

# Selfie culture

## An analysis of women's perceptions of selfie pictures

Christiane Schmidt


View metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk

provided by Helsinki University Library

COBE

University of Helsinki  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Media and Global Communication (MA)  
Master's Thesis

October 2016

 HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI		
Tiedekunta/Osasto – Fakultet/Sektion – Faculty Faculty of Social Sciences		Laitos – Institution – Department Department of Social Research/Communication
Tekijä – Författare – Author Christiane Schmidt		
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Selfie culture: An analysis of women's perceptions of selfie pictures		
Oppiaine – Läroämne – Subject Media and Global Communication		
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Master's Thesis	Aika – Datum – Month and year October 2016	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages 102 pages + 7 pages references + 3 pages appendix
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract  <p>Because of the common use of picture editing programs for mass media content, such as advertising images, the Western beauty ideal has reached a more rigid and uniform standard. This has not only been proven to be linked to a negative body image, but also stands in close relation to the expectation for women to measure up to it. Even though it has become common knowledge that such media content is not a reflection of reality, selfies on social media networks prove that there are indeed women that embody the desired cultural beauty ideal. Over the past years social media networks, such as Instagram, have experienced a significant rise in popularity. Especially celebrities, but also a large amount of non-celebrities, use social media channels in order to promote themselves by sharing body pictures with other users.</p> <p>This thesis analyzes the effect selfie images of both, a celebrity and non-celebrity woman, have on female recipients. The main question of this research is: How do women feel about their own bodies when being confronted with images of bodies of non-celebrities, as well as celebrities?</p> <p>The conducted focus group interviews and the content and thematic analysis revealed that women do not necessarily experience a negative body image after encountering selfie images that conform to the beauty ideal. Instead, different factors were taken into consideration that allowed making distinctions between celebrities and non-celebrities. Specifically, when considering the circumstances of the different lifestyles, the beauty ideal and a perfect body became less relevant. In this regard, celebrities rely on posting such selfie images on social media platforms in order to uphold their image and maintain a certain status. In contrast non-celebrities were perceived to do so out of existing insecurities, such as depending on reassurance from others. However, even though the celebrity selfie was preferred based on aesthetic reasons, the non-celebrity selfie was more relatable because of its realistic appearance. The expressed perceptions towards the selfies also differed noticeably when considering the participants' age as a variable.</p>		
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Selfies; social media; body image; beauty standards; self-esteem; body; celebrities; non-celebrities; gender; culture; feminism.		

## **Acknowledgments**

First of all, I would like to thank the University of Helsinki for admitting me to this Master's program and giving me the once-in-a-lifetime experience of being a student in Finland.

I would also like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Marko Ampuja, for his guidance and endless patience throughout the process of completing this Master's thesis. I greatly appreciate that I could always turn to him and count on his advice whenever I was struggling with something. His support and encouragement were of tremendous help.

Furthermore, I would like to say thank you to all of the interview participants, who took the time and effort to take part in my research. I could have not completed this thesis without your support.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, Roland and Elvira Schmidt, for their lifelong love and guidance. Their encouragement and support did not only enable me to make the right choices in my life, but also shaped me into the person I am today. Words cannot express my gratitude for always being there for me and believing in me, especially at times when I did not believe in myself.

## Table of contents:

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	6
1.1. Research Questions and the Structure of the Thesis.....	9
<b>2. Theoretical Background</b> .....	10
2.1. Approaching Feminist Theory .....	10
2.1.1. Main Points and Theories in Feminism.....	13
2.1.2. Masculinity vs. Femininity .....	16
2.1.3. Sex, Gender and the Body .....	17
2.2. Beauty Ideals.....	20
2.2.1. The Idea of Beauty.....	21
2.2.2. Beauty in Relation to Sex and Gender .....	23
2.2.3. The Importance of Beauty and its Effect .....	24
2.3. Femininity in Media Productions .....	30
2.3.1. The Female Image in the Media .....	30
2.3.2. Picture Editing.....	33
2.4. Digital Media .....	35
2.4.1. Selfies and Social Networks .....	36
<b>3. Methodology</b> .....	41
3.1. Study Design.....	42
3.2. Data Collection in Detail.....	46
3.2.1. Sample Collection .....	51
3.3. Data Analysis Methods.....	52
3.4. Validity and Ethics .....	55
<b>4. Analysis</b> .....	60
4.1. Lifestyle .....	60
4.2. Social Media Content .....	65
4.3. Cultural Differences .....	72
4.4. Beauty Standards .....	73
4.5. Health.....	80
4.6. Moral Concerns.....	82

4.7. Reactions and Emotions.....	85
<b>5. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>90</b>
5.1. Limitations of the Study.....	97
5.2. Suggestions for further Research.....	100
<b>References</b> .....	<b>103</b>
<b>Appendices</b> .....	<b>110</b>

## 1. Introduction

Characteristically for today's mediated world and societies there is an overflow of images, messages and information, which are found in nearly every aspect of daily life. This is especially noticeable in the advertising business, which faces the challenge of standing out in the massive flow of information and still being able to persuade consumers. Because of the constant bombardment of images and messages, recipients have become selective in the information they choose to receive, which Mukherjee and Srinivasan (2013) explain as underlying attention mechanisms that vary depending on choices, problems and situations. This applies especially to the behavior of consumers, which only consider a subset of the available options because of limitations in attention or cognition. (Ibid., p. 123.)

Because of the overload of available information in today's mediated society and its correlation with selectivity, distributors need to take measures in order to make their content more appealing to ensure its reception. This applies especially to the advertising industry, which follows the main goal of selling products and services and therefore needs to further attract customers. As Nick Kolenda (2015) states, one of the tactics is the use of attractive models in visual advertising, if they are relevant for a product. Thus, attractive people actually have the ability to enhance the persuasiveness of an advertisement and lead to an evaluation that is more favorable for the product. However, this is only the case if it is relevant to the category of the praised product, such as luxury, appearance, art, beauty and health.

As a study by Trampe et al. (2010) found out, physically attractive models are valued as useful advertising tools, if the product itself is relevant for physical attractiveness. This helps to understand the widespread use of physically attractive models – celebrities or non-celebrities – in various types of advertisements and commercials, which range from beauty and diet products to phone services and computers. Trampe et al. refer to numerous, previously conducted studies, such as by Caballero & Pride (1984), Chaiken (1979) and Reingen & Kernan (1993), which already found that an attractive model can

affect the attitudes towards a product, advertisement and message favorably. (Trampe et al., 2010, pp. 1101-1104.)

The use of attractive models and the perception of their attractiveness through the consumers reflect on the beauty ideal that is dominant in Western societies. It demonstrates a certain expectation of perfection towards the female body, but often leaves out the acknowledgement that it embodies an ideal that is nearly impossible to achieve. Besides the existence of different body shapes and sizes amongst women, there are simply too many demands that dictate not only a slim body, but also a perfect butt, breasts, etc. Serdar (2005) explains that the images that circulate in the mass media are an unrealistic and unhealthy standard of beauty for women, but nonetheless a strong influential factor in their self-perception. This is also connected to the idealization of thinness and the need to fulfill this ideal in order to appear attractive, as well as the expectation to live up to it and stigmatize the people who do not.

However, the existence of certain beauty ideals within a society is nothing new and can be found in every historical epoch. This does not describe a modern issue, nor does it apply solely for a specific culture, as it has been ongoing in nearly every society for centuries. Nonetheless, the contemporary part of this issue is the use of the mass media in the distribution of the current beauty standards in images of women that fulfill an unrealistic beauty ideal. This sends not only the message that it is normal to measure up to this ideal, but also makes it impossible to escape from those at the same time.

Another factor that contributes to this issue is that in the past years the actual body sizes of women became larger, while the beauty standards have grown thinner. This resulted in a discrepancy, which has further increased the difficulty for women to live up to this sociocultural ideal. (Serdar, 2005.)

Because of the gap between reality and ideal, it has become a standard procedure to Photoshop media images. Editing pictures to perfection is part of a marketing procedure that is not only limited to advertising, but is also present in celebrity culture. It is commonly used to enhance pictures and create an artificial image that fulfills the beauty ideal. According to Karpasitis and Kaniadakis (2015), Photoshopping is connected to

the marketing and sale of goods, where visuals and graphics are highly important to the advertising industry, as they are most effective when the visuals stand out in the competition and are relevant to the marketing message. The right visuals can attract customers and increase the purchasing power of a product. (Ibid., p. 187.)

However, with the frequent use of the program Photoshop, the artificial creation of an unrealistic beauty ideal has led to an intense emphasis and attention on women's bodies. By wiping out any imperfections, it delivers the message that women should always be skinny, young and free of any flaws, which has distorted the perception of beauty along with its achievability. Hereby, advertising excludes bodies that do not measure up to the beauty ideal, by either degrading them or not showing them at all. Therefore, the expectation that comes along with it applies pressure to the female recipients and distorts one's self-perception, especially amongst young women. (Werbewatchgroup Wien, n. d., p. 12.) This has been connected to the significant rise in body-dissatisfaction and self-consciousness, as well as eating disorders and has led to different measures to educate the public that these images are far from reality and regulate picture editing itself (Diller, 2011; Morris & Katzman, 2003). An example of this would be 'The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty', which was launched in 2004 in order to explain the unrealistic nature of advertising images and point out that even models have imperfections (Dove, n. d.).

There has been a significant rise in the uploading of selfies onto social media platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram. On Instagram alone, over 23 million pictures come up with the use of the hashtag #selfie and about 51 million under the hashtag #me. (BBC News, 2013.) The uploading of selfies is not only limited to celebrities, but also non-celebrities, who take an active role in posting images of their bodies onto social media. A large number of selfies show women's bodies that are actually conforming to the current beauty standards with a "flawless" face and body. This leads to a different angle of the above mentioned issue, as the beauty ideal might not only be an artificial creation of edited advertising pictures, but can also be found on social media profiles. This does not only demonstrate a new form of self-advertising, which is no longer limited to celebrities or products, but also outlines the fact that non-celebrity women can embody



the current beauty ideal, which raises the question of to which degree selfies in online environments and social media platforms affect the female viewers.

### **1.1. Research Questions and the Structure of the Thesis**

Because of the findings in previously conducted research about women's self-esteem in correlation to the exposure to Photoshopped advertising models, it raises the question if selfies on social media have a similar effect, which leads to my main research question:

*How do women feel about their own bodies when being confronted with images of bodies of non-celebrities, as well as celebrities?*

My sub-questions are:

*Do those images have an effect on the perception of the female body and self-esteem?*

*Does the modern image and ideal of beauty have a negative effect on women and cause them to feel resentment towards or negativity regarding their own bodies (especially when seeing other women's bodies)?*

In order to approach this issue, I will reflect on the relevant sources of literature and further collect data in the form of focus group interviews with women. Therefore, chapter 2 will give an overview of the ideas and theories of feminism, the female role in society, as well as sex and gender. I will further discuss the importance of the body and beauty, as well as the media's role in relation to digital culture with the particular focus on selfies. Chapter 3 will deal with the methods of gathering and analyzing the data, giving an overview of my study design, followed by a detailed explanation of the data and sample collection and an in depth discussion of the data analysis methods – focus group interviews, as well as content and thematic analysis. Lastly, it will outline the ethics and validity for this study. The analysis in Chapter 4 will discuss the relevant content of the interviews and reflect critically on the study and its possible limitations.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

When handling this subject, the first gaze should be directed towards the underlying theoretical structures, starting with an outline of feminism and its main points before narrowing it down to the specifics in order to build a theoretical framework. The following subchapters will look at the idea of feminism, its key points and the roles that masculinity and femininity play in it. They will further explain the relation feminism has to sex and gender, as well as the importance of these aspects in terms of the body. Because of the angle of this thesis, I will set sex and gender in relation to beauty, as well as beauty's historical and regional factors and lastly the importance and effect it has in a society. I will also outline the connection between femininity and media productions and its content. The final part of this chapter will describe the connection the discussed issues have to digital media, which will focus on social networks and selfies, as well as their relevance.

### **2.1. Approaching Feminist Theory**

In order to address the main idea of feminism, it is necessary to understand the foundation of its theory, which is defined as the idea and belief that both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities, in terms of a political, economic and social equality of the sexes. It is considered as an organized activity, which supports women's rights and interests. (Merriam-Webster.) As Crossman (2014a) states, feminism is one of the major modern theories in sociology that examines the status of both men and women within a society with the main purpose to use the knowledge of this in order to enable improvements in women's lives. However, feminist theories do not only address the differences between the sexes, but also amongst women, in terms of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality and age.

If looking at Judith Butler's (1999) description, feminism addresses the underlying assumption of the existence of a shared identity amongst women. This does not only add feminist interests and goals to discourse itself, but also explains the subject to which

the political representations are directed at. In this regard, the term outlines the normative function of language, which can either reveal or distort the assumptions about truth, in terms of women, and plays an important role in their representation, support and implementation of their political visibility. This is an important factor when considering the omnipresence of cultural aspects and their influence on women's lives, which are either misrepresented or not represented at all. (Ibid., pp. 3-4.) Therefore, language in itself and its structure is not misogynist, but has the power to subordinate and exclude women, depending on its applications (ibid., p. 35).

According to Beasley (1999), feminism points out the mainstream social and political ideas, which accept and conform to the subordinate position that women maintain in social and political life. The underlying factor of this approach is the idea that the mainstream theory takes the subordination of women for granted and accepts it as given, assuming that it is not considered as a topic of high relevance in political thinking. Even though some concern has been expressed towards emancipation, equality and rights, a woman's position is still perceived as a given factor and only receives marginal interest, which is criticized in feminism as a result of male superiority and centrality. (Ibid., pp. 4-6.) This can be further explained by patriarchy, a core concept in feminism, which Walby (1990) defines as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (ibid., p. 20). An important element in this definition is the acknowledgement of social structures, along with its implication to reject biological determinism and the dominant position of men and subordinate position of women (ibid., p. 20).

Heterosexuality and discourse are two aspects that tie into the limitations of women and are grounds for feminism's claims. Hence, heterosexuality is considered as a central institution in men's domination over women and is also an important factor in the radical feminist thought on sexuality itself. (Walby, 1990, pp. 119-121.) Because sex is a mark resulting from an institutionalized heterosexuality, it is part of patriarchal structures, which contributes to controlling women through sexuality. This is not only based on the restricted heterosexual identities, but also ties into the distinctive reproductive functions of women. (Butler, 1999, pp. 34-35; Walby, 1990, p. 127.)

Another contributing factor is discourse, which cannot be grasped solely by its function of maintaining the subordinate position of women, but also in the undermining of the unity and universality of feminism. Because of its demand on a stable subject of feminism, it understands women as a seamless category, which leads to the refusal of the category itself. Thus, the exclusion demonstrates the limiting and regulatory effects of the construction. (Butler, 1999, p. 7.)

In sum, feminism addresses the status of both men and women within a society, along with the female representations in cultural life, as well as the issue of the acceptance of a woman's subordinate status in mainstream thought (Beasley, 1999, p. 6). Feminism further criticizes the existing misogyny or sexual hierarchy and focuses on considering women as the subject of the analysis. This further leans towards the demand for expansion and a higher degree of awareness of this issue in social and political life and away from the non-feminist thought. (Ibid., p. 36.)

Even though feminism challenges the existing subordinate status of women in society, it faces certain limitations. The strong emphasis on womanhood, and especially the term 'women' suggests a commonly shared identity and the view of women as a unity and as an undivided entity. Based on that, the term itself has become rather troublesome, since it assumes a universal basis of feminism in a cross-cultural identity. This has led to a closer examination of if there is actually a unity of women, as well as the essential differences between men and women as part of a wider debate on essentialism. A result of this is the idea that the oppression of women is only visible in a singular form in the universal structure of patriarchy, which has received some criticism because of the failure to see gender oppression inside its concrete cultural context. (Butler, 1999, pp. 6-7; Walby, 1990, pp. 14-15.) Because of feminism's attempt, along with its universal basis, to apply a form of Western oppression onto non-Western cultures, this further led to the construction of a 'Third World' view. Because of various cultural differences, it is necessary to create a universally recognized status for patriarchy, which would also help to strengthen feminism's claims. (Butler, 1999, pp. 6-7.)

### 2.1.1. Main Points and Theories in Feminism

After previously stating the main idea of feminism, I will outline the concrete key aspects that fall under the feministic approach, by giving an overview of the main strands of feminism, along with the points that they address. Since feministic theory compares a woman's subordinate position to a man's, Beasley (1999) states in this regard that it circles around women as the subject of a group that is identified because of its sex differentiation. While there are different dimensions underlying the perceptions based on sex differences, it can be broken down into five main points, outlining the part that sexual characteristics play. (Ibid., p. 15.)

The first point describes the notion of 'sameness', which is based on the assumption that both men and women are generally speaking the same. Thus, the non-feministic thought perceives women as part of 'humanity', which sees men and women as equals based on the idea that both sexes are human and share a human spirit. However, it also addresses the oppression of women, due to the restrictions and limits in the believed human potential, which collides with the different roles and social functions that men and women have. This is addressed by the second point that sees women as 'different' to men, which underlies the emphasis on the differences within the male agenda in relation to the cultural construct of women, as different rules apply to men and women because of the visible distinctions. (Bacchi, 1990, pp. 6ff; Beasley, 1999, pp. 15-16.)

The third point states the approach to 'eschew the sameness/difference dichotomy' and is influenced by the two previously mentioned key points. It shifts the focus towards the aspect of organization and the effects of power and criticizes the either/or choices of the opposing alternatives in 'sameness' and 'difference'. (Beasley, 1999, pp. 15-16.) The fourth approach, still acknowledging the differences in the physiological aspects, takes a more political standpoint and states that men and women can act as 'potential political allies' in struggles that affect both. The final key point describes the aspect in which some feminists see women as morally superior and 'better' than men, turning the sex based hierarchical relationship in mainstream theory upside down. (Ibid., pp. 17-18.)

Besides stating the main points in feminist theory, it is also necessary to describe the different strands and orientations in feminism. Accordingly, the feminist theory consists of four major types or categories – gender differences, gender inequality, gender oppression and structural oppression (Crossman, 2014a). These differences are better known as the basic strands of feminism: liberal, radical, and Marxist/socialist feminism. Liberal feminism is probably the most known form of feminist thought and is often considered as a synonym for feminism itself because of its liberal ideas and moderate composition. It explains a woman's position in society under the aspect of unequal rights or barriers in political, legal and institutional struggles that act as preventing measures from participating in the public world outside of the household. These limit a woman's individual autonomy and freedom through others by denying opportunities of self-realization because of sex differences and different considered values in terms of womanhood and femininity. (Beasley, 1999, pp. 51-53; Crossman, 2014a.)

While many aspects in feminist theory address the idea of a 'malestream' thought, the strand of radical feminism rejects the liberal idea of the public world of men. It analyzes gender inequality by the domination of men over women and considers them as the main beneficiaries in the subordination. (Beasley, 1999, pp. 53-55.) This intensifies the idea of gender oppression and gender differences by stating that women actually face oppression, subordination and abuse by men because of a power imbalance (Crossman, 2014a). This form of domination is solely defined by patriarchy and not by a by-product, such as capitalism. Especially the sexual aspect is perceived as a social construct of only male notions of desire that forces the male notion of femininity onto women. (Walby, 1990, p. 3.) The critique towards this approach is based on the lack of consideration to integrate women into a male society and other areas of activity associated with men. It solely emphasizes the positive values of womanhood and concentrates on women's sexual oppression, by leaving out other factors, such as social class, which limits this approach and encourages the degree of separatism from men. (Beasley, 1999, pp. 53-54.)

Following Karl Marx's work and idea of hierarchical class relations, Marxist feminists see these factors as the source of power and oppression in regards to all existing

inequalities. Therefore, sexual oppression does not derive from discrimination based on sex, but is a dimension of class power, where the exploitation does not only apply to class but also to gender. (Beasley, 1999, p. 60; Crossman, 2014a.) Thus, gender inequality as a deduction from capitalism is no longer an independent system of patriarchy, but more a by-product of the domination over labor. It explains gender relations through the centered position of class relations and economic exploitation of one class by another. This rather narrow approach has been criticized for incorrectly reducing gender relations to the economic relations of capitalism by failing to recognize the independence of the gender dynamic. (Walby, 1990, pp. 3-4.)

