities) such as body-shamed women, lesbians and gay men could lead to the successful undertaking of addressing of social inequalities caused by more powerful groups such as media corporations and institutions that advocate feminist consumerism (Ojerholm and Rothblum 1999: 445).

Chapter 4

Research Design

4.1 Introduction

Gee (2014: 11) puts forth the notion that research “[needs to adopt and adapt] specific tools of inquiry and strategies for implementing them”. This conceptualisation of methodology lends itself to this particular study in its formulation of such “tools and strategies [as] continually and flexibly adapted to specific issues, problems, and contexts of study” (Gee 2014: 11), and is therefore appropriate for research that deals with multiple issues; such as context and discourse, which is essentially two very different areas of study.

Gee (2014: 12) also states that in terms of data analysis, his interest lies not with “simply describing data so that we can admire the intricacy of language, though such intricacy is indeed admirable, [but rather in] a method that can do two things beyond description”, firstly, to shed light on the way in which language works and provide theoretical evidence thereof and secondly to add to the “understanding and intervention” in key social issues as is the duty of responsible, critical thinkers.

This section will give a detailed description of this study’s methodology in terms of sampling, procedure and theoretical instruments.

4.2 Sampling

For the purposes of this study, data was electronically collected from BuzzFeed, a popular social news and entertainment website. Articles spanning a period of fifteen months – from January 2014 to May 2015 – were collected from BuzzFeed’s online archive on Facebook, another popular media site, and subjected to a keyword search in order to determine which of a total of 334 articles were relevant to the study in terms of body shaming and the construction of female identity.

4.3 Profile of Buzzfeed

BuzzFeed, an online link-aggregating news and entertainment website, was founded in 2006 by Jonah Peretti, committed to the distribution of updates on genres ranging from DIY projects and fashion tips to celebrity gossip and food revolutions. BuzzFeed is known for generating content on a daily basis, with lists and quizzes being two of the most popular formats on the

site. BuzzFeed's content has been divided into 28 different sections, including the topics mentioned above as well as Gif Feed, Rewind, Sports, Style, Travel and World. Being mainly of a social nature, this website acquires most of its readership by generating articles which are then shared on social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest. In terms of the generic features of BuzzFeed content, it is evident that the website relies extensively on popular methods of online expression, such as Instagram posts, Tweets, Vines, gifs and memes. These features are presumably used in order to create the illusion of unity in terms of group views on social norms and exceptions, an assumption based on the idea of link aggregation, which relies on the presence of hyperlinks within an article to direct the reader to other related texts, forming a framework for a particular topic, concept or ideology.

4.4 Procedure

This study made use of two complementary forms of data analysis, namely qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

4.4.1 Qualitative analysis

The selected articles were then converted into text files; these files then formed the basis of the corpus used in the study and were analysed in two separate ways. The first of these analyses consisted of the manual entering of data extricated from the BuzzFeed text files into an Excel sheet, which served to record the type of text under scrutiny, a summary of the macropositions of each article, the underlying ideological positioning of the text as well as the most commonly discussed body parts. The aim of constructing this corpus was to gain insight into the nature of the discourse surrounding traditional ideals of beauty, as well as the identification of not only explicit but also implicit body shaming. The data was also analysed in terms of contradictory ideologies, discrepancies between the content of the headline versus the content of the article itself as well as in terms of attribution.

4.4.2 Quantitative analysis

Secondly, the BuzzFeed articles were analysed using Wordsmith Tools, a program designed for use by corpus linguists, in order to create an electronic corpus. Wordsmith Tools was utilised mainly in order to create a word list in order to determine the frequency of particular

words of significance to the study. This process included various keyword searches, this time in terms of both positive and negative adjectives, adverbs and abstract nouns in order to gain further insights into the data. Furthermore, Wordsmith Tools proved immensely useful in terms of its ability to run concordances on the data, thereby providing the researcher with the context in which a specific word or phrase was used in a particular article or articles, enabling the qualitative analysis of the meanings that these words were typically used to (re)construct and thus identify the positioning of the text as mainly positive or mainly negative towards female bodies, as well as the underlying ideologies that gave rise to such positioning.

The benefit of using two separate methods of analysis lies in the fact that while Wordsmith is able to calculate the number of times a particular token is used throughout the span of 81 articles, the manual analysis of the corpus itself allows for implications and implicit meaning to feature in the overall findings. Furthermore, this method of analysis addresses critique against Critical Discourse Analysis that asserts that this field of study is too reliant on the inherent ideologies of the analyst rather than focusing on objective data.

4.5 Theoretical instruments

The analysis of the data focused on the identification of certain ideologies underlying the content of the articles, with the most significant of these being traditional or Westernised ideas of beauty. After the initial identification of ideology, attention was paid to the ways in which the media tends to obscure the ideological positioning of a text. These ideologies were identified through the examination of individual lexical items, qualifiers, sentence structure, thematic roles, rhetorical devices, coherence between headline and content as well as the analysis of implication, presupposition and metaphor. Note that the classification of an article as mostly shaming or proud relied on the presence of either negative or positive adjectives and the connotation of specific word choices.

Furthermore, the data will be examined in order to determine if and how BuzzFeed conforms to typical characteristics of tabloid journalism, particularly in terms of the personalisation and sensationalism of content that may further obscure ideological meaning.

Lastly, BuzzFeed content will be studied in terms of Gee's building tasks of language in order to shed more light on the discursive representation of women in the media.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodological tools that will be implemented in Chapter 5 in order to draw a conclusion as to the media's discursive (re)construction of female identities.

Chapter 5

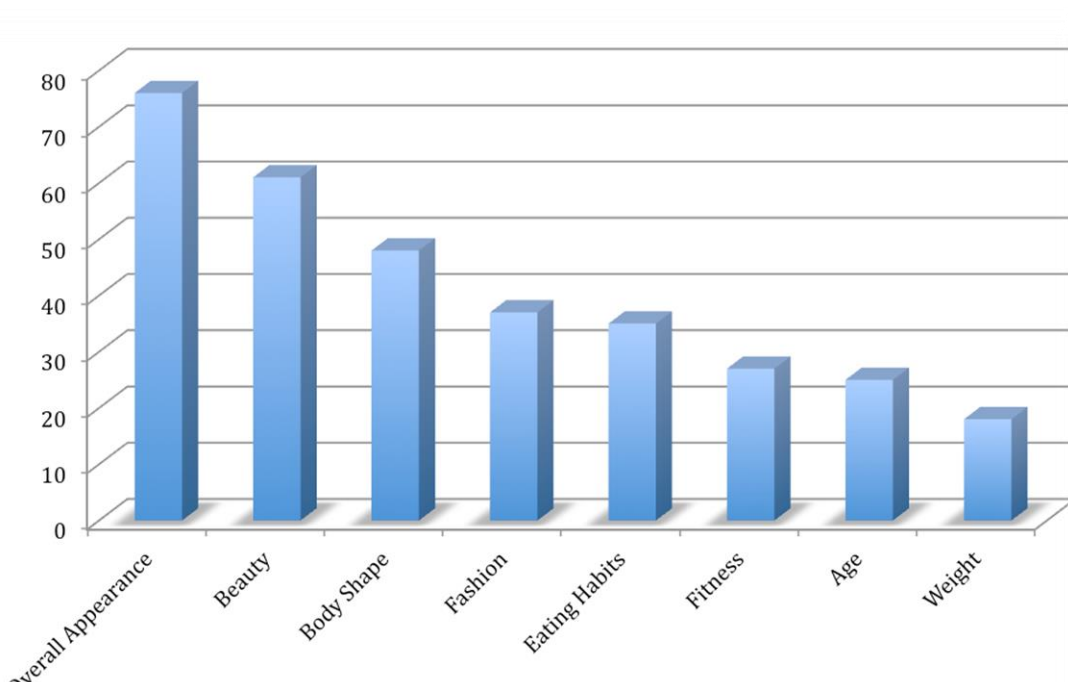
Data and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a detailed overview of the findings of this study in answer to the research questions listed in Chapter 1 above. This overview will include a quantitative exposition of the most commonly discussed topics in the corpus, with specific focus on the most commonly discussed body parts of women as well as the most prominent underlying ideologies that are distinguishable in the content of the articles generated by BuzzFeed as well as a critical analysis thereof. The aim of this overview is therefore predominantly to shed light upon the linguistic devices that serve to propagate body shaming in an attempt to facilitate the (re)construction or challenging of body shaming.

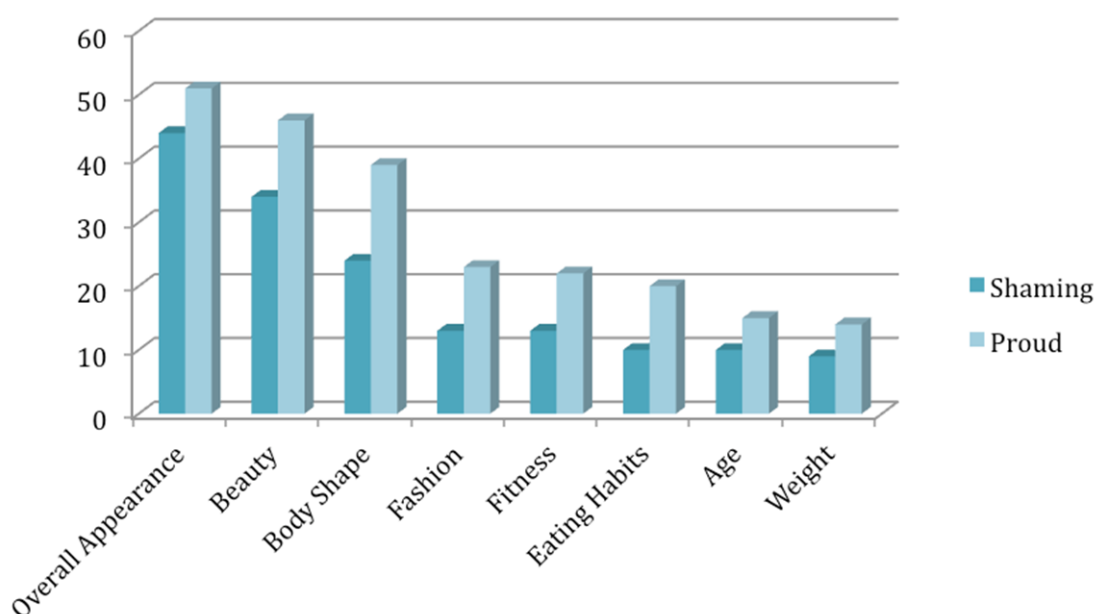
5.2 Most commonly discussed topics

Of a range of topics that included variables such as overall appearance, body shape, weight gain and loss, fitness, strength, exercise, diet and overall eating habits as well as age, fashion, beauty, sex, relationships, pregnancy and parenthood, Graph 1 below illustrates that Overall Appearance was most frequently mentioned in the corpus with a total of 76 out of a total of 81 articles (93,83%) containing some form of discourse around this topic.



Graph 1: Most Commonly Discussed Topics

This was closely followed by mentions of Beauty (75,31%), Body Shape (59,26%), Fashion (45,68%), Eating Habits (44,44%) and Fitness (33,33%) as well as Age (30,86%) and Weight (22,22%). In terms of Gee's (2014: 34) building tasks of language, one might argue that the range of topics most commonly discussed on the website has been chosen according to the notion of recipient design. In other words, it would make sense for BuzzFeed to construct the site and the topics discussed thereon in such a way as to signal that a particular article or post is significant to the reader, often by conforming to the typical "us vs. them" dichotomy as posited by van Dijk (cited in Brokensha 2011). This is often the case in posts where celebrities are discussed, where celebrity is either glorified as an ideal, flawless state of being, or condemned in cases where flaws are being highlighted.



Graph 2: Most Commonly Discussed Topics – Shaming vs. Proud

In terms of body shaming, the abovementioned topics were rated as follows: Overall Appearance was shamed most commonly in 54,32% of articles, followed by Fashion (38,27%), Body Shape (29,63%), Fitness (16,05%), Eating Habits (12,35%), Age (12,35%) and Weight (11,11%). Contrary to expectations, weight as a factor on its own was not directly shamed in a significant number of articles, but becomes more prominent when considering the fact that body shape and fitness is inherently linked to an individual's weight, which contributes to their overall appearance. This is evidenced by the amount of articles classified as 'self-help' articles (45,65% of the total corpus), of which 48,65% relate to weight – mostly more indirectly than

explicitly – especially when it comes to factors such as dress size measured in inches or workout tips not overtly aimed at losing weight but with definite elements of implied body shaming towards individuals not concerned with going to the gym on a regular basis. An example of this can be found in the article “We Worked Out For 90 Days Straight And This Is What Happened: Four normal people worked out for 90 straight days with P90X. Did it work?” from 12 May 2015, in which nothing in the headline suggests body shaming. However, the content of the article is mostly concerned with losing weight and building muscle:

(1) Before getting started, we measured our weight, muscle mass, BMI, and percentage of body fat. From there, we were given a 90-day goal. Mallory and Daysha’s goal was to lose body fat, while Kenny’s goal was to build muscle.

As is the case with many similar articles, instead of neutrally reporting the benefits and costs of exercise, this article advocates weight loss for people who, as evident by pictures accompanying the article, do not need to lose weight, and by doing so implies that people disinterested in losing weight (regardless of health concerns) should reconsider their beliefs and attitudes. It is also interesting to note that while the male participant was aiming to build muscle, the women were expected to lose weight.

By perpetuating the ideology of a single, perfect feminine image through weight loss, BuzzFeed (along with other forms of popular media) is engaging in the formation of a social practice or institution that regards body shaming as “a culturally supported endeavour”, thereby conforming to Gee’s second building task of language (2014: 34).

Losing weight is also constructed as an easy way to lift one’s self-esteem, as shown in example (2), in which the contrast between the participants’ appearance before and after the 90-day workout in the phrases “I had so much back fat” and “I look a lot smaller than I did before” are equated with “look[ing] better”. This emphasis on weight loss as a way of bettering one’s appearance without it being medically necessary is further qualified by Daysha’s assertion that “[she looks] better, so that’s all that really matters”:

(2) [...] The final results were pretty surprising. Mallory lost a pound of body fat, and increased her muscle mass. Mallory: Oh! I look different! Guys, I had so much back fat. Daysha: I look a lot smaller than I did before. I don’t know what to say, but at least I look better, so that’s all that really matters to me at the end of the day.

Evidence of BuzzFeed advocating weight loss is vast, including articles with titles such as "The Invention That Could End Obesity" (27 February 2015) and "11 Ways To Build Muscle And Lose Fat Faster" (7 May 2015). The phrasing of both of these articles makes it clear that they are not focused on building a healthier lifestyle, but rather on the idea of losing weight for aesthetic purposes, as illustrated by BuzzFeed's discussion of a device that aids weight loss in (3) below, in which the adjective "excess" in the phrase "excess body weight" presupposes a subscription to a singular definition of a healthy body. Furthermore, the phrase "significantly more and at a faster rate" implies that so-called "excess body weight" should be shed as quickly as possible, thereby reinforcing the presupposition of a singular definition of an acceptable female body:

(3) [...] At six months, average patients lost 75% of their excess body weight — significantly more and at a faster rate than any bariatric procedure [...]

The content of this article does not aim to critically evaluate the device, nor does the reporter claim to have any true medical knowledge that would enable him or her to do so. Rather, the article merely serves as a type of advertisement for undergoing this weight-loss procedure without much regard for the patient's wellbeing, genes, lifestyle or personal preference, focusing instead on the rate at which weight loss can be accomplished. Compared to the rest of the corpus, the articles discussed above are two of the more explicit examples of advocating weight loss as a way of 'improving' body shape. As illustrated in (2), these articles encourage weight loss in such a way that the idea thereof becomes laden with beauty ideals and therefore an attractive enterprise in the search of happiness.