The debates around the cause for social inequality between radical and Marxist feminists in the 1960s and 1970s has led to the development of social feminism. This approach still contains some elements of Marxism in terms of the significance of class distinction and labor, but also includes the idea that sexual oppression is not a term of class division. Therefore, a woman's subordination is a development of class-based societies, in which class division is not a factor in the cause for oppression. (Beasley, 1999, p. 62.) This form of feminism, also called the 'dual-systems theory', is a synthesis of Marxist and radical feminist theory, as it does not solely focus on capitalism or patriarchy, but accepts that both systems are present and important in the structuring of contemporary gender relations. This is a result of the structures of a capitalist and patriarchal society, in which both systems are closely related to each other. (Walby, 1990, p. 5.)

Therefore, all of the approaches within feministic theory deal with imbalances of power based on someone's sex, which can restrict and oppress a person's life. That being so, the idea that an individual is different from another or even less capable than the opposite sex, further outlines the problematic aspect of sex and gender differences. Even though women have achieved an equal status within most dimensions of contemporary societies, there are still some remaining imbalances, which the following subchapters will approach.

### **2.1.2. Masculinity vs. Femininity**

The distinctions based on sex between men and women create the grounds for the labels of masculine and feminine behavior that serve the purpose of constructing categories that result in concrete actions. These induce two effects: strengthening the power of sex roles, and forming expectations for role-appropriate physical appearance or behavior based on one's sex. Therefore, the categories of male and female are not only socially constructed, but also strengthened through social behavior and interactions, resulting from growing up in a gendered society. (Bacchi, 1990, pp. 236ff.)

In order to grasp the issue connected to masculinity and femininity, the different requirements for a person within the natural and social world need to be acknowledged. To begin with, the human body qualifies as a starting point, which determines how it will be evaluated in relations with others in society; as humans are prone to experience the world based on their bodies and their sex (Elshtain, 1987, p. 146). This ties into the process of socialization, which has contributed to a traditional position of both masculine and feminine identities. While masculinity contains attributes, such as assertiveness, activeness, livelihood and taking an initiative, femininity connects to cooperation, passiveness, gentleness, as well as emotionality. Socialization already begins in childhood, when a boy or girl learns what behavior is appropriate for their sex by using rewards and punishments to establish the desired behaviors in a child. (Walby, 1990, p. 91.)

However, the process of socialization is not the only reflection of the desired masculine or feminine behavior patterns, as childhood itself is strongly gendered, which is noticeable in the gifts that children receive. While girls are most likely to be presented with dolls, boys receive train sets, Lego and are expected to play soldiers. This does not only reflect on adult roles in society, but serves also as a preparation for life within a certain gender role, such as childcare or warfare. However, these gender roles do not only occur within peoples' daily lives, but also circulate in the media, which is especially noticeable in advertising, where women are usually shown as either sexually glamorous or in the role of a wife and mother, while men hold positions of power. All



these aspects connect to socialization that is tied to various sources, such as family, media and education, while further outlining the reason for differentiation of the genders into masculinity and femininity. (Walby, 1990, pp. 92-93.)

Along with the development of ‘modernity’ during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a strong emphasis on the ideal, rational, autonomous and highly individualized human subject formed. This appears as rather ironic for women, as they are still experiencing gender inequality, even though they fit into the modern picture of an independent woman and have become economically independent, socially engaged and politically active. This might underlie a compromise in the modern identity, which is especially noticeable in the media and its revival of a beauty culture by spreading the representation of the female image in society. Even if the beauty ideal in itself might not be implicitly gendered, the social and cultural limitations could also hinder women from achieving self-determination by representing a new femininity, which is bodily, private, emotional and responsive that is rather dependent more than autonomous. In contrast, this never applied to men, as the masculine autonomy was never determined through the aesthetics of the male body. (Tincknell, 2013, pp. 83-84.)

### **2.1.3. Sex, Gender and the Body**

A big part of feminist theory are the aspects of patriarchy, gender inequality and oppression, as well as the importance of masculinity and femininity. In order to allow a deeper understanding of this issue, it is fundamentally important to take the context of the main aspects, sex and gender, into consideration and outline their meaning and importance in society, as well as the relation to the body.

With sex and gender being a major part in the current feminist topics, it is necessary to explain the meaning behind those words. The term ‘sex’ describes the distinctions that can be made based on the biological criteria and is only limited to those facts. ‘Gender’ on the other hand, outlines a variety of aspects that are present in both bodily and behavioral cues. These cues refer to the way men and women are distinguished in everyday life and illustrate that these differences derive from social criteria. While the

word sex is commonly used to label and identify an individual as either male or female, gender is utilized for characteristic traits, as well as the appropriate behavior for the members of each category. (Archer & Lloyd, 1985, p. 17.)

The term gender can be primarily understood as a 'transhistorical' label for a category of a social agent due to biological characteristics and traits. In addition to this, it further combines references to a social position that embodies discriminatory and oppressive content lacking equality. Even further so than this, it stretches out applying this idea to the psychological contents and behavioral repertoire to a category labeled as masculine or feminine, which can be perceived as problematic when used as a generalization or universalized social category. By applying gender characteristics or sex-based categories onto people, a wide variety of problems can emerge, such as a dominant conception of power or the fact that people might not want to identify themselves with the inflicted gender role, as it can act as a social division. (Harrison & Hood-Williams, 2002, p. 2.)

This distinction has led to challenging the idea that biology is destiny, as well as to further arguments regarding the biological claim of sex and the cultural construction of gender. It led to the understanding that gender is neither caused by, nor as fixed as sex, since it cannot derive from sex in only one way if it represents the cultural meanings in form of the assumptions deriving from sex. Therefore, it can be limited by the radical discontinuity between a cultural construction of the body, which means that the construction of 'men' does not only apply to the bodies of males and vice versa. This means that there are not necessarily only two genders, which points out the assumption of a connection between sex and gender in which sex mirrors and restricts gender. If gender would be considered as fully independent of sex, then it would become a flexible category, which would no longer limit the attributes of 'masculine' and 'feminine' to a male or female body. If sex could be proven to be as culturally constructed as gender, the sex and gender difference would be nonexistent after all, turning sex into a neutral surface that culture acts upon. (Butler, 1999, pp. 9-11.) In this regard, culture can be understood as a certain framework, which guides actions, as well as social relations that involve specific assumptions or ideas that are taken for granted by the members within

that culture, making it difficult to overcome stigmata and boundaries. Especially the cultural perception of behavior patterns can lead to certain behavioral expectations towards the sexes, for example in regard to what is perceived as feminine and masculine behavior. (Alvesson & Billing, 1997, p. 105.)

The contributing factors to one's gender identity have been addressed by feminist sociology, stating that biology itself is not the sole factor, since it also derives from socialization. This can be found in the aspect of gender socialization, which defines the learning process of men and women regarding the expectations deriving from sex that cannot be only found in one's self-concept and social and political attitudes, but also in the perceptions and relationships with others. Therefore, gender is a crucial factor in understanding social relations, institutions and processes, which can possibly constitute problems since they show patterns of domination, subordination, inequality, oppression and opposition. Gender relations further seem to be formed through social constructions, which makes, for example, stereotypes socially constructed. This further contributes to the forming of one's gender identity that does not only affect the perception of one's own person and others, but also influences behavior and feelings about appearance and body image, specifically in women. (Alvesson & Billing, 1997, pp. 21-22; Crossman, 2014b.)

However, by the notion that gender is a cultural construct, this leads to the idea of a degree of determinism of gender meanings, which is applied onto the body. Hereby, the bodies are perceived as recipients of the given cultural concept that constructs gender. This would mean that if gender underlies cultural laws, it becomes a set of laws for individuals, which would make gender equally as determined as sex, in terms of the understanding that biology is destiny. By following this assumption, the biology itself would not be destiny, but more the culture of a person. This strongly ties into the debate over the meaning of construction, which also shares a connection to the polarity between free will and determinism. Consequently, the linguistic restriction of that thought both forms and limits the term of this debate. While the body in itself is a rather passive term within cultural meaning, the terms of those cultural laws enable determinism by inscribing meanings onto the body. This creates the perception of the

body as an instrument or medium, which relates only externally to a set of cultural meanings. (Butler, 1999, pp. 12-13.)

In the strong connection between sex and gender, the body holds a central position and represents the solidities of both men and women and helps to clarify and secure the difference between the two social categories of men and women, as well as the relations of subordination. This is based on the representations of the social world, as well as the assumptions that derive from its features and lead to certain roles that come along with connotations of drama and performance, as well as the confirmation of stereotypes. In this regard, sex is the common ground to refer to a biological reality, while gender allows to construct this reality. These distinctions between sex and gender have led to the idea that the body is somehow more real than personal traits, as the social world is something that has been constructed, but leaves out the fact that constructs can also carry falsity. However, these are perceived as less defiant than the obvious biological differences or even as inactive. (Harrison & Hood-Williams, 2002, pp. 16-18.)

These factors can lead to a degree of frustration, as the idea of receiving certain treatment based only on sex and the body due to a social construct can raise the feeling of being trapped in society's expectations and structures. However, this social construction is not as simple as it may appear, since it is made up of, and involves, different contexts. These determine or influence the way that the body is understood, as well as the meanings that it carries, along with the values that are connected to it. These contexts involve numerous different factors – historical, cultural, national, religious, economic, political and generic. (Brady & Schirato, 2011, p. 9.)

## **2.2. Beauty Ideals**

After outlining the key aspects of feministic theory, as well as the issues connected to sex and gender, it is necessary to set these factors into relation to beauty and beauty ideals within societies. Thus, the structure of society, along with the expectations towards the gender roles, especially towards women, can create an area of conflict. In

this thesis, I will solely focus on Western beauty ideals and discuss their meaning, the connection to feministic ideas, as well as their importance and effects for women.

### **2.2.1. The Idea of Beauty**

In order to understand the concept of beauty and its meaning, it needs to be defined what this term actually refers to. The word beauty describes “a combination of qualities, such as shape, colour, or form, that pleases the aesthetic senses, especially the sight” or “an attractive quality that gives pleasure to those who experience it or think about it, or a person who has this attractive quality” (Cambridge Dictionaries Online; Oxford Dictionaries).

These rather broad definitions outline the basic concept of beauty, but should be refined in order to grasp a more concrete cultural and personal context. According to Higgins (2000), the cultural perception of beauty involves a clustered concept, which contains a set of elements that occur together. These can be understood as the makeup of an orderly structured unity, which is formed by distinct elements. Under these elements fall factors such as perfection, epiphany, radiance, overpowering impact, as well as the incitement of love, which is in the ideal case separated from any personal agendas. (Ibid., p. 95.) This definition of the perception of beauty does not only see it as a phenomenon of something that is aesthetic in itself, but more of a complex interaction of different factors.

While the above-mentioned definitions of beauty give an understanding of the term, they do not outline the deep-rootedness of the issue in connection to the feministic points. Wolf (1991) states in this regard that feminism was of great help for empowerment and achievements in legal and reproductive rights, as well as the chance for a higher education or profession. With this overturn of the previous female roles in societies, women are no longer dependent on men or trapped in the role of a wife and mother, which strongly differs from former generations. However, there are still some restrictions that are enforced onto women that derive from factors that deal with the physical appearance, in terms of body, face, hair or clothes. (Ibid., p. 9.)

This refers to the ongoing struggles in granting women freedom and autonomy, enabling many women to now occupy positions of power and to enjoy legal recognition. But when comparing this rather positive development to previous generations, women might actually feel worse about themselves and their appearance today. This could be traced back to a degree of influence from the notions of beauty, which are connected to self-hatred and obsessions towards one's own physique, as well as the fear of aging, along with the loss of control that comes with it. According to Wolf (1991), this can be seen as "a violent backlash against feminism that uses images of female beauty as a political weapon against women's advancement: the beauty myth" (ibid., p. 10).

Beauty ideals have reached such a strong position in today's societies that they now overpower the previous myths regarding motherhood and the domesticity, chastity and passivity of women. This dominant position does not only embody the last remaining factor holding the power to control women, but is also undoing all the good things that derived from feminism. The beauty myth addresses beauty as a quality that exists objectively and universally, demonstrating the necessity for women to embody this quality and evoke the desires in men to possess women that measure up to it. These assumptions are based on the biological, sexual and evolutionary idea that strong men battle for beautiful women because they are assumed to be more valuable for reproduction. (Wolf, 1991, pp. 11-12.)

This perception displays a currency system of rigid beliefs and ideals that is determined by politics, which helps to secure and maintain the male dominance by valuing women in a strict vertical hierarchy. This is displayed through a culturally enforced physical standard, which further outlines the degree of power relations. Because Western women now hold more power and a higher degree of material strength, the strong emphasis on beauty is the last option to weaken the empowerment of modern women. Therefore, this psychological mechanism could be a symptom of the fear of women's freedom and autonomy within male-dominated institutions. (Wolf, 1991, pp. 11-16.)

### 2.2.2. Beauty in Relation to Sex and Gender

After elaborating on the meaning of the term beauty, it is necessary to outline how it ties into the aspect of sex and gender. As Peg Zeglin Brand (2000) explains: “Men have a long-established tradition of appreciating beauty in nature, art and women that is chronicled in histories of art, philosophy, and literature. (...) To sit at the table is even more complex for a woman since she cannot simply be an observer. Beginning at an early age, she must consciously choose to partake in the rites that involve beauty matters like lipstick, gloss and liner” (ibid., pp. 2-3).

As Laura Mulvey (1989) states, this can be traced back to sexual imbalance within the different roles between men and women; where men are the active observer and women are caught in the rather passive role of the subject that is being observed. This is defined as the male gaze, in which women are both looked at and displayed, while their outer appearance aims for a strong visual and erotic effect, along with the expectation to measure up to men’s desires by looking a certain way. (Ibid., p. 19.) Wolf’s (1991) reference to John Berger’s well-known quote (“Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only the relations of men to women, but the relation of women to themselves”) especially outlines the issue that despite the empowered status, it is still mandatory for women to be beautiful (ibid., p. 58).

Based on the equation ‘beauty equals attention’ this also includes the factor of undermining self-determination, self-confidence and autonomy. Hereby, the body is the playground for oppression, but at the same time a tool for liberation. Reasons for this can be found in the social conceptions of femininity, as well as in the determination of a woman’s value through others. (Haug, 1987, pp. 248-249.) Because of the expectations towards women, it creates an imbalance, as good looks are necessary for women to be recognized as feminine, but this does not apply for men in order to be recognized as masculine. Because of this asymmetry in perception, different social expectations and consequences have emerged for every sex and gender. (Freedman, 1989, p. 14.)

Because of the strong emphasis on beauty and the gender-specific differences, women tend to equalize their identity with their looks more than men do, which can lead to

feelings of incompetence and inferiority, but also cause a negative body image deriving from a lack of self-esteem. As research has shown, the self-concepts between men and women differ, since men tend to judge themselves according to their effectiveness and capabilities, while women evaluate themselves according to their own attractiveness. (Freedman, 1989, p. 52.) In this regard, attractiveness is more important for women because it shares a closer link to dating popularity and even to social class in marriage. The perception of beauty in women and its significance for femininity and a good personality is shared by both sexes, which is why beauty and body image impact the self-concept of girls and women more. (Fallon, 1994, p. 128.) This commonly shared perception of beauty can strengthen the feeling of hopelessness within women and further raise the vulnerability of having a depressive disorder, as many times women connect mental fears with a certain body issue. Instead of saying “I am unhappy” a woman might say “I am too fat”, which could not only isolate the depression, but also creates the illusion of potential control over the problem itself at the same time. (Freedman, 1989, p. 53.)

### **2.2.3. The Importance of Beauty and its Effect**

Beauty ideals have existed throughout history and are present in every culture or society of the world. Many ancient cultures practiced body modification in order to achieve certain beauty ideals, ranging from artificial cranial deformations in old Egypt, piercings of the ears, nose and lips in Indian tribes in Latin America, to the foot bindings in ancient China. (Rohr, 2004, p. 92.) However, when comparing different cultures and points in time, it is undeniable that this has reached new dimensions, as the modern Western ideal of a beautiful body has now shifted towards having a slim body. This is also especially visible in today’s media content, which outlines a rather concerning aspect, as the weights and sizes of women in media productions have shrunk in dramatic ways over the past decades. Consequently, the appearance of extreme thinness has become the norm, while average-sized bodies are perceived as rather abnormal. (Eaton, 2000, p. 31; Kite, 2011.)



However, despite the dominant cultural ideal for thin female bodies, along with the demand to live up to those standards, certain exceptions exist and also circulate within the mass media channels. Examples for those are television shows, such as “My Big Fat Fabulous Life” and “Big Women, Big Love”, which document and portray women’s lives, who do not fit the ideal and embody rather overweight or even obese bodies. This outlines the fact that reality television might be passé, giving the stage over to “Fat TV”, which does not involve competitions or makeovers (Konstantinovsky, 2011). Therefore, the media or weight loss commercials do not only address slim bodies, as there are also exceptions of bodies and body types that do not measure up to the beauty standards.

Because of the central position and high standard of the body in societies, it might not only cause a person to feel uncomfortable in their own skin, but also trigger the urge to live up to those ideals. Especially with the presence of images in the media of ideal and slim bodies causes stigmata for people that show imperfections or highlights them being overweight. (Ried, 2010, p. 194.) Based on the emphasis on those ideals in society and media images, it further indicates the importance to live up to those expectations. This does not only stand in close relation to the dissatisfaction towards one’s own body, but also contributes to a more aggressive dominance of beauty ideals. In consideration of the previously mentioned cultural necessity for women to be beautiful, it can cause a person to modify their own bodies and even undergo surgery in order to reach the desired ideal. (Rohr, 2004, p. 92.)

This raises the question of why the body and the beauty ideal carry such a high degree of importance. One approach is that the body actually matters, especially in the social order. During the process of social marginalization, the attention shifts towards our own bodies, those of others and to the problem of the bodily otherness. If one’s appearance does not represent the beauty ideal, or something that comes close to it, the body can be held responsible as having failed to be part of the social average that falls into the social marginalization. This fuels a desire to be like others, simply for the fact of social integration. Thus, the body has become a vehicle of socialization, as being confronted with and living with these standards. However, it becomes only then problematic when one fails to measure up to the ideal. (Haug, 1987, p. 118.)

As a result, the norms that determine the factors of beauty and femininity are defined by the standards of society, which manifest, for example, in the skin type and complexion, body shape and size, as well as the outer appearance. Since fulfilling these ideals is a necessity for women, achieving those standards is not only accepted but also expected from women. These normative beauty practices, as well as the commercialized beauty industry have been criticized by feminists as tools of oppression. Especially the beauty industry has been condemned for holding on to narrow and restrictive definitions of beauty, as well as for the reinforcement of the burden to fulfill these standards. It has further been held responsible for promoting an obsession with an unhealthy body image, along with beauty procedures that are potentially harmful, such as Botox, Liposuction or breast implants. (Lazar, 2013, p. 37.)

These requirements seem to contribute to the idea of constantly striving to fulfill the beauty ideal in order to avoid to lose one's social status. Since women are generally more prone to viewing their bodies critically, they are especially receptive to the fear of falling out of the social margin. Rather big factors that add to this problem are the cosmetic, weight-loss and fashion industries, which spread the idea of glamorized beauty images that suggest women's bodies are never feminine enough. Because of those factors, the female body should be under constant construction or even undergo painful surgery in order to meet the ideal, which has caused it to become the target of obsessions, threats of aging and a constant loss of control. (Urla & Swedlund, 2000, p. 397.)

It is important, however, to acknowledge that the constant demand for a perfectly fit body is not only directed towards women, as men face a rather similar reality. While the requirement for the female body is to be as skinny as possible, men's bodies are commonly never muscular or toned enough. This demonstrates opposing perceptions in each sex specific beauty ideal – women need to be smaller in size, while men need to be bigger. This also affects male celebrities, who are just as Photoshopped as their female counterparts and also face criticism in beauty magazines for not measuring up to the beauty ideal applying to men. (Fell, 2014.)

Particularly the beauty industry acts as a strong messenger, which proposes makeup to cover up flaws and even change the facial appearance. This does not only find a receptive audience in women, but also has an unavoidable effect. The problem itself lies especially in the psychological message, which ties into the already existing gender issues and demands physical flawlessness in order to be recognized as a perfect and beautiful human being, worthy of being part of the social world. Nevertheless, the focus on flaws tends to imply defects of the physical appearance that should be covered up, or at least attempted to be. This suggestion completely leaves out the fact that no matter how carefully those flaws are being covered up, they cannot be removed, which leads to an even stronger focus on imperfections and defectiveness. (Higgins, 2000, p. 96.)

The concern regarding this issue is further affirmed by research on the negative effects of media images on women and the female body image, which found a visible increase in eating disorders, commonly appearing in young girls. An example is a study from Durkin and Paxton (2002), which examined the relation of the female image in the media in connection to the perception of one's own body. Fundamental for this study is the consideration that those images have led to an overall and widespread body image, which connects to weight concerns among women in Western societies. Consequently, there were significant changes in the satisfaction of one's body, as well as a depressed mood and anger, which tied strongly into the perceived images of modified and 'improved' women in advertisements. (Ibid., pp. 995-1004.)

These issues of body dissatisfaction are especially noticeable in various studies and statistics that claim that thousands of healthy women in the US see their bodies as defective and imperfect. A crucial factor is the growing number of cosmetic procedures, such as surgery, but also dieting or exercising, which follows the sole purpose of overcoming a seemingly imperfect physical appearance. Statistically, about 150.000 women undergo breast surgery for cosmetic reasons every year, while already 80 percent of girls around the age of nine are concerned with their weight and consider dieting. (Urla & Swedlund, 2000, p. 397.) Dove's global study released in 2011 found that only four percent of women around the world actually consider themselves as

beautiful and 72 percent of over 1.200 young women in the age group of ten to seventeen, felt a tremendous amount of pressure to be beautiful (Dove, n. d.).

These findings raise the question of why specifically women are generally more critical towards their own bodies in comparison to men, along with possible factors contributing to this issue. According to Fox (1997), one factor derives from the aspect that women face more judgement based on their appearance than men do, which could be because the beauty standards and ideals for women have become higher and at the same time more inflexible. This is also triggered through the constant exposure to exceptional good looks through the mass media channels, which are perceived as an image of normality that is linked to the assumption that anything that is not perfect is considered either as abnormal or ugly. (Fox, 1997.)

Even though beauty ideals have been existing throughout history, the contribution of the media and the unlimited access to its content via technological means outlines a rather contemporary aspect and caused normal concerns to turn into obsessions. In this regard, the media has played a major part in creating an extremely rigid and uniform standard of beauty, which has caused women to become accustomed to it. This might underlie the aspect of the media's omnipresence, which forces its recipients to encounter images of beautiful people at all times, which are at the same time impossible to achieve. These standards apply specifically to the female body, as only an estimated five percent of Western women actually embody the current beauty ideal that circulates in the media of Western societies. (Fox, 1997.)

Because of the high circulation of such images, it raises the question of how these can trigger such a strong reaction. One explanation is that men could be part of the problem, or more specifically, the assumption of what men want, which is formed through the media images. This has led to the presumption that men want their potential girlfriends or wives to look thin with model-like features, which contributes towards women taking dangerous and unhealthy measures in order to achieve what they believe is desired. That being said, beauty is considered as equivalent to sex appeal and therefore equal to the worthiness of male attention. This has caused an imbalance between men and women,

since a woman's sex appeal consists exclusively of the outer appearance, while a man's is also influenced by various factors, such as humor, intelligence, charisma and so on. Even though the body ideals in media productions are highly unrealistic, the subliminal promise of love and companionship for women that measure up to it, is rather real and makes the promise of male attention and love a dominant theme when addressing idealized bodies. (Kite, 2011.)

The claim that beauty corresponds directly with male attention could find a possible explanation in the fact that men and women are not only biologically, but also psychologically, different from each other. According to evolutionary theories, men prefer certain characteristics in women, such as young and clear skin, a symmetrical face and body, as well as feminine facial features and an hourglass figure. All of these signify indications that a woman is healthy, fertile and can be reproduced with. (Alkon, 2010.) Considering that thinness is a crucial part of today's beauty ideal that determines a woman's attractiveness and sex appeal, these factors might play into the higher degree of receptiveness of women towards these unrealistic standards, as well as self-criticism. This has caused this matter to become highly profitable for the beauty industry, especially noticeable in weight loss, clothing, cosmetics, plastic surgery, fitness magazines, as well as in hair and skin care products. The pivotal factor is the reliance on women's perceptions that various aspects, such as health, personal happiness and self-worth, but especially their ability to be loved by a man, are dependent on their flaws or fixing those. (Kite, 2011.)

This raises the question of what contributes to the reason to set these factors in relation to oneself and further allow them to affect one's self-image. Milkie (1999) sees media content as not the only important factor of influence in self-perception. A more complex aspect could also derive from people who encounter the effects of media images by others through their social networks. This causes them to be influenced through the perceptions of how others see the media distorted world, which leads to a self-process that involves others based on the social comparison to other individuals, groups and social categories. (Milkie, 1999, p. 193; Serdar, 2005.) This approach ties into the cultivation theory, which states that the constant exposure to media content could lead

to the recipients perceiving it as reality; where the beauty ideals in the media are considered as the norm and not an exception (Schooler et al., 2004, p. 38; Serdar, 2005).

### **2.3. Femininity in Media Productions**

After discussing the issues connected to beauty, the female body and gender relations, it should also be outlined which role the media plays in contributing to this matter.

Because of the constant confrontations with media images and productions, it can be assumed that these affect society and act as a source of influence on the audience.

Theorists of previous decades, such as Theodor W. Adorno (1971) and Neil Postman (1985) have already suggested that the media is a relevant factor in shaping people's thoughts, influencing society and affecting ideas regarding certain factors, which are then perceived as reflections of the truth (Adorno, 1971, p. 281; Postman, 1985, pp. 28-29). This is further underlined by Marshall McLuhan, who emphasizes the social effects deriving from mediums due to their specific nature, as well as by John Fiske, who sees the television as a way to generate and circulate meanings in and for a culture.

Furthermore, Stuart Hall's model of circuit communication illustrates the sending and receiving of information via media channels, through the process of encoding and decoding. (Athique, 2013, p. 22, pp. 51-52; Fiske, 2011, p. 4.)

These approaches illustrate the degree of media influence, however, they do not include the medium of the internet, which is not only the newest, but also the fastest growing media industry that changed the communication within societies based on its interactive features and integration of all existing mediums – print, audio and video. The internet does not only reflect on politics, society and culture, but also affects and influences these institutions by its content. (Biagi, 2015, p. 9.)

#### **2.3.1. The Female Image in the Media**

Since women are not only more receptive towards beauty standards, but are also expected to fulfill these ideals, this raises the question of how the media actually contributes to this issue. Because of the media's omnipresence, it enables an intense

distribution of its content that makes it difficult to escape from it, which is especially noticeable in advertising images spreading the beauty ideals even further. Advertising can be simply summarized as giving notice, informing or making something known. In its more complex form it refers to a paid, non-personal message that derives from an identifiable source, which is delivered through a mass media channel and aims to persuade. (Sheehan, 2014, p. 2.) In this regard, Tuten (2008) acknowledges that there has been a significant change in the forms of advertising, which shifted from its previous form more towards online environments. However, the advertised content of the internet reaches about 70 percent of the recipients, while other mediums, such as the television, has an outreach of 98 percent. (Ibid., pp. 2-3.)

Even though advertising appears in different forms, its roles underlie mostly informative, entertaining and economic purposes, whereas the economic function of aiming for consumer purchases can be perceived as the most relevant one in this particular context. Along with various grounds for criticism directed towards advertising, the most significant claim is that advertisements actually undermine culture because of their powerful status in society. Hence, it is debated whether it actually reflects a cultural lifestyle and mirrors society, or if it actively contributes to shaping a culture, as it is noticeable that advertising is perceived of having the power to reflect, cultivate and amplify values and behaviors within a culture. (Sheehan, 2014, pp. 4-8.)

By taking the media's influence and advertising's impact on society into consideration, this raises the question of how these factors affect the beauty standard itself. As Sheehan (2014) explains, not only does the advertising industry see men and women as different from one another, but they also perceive advertisements differently, as both sexes have different perspectives and apply different meanings to the advertisements they see (ibid., p. 89). By distributing images of what a person should be like and further aiming to trigger a purchase by appealing to the emotions, hopes and lifestyles represented in cultural symbols, these contents influence the beauty ideals as well. This has led to a rather tight corset of what is considered beautiful, along with a strong suggestion for the need for perfection, which is difficult or impossible to fulfill. (Werbewatchgroup Wien, n. d., p. 3.)

A common factor in advertising is the use of the human and especially female body for marketing purposes, through representations of women in certain categories and in a significant way. This addresses the feminine role by prompting an image of women that is not only unrealistic, but also hard to overcome. (Marschik & Dorer, 2002, p. 37.) Especially sexist advertising contributes to images of gender-related stereotypes and behavior patterns, which can socially discriminate against certain groups. Thereunder falls the devaluation or stereotyping of women in media content, which can also act as gender discrimination. (Werbewatchgroup Wien, n. d., p. 3.)

This raises the question of how specifically female stereotypes and gender roles are represented in advertising. The most common stereotype emphasizes on clichés about men and women, which reflect traditional gender roles and portray both sexes in condensed, unrealistic and even restricting or derogatory reflections of what is considered to be feminine or masculine. The stereotype “household = woman” outlines the female role of keeping the house clean, caring for the children and pampering the husband, reducing women to reproductive and caretaking functions. In contrast “woman = sex” connects the female role solely to sexuality, which not only equalizes women to men’s pleasure, but also establishes a strong link to beauty, youthfulness, fragility, and further emphasizes the decorative function of women for the advertised products. (Marschik & Dorer, 2002, p. 37; Werbewatchgroup Wien, n. d., p. 4.)

In this regard, advertising strongly leans towards the motto ‘sex sells’ by the use and sexualization of male and female bodies, which equates them to consumer goods (Werbewatchgroup Wien, n. d., p. 10). This is especially noticeable in the concept “woman = product/product = woman”, which puts women on the same level as consumer goods and vice versa, with the message that women have to be young, beautiful and unconsumed. The category “cosmetic straightjackets” strongly ties into the distribution of beauty ideals, as it does not refer to a woman’s daily beauty routine in terms of taking care of one’s body, but addresses the constant plea to maintain a beautiful appearance solely for men’s pleasure. (Marschik & Dorer, 2002, p. 37.)



These categories and gender roles in advertising focus strongly on the female body and let the sexualization and objectification of women stand out. Therefore, it is necessary to establish its relevance for body image and beauty ideals. One problem deriving from the body images in advertising is that since they reflect on the beauty standard that is defined by society for both men and women, this often goes hand in hand with the modification and even distortion of these pictures with the use of editing programs. Because of the message that everyone can determine the shape of one's body and should live up to the ideal, either through sports or plastic surgery, this states a rather critical point. By communicating this message through media channels, it fuels the perception that the body is a status symbol, which allows parting the privileged from the disadvantaged social brackets. (Werbewatchgroup Wien, n. d., p. 12.)

However, the underlying problem lies not only in the content itself, but also in its distribution, as a person encounters between 2000 to 5000 times a week pictures of digitally manipulated images of ideal bodies that do not exist in reality (Lauscher, 2010). Further statistics suggest that the average woman gets confronted with about 400 to 600 advertising images on a daily basis and will have seen over 250.000 commercials in the media by the age of 17 (Healthy Place, 2014).

### **2.3.2. Picture Editing**

Because of the wide reach of advertising as media content, it is further necessary to outline an increasingly central factor in advertising images – picture editing. One of the most used programs to edit and manipulate, but also create pictures, is the computer software program Photoshop, which is closely linked to the media images. It creates images that only have little or no connection to the original photo, which addresses the most controversial point deriving from its combination with traditional modes of photography. In this regard, the appearance of persons, such as faces and bodies, can be enhanced and adapted to the common beauty ideal of youth, slenderness and even whiteness. However, getting a picture retouched has become common practice in the performance of public life for celebrities and is now a procedure like getting one's hair and makeup done. (Jones, 2013, p. 21.)

But Photoshopping images is no longer reserved for celebrities only, but has also become the norm in advertising, by slimming down pictures of men and women, enlarging muscles, enhancing skin, erasing wrinkles, etc. Even though these images do not reflect reality at all, they evoke the strong desire to look equally as good, which has caused serious problems for women concerning body image. Due to the overwhelming pressure for individuals to measure up to those narrow ideals, various campaigns have been launched in order to educate the public about the frequent use of Photoshop in advertising images. (Swinson, 2011.)

Because of the debate connected to Photoshopped images, photographers and artists have argued for its use, since stopping the alteration of public media images would only have little effect on the distorted beauty ideal. Michael Graupman sees shunning Photoshop as wrong, as it was originally created to bring a subject more into focus and not to create works of fiction. Therefore, the creative abilities of a person should not be restricted, but more the public be educated about the reality of their perceptions. (Diller, 2011.) Sharon Mac Leod, vice president of marketing for Unilever Canada, states that the demand for retouching pictures is not created by advertising agencies, but that it's more "an entire culture, the entire industry". This is underlined by Dan Strasser, art director and associate creative director of Bensimon Byrne in Toronto, who explains that not only people get retouched, but actually everything does. This even applies to photos of natural settings or advertised burgers, which also create unrealistic expectations of the beauty in burgers. (Krashinsky, 2013.)

By altering the majority of images of female bodies, the perceptions of normal and healthy women are distorted, as the representations show extremely thin and sometimes even unhealthy or unachievable bodies. Based on the magazine editors and media maker's claims that it is the industry standard to use underweight models or actresses and digitally enhance pictures, this also raises the standard of beauty as the norm and has led to the common perception that it is also healthy. Consequently, the advertising industry depends on women believing that their personal health and happiness is connected to their outer appearance, as well as that they can actually achieve these beauty standards by purchasing the advertised products. However, this leads to the

problematic factor that the beauty industry needs to maintain these ideals in order to enable profit. Therefore, these are not decisions that are based on an editor's choice or preference, but also on profit and the feeling of women that it is necessary. Thus, these ideals have been taken up to a new level, as the increased use of editing also implies that the bar goes much higher in creating things that are physically not possible. (Beauty Redefined, 2014.)

#### **2.4. Digital Media**

After taking the media's role into consideration in terms of promoting femininity and body image, it is necessary to also take a look at its digital side. Because of the dominant position of the internet in today's society and the strong presence of digital content, especially within social networks, it is important to outline the role of these factors in society and specifically discuss selfies and the degree of influence they might have on individuals.

With enabling the public to access the internet, it experienced a significant change by allowing people to publish their own documents, which led to a rapid development in processing pictures and text. This further impacted the use of the internet due to its capability of transferring materials and information around the globe. Especially the term 'new media' age refers to the change in the usage of a medium, as well as to the degree of interactivity of its users. The latter underlines the aspect of the internet not only being a medium of reception but as a system of communication between its individual users, which has formed an entirely new way of social networking. (Athique, 2013, p. 14.)

These factors tie into the exponential growth of the internet's popularity, which was lastly measured at two billion users in 2011, which differs strongly from previous mass media technologies. Because of its specific structure, it is part in characterizing an era of new social relationships between individuals and groups, but also between machines and states. (Athique, 2013, p. 14.) This makes the internet highly unique and further contributed to its rising popularity, as now 65 percent of adults in the US actively use

social media sites, which is a tenfold increase when compared to the last decade. Accordingly, the majority of American users are made up of young adults (18 to 29 years), which constitutes 90 percent of the users, where 77 percent of social media users in the US are in the age group of 30 to 49. (Perrin, 2015.)

Because of the possibility for people to interact with one another without the limitations of time and space, the communication has changed through the use of digital media as well. Besides the degree of interactivity, the formation and organization of groups on social networks can be considered as another key factor of digital media. (Smith, 2013.) The major characteristic for digital media is its digital content in its various forms, such as in text, audio and video files, as well as graphics, animations and images. The available information is downloaded, distributed or published in a digital environment and allows everyone, participating on social media, to become a producer of digital content. (Mullan, 2011.)

#### **2.4.1. Selfies and Social Networks**

Social media, online platforms and internet-based tools make up a major factor of the digital landscape and have enabled an increased flow of information, as well as a shift in the communication towards online environments. Because of the options for interaction on social media platforms, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, this has resulted into a massive increase in the amount of shared personal information between other network users, which circulates on the internet. This is especially underlined by the latest technological developments that facilitate users to connect to the internet via mobile phone and further influence the interpersonal interaction. (Nations, 2016; Social Media Defined, 2014.) Due to its nature, Web 2.0 has played a major supporting factor in the process of maintaining social networks, in terms of interactivity and the degree of connectivity, which has helped to link humans closer together via electronic means, and at the same time promoted a rather new aspect within the social collaboration (Dasgupta & Dasgupta, 2009, pp. 2-4).

One aspect that is especially noticeable in social networks are the self-representations, which are a result of the shift from interpersonal communication onto the online sphere and the possibility to provide a digital representation of oneself (Athique, 2013, p. 102). However, besides the beneficiary aspects of social networks there is also a notable downside to those casual connections. Apart from obvious negative factors, such as cyber bullying and a decreased productivity in working environments, these can also contribute to a false perception of connection, along with a higher degree of disclosure of one's privacy. Because of the composition of online environments, users are prone to have numerous digital friends, which can make it harder to distinguish between actual relationships in the real world. This could possibly not only weaken the ability in forming interpersonal connections, but also affect the degree of information a person provides about themselves. The encouragement to publish even intimate details can contribute to users ignoring filters that would be addressed under normal circumstances in face-to-face social situations. (Jung, n. d.) By personalizing one's social media profile by disclosing private information, this enables a high degree of self-representation through posting personal pictures or sharing opinions. In this regard, a user's profile can be understood as an electronic version of an already existing social configuration, which is however not an adequate representation of reality, since the individual pages can be modified according to a person's own judgement. (Athique, 2013, pp. 103-104.)

Because of the specific nature of self-representations in social networks, the sharing of selfies on online platforms has developed into a trend over the last years. Both celebrities and non-celebrities post selfies onto social media, which has noticeably affected social networks and led to the emergence of a selfie culture. As Stiegler (2015) explains, a selfie can be understood as a digital self-portrait of a single person or a group of people. It is a snapshot of a moment and capturing these moments has become a fixed part of the daily life in media culture. Because of the amount of the daily share of pictures and selfies, this further leads to the assumption of a rather narcissistic way of self-representations of an entire culture, by the use of digital technology. This is often linked to the younger generation, which is frequently referred to as 'generation selfie'. However, this does not necessarily have to be true, as selfies can also be perceived as

performative acts through the means of an image, which can in turn be understood as an act of communication. Therefore, the self is in the center of perception through the production and reception of a selfie, where they function similar to spoken acts with a communicative double structure. (Ibid., p. 67.)

In this regard, selfies do not only communicate through their visible means about the (social) world, but further also constitute the social relations of this world. This is noticeable in the claims of the producer of the selfie, which leads to the understanding that selfies are part of a production about one's own person, along with a medial symbiosis between performance, or representation, and reception through and with the media. However, this relation of factors between communication and performance/representation is not a contemporary aspect, as it was already part in societies prior to the rise of the selfie culture, which is for example noticeable in self-portraits of painters. Stiegler hereby refers to Warfield (2014) who states that selfies can be understood as a multimodal convergence of previous and contemporary technologies, whereas the selfie acts as a mirror, camera, stage and billboard, all at the same time. (Stiegler, 2015, p. 68.)

This way of a self-portrait serves as a medium for memory, both in a private but also public context, in previous decades or centuries, as well as today. With the use of mediums, the memory of single individuals has become superfluous, where pictures have taken the place of stories and overshadow the function of memory with their function of representation. This means that individuals no longer need to remember specific moments or stories, but have the option to store these by using different mediums. Especially pictures have the ability to capture a moment, which, when looked at, do not only tell a story, but further also serve as a memory backup. Selfies help to create a reality of ourselves that is based on a medium, which does not only apply to the perception of single individuals, but stretches out to an entire collective and society, which contributed to an increase in their significance of sharing between cultures. Therefore, the selfie can be seen as an extension of the body or of its identity, which further produces intimacy because of its specific nature of display and representation. In this regard, selfies can be exclusively understood within the overall context of digital

media, which is a rather interesting aspect, as social media networks have a strong interactive component and contribute to the creation and organization of user groups. However, the production and staging of the individual self is an essential part within digital cultures, which stands in a discrepancy of the nature of social networks. (Stiegler, 2015, p. 69.)