Importantly, these articles position themselves in such a way as to appear to be the reader's friend (Conradie 2012: 144), advising rather than instructing, while at the same time obscuring the true agenda of the article, as seen in (4) below, in which "the results you want" and "doing all the right things" are presupposed to be related to "building muscle, losing weight and getting lean". Additionally, the phrases "[y]ou're not alone" and "you probably know" presuppose that the article is relevant to the reader, regardless of her weight, and imply that it could provide more relevant insights than, for example, a medical journal article on weight loss in obese patients.

(4) Still not seeing the results you want? You're not alone. Building muscle, losing weight, and getting lean can be hard, even when you think you're doing all the right

things. You probably know that if you want to lose weight, you should be burning more calories than you're eating [...]

The amount of contradictory articles (in terms of both shaming or proud of women's bodies) were overwhelming, with a total of 45,68% of articles falling within this classification. Once again, Overall Appearance was found to be the topic that discussed ambiguously the most often, with ambiguous discussion of overall appearance making up 44,44% of the corpus, followed by Beauty (39,51%), Body Shape (27,16%), Fashion (25,92%), Fitness (16,05%) and Eating Habits (16,05%), Age (13,58%) and Weight (12,35%).

In terms of body shaming, the majority of articles were contradictory in that they would possess some elements of being body proud, but then undermine that idea with traditional beauty ideology. Two articles in which this is visible include "29 Unexpectedly Awesome Things About Being Pregnant" from 7 January 2014 and "19 Things You Should Never Do When Your Partner Is Pregnant" from 13 October 2014. The first of these articles contains the following phrases in which the lexical items "gain" and "per day" contradict the last phrase "so go ahead, eat that full-fat frozen yogurt", which narrowly equates being able to decide what you want to eat for yourself with eating full-fat frozen yogurt:

(5) You are eating to GAIN weight. A typical pregnant woman needs 350-450 additional calories PER DAY. So go ahead, eat that full-fat frozen yogurt [...]

The implication built into this supposedly permissive stance is that women who are not pregnant should not eat full-fat frozen yogurt, or any similar food items. This contrast between permissiveness and shaming is also visible in the latter of these articles, "19 Things You Should Never Do When Your Partner Is Pregnant" (13 October 2014) in which the author appears to be sympathizing with the pregnant woman, but highlights "pregnancy-related weight gain" in a way that implies that this is something that pregnant women should naturally be concerned about, linking with the internalization of traditional beauty ideals that list thinness as a prerequisite. This article is also not particularly focused on the health of either the woman or the unborn infant, as it does not mention that excessive exercise is generally discouraged as a health risk:

(6) [...] Your partner may be having trouble accepting her changing body (especially pregnancy-related weight gain), so the last thing she needs is to listen to you moan about missing a gym class that you were supposed to attend together.

Compared to being framed as shaming or contradictory, it was surprising to find that Overall Appearance was discussed in a positive way in 62,96% of the total corpus, followed by Beauty (56,79%) and Body Shape (48,15%). Less commonly described in a proud way were the topics of Fashion (28,40%), Fitness (27,16%), Eating Habits (23,46%), Age (18,52%) and Weight (17,28%).

It is, however, important to note that the word “proud” was used only six times in the entire corpus, and that three of these mentions were directly correlated with weight loss, as illustrated by examples (7), (8) and (9):

(7) [...] It will take time [to lose weight]. In the meantime, take time to celebrate little successes and be proud of yourself for being proactive about your fitness and your health.

(8) [One of the best feelings is] when you look in the mirror and are proud of your hard work.

(9) Before he ditched alcohol and pizza, he showed it all off [his less fit body] loud and proud. He was cute, he was natural. But he just wasn't the Chris Pratt we know and love now.

As demonstrated by (9) above, the use of the word “[b]ut” serves to highlight one of the primary contradictions often found in articles that appear to be body proud; there is a discrepancy between being “proud of his natural body” and being “the Chris Pratt we know and love now”. A so-called natural body, therefore, is framed as being less attractive than being toned, lean and fit. Importantly, this article is one of very few that deals with misandry¹, the objectification of men by women, which is believed to stem from a hatred of women, which is less common than female body shaming. It is clear, then, that even articles that superficially conform to the category of being body proud in some sense also possess elements of body shaming. This feature of tabloid journalism is prevalent even when reporting on non-celebrities as in the article "We Tried On Oscar Dresses, And This Is What Happened" from 21 February 2015:

(10) [...] but once it's on, you can really appreciate how it's crafted to make a woman's body look like the best version of itself.

¹ Misandry here refers to the objectification of men by women

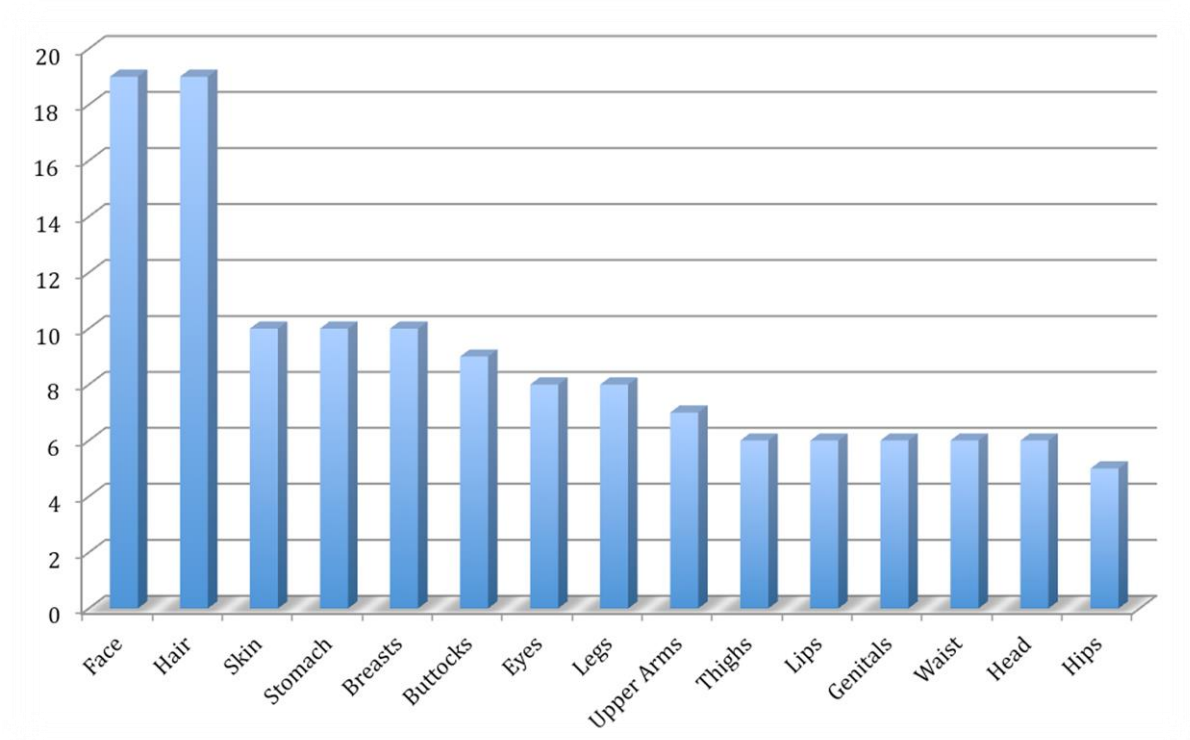
(11) It is impossible to feel bad with that kind of reaction. Seeing my picture, [I thought]: Damn, my body looks good. I actually don't regret putting on Spanx for this.

In example (10), the focus is on the dress rather than the woman; instead of giving the woman agency, the dress is credited for “[making] a woman's body look like the best version of itself”. This sentence also implies that there are different versions of the same body, and that the one that is aesthetically more pleasing is, by definition, the most desirable one. Example (11) is particularly interesting in terms of the statement that “it is impossible to feel bad with that kind of reaction”, which presupposes that the evaluation of physical appearance is and should be relevant to a woman's (lack of) satisfaction with her own identity. Further, the woman's assertion that she “[doesn't] regret putting on Spanx”, (a type of underwear that compresses the body in such a way that it makes the wearer appear to be slimmer than she might be) which follows an assertion that “[her] body looks good”, implies that the discomfort associated with wearing such constricting undergarments is outweighed by an enhancement in physical appearance, thus placing appearance before comfort.

It is evident, therefore, that the nature of the discourse found in the media's construction of women's bodies is primarily of a shaming or contradictory nature, and it is important for readers to adopt a more critical reading style (as posited by Gee 2014) in order not to confuse prescriptive content in terms of body shape with objective healthcare advice.

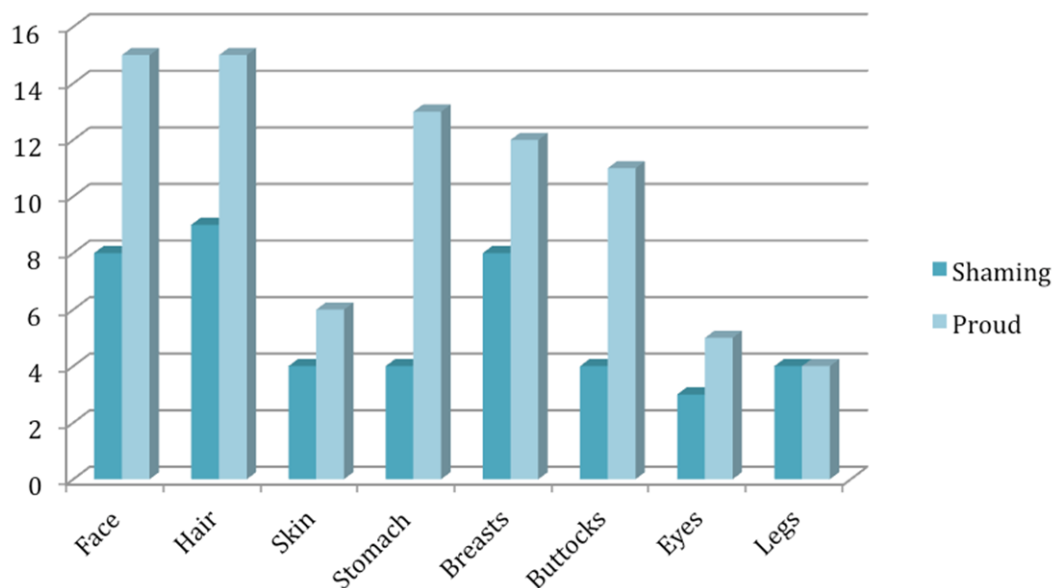
5.3 Most commonly discussed body parts

The primary corpus used for this study identified 31 different body parts that were explicitly mentioned in the content of the selected articles. Of these, the face and hair of individuals were most commonly discussed; interestingly, these body parts were discussed equally frequently in 23,46% of the total articles. The skin, stomach and breasts of women followed, all being discussed in 12,35% of the articles, respectively. Other most commonly discussed body parts were buttocks (11,11%), eyes and legs (9,88%), upper arms (8,64%), thighs, lips, genitals, waist and head (7,41%), followed by the hips (6,17%).



Graph 3: Most Commonly Discussed Body Parts

Although these percentages may not seem to be highly significant, when considering the human body as subjective and personal, the fact that body parts are mentioned at all on a public, popular online media platform such as BuzzFeed (which, for the most part, does not report on injuries or medical news) is surprising. It is therefore plausible to assert that BuzzFeed is facilitating derogatory acts such as body shaming by continuing to report on women's bodies in an objectifying manner, thereby contributing to society's shared attitudes and beliefs that there is only one acceptable way for women to look, othering any individual who does not conform to this norm.



Graph 4: Most Commonly Discussed Body Parts – Shaming vs. Proud

Body shaming as a social practice is also one way in which identity construction might take place when an individual builds their identity around what they are versus what they are not, thereby creating a direct contrast between the self and the other. In this sense, body shaming in the media becomes linked to Gee's (2014: 34) third building task. In terms of the body parts most frequently shamed in the BuzzFeed archive, it appears that the content of the articles in which the body parts are mentioned mainly shames these body parts in an indirect way (38,25%) rather than doing so explicitly (34,55%), which makes sense when considering the nature of the majority of these articles. Because of the way self-help articles position themselves as the reader's friend, it would be counterproductive to then shame individuals' appearance in a direct way. This is not to say, however, that this phenomenon does not occur. In fact, this study found that hair, the head and breasts were most frequently directly shamed in a total of 4,94% of articles, followed by the face and buttocks (3,70%), the stomach, waist, skin and legs (2,47%) and finally the lips, thighs and hips (shamed in a total of 1,23% of articles, respectively).

The concordances run on the word "hair" delivered some of the most interesting results of the study, illustrating that hair is mentioned in a prolific number of contexts:

(12) At lunch today, she's got a tanned face and long, gray-and-brown hair.

(13) Donna Jean is a buoyant strawberry blonde. (It's a dye job, to cover gray.) Her hair is long but actually shorter than how she wore it in her early veteran days.

Examples (12) and (13) shows how grayness – a natural process of aging – is perceived as a negative feature in a woman's overall appearance, especially when considering the way in which the adjective "buoyant" is used to describe the woman's hair colour in a positive way, and then undermined by the phrase "[i]t's a dye job, to cover gray", implying that gray hair is something that should be covered. Example (12), while not directly shaming gray hair, is a reference to the woman's age, which is not relevant in the context of the article. In addition to this perceived flaw in the appearance of a woman's hair, it is interesting to note in which other ways hair is portrayed:

(14) We never talk about how movies condition girls to associate glasses and curly hair with ugliness because that is so damaging to young girls [...]

(15) Sophia wanted long straight hair, and she even started expressing a strong dislike for her facial features [...]

(16) Meet the Angelica Doll, a natural hair doll for young girls.

It is interesting to note, firstly, that curly hair is associated with being less desirable, but secondly also how women of colour are portrayed to have become preoccupied with "[wanting] long, straight hair", as evidenced by the supporting features of the article that make it clear that the content is written for and about women of colour. This discontent, as the article "This Mom Made A Natural Hair Doll To Improve Her Daughter's Self-Esteem" explains, stems from the lack of variety of dolls to suit consumers of different ethnicities, thereby propagating the traditional, Westernized ideal of beauty. While it is arguably commendable of this mother to fill at least one of these ethnic gaps in society, it is interesting to note how the adjective "natural" is used in the content of the article to described African hair, as if to imply that other hair types are in some ways unnatural. Thus, even articles that appear to be celebrating "natural" appearance do so by implying that "natural hair" is preferable to other types of hair, shaming women who, for example, prefer to wear extensions, wigs or weaves. Additionally, one might argue that this type of content poses as supportive of feminist worldviews, while simultaneously failing to allow this consideration to impact the overall ideologies from which a singular standard of feminine beauty is constructed.