The increasingly important role of selfies might underlie the fact that people have always had the urge to orchestrate and position themselves within a group or collective as an individual, which is also visible in the online sphere. This occurs in the easily accessible social media networks, in which recognition, acknowledgement and the distribution of one's self-representation play a major role. In this regard, Stiegler (2015) refers to Iqani (2013), who states that the selfie is a rather interesting kind of snapshot, as individuals often use it to represent themselves at the peak of their attractiveness. It is often used as a profile picture or shared with the public through a social network. Therefore, the selfie aims to say 'look at me' in a public sphere with the purpose to get attention and to further produce oneself as an object in a certain way. (Ibid., pp. 70-71.)

Besides the cultural and individual aspects regarding the taking and sharing of selfie pictures, it is further questionable which influence they have if people are confronted with this specific image of another person. As experts from the USA and the UK discovered, images of online friends could actually be more influential than pictures of celebrities, since they hit closer to home, even though they might still be as unrealistic as any other media image. Briggs (2014) refers to research conducted by the University of Strathclyde, Ohio University and University of Iowa, which discovered that spending a lot of time looking at pictures of friends on social media, such as Facebook, can make women feel insecure about their own body image. This might underlie the fact that the more women are exposed to photos on social media, the more they tend to compare themselves to these in a negative way. As a result, this might just make the attention towards those physical features on social media more dangerous than in the traditional media channels, as social media users might be someone that a person is acquainted with. (Briggs, 2014.)

Studies conducted at the Universities of Wisconsin-Madison, Humboldt in Berlin and Utah Valley University showed that images on social media can have negative effects, including feelings of depression, loneliness, resentment and low self-esteem. Most of these effects derive from photo sharing, which is connected to 'the pleasure-loathing phenomenon' that describes the reception of photos of others' seemingly better lives on social networks. Especially, when other people's lives are perceived to be better than one's own, it can lead to a constant follow-up on their profiles in order to maintain an overview of their lives, along with a permanent comparison to oneself. (Mariella, 2014.)

However, besides the negative body image on the side of the receivers, sharing selfies and pictures on social media can also have an impact on the uploaders. By receiving approval, recognition and appreciation from others, based on the posted pictures, a user's self-esteem might strongly depend on the recognition they get from the online environment. This could possibly even stretch out to severe extents in some cases, such as becoming self-absorbed, self-obsessed or showing other narcissistic signs. (Khamis, 2015.)



### 3. Methodology

The following chapter will introduce the methods used to address the previously stated research questions. In this regard, I will give an overview of the general study design, with a short review why digital media, and specifically the image content demonstrate such a high degree of importance. Further, I will discuss the process of data collection and the analysis of the material, as well as give an explanation why I chose these methods by outlining their advantages and limitations. Lastly, I will take both ethics and validity into consideration, since these embody factors which could also have an effect on the outcome of the study.

This thesis will focus on and analyze the female body image deriving from selfie pictures of celebrities and non-celebrities, which circulate on social media platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram. Accordingly, I did not only investigate the reasons behind publishing such images, but also how they could affect women who are confronted with these on a daily basis. Because of the given aspects of this topic, the actual research and analysis in addressing this matter can be handled by the use of various methods – both qualitative and quantitative. However, after taking all of the given choices into consideration, I opt for focus group interviews for the data collection and content and thematic analysis for handling the material.

Since the main focus of this thesis is the current beauty ideal, as well as thinness and attractiveness as necessities for femininity, as well as its connection to selfie culture, the main research question in approaching this issue is:

*How do women feel about their own bodies when being confronted with images of bodies of non-celebrities, as well as celebrities?*

With the following sub-questions:

*Do those images have an effect on the perception of the female body and self-esteem?*

*Does the modern image and ideal of beauty have a negative effect on women and cause them to feel resentment towards or negativity regarding their own bodies (especially when seeing other women's bodies)?*

### **3.1. Study Design**

With the understanding of the importance of social media platforms in today's society, it is further necessary to inquire how they actually affect women's self-esteem. As Winter (2013) explains, the Human-Computer Institute at Carnegie Mellon found indications that the 'passive consumption' of feeds from friends on Facebook is connected to feelings of loneliness and even depression. This was also underlined by two German universities, discovering that the 'passive following' on Facebook can trigger feelings of envy and resentment, with vacation pictures being the number one reason for it. This underlies the fact that there are more explicit and implicit cues of people being happy, rich and successful in photos than there are in status updates, which causes a picture to act as a powerful trigger provoking a social comparison. (Winter, 2013.)

Instagram plays a major role when considering the sharing of pictures and the degree of social comparison deriving from these, as it is solely image based, unlike other networks, such as Facebook. However, Instagram is, just like Facebook, filled with "half-truths and optimizations of life", which people use as a measurement for their own lives. This leads to the assumption that users might compare themselves to others on many occasions, regardless of how much they value themselves and their own life, simply because they look better on Instagram. This describes a new form of online culture, which is not only intrigued by looking at other people's lives, but also widely accepts the fact of being constantly looked at. (Mariella, 2014.)

This ties into the idea that social media images seem to have taken over the perception of reality, as they embody a more colorful and interesting world, making someone else's life appear more appealing than one's own. Because of the constant comparison, users might experience a permanent need to look at others, feeling at the same time the tremendous pressure of needing to embody an image of perfection themselves. Furthermore, it seems that the fact that advertising images do not display reality has been widely accepted. However, many people fail to perceive social media images in the same way. Therefore, it is questionable what effect this distortion of reality has on female users, given the circumstances related to the beauty ideal, standards in society, cultural frameworks and sex and gender issues.

In approaching this issue, I sought answers to these questions, which allowed me to gain further insight into the stated problem. For the concrete approach to this matter, it was fundamentally important to choose a suitable method, in order to understand the connections between these aspects. Regarding the research, I will hence outline the data collection and analysis in this chapter and give a brief overview of the steps of the study, as well as its design and the analysis of the gathered data.

Regarding the first step in approaching this issue, it was necessary to decide how to proceed – qualitative or quantitative – in relation the research question. After taking the processes of both forms of data collection – written questionnaire or spoken interviews – into consideration, I decided to use a qualitative method, as it appeared as the more fruitful option regarding this topic. According to Kenneth Bailey (1987), interviews are characterized by certain advantages. One of them is flexibility, which enables the interviewer to gain more specific answers, but also allows the repetition of a question when misunderstood, as well as the rearrangement of the questions. Another factor is that the response rate is higher than in comparison to written designs. Further, interviews allow gaining control over the environment and setting, but also enable the securing of answering all questions completely. This further supports spontaneous answers or comments to be recognized and taken into consideration. (Ibid., pp. 174-175.)

Besides the advantages of interviews, there are also some existing disadvantages. One major aspect is the amount of time they consume, not only during the data collection itself, but also in the actual analysis, due to the large amount of data. Another factor involves the verbal nature of interviews, which can lead to possible misunderstandings in the respondents' answers. Especially questions not worded in a standardized way can pose as a disadvantage, since the same question might have to be rephrased for different participants. In turn, this might make it difficult for the researcher to compare the answers of different participants. Lastly, the lack of anonymity also outlines a disadvantage, as it might influence the degree of disclosure in the answers. These factors of the social nature of interviews demonstrate the most potential for bias, inconsistencies and inaccuracies. (Bailey, 1987, pp. 175-176.)

After weighing out the advantages and disadvantages, I decided to choose interviews as my research method and more precisely focus group interviews. It is an empirical and qualitative approach to get information regarding a topic through group discussions, rather than interviews with single individuals. Often certain ideas surface only through the process of human interaction, which often occurs when topics are rather sensitive or extreme. For those reasons, I decided to collect the data by face-to-face interview sessions in a focus group setting made up of women. Even though I first considered to start a group discussion amongst women in an online environment, I moved away from this idea for different reasons. One of the possible problems is the inability to trace back if a reply came from a male or female user. Further, the phrasing of written statements could make it difficult to understand sarcasm or jokes. In addition to that, online environments allow a certain degree of anonymity, which can lead to opinions being expressed without the ability of censorship. Lastly, users in online forums might not feel the need to participate because of the given anonymity or only answer the stated question and not get into a discussion with one another. For those reasons, face-to-face focus group interviews seemed to be the more fruitful option, not only because it would be harder for participants to remain silent during the discussion, but also because I could steer the discussion if necessary.

After I gathered the material through the interview sessions, it was necessary to analyze the data after its transcription into a text format. Through the process of the analysis I was able to find answers to the research questions of this thesis. Because of the fact that I gained a large amount of data from the interview sessions, it was necessary to choose an analysis that would enable me to process greater quantities of text. Under consideration of these circumstances, I chose to use the qualitative content analysis, also because it does not only use data from parts of the text (or other documents), but additionally the information from the text in order to make statements regarding the social reality outside of the text (Kromrey, 2009, p. 301).

Because focus group interviews enable gathering large amounts of data and the content analysis allows processing large quantities of text, these appeared to me as the ideal combination when approaching this issue. In particular, the content analysis considers the entire text material by following categories that demonstrate the central aspects of the analysis. By doing so, it enables dividing specific aspects of a certain context into different categories. This technique is characterized with the advantage of the strong methodological control, based on the systematic analysis of the text material. After first breaking down the material into single units, these are then being handled one after another. It circles around a system of categories, which are developed by using the actual data material. The aspects that are to be filtered out by the text material can be previously defined. (Mayring, 2002, p. 114.)

By narrowing down the text material, it is further necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the specific meaning it stands for and set the material into relation with the meaning. In this regard, I chose the thematic analysis, which is used to create meaning for material, as well as for analyzing qualitative information in order to gain knowledge about a person, an interaction, a group, a situation, an organization or a culture. Thus, the thematic analysis helps the researcher to move away from the broad reading of the data and more towards the discovery of certain patterns. This further enables to address a specific research question, which can be used to gain insight into the gathered data. (Komori, n. d.)

### 3.2. Data Collection in Detail

For the concrete data collection, I chose to interview women in a focus group setting. The duration of a focus group interview is usually set to approximately 1.5 to 2.5 hours, which also derives from its specific nature of the group setting, enabling to question many people at the same time. In this regard, the participants for focus group interviews are selected based on certain characteristics that they share regarding the topic, and should make up an ideal group size of five to ten people, but still allowing room for variation of more or less persons. Because of the form of group interviews, the size of the group itself matters, as it should be small enough to give every participant the opportunity to share information, but also needs to be large enough to ensure enough diversity within the group, regarding perceptions and viewpoints. Therefore, a big group, exceeding twelve people, is not advisable, since there might be certain problems occurring in the flow of the conversation, as for example participants not sharing their opinions because there is no pause in the discussion to do so. Another problem could be a fragmentation of the group, where participants would, for example, whisper to their neighbors. This could make a smaller group more advantageous, as it gives the participants the opportunity to share their ideas, but at the same time leads to a smaller pool of ideas. (Bortz & Döring, 2002, p. 139; Fern, 2001, p. 19; Kruger & Casey, 2000, pp. 10-11; Mayring, 2002, p. 77.)

When I approached the concrete data collection, I aimed at recruiting about 15 participants, in order to calculate in the possible dropout rate of the people. Though, the ideal group size was set to around six to eight persons, which appeared to be a more moderate size. The reason for this underlies the fact that I considered it to be more advisable to reach out to more individuals and end up with a larger group, than to recruit, for example, eight persons and end up with four or less participants. However, even though I recruited an amount in these dimensions, the participants in my interviews ranged from three to four persons, myself excluded. This differs from the originally intended approach of focus groups with up to ten participants, since these are considered to be mini focus groups, which consist in contrast of about five respondents (Clowes, 1994). This does not necessarily need to be perceived as a disadvantage, as

mini focus groups, ranging from three to six people, can provide a greater depth in terms of the discussion and are the preferred choice of group interviews for some (Groupsplus, n. d.).

Because of the purpose, size, composition and procedure, a focus group interview can be understood as a special kind of group setting, as it is based on listening and gathering information through a better way of understanding the feelings or thoughts of the participants towards an issue due to its design. In addition to that, it also reaches the perceptions of many people at once, which demonstrates the economic benefit of this design. It follows the idea to create a setting that stands in close relation to social interactions with an orientation towards conversations that are similar to those in the daily life, which does not only enable reaching social opinions rather than those of single individuals, but also leaves out the pressure of the moderator to reach a consensus. Therefore, the group setting allows certain opinions to surface, which underlies the factor that many viewpoints are expressed in group conversations that are shared in a social context. This allows to take the social context of the group, as well as the expressed thoughts within the discussion into further consideration, also because it helps to break psychological barriers. Hereby, this helps the participants to open up more during the group setting of the interview, which enables gathering collective opinions and ideologies. However, considering that some topics could be highly intimate and cause the participants to feel that their privacy is being threatened, it needs to be acknowledged that this could lead to feelings of discomfort and trigger a withdrawal from the discussion or even disruptive behavior. (Bortz & Döring, 2002, p. 139; Fern, 2001, p. 19; Kruger & Casey, 2000, pp. 4-5; Mayring, 2002, p. 77.)

The desired goal is an increased ability of self-disclosure of the participants with the understanding that some people might easily disclose personal information, while others feel uncomfortable doing so. These obstacles and difficulties in disclosing information could be overcome by choosing this form of interview, based on the creation of a comfortable environment due to the selection of participants that share certain characteristics. During the interview session, the group is informed about what they have in common and are further encouraged to share comments of all types, regardless

if positive or negative. Therefore, the interview should take place in a setting, which will contribute to the participants' feeling of comfort, which varies in different groups, as they might have different perceptions of comfort, e.g. teenagers vs. corporate employees. (Kruger & Casey, 2000, pp. 7-9.)

The interview groups in my research consisted solely of women, which allowed me to take the participants' sex and its correlation to self-esteem into consideration. I chose to exclude male participants, as they could possibly create some degree of discomfort and prevent the participating women to be less open about their thoughts, emotions and opinions. By restricting the groups to women only, I hoped to ensure the setting of a comfortable atmosphere, which increases the degree of honesty and disclosure about the participants' feelings towards their own bodies and insecurities. In order to allow a valid use of the data, I originally intended to have a minimum of two focus group interviews with two different groups, but decided to conduct three interviews by adding another group. By doing so, I aimed for a higher degree of comparison and validity. I further divided the interviews into different age groups, with Group 1 consisting of participants between the ages 20 to 23, Group 2 ranging from 24 to 27 and Group 3 being made up of women at the age of 28 and over. There was no age limitation for the participation in Group 3 (28+). By dividing the groups by age, this also allows me to consider a participant's age as a possible variable in correlation with self-esteem under the assumption that body image might or might not be as important for older women.

The individual participants consisted solely of women with differing nationalities, with most of them being university students. In this regard, I will give an overview of their background information, in terms of age and nationality. When referring to the participants in the analysis chapter, I will use the specific numbers I have assigned to the individual women, as well as the number of the group they were in. For example, when talking about participant number three from Group 2, I will use the short form "G2P3". In terms of the group specific makeup, Group 1 consisted of altogether four participants, which were all university students. P1 was a 22-year-old student from Russia, P2 a 22-year-old student from Finland, P3 a 22-year-old Turkish student and P4 a 23-year-old Russian student. The second interview session with Group 2 consisted of



a total number of three participants and had the same educational background, also being made up solely of students. P1 refers to a 26-year-old German student, P2 is assigned to a 26-year-old Austrian student and P3 was a 26-year-old student from Finland. In this regard, Group 3 differed slightly from the previous groups, since only two of the four participants were university students. P1 is assigned to a 28-year-old British student and P2 refers to a 31-year-old student from Greece. This differs from the remaining two participants, who were employees and not students, with P3 referring to a 29-year-old Finnish woman and P4 a 39-year-old woman from Portugal.

In the concrete procedure of the interview session, the questions should be predetermined and in a certain logical order with understandable phrasing to ensure their understanding by the participants. In this regard, the questions in the beginning are usually more general and become more specific and focused as the group continues. This should help to spark the flow of the conversation and enable the participants to get into the discussion. (Kruger & Casey, 2000, p. 12.) Therefore, it is common to start the discussion with a topic or a medium in order to spark the conversation and ease the participants into the theme. In order to allow a comparison between the groups it is necessary to confront all of the participants of each group with the same content. Therefore, I showed every group five advertising images of women before starting with the actual interviews, with three of them using skinny and presumably Photoshopped women advertising protein powder, Victoria's Secret underwear, and Dolce and Gabbana eye makeup, as well as two that were published by Dove in the context of its 'real beauty' campaign. By doing so, I intended to show the participating women the common advertising images and introduce them to the topic. The advertising pictures were used to explain to the groups that it has become common knowledge that these images are Photoshopped and far from reality.

After showing the advertising images to the participants, I proceeded with presenting two selfies of a celebrity and non-celebrity woman that have been uploaded onto social media to the groups. This allowed me to gain insight of how the groups perceived the selfies by acknowledging their status and examine the degree of different perceptions towards celebrities and non-celebrities and the effect this might have on the body image

of the participants. Because of the angle of the thesis, and the composition of the groups, I chose to use only selfies of women in order to research the concrete comparison in terms of body image within the groups. I chose to show the celebrity selfie before showing the non-celebrity selfie, since it appeared to me that it would allow a smoother transition from the advertising images to the interview discussion, as a celebrity selfie might stand in a closer relation to these. The first selfie was a picture of Kylie Jenner, the half-sister of Kim Kardashian and famous for being part of the reality TV series 'Keeping up with the Kardashians' (see Appendix A for picture). The reason why I selected her was because of her high online presence for self-marketing reasons. The second selfie was a young, non-celebrity woman from the UK (see Appendix B for picture), who had been documenting her weight loss success on Instagram. I encountered her picture in an article of the Daily Mail, explaining that the pictures of her body transformation have been illegally used by weight loss companies to advertise their products without her consent. The reason why I chose this picture was not only because her posture and setting was similar to Kylie's, but also because it helped me to avoid facing possible problems regarding privacy issues.

While conducting interviews, it is fundamentally important to save the spoken information, which can be done either by recording the discussion or taking notes. Written notes are considered to be an essential part of focus group interviews, where either the moderator takes notes, or, to avoid interference with the flow of discussion, an assistant writes down the spoken content (Kruger & Casey, 2000, p. 105). However, I considered taking notes as a distraction during the interview process, especially because of the small size of the groups. Further, notetaking could have possibly created inconsistencies in the data, which would have led to flaws in the analysis. Because of the given reasons, I chose to record each session with a Dictaphone and transcribe the audio files into a Word document after the interviews. In order to allow a thorough and correct transcription of all the spoken content, I listened to the audio files not only from the Dictaphone, but also from a computer to calculate in possible variations in the sound quality. Therefore, every interview was listened to several times, with a minimum of two rounds of editing for the entire text.

Particularly in the group setting of focus group interviews, the aspect of group cohesion also plays a major role. According to Fern (2001), it is important, as it can be critical for the success for some focus group research. It is defined as the sense of closeness and common purpose amongst the group members and provides a reason for the motivation of the participants to contribute to the discussion, which causes individuals to remain in the group and take part in it. Further, the composition of the group also has an effect on the cohesion itself, which partly depends on the purpose of the research, the task within the group and specifically the investigated people. (Ibid., pp. 14-15.) While conducting the interviews, I noticed that especially the fact that the discussion was about female body image and all the pictures showed women, the cohesion between the participants was rather strong. All of the group members showed a high degree of involvement in the group discussion, especially in the Groups 2 and 3.

### **3.2.1. Sample Collection**

Before being able to conduct the interviews, it is necessary to assemble the participants for the sessions in order to enable the data collection. For the concrete collection of the sample, it is essential to gather a population sample that describes a subset of subjects, which represent the entire population, due to the impossibility to test every individual within a certain population. The sample should be selected carefully, since it enables making statements about the basic population. (Explorable (a), n. d.; Kromrey, 2009, pp. 251-253.) I originally intended to collect my sample through non-probability sampling, which describes the fact that not all of the members of a population, in this case all the women in Finland, have an equal chance of being selected for the research (Explorable (a), n. d.). In order to achieve this, I contacted the University organization 'Kannunvalajat' and various other, faculty-specific organizations, which published my invitation to participate in the interviews in their newsletter that is distributed to the students, who have subscribed to it, via E-Mail.

However, after receiving only a single response of a person who was willing to participate in the study, I had to resort to the process of snowball sampling, or also snowballing, in order to be able to conduct the interviews. Snowballing refers to a type

of sampling technique that is characterized by its chain referral, in which the researcher asks an initial subject for assistance to help identify and contact people with similar traits of interest. Therefore, choosing one member as an initial subject will lead to more subjects for the study. This has the advantage that it helps to reach populations that are difficult to sample with other methods; however, it further does not guarantee a high degree of representation, as the idea of the true distribution of the population remains unclear. Another disadvantage is ‘sampling bias’, which refers to the fact that the initial subjects tend to nominate people who they know well, which causes the subjects to have similar traits and characteristics, representing only a small subgroup of the entire population. (Explorable (b), n. d.)

Even though snowball sampling might not be a preferable option, especially since I did not chose to investigate a population that is hard to reach, as for example persons with a rare disease, I resorted to it when I was unable to find participants who were willing to take part in the interviews. However, despite the disadvantages that this form of sampling might have, my main intention behind those interviews was to find out how women feel about themselves when being confronted with selfies. By taking the emotional component into consideration, snowball sampling has become more justifiable, since it is safe to assume that despite similar characteristics, the emotional makeup and complexity is rather unique and differs between every person.

### **3.3. Data Analysis Methods**

As Krueger and Casey (2000) state, the analysis is a sequential and evolving process, which enables getting verifiable results that will reflect on what was shared within the group during the actual interview situation. The analysis of the data from focus groups is different to, for example, the analysis of numbers, since it already begins with the first focus group interview session, where then every following session is analyzed and compared to earlier groups. (Ibid., pp. 128-129.) By taking these factors into consideration, I reflected on certain aspects beforehand, which I would specifically consider prior to the interview sessions. Therefore, I took significant factors, such as body image, status and specific emotions into consideration, as these are of high

importance for my research questions. Since these factors were a topic of discussion during the first interview session, I kept my focus on them throughout the following group sessions and consider these as major aspects.

For the concrete analysis process, I chose the content analysis, which allowed me to gain a deep understanding of the specific content of the data. This form of analysis was especially useful when processing the large amounts of text that I have gained from the interview sessions. The content analysis consists of three basic forms that can be broken down into summary, explication and structuring. While the summary aims to reduce and summarize the text material won through the data collection, the explication takes the material to the parts within the text that contain certain words or sentences, which should be broadened, explained and interpreted in order to allow a full understanding of the text. Lastly, the structuring filters out certain aspects of the material. (Mayring, 2002, p. 115.)

In order to approach analyzing the data, I first transcribed the interviews into text in order to make it easier to handle the material. By doing so, it enabled me to go through every line of the text to summarize the content and narrow it down, which reduced the amount of text tremendously. With the condensed text material, it was easier to find and highlight certain words or sentences that carried significant meaning. Especially the final step of structuring helped to further shorten the material by filtering out the relevant aspects of the text. According to Mayring (2008), the further process consists of the paraphrasing of the text and putting it into single code units, which should be kept short and reduced to their descriptive content. By doing so, the relevant parts of the text are rephrased, while other parts that do not carry the desired content are being crossed out or dropped. The categories are narrowed down further, by translating and transforming text parts into grammatical short forms, which is followed by generalizations and an increase in the level of abstractions. In order to continue to reduce the material, the limitations and summaries of the categories are included. (Ibid., pp. 60-64.)

After having completed the predetermined criteria of selection, I proceeded to paraphrase the selected text, in order to create different categories. By narrowing the text further down, I was able to build categories by transforming pieces of text into a more general and abstract category. Mayring (2002) explains that building categories represents a deductive element, which needs to be explained by theoretical thoughts that address the subject and goal of the analysis. Therefore, a category is constructed when a matching part is found in the text. If a single word or sentence stands in close relation to the data material, it can be used to describe a certain category. (Ibid., pp. 116-117.)

However, there are certain demands that are tied to the building of categories, as they need to be formed in a selective manner. Not all particular details can be found in the text, but also in the differentiations of the schema of categories, which further does not need to contain all of the content that appears within the text. They must differ in a way that all dimensions of meaning are included, but also allow comparisons between the different text units. This means that the categories need to be related to the relevant dimension and have a precise definition, which makes text elements clearly classifiable for the distinct categories. The schema of categories further needs to derive from a consistent principal of classification, which should only refer to one dimension of meaning and exclude the single categories from one another. This grants a high degree of clarity for the different categories and subcategories, which also ensures their independence. (Kromrey, 2009, pp. 314-315.)

By using the thematic analysis on the previously built categories, the focus lies on identifying and describing, both implicit and explicit ideas, as themes within the data. In this regard, codes are developed that represent the identified themes that are linked to the data as summaries for the later analysis. Hereby, reliability is of a greater concern than with word-based analyses, due to the requirement for a higher degree of interpretation, as well as in applying the specific codes to the text itself. (Guest et al., 2012, pp. 10-11.) The first step consists of segmenting the text, which is understood as a technique to bind text together, in order to assess and document the general quality of the data. This further facilitates the exploration of the thematic elements, as well as their similarity, dissimilarity and relationships. Because only very little qualitative analysis is

done without relying on some degree of segmentation and abstraction of text, this is a rather important step, where the researcher is constantly confronted with questions regarding the beginning and end of meanings and how these meanings intersect and interact with one another. (Ibid., pp. 50-51.)

By using the thematic analysis, the researcher codes the data either by hand or with a software program. Usually, every two or three lines of text are coded, where key words, concepts, images and reflections are identified and handled. The coding can be understood as an explicit and iterative process, which allows the researcher to alter and modify the analysis as it reflects on the data and lets ideas emerge. A qualitatively good code is able to capture the richness of the phenomenon and at the same time be clear and concise, stating what it stands for, its boundaries and how to recognize it when it occurs. These codes build the foundation for the themes used by the researcher. (Komori, n. d.)

The most critical component of the thematic analysis is the codebook. Its development can be understood as a discrete step in the analysis where the meaning that is observed in the text is systematically sorted into different categories, types and relationships of meaning. The text is then reread and analyzed through the process of segmenting and coding into these categories, types and relationships. Hereby, the ‘messiness’ of the text is minimized by the use of code definitions and with the degree of maximizing the coherence amongst the codes in the codebook. The codebook describes a structured compendium of codes that includes a description of how the codes are related to one another. (Guest et al., 2012, pp. 50-52.)

### **3.4. Validity and Ethics**

When conducting research, certain factors need to be considered in order to grant results that consider the ethical principles, possess a certain degree of validity and allow making assumptions regarding generalizability. In regards of ethics, there is a general agreement about the terms of ethical principles in research; however, there has also been some degree of disagreement about how to word those codes of ethics, as well as how to

act in a situation with a conflict of interest. Such a conflict of interest might occur between the right of the majority to know, but also on the other side the right of the protection and privacy of the minority. Generally, there is an agreement of ethics that states that it is unethical for researchers to cause anybody harm in the course or name of research, while it especially holds count if it is without the person's knowledge or permission. (Bailey, 1987, p. 406.)

These ethical principles further stretch out to deceiving the participants about the true purpose of a study or asking the participating individuals questions that cause extreme embarrassment or other emotional turmoil, or are reminders of an unpleasant experience, cause guilt or invade their privacy. Further, is it also considerably unethical if the participants are studied without their knowledge or if the promise of confidentiality is being violated. Lastly, another criterion for unethical research is if the data is analyzed by only revealing parts of the facts, presenting facts out of context, having wrong findings or lying with the results. (Bailey, 1987, p. 406.)

In terms of applying these ethical principles onto my own research, there are some factors that should be taken into consideration in regards of the study design. Characteristically for this method of data collection is the process of human interaction, in which certain ideas and viewpoints surface. It is often used when topics are quite sensitive or extreme, in order to help eliminate the disadvantages of interviews, for example lying. Especially, in the setting of focus group interviews, the flow of the group discussion and its moderation is important. However, the researcher cannot foresee which individuals will make up the group and which points are expressed during the interview session. It could occur that extreme points are addressed or certain individuals might feel intimidated and not speak at all.

While women's self-esteem in relation with body image and social media content is not necessarily an extreme topic, it still requires a degree of sensitivity. This particularly applies to the group of younger women in their early twenties, which might feel more self-conscious if they are confronted with perfect images of non-celebrity women. However, this approach to the issue might still be more fruitful than interviewing single



individuals. Certain insecurities or admitting to insecurities might not surface during a one-on-one interview session, but more in a group setting with more women agreeing to feel the same way.

Since it has been established that women in advertisements or on billboards are usually Photoshopped and the images do not embody their natural body, it might be a rather different approach to see pictures of real women that actually match the ideal body type, which is praised in the media. Therefore, this raises the concern if these images might affect the interview participants in a negative way, as it points out to them that a perfect body and physical appearance is not only due to the program Photoshop, but is actually achievable. In the worst case, this could actually deepen already existing insecurities or cause feelings of self-consciousness about oneself and one's body. Another relevant consideration for this particular research could be that the selfie pictures, which I will take from internet platforms, could violate the user's privacy or the privacy of the women in the picture. This would tie into the unethical aspect of studying a person without their knowledge of it. However, this problem was solved by using a selfie picture that has already been published on a news website.

In terms of the validity, possible errors can occur, which will have an impact on both the interview situation and the analysis. Besides the possibility for errors based on the interviewer, there are also errors that may occur because of the respondent. These could be caused through (1) lying, which might be due to the fact that the respondent does not know the answer or the sensitivity of the question or the participant does not want to give a socially undesirable answer. Further, there might be (2) subconscious mistakes that can occur when the respondents think that they are actually giving accurate answers regarding, for example, their own behavior, when in fact they are not. This can also occur when the participants have traits, which they do not even want to admit to themselves. There can also be (3) accidental factors that cause errors, which occur when the participants misunderstand or misinterpret the question, which might then lead to a wrong answer. Lastly, there can be (4) memory failures, which underlie the fact of respondents not being able to remember certain information for sure. (Bailey, 1987, p. 177.)

However, these errors might not necessarily apply to focus group interviews. While there is no concrete way to determine if one of the participants is lying due to the absence of options to measure the truth, factors, such as misunderstanding the question can be avoided in a group setting. Because of the group dynamic and discussion, the possibility of one participant misunderstanding the question can be easily overcome through the process of interaction and the responses of other participants. Based on the nature of the study, I can most likely exclude factors, such as memory failures, since I am questioning concrete feelings, which might also enable me to eliminate subconscious mistakes.

In terms of possible influences on the validity, the content and thematic analysis could also bear some mistakes, which could influence the degree of validity of the study. Kromrey (2009) states that certain values need to be given in order to consider the result as reliable and valid. The highest danger for the reliability in the field of the content analysis is when more than one person is doing the codes, due to the differences of the viewpoints or acknowledgements of the codes. However, considering the fact that I will be the only person coding the text, it is not necessary to acknowledge different viewpoints regarding the codes. The validity has a specific focus on the categories. If those are made without taking the material into consideration and kept for the further analysis, there is only little validity about the text itself. On the other hand, if the categories are built and developed among the text material, the material itself can say little or nothing about the desired variables. (Kromrey, 2009, pp. 320-321.)

This outlines the possibility of room for mistakes, which can occur from the respondents, which is a factor that is harder to control, but can be curtailed by using focus group interviews. On the other hand, certain errors can be made in the analysis of the material through the researcher, which might be harder to overcome, since they might be made subconsciously. Hereby, it is possible to involve another researcher, in order to control the validity of the categories made, as they should be significant enough to come to the same result.

When conducting research it is specifically important to gain reliable and valid results in order to be able to make general assumptions. These generalizations enable applying the results onto a population or the broad mass, even if the outcome of a study only derives from a population sample. However, the design of this particular study makes it rather difficult to apply generalizations onto the population, due to the small sample size. Nevertheless, the generalizability derives from different criteria in this case, since the main focus did not lean on the number of participants or on the count of the amount of responses I received. Therefore, my attention was not directed at the quantity of participants or responses, but concentrated more on the depth of the discussion and the different emotions and viewpoints expressed by the participating women throughout each session. Thus, these affect the generalizability in a different way, as this study mainly focused on the emotions and modalities that were expressed by the participants when encountering the images presented in the interviews. Therefore, my main point of interest was not the quantity of reactions or answers, but more the specific responses or reactions towards the presented content. Because of my orientation towards a more in-depth approach, this particular focus still allows me to make generalizations based on the results of my research.

## 4. Analysis

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, I began with the summary and segmentation of the text. By increasing the level of abstractions of the content, I was able to apply the codes and determine the different themes. Therefore, this chapter will outline and explain these themes, as well as their subcategories and content. The following subchapters will handle all of the themes and subcategories that occurred in each of the three interview sessions with the different age groups. Altogether, I found seven themes – *lifestyle*, *social media content*, *cultural differences*, *beauty standards*, *health*, *moral concerns* and *reactions and emotions* – which I will discuss one after another. The groups I will be referring to are labeled as followed: Group 1 (age 20-23), Group 2 (age 24-27) and Group 3 (age 28+). As already stated previously, when quoting the statements from the interview sessions, I will use short codes that refer to a specific group and participant. Therefore, a quote from, for example, participant number three in Group 2 would appear as “G2P3”.

### 4.1. Lifestyle

The first theme that was present throughout every group was *lifestyle*, which describes the different characteristics regarding the lives of celebrities and non-celebrities. This is rather self-explanatory, but states an important aspect that seems to be ulterior when talking about celebrities, as they live a life that is significantly different when making a comparison to the average person. Especially, when talking about the body and selfies, there are different aspects, which make it nearly impossible for non-celebrities to reach the same standard. This was also mentioned during the interview session with Group 3, stating that a celebrity and non-celebrity status also reflects in the quality and content of the pictures taken.

“You can tell when somebody has a whole business industry behind you, you know? And when you don’t.” – G3P4

This underlines the fact that one reason for celebrities having perfect bodies, is because of the industry that stands behind them. In this regard, it was discussed that it is not only the body that matters, but also the lifestyle, which causes people wanting to be skinny and fit because of what it represents. Striving for a fit and slim body is not only associated with being skinny, but further also connected to the goal of fame and money. Thus, being thin and toned is not only about working out, but also about the dream that comes along with it of having lots of money and being able to afford luxury products. However, in Group 3 it was addressed with a rather differentiated view, stating that making money only with one's body must be rather challenging, if it is the only qualification that a person has.

“It's [the body] the only thing that she [Kylie] has (...) she's making her like living on just posting to Instagram. So it must be quite tough actually, cause you don't have anything else.” – G3P3

Since *lifestyle* consists of two components, in terms of considering different ways of living, I have decided to divide it into the two categories of *celebrities* and *non-celebrities*, along with *materialism*, which solely applies to Group 3. *Celebrities* includes various aspects regarding the celebrity lifestyle, along with the common assumptions concerning the appearance of their bodies. Consequently, it is often not acknowledged that celebrities have to work hard to maintain their fit body, but is instead believed that they have perfect genetics, which stands in contrast to the assumptions made about non-celebrities.

“When you look at her [non-celebrity] you say ‘oh she looks like she works out’, but for example with like Kylie (...) that's not the first thing you would say because what they're trying to achieve is this ‘I work out but I don't look that toned, it looks like I was born with this body’.” – G1P3

This especially ties into the fact that celebrities are often not perceived as ordinary human beings, but are put on a pedestal. This can be problematic to an extent, since it further influences the perceptions of beauty standards and takes them to another level, which again raises their importance in society. Because celebrities often embody the Western beauty ideal, they also contribute to the distribution of a more uniform and

rigid body ideal, which is at the same time a necessity for them, in order to fit the demands of the beauty industry.

“It’s because of the industry. It’s what they demand from them [celebrities] to look like that, otherwise they don’t get work (...) they want to try to keep this image of no flaws.” – G3P4

Therefore, the trend of a fit and slim body is not only something that necessarily derives from celebrities and their lifestyle, but is also the industry’s demand that requires them to measure up to the ideal. Because of the high degree of influence stemming from celebrities, Group 1 stated that they should also take their audience into consideration and further take responsibility for what they share online. This outlines the aspect that celebrities do not have anything else in their life other than measuring up to the beauty standards, unlike non-celebrities, who might have studied or obtained a higher education. In Group 3 this was considered to fall under the basic human need of appreciation.

“I think all people, they want to have the feeling they’re good at something or (...) admired with something and it’s (...) hard thing for those celebrities (...) I don’t think Kylie Jenner has really studied or anything.” – G3P3

The category *celebrities* is further divided into the subcategories *image*, *status* and *financial aspects*. In this regard, *image* outlines the need for a celebrity to not only build, but also maintain their image, often through selfies and social media presence, which contributes to create and promote a brand or oneself as a person. This was especially debated throughout every group when talking about the celebrity selfie of Kylie Jenner, who has built her image through social media and needs to uphold it by showing a strong presence in online environments.

“They are celebrities (...) selling their image (...) they have their business on the side (...) but, uh, mainly their business is selling their image.” – G3P4

“And the lips and just this whole kind of image that she’s [Kylie] trying to create for herself.” – G1P3

However, there were some differentiations of how this issue was addressed by the groups, which might demonstrate the distinctions between the different ages. While Group 1 focused on the fact that one's image and fame can be built by the use of social media and through a strong Instagram presence, Group 2 discussed factors that contribute to the maintenance of one's image, such as the need to look exactly as perfect and flawless, both online and offline, without any addition or Photoshop, in order to remain successful in the market. Group 3 stated that not only the industry, but also society has specific demands towards celebrities, as they are faced with the need to fulfill certain standards, because otherwise the expectations would be disappointed. Especially the discussion in Group 3 shows a rather detached and differentiated view, taking the social construct more into consideration rather than single individuals.

“People have so much high expectation of like celebrities and when they see them in real life, they want, they will be disappointed because they are everyday people anyway.” – G3P2

This goes hand in hand with the subcategory *status*, which differs from *image*. It does not only include the expectations from fans or society, but also contains the demands that the industry has towards the celebrities, in terms of fitness and a flawless appearance in order to be able to market them as brands. This also ties into factors, such as age, which was a topic of discussion throughout all of the groups, since most celebrities gain fame and a certain status in young years, which is questionable if this is appropriate or not. In this regard Group 3 discussed that the celebrity status also reflects on their behavior, as the ones who define themselves through their status often have a rather bad attitude or see it as an excuse to act rude or arrogant. This demonstrates more of a neutral view, as the group did not only focus on the celebrities' image, but also saw them as simple human beings that can have bad manners and insecurities, which show for example by valuing themselves through their status. However, it was also noted that the understanding of beauty in relation to celebrities is also strongly connected to their celebrity status and fame. The one major difference is the status itself, which affects the perceptions between celebrities and non-celebrities.

“I think that’s the thing that if they [Instagram users] see this girl [non-celebrity] they won’t, uh, maybe consider it as attractive as, uh, Kylie Jenner, because she’s not Kylie Jenner.” – G3P2

The last dimension of the subcategory *celebrities* is *financial aspects*, which is a big part of the celebrity lifestyle. It describes not only the profit that celebrities make by selling their image or own brand, but also outlines a financial need to uphold their current lifestyle. This also points out the aspect that celebrities have the financial means to keep their *image* and *status*, by being able to afford professional trainers and even plastic surgery.

“You’re getting your millions by posting to Instagram and then you have (...) time to (...) paint yourself and use the best trainers in the world and you don’t have (...) any other obligations other than just like keeping yourself straight.” – G3P3

On the one hand, these factors contribute to celebrities being able to embody those beauty ideals, simply by having the means to do so, but on the other hand it also builds up more pressure to constantly incorporate the industry’s standard. As one person in Group 1 stated, the fact that celebrities have all that money and are able to afford expensive clothes, houses and cars is more troublesome than their perfect bodies.

“Her body is one thing, but the fact that she can afford or she can get so expensive clothes or underwear is completely another thing (...) might be a bit more frustrating than the fact that they have perfect bodies.” – G1P1

The category *non-celebrities* describes women that differ from celebrities, based on the previously listed subcategories *image*, *status* and *financial aspects* and do not fulfill these. Because non-celebrity women do not need to build, uphold and maintain an image, since they are not dependent on it, they further do not necessarily need to embody the beauty ideal. Further, non-celebrity women do not have a certain status, which requires them to fulfill any expectations towards an industry, society or fans. Therefore, there are no existing bodily demands that apply for non-celebrity women regarding existential factors, such as their employment.



Because of these aspects, it is necessary to address the reasons why many non-celebrity women, who post selfies online, seemingly feel the need to measure up to celebrities. Therefore, the category non-celebrities is further divided into the subcategory *imitation and idolization*, which aims to explain that the reason for non-celebrity women exposing their pictures on social media, actually underlies the desire to imitate celebrities, as well as the lifestyle they represent.