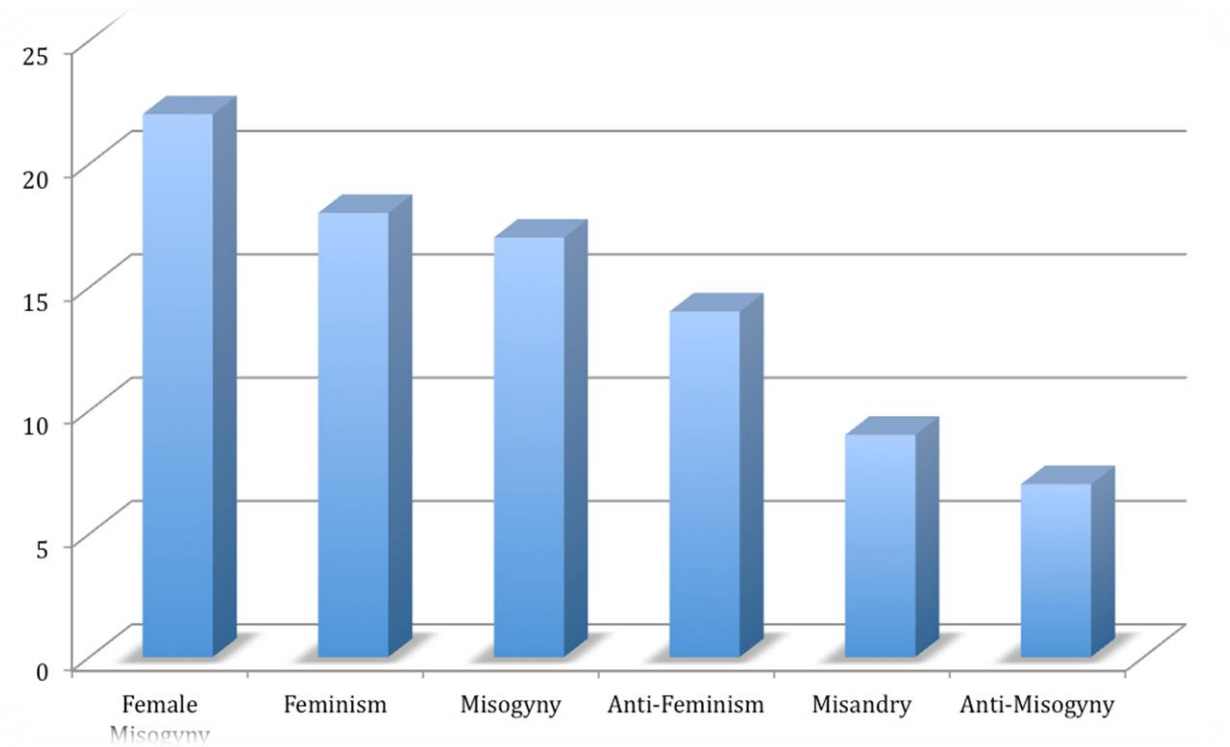
In terms of which body parts were most commonly praised (or at least described in a positive light), it is fascinating to find that hair and face is once again at the top of the list, positively described in a total of 18,52% of articles. This was followed by positive portrayals of the stomach (16,05%), breasts (14,81%), buttocks (13,58%) and thighs (12,35%). These body parts were then followed by less significant positive descriptions of the hips (9,88%), skin, lips and upper arms (7,41%) as well as the waist and legs (4,94% respectively). These positive mentions were mostly in the form of direct objectification of either men or women. The fact that this study found women to be discursively shamed for their appearance 32,7% more than men illustrates Gee's (2014: 34) fourth and fifth building tasks in terms of relationship formation and the distribution of social goods: by objectifying women more often than men, the relationship between the genders become unbalanced, creating discord and clearing the way for social power imbalances. By focusing its attention on the objectification of women, the media is effectively putting men in a position of power over women and thereby creating and perpetuating traditional ideals of beauty, that often dictate that beauty is for the sake of the observer – the male gaze.

5.4 Ideology in the media

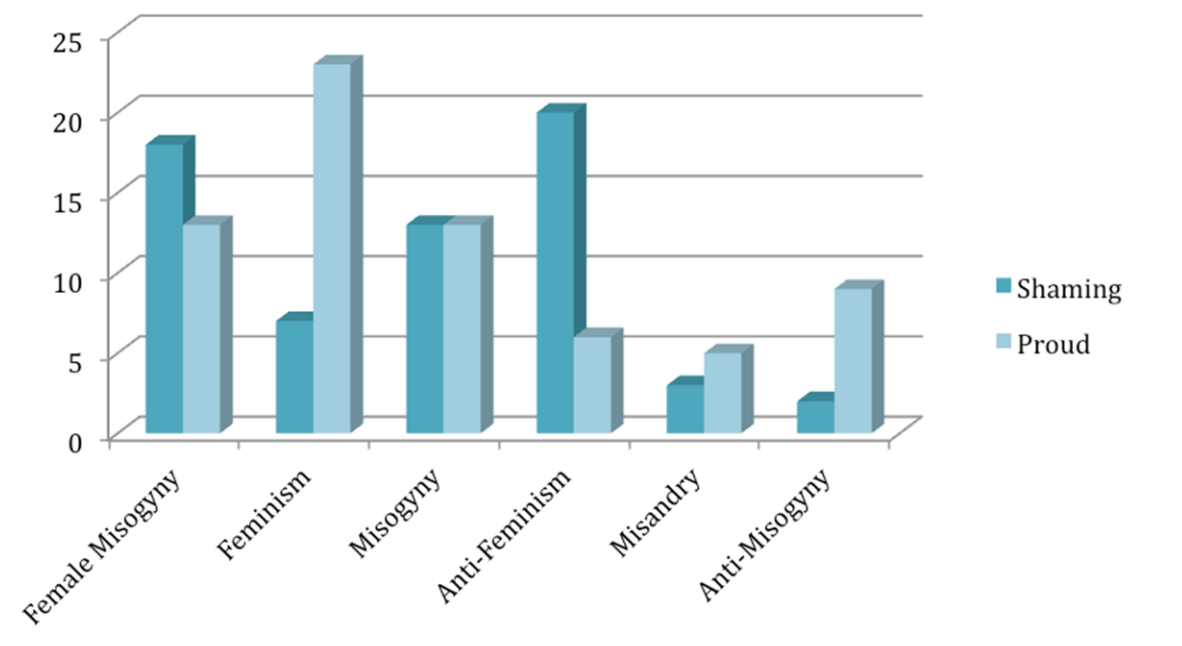
A total of nine possible ideologies were identified in the corpus, including racism, attitudes towards individuals of a different sexual orientation, objectification in terms of female misogyny² and misandry, feminism, misogyny and chauvinism (as well as the three last-mentioned ideologies' counterparts).

Considering the fact that more than half (51,85%) of the corpus was found to be of a body proud nature, this does not seem to correlate with the abovementioned findings. However, when one contemplates Elison et al's (2006) theory that women typically manage the shame that results from self-surveillance by attacking the Other in an attempt to project an individual's own feelings of body shame in a display of "outward-directed anger and blame" (cited in Tangney et al 2007: 11), this finding makes more sense. Thus, one might argue that while there seems to be a shift in the internalization of negative perceptions of the Self in the sense that women are claiming ownership of their own bodies (indicated by the pervasiveness of feminism that underlies so much of the corpus), it is possible that feelings which might have been internalized by one individual are now being projected onto other women.

² The shaming of women by other women



The study also found that the amount of articles that were shaming but also possessed feminist undertones came to 19,75%, which is significant as women who identify as feminists are considered to be “less concerned with body image” (Murnen and Smolak 2009: 195).



Graph 6: Most Commonly Identifiable Ideologies – Shaming vs. Proud

An example of objectification of women by other women can be seen in (17) below, in which the author's characterisation of Rihanna's look as one that resembles "scrambled eggs", "a pancake" or "pizza" is contrasted by her rhetorical question "[w]hat look were you going for, Ri-Ri", in which the positive politeness in the use of Rihanna's nickname is incoherent with the insults levelled at her in the preceding phrases:

(17) Has anyone else realized that Rihanna look like the coney scrambled eggs special on the red carpet? Rihanna looks like a damn pancake. Or pizza. What look are you going for, Ri-Ri?

While the notion that women are utilizing the "attack other" (Tangney et al 2007: 11) adaptive strategy would partially explain the relationship between feminism and female misogyny in the corpus, it is also possible that women have attempted to turn the tables by objectifying men, as is evident from articles such as "You Won't Be Prepared For How Hot Stephen Colbert Looks With His "Colbeard"" (20 February 2015), "Zach Galifianakis Looked Totally Different When He Auditioned For "SNL"" (16 February 2015), "Ryan Gosling Makes First Public Appearance In Months, Pumps Gas, And Saves Your Soul" (28 March 2014) and "Jared Leto Defies All Aging Logic As The Sexiest 42-Year-Old Man On Earth" (14 January 2015). While misandry is a form of objectification, it is not negative in the way that female misogyny and body shaming is, being of a more complimentary nature.