“Behind (...) those celebrity pictures, there’s a whole lifestyle (...) people want to live just like them and have all that money and all those things.” – G3P4

Throughout every group there was the assumption that the reason for non-celebrities posting selfies on social media derives from the desire to imitate and copy the posted celebrity images. This might underlie a high degree of idolization, which causes non-celebrities to imitate celebrities.

*Materialism* was solely addressed during the interview session with Group 3 and describes the reason for the motivation of people to strive for a celebrity lifestyle and measure up to the beauty ideal, which originates from the commonly shared perception of the importance of money. Hereby, non-celebrities aim to become as famous and rich as the idolized celebrities, solely because society itself has become more materialistic, where expensive objects are of high value and people define themselves over what they can afford.

“People care more and more about the material stuff (...) these reality shows that’s what they show (...) ‘I got this bag, I got that and that.’ (...) that also influences, uh, this new generations, because they think: ‘that’s what I will get’.”  
– G3P4

#### **4.2. Social Media Content**

The theme *social media content* includes everything that was addressed in terms of social media exposure, content, as well as its importance and relevance. Throughout all of the interview sessions the reality of social media images was questioned, along with the assumption that these might be just as Photoshopped and unrealistic as advertising

images, but are falsely perceived as real. Especially when discussing Kylie's selfie it was stated in Group 2 that it is not necessarily more real than advertisements.

“It's [Kylie's selfie] just as Photoshopped as the rest. She would never ever put a normal one, like unphotoshopped, I don't think.” – G2P1

The unrealistic content on social media could distort the users' perceptions even more, especially through platforms such as Instagram, which people utilize to show off their achievements in fitness and body transformations. In this regard, Instagram content was compared to propaganda, since it does not only create new phenomena, but further also displays a negative degree of influence. This does not only derive from the pictures that show off one's life, in terms of promoting and advertising oneself, but also from the comments of other users, as well as the picture captions. Groups 1 and 2 addressed the fact that due to the high degree of media exposure, this could even lead to a blurred line between the online and offline world, which could make it hard to distinguish the genuineness of users and content. Group 3 stated that becoming a celebrity is a lot easier now through social media, than before sites, such as Instagram, existed.

“Now they have the more means to show off and it's easier to become a celebrity and some they are just Instagram celebrities. They became famous from Instagram, while before you need to go to the (...) fashion industry, towards there.” – G3P2

Because of the influence on people's behavior and perceptions regarding normality, this is specifically alarming due to the lack of awareness. However, Group 2 saw Instagram and social media also as a good way to get in touch with media criticism and counter culture, since it helps to spread awareness, which demonstrates an important aspect regarding the transition of social media to real life. This outlines a rather interesting point, as Group 2 moved away from Instagram's design of sharing photos and took a different perspective by addressing its possibility for counter culture.

“Instagram as a platform for example gives (...) another possibility for media criticism (...) like in our childhood when you just got exposed to an ad and didn't really get exposed to counter culture very easily.” – G2P3

The theme *social media* is further divided into the category *selfies*, in order to address this particular form of online content. All of the groups were questioning not only the authenticity of selfies on social media, but also the effects deriving from these. Group 1 perceived selfies as a way to document an idolized state of being, as well as a mean for self-sexualization and self-objectification based on one's own choice to do so. Group 3 stated that a selfie is actually worse than Photoshopped advertisements, because of the impossibility to acknowledge its reality.

“These kind of pictures [selfies] they could be even more depressing, because like thinking if someone is looking like that in a selfie. Like it's not that bad if someone is looking like that in an advertisement.” – G3P3

Further, it was assumed that selfies are used to advertise oneself through social media, which also ties into the fact that it is now easier to become a celebrity. Groups 2 and 3 assumed that selfies are still fake, but not necessarily as fake and Photoshopped as advertisements. In this regard, Photoshop might not even be necessary after all, since certain filters, such as for example on Snapchat, enable to artificially alter one's appearance and modify bodily features. Therefore, as discussed in Group 2, Photoshop has transitioned more towards real life, which underlies the fact that celebrities, such as Kylie Jenner, would get negative feedback if it became apparent that their pictures were digitally edited. This has led to a decrease in the use of Photoshop, especially since the editing of advertising images has become common knowledge. Therefore, the obviously Photoshopped advertisements were considered as positive, since they clearly show that the images are altered and far from reality.

“I'm actually really happy that when we were thirteen this Instagram (...) didn't exist because I wouldn't have been able to separate it (...) we only had this very clearly defined, yeah, fake advertisings.” – G2P1

I have divided *selfies* into the four subcategories *content*, *function*, *effect* and *choice*, as well as the category *reach*, which solely applies to Group 1. *Content* refers to everything that is visible in the two selfies, and especially to the factors of background, underwear and picture quality of both the non-celebrity and celebrity. The majority of the participants considered the non-celebrity's selfie as more realistic and relatable,

whereas the celebrity selfie was perceived to lack sincerity, since it is only published for profit and displays a perfect image.

“It’s her [Kylie’s] living and that’s how she makes money (...) this is just clearly for her [non-celebrity’s] friends or for other people to see, like just, just for self-esteem (...) just to show people that she looks good.” – G3P1

This differs from the non-celebrity’s intentions, which were assumed to be mainly about showing her body off to friends and family, since her picture is homemade, intimate and considerably more arousing because it is more personal. Specifically in terms of the non-celebrity picture, there were a lot of assumptions made regarding her body, such as that she might hide imperfections, suck in her stomach or use protein powder.

“That [non-celebrity selfie] feels more intimate and personal in a way.” – G1P1

Especially the background was considered to be the major difference between the otherwise rather similar selfies, in terms of body and posture. While the non-celebrity’s untidy background was often criticized because of the assumption that only her body matters to her and for not taking a picture in more appealing surroundings, the celebrity selfie was preferred due to its perfect setting.

“Her [non-celebrity] hair is a mess, so hair is not important for this kind of picture, but the body is important (...) I guess she ignored the rest – her messy background, her messy hair.” – G1P4

Specifically the messy background in the non-celebrity’s picture caused the participants to be able to relate more to it and further perceive it as a source of motivation to work on one’s own body and fitness. Another factor was the underwear in the picture of both the celebrity and non-celebrity, where the celebrity selfie was again preferred because of her more appealing underwear. This led to the assumption that the underwear itself also has the ability to conceal imperfections or highlight specific features.

“This underwear that, you know, underlines the perfect things and covers the non-perfect things.” – G1P1

Lastly, the picture quality also played a major role in the perception of the selfies. In this regard, the groups stated that because of the non-celebrity's poor quality and lighting in the selfie, it appears to be more realistic and therefore has a stronger impact than the polished, high quality celebrity picture. Group 2 also mentioned the importance of the posture and angle in a selfie, since these factors can also cause a person to have slimmer features, such as a thigh gap or a flat stomach. In this regard, especially celebrities and Instagrammers are perceived to be familiar with the right poses, which are understood as another source of distortion in the reality of the picture content.

“She [Kylie] knows how to pose like that, cause there's been like a lot of Instagrammers showing like ‘ok, if I pose like this, I will have my tummy out and like I won't look as good as when I pose like this’.” – G2P3

Another subcategory of the category *selfies* is *functions*, which outlines the functional nature of posting selfies online. In this regard it needs to be differentiated between the celebrity and non-celebrity selfie. For celebrities, selfies are also used as a cheap, natural and personal way to advertise a product. While celebrities strongly rely on selfies as a means to build their image and influence their status, non-celebrities are perceived to do it in order to get attention and likes on their social media profiles.

“They [celebrity and non-celebrity] both want the same, which is attention and that people to say how good you look.” – G3P4

Consequently, selfies aim to send a message, express one's sexuality, document a body transformation or show off one's achievement, which all ties into receiving reassurance from the external world because of one's presumed low self-esteem. Group 1 addressed the specific nature of mirror selfies, as visible in the pictures used for this study, which differs to regular selfies that usually only show the face, as it enables the viewer to see a person through their own eyes.

“But mirror selfies, I think there's a different element to it because (...) kind of ‘this is how I see myself, I looked in the mirror today and I think I look really good. So here, see what I'm seeing through the mirror’.” – G1P3

In regard of the *functions* of selfies, the dimension *self-love* also ties into it, which was solely discussed in Group 1. It outlines the assumption that selfies are posted in order to demonstrate self-love and show proof that a person is comfortable in their own skin.

“Love the way you look (...) post pictures about it because you must be proud of the way you look. But you have to think about what, what falls under the criteria of being able to love yourself. That’s the problem.” – G1P3

At the same time this could also lead to a conflict, since it is rather difficult or impossible to feel self-love if certain standards are not fulfilled. Therefore, selfies cannot fuel self-love if the body of the receiver does not represent the ideal, which also ties into the perception that it is considered as rather hypocritical and contradictory when celebrities preach self-love. In contrast, this can also lead to an overestimation of one’s own body if overweight people post bikini selfies on social media in order to proof that they love themselves.

Another subcategory handles the *effects* that derive from a selfie picture. Groups 1 and 2 stated that one of the most crucial effects from selfies is that it does not become apparent that it may be only one of many pictures taken beforehand, as well as the fact that the effort, such as makeup or contouring, is not clearly visible. However, it was also addressed that it is not obvious what effects actually derive from selfies, since there are different perceptions. One of the strongest effects from selfies that appeared in every group was the notion of a higher motivation to work out more, but also an increased obsession with body and beauty.

“I might kinda use those things as motivation (...) I see perfect bodies and it makes me wanna work out more.” – G1P1

In Group 1 the point was made that one effect is that it has become the norm to expose one’s body, since it is a common factor on social media. Group 2 further perceived selfies as a good motivation to do more sports and increase the level of exercise; however, also addressed the point that these kinds of selfies might attract negative attention, with the potential danger of exposing oneself to comments of pedophilic nature, especially in the case of young, non-celebrity girls who imitate their idols.

“Like 13 to 15 year olds and they start posting these [bikini] pictures and I’m like ‘no, don’t do that’ (...) and then they get these creepy Instagram comments from old dudes (...) it’s a whole other level of harassment that you might have gotten in your small scale life” – G2P2

Lastly the subcategory *choice* includes the aspects that outline the degree of free will of celebrities and non-celebrities, in terms of posting onto social media. While celebrities might have less of a choice, for reasons such as image and status, non-celebrities do it out of free will. This further includes the aspect that it is also a person’s choice of how much they want to show in a picture, as well as the freedom to make the decision if they want to post the picture online or not. Especially Group 2 stated that in the specific case of Kylie, she did not have a choice if she wanted to be famous or not and is now again in a position with no choice, since her career and income depend on her Instagram presence. This was also referred to as close to child abuse since she was robbed of a normal childhood.

“She’s [Kylie] been in there since, from such a young age. It’s almost like child abuse. I feel sorry for her, cause she didn’t have a childhood and always exposed.” – G2P2

One category that only applies to Group 1 was *reach*, which describes the differences in the celebrity and non-celebrity selfies. Concerning this matter, it was noted that celebrities have a much higher amount of followers than non-celebrities, which also causes celebrity selfies to reach millions of people, while non-celebrities might only reach thousands.

“She [non-celebrity] has like, I don’t know, 1.000 followers, maximum what? 10.000 followers? With Kylie’s picture, you know that she’s sending it out to 40 Million followers (...) a picture like that, you know it’s not intimate in any way.” – G1P3

This was also mentioned as an underlying reason when addressing the fact that the non-celebrity selfie was more personal and intimate. Because celebrities, and in this case Kylie, have so many followers on social media, it prevents their selfies from appearing to be too intimate and personal.

### 4.3. Cultural Differences

Throughout every group the *cultural differences* were pointed out, which are not only connected to selfies, but also to what is perceived as beautiful and what not, which strongly varies between cultures. As it was mentioned in Group 1, there are certain distinctions in what is considered to be an ideal appearance, differing within cultures, for example when comparing American beauty standards to Scandinavia.

“Here in Scandinavia (...) it’s trendy to not look too feminine or too, too masculine, so you have this almost androgenic [sic] uh, way you want to look like.” – G1P2

Another aspect that was brought up in Group 1 was that there are major differences between American and Scandinavian culture, when talking about Kylie’s fame and specifically when taking the aspect of nudity into consideration. This underlines the differences between American, and in this case Finnish culture. Especially when thinking of naked bodies, which are considered to be rather a taboo in the USA, it is a normal part in Finnish sauna life, which further also affects the cultural perceptions of what is considered as sexual or not.

“She will never be such a big phenomena here in Finland than she is in the states (...) nudity in, in the US it’s in a way, it’s a big taboo (...) we have like a lot of saunas and like everybody is naked (...) you see a big variation of body types.” – G1P2

Therefore, seeing naked bodies cannot only help to understand that there is more than one specific body type, as it is preached by the beauty standards, but it further enables people to acknowledge the reality more. Cultures where a naked body is a taboo, as in the USA, might be more prone to idolizing celebrities, such as Kylie Jenner, since they are not exposed to nudity in a socially acceptable way. This also stretched out to the degree of body exposure, as it was discussed in Group 2.

“We’re all like this European (...) some people from other cultures would probably say: ‘Nah, what does she look like? She’s too thin’.” – G2P1



However, Group 2 did not only discuss the various cultural ideals, but also reflected on the fact that there are different beauty standards and ideal body types. This also stretches out to the aspect of distinct levels of body exposure throughout different cultures, along with the determination of what is acceptable and what not.

“And even like we’re used to seeing like exposed bodies, whereas like in some cultures it wouldn’t be ok to look like that.” – G2P3

Group 3 discussed that beauty ideals depend on the cultural context, which also correlates with the procedure of certain plastic surgeries. In this regard, it was addressed that plastic surgery is widely accepted within some cultures, such as in Latin America, or also in certain locations where the specific lifestyle demands it, as for example in Hollywood.

“In Europe we don’t have this culture that much as they have in US or the in, in South America, like the surgeries (...) I only know few people in my life, uh, that they have done some nose job or they have boobs.” – G3P2

The cultural differences were mentioned throughout every group; however, significant for Group 3 was the fact that there was also a comparison between surgeries and one’s own family and culture, which Person 2 states as:

“If I tell my father that I want boobs (...) he will just tell me that I’m crazy, he will never send me money again, thinking that I’m going to fix my boobs.” – G3P2

#### **4.4. Beauty Standards**

The theme *beauty standards* refers to the current, Western beauty ideal of being slim, fit and toned. In this regard, celebrities are perceived as a major contributing factor in spreading a beauty ideal that has been glorified by the beauty industry. Because of celebrity’s high presence in various media channels, having a body that measures up to the dominant ideal has become a need item in society. Further, this led to the common perception that a perfect body is understood as an achievement that can be reached through sports and even serve as a source of income.

“When I look at this picture [non-celebrity], I don’t know, first thing that crossed my mind that this, it’s kind of bodies that also kind of achievement.” – G1P4

Because of the changing nature of beauty ideals, the demands for certain bodily features vary according to the current beauty trends. However, due to the constant exposure to these trends and ideals on social media, it has become more and more important to fulfill the expectations of living up to them, which has led to an obsession. Nonetheless, all the different demands and signifiers for being slim and fit make it nearly impossible to measure up to the beauty ideal, which simply cannot be achieved by dieting alone.

“You’re supposed to have, like, this immensely small, like, waist and then boobs and then a huge ass and I can’t do that by dieting. Like, you can’t, like, you won’t achieve that figure.” – G2P3

Because the demands for different bodily features are rather contradicting in their nature, they further contribute to a distortion of reality. This is rarely acknowledged and still preached by society and the media, leading to a stronger emphasis on having a perfect body. These factors have caused a beauty obsessed culture to arise, in which people focus solely onto achieving an ideal, without acknowledging that there might be more meaningful things in life. Especially the importance of the body and the unified standard of only one ideal have become the main rule for everybody, along with the perception that deviations of the desired goal, such as fuller bodies, are not considered as attractive.

“It has to do with this like body obsessed culture, where you can dedicate your whole life into getting a toned body.” – G2P3

Despite the acknowledgement that beauty trends are always changing and not a modern phenomenon, it can be said that their nature has become more aggressive over time, due to the constant confrontation with these unrealistic images on social media. This is perceived as a major contributor in terms of body dissatisfaction, as well as to the high standard of the beauty ideal. P2 in Group 3 stated that she considers her breasts to be too small, but only feels this way because she sees larger sized breasts on other women, causing her to compare herself to others.

“I mean, probably I want boobs because I see everyone have boobs. So, I’m like why do I don’t have?” – G3P2

I decided to divide *beauty standards* into the four categories *sexualization*, *bodily differences*, *cosmetics/plastic surgery* and *class*. Further, *beauty standards* includes the category *femininity*, which only relates to Group 1, the categories *fat* and *feminism*, which were only discussed in Group 2, as well as *aesthetics* and *uniqueness* that solely apply for Group 3. *Sexualization* addresses the fact that it was considered as rather negative to show off one’s body by posting revealing selfies onto the internet. This stretched out to the point that this form of self-sexualization is considered as normal and is expected from celebrities based on their status, but underlies a different motivation and causes a distinct reaction when done by non-celebrities. Group 1 also focused on the fact that celebrities already face sexualization at a rather young age, which also led to some concern being expressed in the discussion. Especially when taking selfies into consideration, it was stated in Group 1 that images of half-naked bodies signify sex and sexuality:

“She’s [non-celebrity] making herself into a sexual object (...) she is still the one who wants to put her like body and picture on, on the internet (...) you still have the right to, I mean, express your, your sexuality (...) if I look at a half-naked body, I, I just think about sex.” – G1P2

The category *bodily differences* describes the variations between different body types, which are ignored by the uniform demands of the beauty ideal. In this regard, it was explained in Group 1 that seeing both, perfect and non-perfect bodies in settings, such as the gym or sauna, helps to stay in the reality by acknowledging the existence of different body types. Group 3 stated that bodily differences should be accepted as well, instead of holding on to a rigid beauty standard and applying that as the main rule for everybody, along with the demand to measure up to the ideal. This further outlines the age gap between the groups, as the youngest group seemingly focused on getting reassurance through the comparison of different bodies, while the oldest group criticized the uniform standard itself.

“People (...) with different waist, different skin colors, you know, hairs, everything, they can also be beautiful (...) just in different, uh, measurements (...) They [beauty industry] only want people that look all the same and they take it as the main rule for everybody.” – G3P4

The category *cosmetics/plastic surgery* includes all of the measurements that women take in order to measure up to the ideal, such as makeup and body contouring, fake eyelashes, as well as Botox and even plastic surgery. Throughout the groups it was discussed that this also contributes to the problem, by complicating the ability to distinguish what is real and what not, since these factors can enable a person to modify their appearance. This also ties into the statement expressed in Group 2 that it is no longer enough to use Photoshop, since a person, and especially a celebrity, needs to look the same way in real life as they do in their pictures online. Therefore, the demands have become stricter, due to the fact that one’s online appearance is no longer sufficient, as it also needs to be fulfilled in the offline world as well.

“I mean normally people would Photoshop their lips, but it’s not enough anymore, because you have to have plump lips in real life, so that why like that stuff [plastic surgeries] happens.” – G2P3

But not only plastic surgery was considered to be a factor in changing one’s appearance, as makeup was also perceived to have the power to transform someone’s looks and enhance certain features or cover up flaws. Because of the already existing difficulty to distinguish if a person had surgery done on them or not, the use of makeup and body contouring makes it even harder to recognize the reality of a picture on social media.

“I’ve saw once a video, like of herself [Kylie] putting makeup on, so it was a huge difference (...) to get her face into that.” – G3P3

This is further also connected to the perception that celebrities have to strongly rely on their looks and constantly need to maintain those and fix any imperfections, which also affects society because of their dominant position in the media. In this regard, Group 3 stated that enhancing one’s appearance with plastic surgery does not necessarily have to be perceived as something negative, since it can act as a positive factor if it is done for

oneself and helps to improve one's self-esteem. However, if it becomes the norm to wipe out any imperfections, especially when considering celebrities' need to do so in order to remain in the competition within the industry, it demonstrates a rather negative aspect. With the given circumstances of a celebrity lifestyle, the dependence on one's appearance and constantly improving such is more understandable, though, when done so by non-celebrities, it implies that it underlies solely the motivation to imitate celebrities and show off.

“If you are gonna do something like that [plastic surgery] then it should be for yourself. It has become a culture that people do it, so that they look good and they can show it to people.” – G3P1

Lastly, the category *class* outlined the fact that being fit, toned and skinny is not only a topic related to the beauty ideal, but also represents one's social class. In this regard, measuring up to the standard, does not only stand for being slim and healthy, but further also resembles being part of a certain social class. This could possibly be connected to the specific assumptions that were made in the theme *lifestyle*, where it was addressed that a celebrity's high income enables them to solely focus on achieving and maintaining an ideal body. Therefore, incorporating the beauty standard would not only demonstrate that a person is healthy and fit, but further show that they have the financial means to put a lot of time and effort into their body.

“It's a class statement. She's [Kylie] rich, she's fit, she can afford all these clothes. That's the dream. It's what many people are thinking.” – G1P3

But not only a perfect outer appearance and body is associated with a higher social class, but also certain features, as for example Kylie's long fingernails, which were discussed in Group 2. With the given example, having long fingernails is considered to be rather limiting in one's daily life; however, celebrities do not encounter this problem, since ordinary tasks, such as doing dishes or cleaning the house are assumed to be done for them by their employees. Thus, celebrities embody a certain lifestyle, which enables them to keep up a way of living that does not require them to work manually.

“That definitely is also some sign of, of her, her [Kylie’s] posi-position in society. She’s surely not gonna change her own tires. Not with those nails, honey.” – G2P2

The category *femininity* of Group 1 ties into the beauty ideals and outlines the fact that none of the selfies, celebrity and non-celebrity, represent femininity, since their bodies are too skinny and resemble more a girl’s than a woman’s features. In this regard, it was stated that neither the celebrity, nor the non-celebrity could possibly compete with each other on who is more feminine, considering that their bodies are too skinny. Therefore, it was stated that a fuller body is more beautiful and a more desirable shape, as it equalizes femininity. Further, P1 argued that when she compares the selfie images to her own body, she perceives herself to be more feminine than the women in the pictures, which eliminates feelings of discomfort.

“I don’t think about how these girls [Kylie and non-celebrity] are feminine and how like real women they are (...) those pictures are more about this perfect image and flat stomach and perfect thighs, but not about being a real woman (...) it doesn’t make me feel so uncomfortable, cause I think like ‘well, my body might look a bit more feminine than theirs’.” – G1P1

Specifically occurring in Group 2 were the categories *fat* and *feminism*. After seeing the selfie images of the celebrity and non-celebrity, the discussion circled around the topic that the factors of thinness and beauty ideals are cultural constructions. In this regard, failing to measure up to the standard by having a body that is *fat* or obese was perceived to be challenging for individuals, since it is considered to be a negative characteristic. This underlies society’s expectation that everyone should do their best to live up to the ideal that is dictated by the media, with negative sanctions if one fails to do so.

“It’s also sad that like society makes you think that like fat is the worst thing you can be as a woman (...) people actually put on like a lot of worry (...) if somebody thinks you’re fat, what the F? Like what does it matter? – G2P3

This underlines the more analytical and feministic nature of the group discussion, where the participants were rather detached and unreceptive towards image based social media

content representing the beauty ideal. However, there was a commonly shared mood of misunderstanding and annoyance regarding society's structures that encouraged the upholding of such standards.

The category *feminism* addressed the fact that these beauty ideals, as well as the degree of comparison between women, underlie the concept of patriarchy. Therefore, beauty standards can be understood as a symbolical tight corset that is applied onto women and limits their freedom and autonomy. This further implies a degree of helplessness and oppression, which makes it highly important for women to gain independence and restrain their receptiveness towards these trends.

“Women hating on other women is like the conspiracy of patriarchy, which like makes us sit here and watch some random bitches instead of trying to make politically something relevant.” – G2P3

The categories that were specifically mentioned during the interview session with Group 3 were *aesthetics* and *uniqueness*. *Aesthetics* refers to the fact that most people want to see attractive celebrities in advertisements and movies, which is the reason why Photoshop and makeup is widely used. In this regard, it was discussed that on the one hand it is good to show people's natural, unedited looks, but on the other hand the degree of a model's attractiveness strongly influences how successful a product will be marketed. This also demonstrates a higher degree of detachment from the older participants, as they moved away from the micro level of an individual's desire to get compliments for their outer appearance and addressed the economical principle of product marketing by the use of an attractive model.

“Of course it's nice to like see when someone looks good and I appreciate it (...) if they're gonna sell a product (...) you don't want someone who looks terrible to sell, like, a luxury product.” – G3P1

Concerning this matter, unattractive models were perceived to be less successful at advertising luxury products as their attractive counterparts, which further outlines the use of good looks for profit. This was also stated when the group discussed the use of

attractive actresses in movies, with the assumption that people do not want to see an ordinary person in a movie.

However, by trying to measure up to the rather rigidly defined beauty ideal, it might be challenging to maintain one's *uniqueness*. This category refers to the group's perception that the unified standards of only one ideal have led to a lack of appreciation for the diversity of people's bodies and looks. The group criticized the strong demand to live up to the beauty standards, which was perceived to go hand in hand with the creation of a uniform look. Especially when comparing modern day actresses to the ones of previous decades, there has been a significant loss of uniqueness due to an overuse of plastic surgery.

“They’ve [modern actresses] all clearly had surgery (...) in their face and it’s the same (...) and you compare it to like the stars from like the 20s and 30s (...) and they were beautiful, like and they look unique, whereas nowadays I don’t think anyone looks unique, cause they all look the same.” – G3P1

#### **4.5. Health**

The theme *health* describes the concerns expressed in the interview sessions that deal with matters, such as valuing a slim body more than one's physical wellbeing. Especially when taking the beauty ideal and weight loss means into consideration, the groups often stressed on the importance of doing so with healthy means. In this regard it was stated that health is more important than looks, where a slim body should not be emulated at all costs. During the discussion dealing with unhealthy weight loss measures, P3 in Group 1 mentioned a commonly sold laxative in tea form, for weight loss purposes. In this regard, it was also addressed that the reason for this tea being so successful, underlies the impact of such social media images and the power they have over their audience, making a perfect body a need item in society.

“You’re not supposed to take those things more than 20 days in a row, right? But these girls follow these celebrities and even, like micro celebrities (...) they order the tea and they do it excessively and imagine what that can do to your body.” – G1P3



Throughout the groups the concern about physical health and its connection to beauty ideals was often expressed. All of the groups worried about the possible effects, such as unhealthy weight loss, deriving from such selfies that show women who embody the current beauty ideal. P1 in Group 3 addressed the common misperception that skinny bodies automatically equate healthy bodies, which is not always the case, as slim people can also be unhealthy. Every group addressed their concern that it is more important to be healthy than skinny, which is rather difficult as having a slim figure is automatically linked to being healthy, due to the current fitness trend and society's perceptions.

“Being skinny doesn't necessarily mean being healthy either. Like I know overweight people are generally unhealthy, but that's not always the case.” – G3P1

But not only the unhealthy means of losing weight raised concern, but also the significant rise of eating disorders, as discussed in Group 2, outline an important factor. Because of the demand for a fit body, along with the measures people take in order to live up to the ideal, eating disorders have become one of the factors that underline the problematic nature of this perception. However, not only the questionable aspect of appearance being more important than health, there is also a noticeable difference in terms of working out and exercising. Hereby, sport is no longer about physical activity and enjoying the movement itself, but underlies more the motivation of getting in shape and sharing one's progress and body on social media.

“It [fitness] all becomes very obsessive for many people (...) it's all about how your body looks and not about the movement (...) sports is more about (...) having fun and moving and then doing something good for yourself and not about toning (...) and then putting that on Instagram.” – G2P2

When taking health into consideration, in terms of unhealthy weight loss means, Group 1 also discussed rather opposing viewpoints. In this regard it was stated that even though it is unhealthy to use laxatives in order to lose weight, however, it is also wrong to go to the other extreme. Though, it is important to be proud of one's body, but factors such as body positivity and plus size models, could distort it in another way, as obesity

is not healthy either. It was perceived as wrong to focus on extremes, as an extremely thin or obese body does not reflect a healthy lifestyle at all, which is a key factor.

“Plus sized model (...) she was posing in her swimming suit (...) she had like absolutely no second thoughts about like anything (...) her real body and real beauty (...) but this is not a like healthy look, are you healthy?” – G1P4

This characterizes both extreme thinness and obesity as negative factors, due to possible health problems, which are also perceived to increase with age. P4 from Group 3 also stated, what was already previously expressed in Group 2, that exercising nowadays serves the sole purpose of achieving a perfect body in order to show it off to others. Thus, the health factor has become irrelevant for many people, as it is more important to incorporate the beauty ideal to get reassurance from others.

“I’m not sure that (...) people do it for ‘ok, I’m doing this because I want to be healthy, I exercise, I eat well’ (...) no, it’s because: ‘I want this body to show off the other ones to tell me how great I am’.” – G3P4

#### **4.6. Moral Concerns**

The theme *moral concerns* includes all of the concerns that were expressed regarding the effects of the message that advertising images, selfies and social media might have on their audience. Since various points were stated that deal with issues regarding morality, the theme *moral concerns* consists of the categories *younger generation*, *intelligence and education*, as well as *environment* in order to address each of the concerns individually. When considering the *younger generation*, it was discussed that such social media images could have a stronger effect on younger recipients. Especially the beauty ideal and images containing celebrity or non-celebrity bodies might influence a younger audience more, simply because it is assumed that they are more receptive towards it and would try to imitate what they see. This was expressed in the interview session with Group 1, where P3 stated that young girls might be more prone to fall for the beauty standards and use unhealthy means in order to live up to it.

“It’s really frightening actually because young girls are like trying not to eat so that their legs would get slimmer so they could have the thigh gap. It’s like a signifier of being skinny.” – G1P3

Throughout the groups each of the participants stated that they would have perceived selfies on social media platforms differently than they do now as adults. This explains the problem that younger people, and especially teenagers, view such content in a completely different way than grown women. A possible underlying factor might be that teenage girls face more social pressure to live up to those beauty standards, as looks might be more important in a younger age group than in older generations. In this regard, P1 in Group 3 explained that she is able to filter these images as an adult, with them having only little effect on her, however, acknowledges that in younger years she would have felt differently towards these.

“It’s different if you can see it as an adult, whereas if I was a teenage girl, I know I would have looked at that so differently.” – G3P1

Further, social media itself might also be problematic, since many celebrities have a large amount of followers, and especially in Kylie’s case, these are mainly made up by young girls and women between the ages 13 to 20. Because of the impact that these images have on young followers and the high degree of receptiveness towards such content, teenage girls might be more prone to imitate these selfies. In this regard, the alarming factor is that it has become the norm in which girls of 12 to 13 years of age post half-naked pictures of themselves on Instagram, which is problematic in itself since it does not raise any concern.

“They [teenage girls] po-post pictures of themselves like naked at age of 13, 12 (...) the alarming thing now is that people just ignore this, it’s like it’s normal (...) I see it like really interesting how it all changes gradually and al-almost nobody notices this.” – G1P4

However, Group 2 stated in this regard that it is wrong to underestimate a person solely because of their age, since it does not necessarily have to imply that they are more receptive towards media images. The underlying assumption is that younger generations

live in a slightly different reality, since they have grown up with social media content as part of their daily life, which makes it more difficult to make conclusions about their degree of receptiveness and comparison.

“I wouldn’t think that just because a thirteen year old sees this, they’re automatically gonna be like ‘oh, I need to achieve this’, because (...) people grow in a different way nowadays when they’re ex-, like exposed to media.” – G2P3

The category *intelligence and education* also ties into the concerns circling around beauty ideals and selfies. These factors were especially addressed in Groups 1 and 2 and take one’s intelligence and level of education into consideration. P1 in Group 1 considered advertisements and pictures that circulate on social media as propaganda, which has nowadays become common knowledge, especially due to the high degree of exposure. Because of this perception, the receptiveness towards this also allows drawing conclusions about a person’s intelligence, meaning that the more influential such content is for a person, the lower their intelligence might be.

“You guys started talking about advertising things from those Instagram channels, but I always thought that, well, people who buy it are a bit stupid, cause, you know, they’re so exposed to this propaganda.” – G1P1

Group 2 did not address a person’s level of intelligence, but instead stated that education, or also a lack of education, could contribute to one’s receptiveness towards media images and beauty trends. Therefore, a higher level of education could imply that someone is able to differentiate and understand the context behind these images better than a less educated person. Consequently, the lower one’s level of education is, the higher is the risk of being prone to get affected by such content. Furthermore, this does not only address the receptiveness, but also the likelihood of imitating celebrities.

“Some people in my hometown who haven’t studied, who have not even done their A level, level education, they probably would either to go maybe hate on her or be like: ‘Oh, Kylie, she’s so awesome, I wanna look like that’.” – G2P2

The category *environment* refers to the specific circumstances of a person’s upbringing by their family and the way their sociocultural environment has influenced them in

terms of their cognitive development. Because these aspects are also contributing factors in regard of how a person's personality and self-esteem develops, this further outlines the degree of receptiveness towards social media content and beauty standards. However, it also considers factors that appear in a person's environment, such as the confrontation with the beauty ideal in real life. In this regard, P1 from Group 2 stated that celebrity pictures are most likely unrealistic images, but non-celebrity images carry more meaning, considering that they show a person that could be encountered in one's everyday life.

“With the advertising pictures and with the Kylie person we know that it's not supposed to be an achievable goal because they spend so much time and Photoshop and money (...) she's [non-celebrity] (...) the girl next door.” – G2P1

#### **4.7. Reactions and Emotions**

The final theme *reactions and emotions* deals with the participants' expressed emotional content in the interview sessions. Because of the age differences in the groups, this will also enable me to include these distinctions as a variable, which will allow me to further take it into consideration for the different group discussions. Significant for Group 1 was the commonly shared lack of understanding regarding the reasons why people, and especially non-celebrities, post revealing selfies onto social media. It was further questioned why Instagram is such an important factor in people's lives, as well as the origin for the degree of comparison to celebrities.

“Why is it so popular? (...) why people just post naked pictures of themselves? – G1P4

Because of the acknowledgement that celebrities depend on a strong social media presence in order to secure their income and maintain their image, it was questioned what motivation non-celebrities have. Seeing a half-naked body or a picture of a woman posing in a bikini caused a strong feeling of discomfort amongst the participants, along with a shocked reaction based on the women's, and especially Kylie's, young age in combination with such revealing selfies.

“She [non-celebrity] wants to send (...) signals (...) it’s a bit of a conflict because in a way you (...) have the right to do that, but still (...) this just makes me feel bad.” – G1P2

The reactions within Group 1 were stronger towards the non-celebrity, since it was considered that she has no need to post such pictures of herself online. P3 stated that the non-celebrity’s selfie evoked more negative emotions in her than Kylie’s, since she has created her entire image out of it and depends on it based on her status and financial aspects. However, all of these factors fall away for non-celebrities, as it is perceived that they do it simply for attention, which triggers more negative feelings.

“To be (...) brutally honest, I would roll my eyes more at this [non-celebrity] than I would at Kylie Jenner’s selfie.” – G1P3

However, the non-celebrity’s selfie was not the only source of feelings of discomfort for the participants towards the content. P3 stated that indeed Kylie’s selfie caused her to feel uncomfortable because of the fact that she has gained fame and created her image from her body. This outlines the fact that if a person is attractive, they can actually make money solely with their body and good looks.

“Her [Kylie’s] body is like her image and she’s making money from that, so that makes me a little uncomfortable, cause you think to yourself: ‘Oh, (...) hot people can make money like that’.” – G1P3

Not only the emotional effects deriving from the selfie pictures were significant in this group interview, but also the comparison of the group members to the picture content. The majority of Group 1 would rather compare themselves to the non-celebrity selfie because of its content, such as quality and the nonprofessional setting. However, these were considered to occur on a more subconscious level, along with the acknowledgement of the individual group members’ bodily capabilities, which would enable them to live up to the beauty ideal or not. Further, it was also discussed that the degree of exposure of one’s body would have not been acceptable for one’s own family, as P2 stated:

“She’s [Kylie] a teenager, I mean my parents would be so angry if I (...) as a teenager (...) show my body.” – G1P2

In addition to discussing the quality of the selfies and the comparison to them, Group 1 often questioned the genuineness of such picture content. In this regard, the participants repeatedly doubted the reality of the images, stating that each of them, regardless if celebrity or non-celebrity, could easily be modified and edited, which contributes to the difficulty of being able to draw the line between what is real and fake.

The discussion with Group 2 was characterized with a lesser degree of a lack of understanding, but focused more the nature of beauty trends. These evoked a strong degree of resentment and irritation towards the beauty ideal, as well as society’s demand for women to live up to those. Furthermore, the group shared a feeling of pity and sadness for women who suffer from a negative body image based on those standards and who strongly believe that it is necessary to measure up to the ideal. The group further emphasized that they do not have a firm interest in Instagram content and considered body pictures as dull. As P3 stated, she perceived the intense engagement with a stranger’s body in a picture as disturbing.

“I’m not very interested in people’s bodies in, in, in general (...) this is probably the longest time I’ve ever spent looking at someone’s body and I think it’s fucking creepy.” – G2P3

During the group discussion the participants expressed not only negative emotions towards society’s demand for having a body that embodies the beauty ideal, but also stated that they would consider such picture content as rather boring and would not actively choose to perceive it. In this regard, P3 stated:

“My brain classifies this as really boring content (...) I would probably just like scroll through, I wouldn’t even probably like just pause to even like look at it very closely.” – G2P3

Group 2 also discussed the differences in the reception of the images circulating on social media. In this regard, it was acknowledged that for adults, selfie pictures would

have less of an impact than they would have on young girls. This underlies the assumption that teenagers might not be able to filter or separate such images, causing them to feel that they need to incorporate what they see. Thus, P1 acknowledged her own body capabilities and stated that not everyone can possibly achieve the beauty ideal, simply because the various body types differ from each other, as for example in height and bodily features, such as big breasts.

“I’m actually really happy that when we were thirteen this Instagram stuff and all the Facebook and things didn’t exist because I wouldn’t have been able to separate it (...) from my reality and my body possibilities.” – G2P1

During the discussion with Group 3, the participants addressed the fact that building up self-esteem and body confidence is more important than trying to incorporate a nearly impossible ideal. The group shared a common support for people taking a stance against Photoshop and encouraged a more realistic display of the female body. Especially the ridiculing of celebrity poses and Photoshopped advertising pictures were strongly appreciated, which caused the group to idolize women who point out the reality of such images more than such who embody the ideal. Group 3 was similar to the other groups in terms of the expressed emotional content when being confronted with the selfies throughout the interview sessions. The participants also discussed the assumption that celebrities depend more on a strong social media presence for the maintaining of factors such as image, status, etc., while non-celebrities’ underlying motive is attention. These perceived differences evoked rather contrasting emotions, based on the assumptions for the distinct motivations. It was further considered that non-celebrity women posting such pictures have rather low self-esteem, which would mean that they depend on likes and other people’s approval in order to actually feel comfortable in their own skin and are only then able to appreciate their bodies.

“I just wonder, you know, what kind of self-esteem do they have, you know, to feel that they need other people’s approval, you know, to say how beautiful I am to feel actually beautiful.” – G3P4

The participants also found it difficult to understand the reasons for posting such selfies, as they provoked feelings of making them cringe or laugh. Such reactions might



underlie the fact that this discussion consisted of women in the oldest age group, whose mindset regarding beauty ideals and acknowledging one's own body differs strongly from younger participants. Consequently, the oldest group has been confronted with social media content at a later point in their lives, which could have caused them to develop a different attitude towards such selfies, than, for example, women in their early twenties. This might underlie the fact that older women might have had the ability to develop a different kind of self-esteem as, for example, women who were confronted with such images during critical points in their lives, such as the teenage years. Therefore, encountering such a picture on social media triggers different emotions for the participants, as P1 stated:

“They [selfies] just make me laugh, like when I see them, I'm like ‘come on’ like and it makes me cringe. Like I would never think of standing in front of a mirror and taking a photograph like that of myself.” – G3P1

The interview session with Group 3 was characterized with a different attitude towards the picture content, since the group members did not compare themselves directly to the selfie images as much as the younger participants. Hereby, the women acknowledged that their bodies do not measure up to the dominating beauty ideal, but also accepted this as a given factor.