Other significant but less surprising results included the relationship between body shaming and anti-feminism³ (present in 32,10% of articles) as well as the relationship between body shaming and misogyny (25,93%).

³ Here 'anti-feminism' refers to the implicit or explicit mocking or rejection of feminist values, while misogyny refers to the objectification of women by men.

5.4.1 Linguistic articulation of ideologies

While there are some examples of direct propagation of ideology, as in the case of objectification of women by women, it is interesting to note that the linguistic articulation of ideologies is mainly implicit, with very few articles openly expressing attitudes towards feminism, misogyny, or anti-feminism. The main indicators of the propagation of particular ideologies were therefore implications, presuppositions, metaphors and similes.

5.4.1.1 Implication and presupposition

Implication and presupposition enabled body shaming in a substantial expanse of the total corpus, and it was interesting to note that the two were often used together within a single phrase, as indicated in (18) – (21) below. Implication, as an exceedingly subtle form of linguistic articulation, is often overlooked by the general readership of BuzzFeed articles, which would explain the profuse amount of articles generated with headlines such as "16 Ways To Tuck, Tie, Roll, And Twist Your Clothes Like A Stylist" from 11 October 2014 and "26 Incredible Hairstyles You Can Learn In 10 Steps Or Less - No matter what your hair type" from 2 May 2015. While these articles' intent come across as being helpful to the reader – even carrying a positive tone – the implication is that the reader is in need of these tips in order to be acceptable and therefore desirable.

In addition to implication, presupposition is particularly noticeable throughout the entirety of the corpus. Presupposition here has to do with the writer making certain assumptions about the reader, resulting in headlines such as:

(18) 22 Struggles All Curvy Girls Know To Be True: Your hips don't lie, but they do keep bumping into things.

The example in (18) above presupposes that every girl with a fuller figure goes through "struggles" because of her body shape; and that these supposed struggles are universal and thus inevitable, implying that the only way to overcome them is to lose weight. The article also refers to the following :

(19) Boarding a packed flight without hip checking a random stranger is more or less impossible.

(20) Trying to get out of your seat in a packed movie theatre? Yeah, someone's probably getting a face full of booty.

(21) Getting a coat to fit on all your body parts at the same time requires some Macguyvering.

(22) Pants do not fit you the same in the front as they do in the back. Sometimes, you love how the front fits so much, you consider just buying them, and walking backward everywhere.

(23) When you find something that you look AND feel good in, you become an unstoppable hurricane of fabulous.

(24) You're not super worked up about not having a thigh gap. You don't even have a gap between your boobs.

All of the above examples presuppose that a curvy body (used in the context of this article as a euphemism for being overweight) is problematic in some way, noticeably in terms of the effect your body might have on strangers, as illustrated by (19): "hip checking a random stranger" and (20): "somebody's probably getting a face full of booty". These statements presuppose that these women's bodies are an inconvenience to other people, thereby implying that they need to change their bodies – most likely by losing weight.

Examples (21) – (23) all relate to how clothes fit (or don't fit) curvy bodies, presupposing that finding clothes that fit appropriately in terms of size is particularly difficult for women who have fuller figures than the norm dictates by asserting that "[g]etting a coat to fit on all your body parts at the same time requires some Macguyvering", implying that a great deal of effort is required to perform the simple task of putting on a coat and that the fault lies with the wearer's body shape, and not with the garment. Furthermore, example (23) illustrates the subliminal messaging that so often occurs in BuzzFeed articles; by stating that "you become an unstoppable hurricane of fabulous" – but only "when you find something that you look [and] feel good in". The positioning of the chosen lexical items is significant here: by putting the verb "look" before "feel", the phrase implies that looking good is something that needs to happen before an individual can or should feel good. The shaming nature of this presupposition is masked by the pretence of care and understanding, further obscured by the framing of the article as universal by using use of the second person pronoun "you",

Example (24) is especially interesting in terms of the way in which the two sentences are juxtapositioned; the first sentence states that "[y]ou're not super worked up about not having a thigh gap", which firstly presupposes that curvy women are not obsessed with body image –

an apparently positive trait – but then gets undermined by the following sentence which is recognizably of a shaming nature: “[y]ou don’t even have a gap between your boobs”. The latter sentence presupposes that having “a gap between your boobs” is the norm, and therefore implies that curvy women are not as desirable as women who conform to traditional ideals of beauty.

Other examples of obscured meaning through presupposition can also be found in examples (4) and (10) above.

5.4.1.2 Metaphor and simile

Another strategy used for the obscure articulation of ideology throughout the corpus is the use of metaphors and similes, where the ideological meaning of a text only becomes clear when one examines what an individual is compared to, and whether this object has positive or negative connotations, particularly in terms of body shaming. Objectification in the BuzzFeed articles was particularly prevalent, occurring in a total of 34,57% of the overall corpus:

(25) Why does Ariana Grande always look like she just farted and it was louder than she thought it was going to be?

(26) Why does Nicki Minaj look like she wasn't paid enough for this song?

(27) Why does Taylor Swift look like one of the little dolls my mum used to put over the bog roll?

(28) Why does Selena Gomez look like she has babies trying to escape from her knees?

(39) Why does Miley Cyrus look like a giant baby with her diaper-looking high waisted shorts?

The examples above were all taken from an article called “24 Questions That Can’t Be Answered” from 19 August 2014. While these are just five examples of body shaming, there are many more contained within the article, as well as in similar articles throughout the corpus. The comparisons made by means of rhetorical questions in examples (25) to (28) all carry negative connotations, but significantly examples (25) and (26) are of a more indirectly shaming nature: (25) implies that Ariana Grande’s face is unattractive, comparing it to the facial expression one might come across when someone is surprised. This comment is also

shaming the individual by referring to a natural bodily function. Example (26) implies that Nicki Minaj does not look desirable and is therefore dissatisfied with her appearance.

Examples (27) to (29), however, carry more directly shaming ideology by explicitly comparing individuals to unattractive objects, or, in the case of (28), unattractive situations. In (27), Taylor Swift's outfit is compared to that of "one of the little dolls my mum used to put over the bog roll", implying that it is outdated and unattractive. In (28), Selena Gomez's legs are shamed through the claims that she "look[s] like she has babies trying to escape from her knees" implying that they are too big, and thus unattractive and unacceptable. Further, in (29), Miley Cyrus is compared to "a giant baby" as a result of wearing what is described as "diaper-looking high waisted shorts", implying that women's clothing is sufficient grounds for their infantilization. It is also interesting to note what exactly these celebrities are being shamed for, including their outfit choices in (27) and (29), their overall appearance in (25) and specific body parts, such as Ariana Grande's face in (25) and Selena Gomez's knees in (28). As posited above, these types of articles are possibly generated because of society's apparent need for downward social comparison, and attacking others appears to be the simplest strategy for dealing with the internalization of negative ideas and attitudes about one's own body image.

Interestingly, these shaming articles are occasionally contrasted with intensely objectifying articles, such as "A Reminder That Jennifer Lopez Looks Like This" from 14 October 2014, which serves as an example of what society considers to be the ideal for women to strive towards:

(30) This = perfect.

(31) Jennifer Lopez decided to change her shirt while walking on a sidewalk, which only made us remember that she looks like a flawless human.

(32) That's a real person. Who actually looks that amazing. And those abs are real. And clearly she is aging backwards.

The comparison in (30) is quite clear as a subheading to the article; Jennifer Lopez is equal to perfection. However, it is remarkable that perfection here is narrowly defined in terms of physical appearance: as illustrated by the equation of flawlessness with beauty in (31), and the equation of "abs" and "aging backwards" in (32). The claim that Lopez is "clearly aging backwards" is incoherent with the phrase that precedes it, in which the journalist states that she is "a real person". These examples praise the celebrity in question not for her character or

intelligence or accomplishments, but rather for how good she looks. While this kind of objectification might appear to be flattering, it is again negated by the last sentence in (32), “[C]learly she is aging backwards” as this sentence implies that Jennifer Lopez looks good despite her age, which carries definite body shaming undertones, but also implies that individuals should strive to age as well as Lopez.

5.5 The justification of body shaming in the media

Unsurprisingly, there appears to be no form of justification of body shaming in any of the BuzzFeed articles that have been examined. BuzzFeed as an institution shields itself from critique by utilizing the notion of plausible deniability to its benefit – in essence, this means that BuzzFeed does not attribute itself or the writers of these articles with what is said in the content of the articles, thereby creating the opportunity for them to shift blame onto cited sources, or using implicit meaning as is the case with implicature, presupposition, metaphor and simile (Pinker, Nowak and Lee 2007), (Scollon in Mongie 2013: 144).

This study found that only 4,94% of articles were directly attributed to BuzzFeed or its staff; significantly, 75% of these articles were in some way connected to weight or body image, with only one article that could be classified as body proud. The shaming articles attributed to BuzzFeed were noticeably not of a shaming nature, but rather suggestive in nature, as demonstrated by the following headlines:

(33) "We Worked Out For 90 Days Straight And This Is What Happened"

(34) "We Tried On Oscar Dresses, And This Is What Happened"

By using the pronoun “we”, these headlines are obscuring ideology by presenting the BuzzFeed team as fellow victims of body shaming, with the content of the articles mainly focusing on the positive reactions obtained from other people in terms of compliments when these women “worked out for 90 days straight” as asserted in (33) or hired a stylist to dress them (34). While these articles are not explicitly stating that working out more or dressing better will make women more attractive, the implication of the positive reactions suggest that women should want to be more attractive, and should therefore be motivated by BuzzFeed to do these things. BuzzFeed is therefore yet again positioning itself as a helpful, motivational tool rather than attaching the propagation of beauty ideology to itself.

Of those articles lacking attribution (75,31%), a total of 66,67% were of a shaming or contradictory nature, which is significant when considering that the articles that were directly attributed to BuzzFeed were of a seemingly positive nature. This is especially interesting

because the lack of attribution makes it possible for BuzzFeed to claim plausible deniability, meaning that despite the fact that the majority of articles were directly shaming in nature, BuzzFeed has the opportunity to deny responsibility for the act of body shaming.

Mongie (2013: 143) posits that, in terms of ideological (re)production, “non-neutral attributive verbs” such as “claim”, “admit” and “explain” are “most likely to influence the way in which the reader interprets the source’s contribution. In addition to this, Mongie (2013: 144) asserts that “credibility is [typically] emphasized by explicit reference to a source’s expertise, personal involvement, or authority”, most commonly conveyed through apparently neutral news articles, while “credibility may be de-emphasised by a lack of specific attribution”. An example of heightened credibility while still deflecting attribution can be found in (35), where two separate attributive verbs are distinguishable:

(35) Maggie Gyllenhaal Said She Was Told 37 Is Too Old To Play A 55-Year-Old Man’s Love Interest

This particular headline clearly removes responsibility for the content of the article from the author by claiming that “Gyllenhaal said” that “she was told” that “37 is too old to play a 55-year old man’s love interest”, implying that the author agrees with this claim without stating it explicitly. The article’s credibility is also heightened by the author directly implicating Maggie Gyllenhaal as the source of the content, making it more believable and therefore less open to criticism.

Body shaming has evolved from the macro level in the media to the micro level of everyday interactions, but it is significant to note that these everyday interactions then condone body shaming as a social norm, which is in turn perpetuated by the media. This cycle is demonstrative of Gee’s (2014: 35) final building task, that of sign and system knowledge, which explains how it is possible for language to impact reality and vice versa.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed analysis of the data acquired from BuzzFeed’s online archive, with discussions of relevant qualitative examples as well as a quantitative overview of the corpus. The following chapter will provide the reader with a discussion of the findings of the study and come to a conclusion in terms of the (re)construction of female identities in the media.

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide insight into the most significant findings of the study in terms of the nature of discourse(s) surrounding female identities as portrayed in online tabloid media, as represented by BuzzFeed. Furthermore, this discussion will include commentary on the relationship between female misogyny and feminism as illustrated by the data analysis. Finally, this chapter will present the limitations of the study, as well as suggestions for further research.

6.2 Findings of the study

The most significant findings of this study lie in the examination of the nature of the discourse found in the media's construction of women's bodies; which yielded the conclusion that BuzzFeed's (re)construction of women's bodies (and therefore also their identities as a consequence of internalisation of ideology) is mainly of a shaming nature, particularly in terms of overall appearance as influenced by body shape, fitness and eating habits. Furthermore, the study found that the parts of women's bodies that are most typically shamed in the media is the face, hair, skin, stomach and breasts, which might contribute to many women's insecurity about these particular parts of their bodies. These aspects will be discussed in 6.2.1, followed by a discussion of the findings related to primary ideologies in 6.2.2, and finally by a discussion of the findings related to attribution and justification in 6.2.3.

6.2.1 Findings related to most commonly discussed topics and body parts

In terms of the most commonly discussed topics, this study revealed that overall appearance was discussed in a shaming manner in more than half of the total amount of articles. This indicates a significant amount of discourse surrounding the physical image of women, which one would imagine to be an arbitrary topic in news media. Furthermore, the analysis shows that, while weight was not directly addressed, it is clear that from the discussion of body shape, fitness and eating habits, weight is implicitly shamed in more than three quarters of the corpus. It was also found that attitudes surrounding the discursive (re)construction of female identity were primarily ambiguous in terms of articles that appear to contain content of a body proud

nature as these articles mostly also contained implicit indicators of body shaming, which then served to undermine the apparent body positive message conveyed by these articles.

6.2.2 Findings related to primary ideologies and their linguistic articulation

The primary ideologies that could be identified through the critical discourse analysis of the total corpus were objectification in terms of female misogyny and misandry, which made up more than a quarter of the corpus. Possibly the most interesting finding of the study is the relationship between female misogyny and feminism, with only a minor difference in the amount of times these ideologies could be identified. In accordance with Elison et al's (2006)'s theory on strategies to manage shame, this relationship seems to demonstrate a shift in power dynamics – women appear to be empowered through body shaming other women, which makes sense in terms of being a defensive strategy to deflect or project traditional beauty ideology. Furthermore, a direct link between misogyny and female misogyny was identified, which makes the fact that feminism could be identified in more than one third of the corpus all the more surprising.

The study also found that the amount of articles that were shaming but also possessed certain feminist undertones was significant in terms of Murnen and Smolak's (2009) study, seemingly disproving the hypothesis that women who identify as feminists are supposedly "less concerned with body image" (Murnen and Smolak 2009: 195).

In addition to this, the study indicates a proliferation of self-help articles present in the content of articles generated by BuzzFeed, which points to the presupposition that BuzzFeed's readership is assumed to take on the identity of individuals in desperate need of help in terms of weight loss, eating healthier, dressing better and therefore looking better in terms of overall appearance. This links with Conradie's (2012: 410) notion of the media positioning itself as the reader's friend, giving advice where supposedly needed.

6.2.3 Findings related to attribution and justification

It was not surprising to find that most of the ideologies that could be identified were mainly indirectly articulated throughout the totality of the corpus, and that body shaming was not at all justified but rather remained unattributed, allowing for the possibility of plausible deniability. Interestingly, more than two thirds of the articles lacking attribution were of a

shaming or contradictory nature, which links with society's apparent need for downward social comparison when it comes to identity formation. Furthermore, the study illustrates that the content of BuzzFeed's articles are particularly problematic in terms of apparent truth-value; it is possible that a lack of critical thinking on the part of BuzzFeed's readership may lead to misconceptions and misrepresentations of women as BuzzFeed primarily makes use of citizen journalists – that is to say, writers who do not necessarily possess the skills expected of ethically aware writers.

6.3 Limitations of study

The primary limitation of this study was the capturing of BuzzFeed content in text files, which meant that eight of a total of 90 articles were accidentally deleted from the corpus, and could not be identified in the corpus. Moreover, the restricted scope of the study did not allow for observing change in the (re)construction of female identity over a more significant period of time, which would have been useful in terms of identifying changes in the discursive realisation of ideologies surrounding the notion of beauty.

6.4 Conclusions and recommendations for further research

From the findings of this study, it is reasonable to conclude that online news media sites such as BuzzFeed have a significant influence on the discursive (re)construction of reality, potentially impacting common beliefs and attitudes toward traditional ideology surrounding the abstract and subjective notion of beauty. While it is possible that some readers might view BuzzFeed content more critically than others, this does not detract from the articles' potential for body shaming. The (re)production of this ideology of beauty – whether it be explicit or implicit through the use of presupposition and implication or downward comparison through metaphor, in turn supports the concept of a singular, universal female identity. Finally, and most significantly, the discursive construction of this universal ideal of a female identity serves to create certain societal expectations of femininity, which makes it all the more difficult for women to challenge and (re)construct this idea and to reclaim their own identity as individuals with unique experiences, backgrounds and worldviews.

In terms of suggestions for further research, the investigation and comparison of how lifestyle magazines for men and women respectively construct the notion of female identity, with particular focus on the differences and similarities between these discursive constructions,

would be relevant and of great benefit to other researchers with similar interests in furthering the cause for equality between the sexes.

Furthermore, it would be fascinating to perceive the different ways in which other media (such as television, radio and music lyrics) portray the idea of femininity, and to determine if femininity leaves space for bisexual, lesbian or transsexual individuals in any manner.

I feel that this particular field of study is significant because body shaming perpetuates gender inequality and power imbalances as a result of gendered discourse concerning women's identities. Body shaming has a profound effect on the formation of young girls' identity and self-worth, which serves as a distraction from those aspects of personal development that would benefit them as adults.

References

- Bakhtin, M. M. 2004. Dialogic Origin and Dialogic Pedagogy of Grammar: Stylistics in Teaching Russian Language in Secondary School. *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology*, 42.6: 12-49
- Breeze, R. 2009. Tarnished Stars: The discourses of celebrity in the British tabloid press. *Odisea* ISSN: 1578-3820
- Brokensha, S. 2011. Noticing ‘Us’ and ‘Them’ Constructions: The Pedagogical Implications of a Critical Discourse Analysis of Referring in Political Discourse. *Per Linguam*, 27.1: 56-73
- Browne, J.L. et al. 2013. ‘I Call It The Blame And Shame Disease’: A qualitative study about perceptions of social stigma surrounding Type 2 Diabetes. *BMJ Open*, 3: 1-10
- Buszek, M.E. 2006. Pin-Up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality and Popular Culture. London: Duke University Press
- Conradie, M. 2012. Constructing Femininity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Cosmo. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*, 29.4: 401-417
- Eisenchlas, S.A. 2012. Gendered discursive practices on-line. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 44: 335-345
- Els, C. Constructing Xenophobic Discourses: The case of the Daily Sun. *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Africa*, 44.2: 47-67
- Fairclough, N. 2003. *Analysing Discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. London: Routledge
- Gauntlett, D. 2006. *Media, Gender and Identity: An Introduction*. London: Routledge
- Gee, J.P. 2014. *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. 4th ed. London: Routledge.
- Gilbert, J. et al. 2014. A Qualitative Study of the Understanding and Use of ‘Compassion Focused Coping Strategies’ in People Who Suffer From Serious Weight Difficulties. *Journal of Compassionate Health Care*, 1.9: 1-10
- Grabe, S. et al. 2007. Body Objectification and Depression in Adolescents: The Role of Gender, Shame and Rumination. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 31: 164-174
- Green, G. 1989. *Pragmatics and Natural Language Understanding*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Guimond, S. (ed.) 2006. *Social Comparison and Social Psychology: Understanding Cognition, Intergroup Relations, and Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harcup, T. and O’Neill, D. 2001. What Is News? Galtung and Ruge Revisited. *Journalism Studies*, 2.2: 261-280

- Hyland, K. (ed.) *Discourse Studies Reader: Essential Excerpts*. London: Bloomsbury
- Izgarjan, A. et al. 2014. Gender aspect in humorous discourse in popular women's magazines in Serbia and the US. Novi Sad: Plenum Publishers
- Johansson, S. 2007. *Reading Tabloids: Tabloid Newspapers and Their Readers*. Sweden: Södertörns Högskola
- Johnston, J. and Taylor, J. 2008. Feminist Consumerism and Fat Activists: A Comparative Study of Grassroots Activism and the Dove Real Beauty Campaign. *Signs*, 33.4: 941-966
- Major, B., Testa, M., Blysm, W., H.; Suls, J. and Wills, T.A. (eds). 1991. *Social comparison: Contemporary theory and research*. Hillsdale, NJ, England: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Matos, M. et al. 2013. Internalising Early Memories of Shame and Lack of Safeness and Warmth: The Mediating Role of Shame and Depression. *Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 41: 479-493
- McKay, T. 2013. Female Self-Objectification: Causes, Consequences and Prevention. *McNair Scholars Research Journal*, 6.1: 53-70
- Mitra, A. and Watts, E. 2002. Theorising Cyberspace: The Idea of Voice Applied to the Internet Discourse. *New Media Society*, 4: 479
- Mongie, L.D. 2013. *The Discourse of Gay Liberation: The Portrayal of the Gay Liberation Movement in South African News Media from 1982 to 2006*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Stellenbosch
- Murnen, S.K. and Smolak, L. 2009. Are Feminist Women Protected From Body Image Problems? A Meta-Analytic Review of Relevant Research. *Sex Roles*, 60: 186-197
- Nuttall, S. and Micheal, C. (eds.) 2000. *Senses of Culture: South African Cultural Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Ojerholm, A.J. and Rothblum, E.D. 1999. The Relationships of Body Image, Feminism and Sexual Orientation in College Women. *Feminism & Psychology*, 9.4: 431-448
- Peterson, R.D. et al. 2008. Empowerment and Powerlessness: A Closer Look at the Relationship Between Feminism, Body Image and Eating Disturbance. *Sex Roles*, 58: 639-648
- Pinker, S., Nowak, M.A. 2007. The logic of indirect speech. *Proc Natl Acad Sci USA* 105: 833-838.
- Ringrose, J. and Renold, E. 2012. Slut-shaming, girl power and 'sexualisation': thinking through the politics of the international SlutWalks with teen girls. *Gender and Education*, 24.3: 333-343
- Senft, T.M. et al. 2015. What Does the Selfie Say? Investigating a Global Phenomenon. *International Journal of Communication*, 9.

- Streiliz, L. and Steenveld, L. 2010. Thinking About South African Tabloid Newspapers. *Ecquid Novi – Media Forum*: 266-268
- Sutin, A. and Terracciano, A. 2013. Perceived Weight Discrimination and Obesity. *PloS ONE*, 8.7: 1-3
- Tangney, J.P. et al. 2007. Moral Emotions and Moral Behaviour. *Annual Reviews Psychology*, 58: 345-372
- Van Dijk, T.A. 1984. *Prejudice in Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Van Dijk, T.A. 1990. Social Cognition and Discourse. *Handbook of Language and Social Psychology*. H. Giles and W.P. Robinson (eds.) Amsterdam: John Wiley & Sons Ltd
- Van Dijk, T.A. 1998. Opinions and ideologies in the press. *Approaches to Media Discourse*. A. Bell and P. Garret (eds.) Oxford: Blackwell Publishers
- Van Niekerk, A. and Jenkinson, A. 2013. The Use of Sexual Controversy in South African Advertising: A Pragmatic Analysis. *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Africa*, 44.2: 29-46
- Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. 2001. *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage Publications
- Womersley, G. et al. 2011. *The Construction of Shame in Feminist Reflexive Practice and Its Manifestations in a Research Relationship*. Cape Town: Sage Publications
- Zurbriggen, E.L. 2013. Objectification, Self-Objectification, and Societal Change. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 1.1: 188-215