“It's [body in celebrity and non-celebrity selfie] nothing like my body at all, so I would never look at a picture like that and think: ‘Oh my god, that's what I wanna look like that’, cause I know that's not gonna happen in a million years.” – G3P1

Despite the acknowledgement of one's own bodily capabilities and possible limitations, the group also discussed the motivation for posting such selfies onto social media. In this regard, not only the reasons for sharing such pictures were questioned, but further also a lack of understanding was expressed, in terms of classifying such content to be underlying the purpose of seeking attention.

“I would consider myself, uh, to be attention seeker, so even if I had the perfect body, I would never (...) of course if we're like (...) at the sauna or one day at the beach, yes I might.” – G3P2

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to present the results in relation to the previously stated research questions and answer them based on my findings through the interviews. When addressing my main research question, regarding how women feel about their own bodies when being confronted with body selfies of non-celebrities and celebrities, there is a noticeable difference based on status, especially throughout the younger groups. In this regard, Group 1 focused strongly on this aspect, which could lead to the assumption that the younger participants are within an age range, where there is a considerably higher demand to achieve such a status. This could also tie into the aspect that the youngest group has either not entered working life yet, or has not been in a job for a longer period of time, which could in turn mean that the participants have different expectations towards working life and earning money. Further, most women would compare their body more to a non-celebrity selfie, since it outlines a higher degree of relatability.

This stands in contrast to the selfie images of celebrities, who are perceived to represent not only the image, but also the lifestyle behind it, which embodies the sole, primary need to measure up to the ideal, without having any other obligations in life other than being fit and slim. This could be connected to the fact that was addressed during the session with Group 2, stating that the reason why the non-celebrity selfie has more impact derives from the fact that celebrities have a certain lifestyle that enables them to put a lot of effort in their looks, whereas a non-celebrity selfie demonstrates that this is achievable by anyone. This perspective differs from the points made during the discussion with Group 1, as the participants of Group 2 were more detached in their reactions towards body selfies, which specifically ties into the feministic viewpoints expressed by the group members. This could not only mean that because of the specific feminism-oriented makeup of Group 2, the participants were less receptive towards such selfie images, but also that they could have experienced an inner conflict in expressing emotional statements towards such content.

While the reactions towards the celebrity selfie were mainly characterized with an understanding and acknowledgement of the relations between demand and image, the non-celebrity selfie evoked more negative feelings. This was especially defined by a lack of understanding in terms of why a non-famous person would share such images on social media, which was specifically discussed in Group 1. In this regard, it could be assumed that the youngest age group is confronted with more social pressure, than the participants in Group 3, who neither expressed such negative emotions, nor a lack of understanding, which outlines a strong degree of detachment in the oldest group. Throughout all of the group sessions the non-celebrity's motive was questioned, based on the underlying assumption of her need to show off her body on the internet deriving from low self-esteem. This was linked to the common understanding that a celebrity selfie is connected to status and, therefore, also to certain responsibilities and requirements, in terms of needing to satisfy, not only the industry's, but also the public's demand to embody the cultural perception of beauty. However, because of the acknowledgement that non-celebrities do not face these expectations, this has had a different impact on the participants, which further led to a shared lack of understanding why a non-celebrity would consider sharing such pictures as necessary.

This was specifically addressed when the different lifestyles were taken into consideration, which outlines the major distinctions between celebrities and non-celebrities. Celebrities do not only have the need to measure up to the beauty ideal, but also the means to do so, which led to the perception that non-celebrities attempt to imitate not only their bodies, but also strive for the same lifestyle as their idols. The interview participants did not feel self-conscious after being presented those images, but acknowledged the differences in the ways of living, along with the demands connected to these. Therefore, the interviewed women did not necessarily feel negative towards their own bodies, but tied it more to status or imitation, depending on the specific context of the pictures. This was especially noticeable during the interview session with Group 1, where the participants compared the differing surroundings and matters of privacy in the pictures to the distinct lifestyles. Consequently, this could lead to the assumption that these factors are more important to the younger generation, which stands in contrast to Group 3, where the participants expressed compassion and empathy

after finding out that the non-celebrity used body selfies to document her weight loss success. This outlines a lower degree of social comparison and further demonstrates the consideration of factors, such as someone's personal background.

However, even though the selfie content itself did not evoke a direct body comparison within the groups, it was noted throughout each session that this kind of image content might have a negative effect on young women and girls. This underlies the fact that these pictures embody an ideal that is not only associated with celebrities and their lifestyle, but also praised in the media. Because of the constant exposure to such content on social media, especially in terms of non-celebrity pictures, this also sends the message that everyone could actually achieve the beauty ideal, along with an even stronger demand to live up to it. This was especially addressed in Group 2 and 3, stating that the non-celebrity's fit body could evoke the feeling that everyone can measure up to the ideal, which sends a stronger message than the celebrity selfie. In this regard, the groups in this age range might be more detached to this content than the youngest group and face less social comparison.

One reason could be the fact that the participants have less involvement in such social media content and further do not place so much value on beauty ideals when being confronted with such. This outlines a rather crucial factor when considering the high degree of social media exposure, as well as the beauty ideal circulating within online environments. Especially the degree of imitation by non-celebrities raised a commonly shared concern expressed by the interview participants, in consideration that young teenage girls already post revealing pictures on social media networks, without possibly being aware of the consequences. This further led to the shared perception that social media networks act as a strong contributor when addressing the reception of selfie images. Thus, there were also noticeable differences between the groups, which could tie into the fact that the older the participants are, the less amount of social media exposure they have faced in younger years, which could be a significant factor in addressing the lower degree of impact when being confronted with such images.

But not only the effects of selfie images, but also the class dimension was a common factor in the discussions. In this regard, a fit and skinny body does not only resemble a certain lifestyle, but also expresses one's belonging to a social class, which also reflects the stigmata of being overweight and obese. Because of the high value and positive attributes connected to an ideal body, it is something that is worth striving for, which leads to another degree of comparison. Especially when taking the different age groups into consideration in regards to class, it was addressed by Group 1 that a lot of money might be more frustrating than perfect bodies. This could tie into the aspect that the younger participants might not be employed in jobs with a high salary, which causes it to have a higher impact on them. Because of this being a further underlying factor in the distribution of the Western beauty ideal of being slim, fit and toned, it has become not only a class statement, but also more of a need item in society. Hereby, the major factor is that a fit body is considered as an achievement, which does not only outline its importance in society, but also the fact that the high degree of media exposure has led to an obsession. Especially when considering the rigid beauty ideal, it has become impossible to achieve the standard, since there are too many demands, which are at the same time contradicting each other. In terms of age comparison, it is safe to assume that this might mean more to the younger participants, since they still face a higher degree of social pressure and comparison, which was expressed during the interview sessions.

When discussing the specific sub-questions, in terms of the effects of those images on the perception of one's own body and self-esteem, it is safe to say that they indeed influence those. Throughout the interview sessions the participants definitely acknowledged the bodies and bodily features in the selfie images, and compared themselves to them. However, this underlies certain limitations, as for one, the participating women did not encounter these images by choice or their own free will, since they were forced to receive and deal with the content because of the interview sessions. Second, the comparison and perception regarding one's own body and self-esteem only occurs to a certain degree, as most of the participants were aware that the selfie images are not necessarily a display of reality. The knowledge of this can be understood as a factor that hinders these images to influence aspects such as self-esteem or poor body image, but does trigger other aspects, such as motivation or the desire to

work out and get fit oneself. Therefore, the presented selfie pictures in the groups did not affect the participants in a negative way or evoke a poor self-esteem, but caused them to acknowledge their own capabilities. This specifically arose when some of the participants stated that they could look equally as fit as the women in the pictures, if they would do more sports, which also reflects their own choice and decision.

Further, the groups' concerns were in fact not so much directed towards their own bodies' level of fitness, as well as measuring up to the beauty ideal or not, but more about being healthy. Hereby, it was addressed throughout all of the groups that health weighs more heavily than having a skinny figure, along with the acknowledgement that these factors are often perceived as a synonym for one another. This was especially expressed during the interview session with Group 3, where health was a major factor when discussing one's body and level of fitness. A reason for this might be that the older participants might already face bodily changes and be therefore more prone to acknowledge those, as well as the importance of staying healthy. This also outlines the point made by Group 2 that doing sports and exercising has nowadays moved away from finding pleasure in the movement itself or enjoying a workout, and more towards the sole goal of being as fit as possible and either showing off the results or the process on social media, as for example by posting gym pictures on Instagram.

In terms of the sub-question if the modern image and beauty ideal has a negative effect on women or causes them to feel resentment towards their own bodies, especially when seeing other women's bodies, this does not necessarily have to apply. The women I have interviewed for this study were seemingly comfortable in their own bodies, even though some acknowledged having imperfections and realized that they do not measure up to the ideal. However, all of the interview participants were rather indifferent to the selfie images to an extent, that these did not make a difference nor cause a feeling of discomfort regarding their own bodies. Thus, there were documented feelings of discomfort, which were solely expressed in connection to the fact that people post such pictures on social media and expose themselves in such a way. This was more connected to a lack of understanding, as well as a concern regarding the effects from

such exposure in terms of younger generations, rather than to negative feelings towards oneself.

One aspect that was specifically addressed when talking about bodies and body image, are cultural differences, which were frequently discussed throughout each interview session. In this regard, the common understanding was that these selfies could only be as powerful, based on the makeup of the cultural structures they circulate in. Especially in the US, celebrities have a rather high status in society, as well as a high degree of imitation by their fans, which also ties into the aspect that a larger number of people aim to live up to this ideal. This factor is also illustrated in the number of plastic surgeries, which are influenced by the cultural environment, whereas some might perceive them as normality, whilst others would consider them as extreme procedures. Therefore, the effects from such images might differ, depending on the culture, making the selfie itself only as powerful as the receiver allows it to be. This further applies to aspects such as nudity, which outlines a contributing factor, as a naked body is considered as a taboo in some cultures, such as the American, it is completely normal in others, which also influences the perception of the beauty ideal. In this regard, the exposure to different body types is rather positive, since it shows that there is not only one shape, but instead a wide variety of different sizes.

When taking the different ages in the groups into consideration, there were noticeable differences in the responses towards the presented selfies. Group 1 was characterized by an overall lack of understanding for the reasons for posting these kinds of selfies, especially by non-celebrities. Questioning the motives for such exposure also occurred within the other two groups, but not as dominant as in the youngest age group, which could signify the high degree of social pressure and comparison that young women face. This could possibly be the reason why such social media and image content is perceived as more personal, deriving from the fact that one's own identity is not fully formed yet at a younger age. Especially the expressed degree of discomfort, due to the self-sexualization, was a common theme that occurred solely in the first group, which also derived from the dominant lack of understanding. Hereby, Group 1 dealt with factors,

such as that a workout routine does affect one's perception regarding one's own body more than if one does not work out.

In comparison, Group 2 differed from this point of view, as the commonly shared emotions addressed a strong degree of resentment and irritation towards the beauty ideals, as well as society's demand for women to live up to them. The degree of compassion towards women who suffered from a negative body image and the need to live up to the standards, as well as the overall lack of emotion and boredom towards body content on Instagram, was specifically distinct in Group 2. This might underlie the fact that the participants in this age group have outgrown the degree of social pressure, but still face a certain amount, which could lead to a higher degree of resentment than in any other group. This is connected to the strong expression of sympathy for people who speak out against beauty standards, build up self-esteem and ridicule perfect poses, as discussed in Group 3. One explanation for this could be that the participants in the oldest group have learned to deal or ignore any expectations or pressure deriving from society.

In this regard, the youngest group had a strong reaction in trying to understand the reasons for such selfies, as well as a high degree of comparison with the non-celebrity. It was specifically relevant that Group 1 addressed the aspect of intelligence, meaning that less intelligent individuals are more prone to being affected by these media images, as well as by the beauty ideal. Further, it was considered that femininity is more important than a perfect body, as the bodies in the selfies do not represent a feminine shape. Group 2 was more aware of the social and feministic mechanisms behind the beauty ideal, which caused the discussion to be rather pragmatic and scientific than emotional. However, it is notable that both groups (1 and 2) shared a common acknowledgement of their own bodily capabilities and limitations, while Group 3 stressed more the importance of health, as well as a higher degree of acceptance that they might never achieve the ideal. Group 2 also acknowledged aspects that are connected to Group 1's statement regarding intelligence, but addressed them in a more abstract way, by focusing on the personal background, such as education and the upbringing by the parents, which also ties into the receptiveness of media content.



While Group 1 discussed femininity, Group 2 addressed it in terms of fat shaming and feminism, which plays a major role in society's acknowledgement of femininity.

Group 3 did not show strong emotions when being confronted with the selfies, however, a difficulty to understand the reasons for posting such pictures, especially in the case of the non-celebrity, was also present in this group. Hereby, the oldest group of participants dealt with more abstract categories that moved away from a personal level, such as factors of intelligence and upbringing, and focused on a more objective perception of society and the media industry. This was specifically obvious when the group discussed factors, such as aesthetics for marketing purposes, the loss of uniqueness due to industry demands, as well as materialism as a reason for the glorification of celebrities.

### **5.1. Limitations of the Study**

After summarizing the results it is, however, also necessary to outline the limitations of the conducted study. One major factor was the relatively small size of the interview groups. Because of the few participants in each group and the observed flow of discussion, it is safe to assume that a larger number of group members would have led to a more diverse debate and a higher variety of opinions. This was especially noticeable when pauses occurred during the discussions, which could have been avoided if the groups would have consisted of a larger number of participants. However, by the use of smaller group sizes, it enabled the flow of discussion to develop more towards a deeper level, which was beneficial in terms of being able to access the emotional content of the participants.

Another aspect relates to the concrete conduction of the interviews, for which I have used advertising images to spark the discussion before revealing the actual selfie content. However, these pictures might have acted as a source of distraction, which caused the groups to comment on them considerably and triggered the participants' focus to shift back to these at several points in time. Even though they were initially used in order to ease the group members into the discussion by starting with the broader

topic before narrowing it down to the specifics, they did not have much in common with the actual research background. However, despite the possible amount of distraction deriving from the presented advertising images, they also enabled the participants to take these factors into consideration when addressing the selfies.

Another aspect was specifically the makeup of Group 2, ages 24 to 27, which consisted of women with a strong feministic background and a high degree of awareness in terms of media images. This caused the overall course of the discussion to be more analytical and allowed only little emotional content to surface. Even though this gave valuable information about connecting the points that selfies share with feminism, patriarchy and society, however, it did make analyzing the emotional components more difficult. This also ties into the general makeup of the interview groups, as almost all of the participants, with only a few exceptions, had an academic background in social sciences. That being said, most of the women were familiar with media exposure and had a higher degree of awareness regarding media content. This could also act as a source of distortion, as the expressed opinions might not reflect the participants' viewpoints, but outline more the specific knowledge that they have obtained within an educational environment, which makes it difficult to generalize the results.

Besides the educational background of the participants, another relevant factor is that all of the women were either Finnish or foreigners that have lived in Finland for a longer period of time (six months or more). This might display an additional source of distortion, as all of them were acquainted with the Finnish sauna culture and have experienced it themselves. This also addresses the point stated in the interviews, which describes that seeing naked female bodies in sauna does indeed affect one's perception of body image. Because the sauna setting enables people to acknowledge the existence of different body types, it further contributes to a person's understanding that there is not only one uniform standard, as there are various shapes and sizes. Therefore, this study might have had a different outcome if it was conducted with female participants, who have never visited a nude sauna or, generally speaking, a setting in which they would have been confronted with the naked bodies of other women. However, this might not necessarily resemble a negative aspect, as this allows to gain different insight

into the topic, since a point of high relevance was addressed, which can be understood as a contributing factor in regard of the perception of female bodies.

Further, another possible source of bias could derive from the celebrity selfie I have used for the interviews, since not every participant knew the person Kylie Jenner. This was stated within every session at least once, where it is safe to say that it must have influenced the perceptions and emotions regarding the selfie. Therefore, the lack of familiarity with the celebrity might have caused the participants who did not know her, to react differently towards her selfie and express fewer emotions towards it. In this regard it would have been advisable to use a bigger and more well-known celebrity, as for example Rihanna, in order to ensure that all of the participants share the same common ground when discussing the effects of the selfie image. However, despite the fact that not all of the participants were familiar with the celebrity, it might not have been a significant factor in the perceptions of the interview participants, as it was still noticeable that Kylie's selfie appeared to be more professional and polished than the picture of the non-celebrity.

One major factor that needs to be considered as well is that I have only interviewed women who do not have children of their own. This does not necessarily have to be a crucial factor when addressing body image; however, it can be assumed that it plays a role in how a woman perceives her body. Especially during pregnancy a woman's body undergoes major changes, where some of them are of permanent nature, such as stretchmarks or a loss of the elasticity of the skin, which could in turn also affect one's body image. Because none of the participants have given birth to a child, this could mean that they might have a better perception towards their bodies than women who are mothers. However, this also ties into the assumption that having children could also affect women in a positive way, by moving away from the importance of how their bodies look and more towards what their bodies are actually capable of.

When considering the capabilities of one's body, sports should also be taken into consideration. Hereby, none of the participants were excessively active in any sport, nor did they have a regular exercise routine. While some of the women have training habits,

none of them mentioned that they are following a strict routine or structured schedule of physical activity. This could indicate that if a group would have been made up of women who train, for example yoga, every day, they might have a different perception towards their bodies as well, due to the fact that they are able to acknowledge what their bodies are capable of achieving in sports. However, besides all of the possible sources that could have contributed to the degree of bias, this study still brought back interesting results through the more depth-oriented interview sessions, which allowed me to gain insight into this topic of research.

## **5.2. Suggestions for further Research**

After acknowledging the limitations of this study, it is necessary to address how it could be improved, especially when considering further research. One of the disadvantages of this study was the number of interviews, as well as participants. Since I only interviewed three different age groups in the sessions, I was able to analyze the results from the interviews and make an age comparison. However, due to the small number of conducted group interviews, a proposal for further research would be to plan not only one interview session for each age group, but to gather a larger number of participants, which would allow me to divide them into at least two, or preferably three groups. By gathering more participants for each age group, this would enable a better comparison between the different ages and groups. Therefore, it would be advisable to have more interviews for each age group, which would automatically lead to more interview sessions altogether. By conducting three interview sessions for each age group, this would add up to a total of nine focus group interviews, which would grant a better comparison between the different ages and groups. One of the main reasons for this would be that the results deriving from the group sessions would be more valid and reliable, even if one of the groups would not be as efficient or productive in their discussion.

In this regard it should also be taken into consideration that even though mini focus groups are also an acceptable means of data collection, it might be preferable to rely on the actual size of focus group interviews, which are conducted with around seven to ten

participants. During the interview sessions, I made the experience that the fairly small group size was rather a disadvantage, as it affected the flow of discussion at several points in time. Therefore, it would be advisable for further research to gather more participants, in order to not only allow a higher degree of diversity in the expressed opinions, but also to enable a more fluid flow of discussion and eliminate the danger of stagnation during the conversations.

Another factor that should be taken into consideration is the variation of the age range itself, as most of the group members were roughly around the same age, as for example in Group 1 where most participants were 22 or 23 years of age, but none were around the ages of 20 or 21. In further research this aspect should be considered, by including participants that embody more variance in terms of age. This is especially relevant for the youngest group, since there could be particular differences in the perceptions of selfie images and in the opinions expressed between the ages 20 and 22. This also ties into the point that was made during the interview session with Group 2, which stated that the outcome of the discussion might be different if it would have included younger women and girls. Therefore, further research should consist of participants that are much younger, as for example teenagers, in order to allow a concrete age comparison and gain deeper insight. This underlies the assumption that age could act as a possible variable affecting the degree of insecurity and negative body image, which might stabilize itself in adulthood.

However, not only the group size and age range are factors that could be improved in further research, but also the method in terms of the sample collection. Even though I initially intended to gather the participants via newsletters and E-Mail subscriptions, this was rather difficult to implement in reality, which is why I resorted to snowballing. Thus, it is safe to assume that snowballing is not necessarily a suitable method when collecting a sample for this concrete topic of discussion. Therefore, further research should ensure to gather participants by using the originally intended method of contacting potential participants. One option that could help to attract and interest people to take part in an interview session would be to offer some sort of compensation for their efforts, such as presenting them gift cards in exchange for their participation.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to not only focus on interviewing students, as for the previously stated reasons, but instead also include participants from various educational backgrounds and different social classes. This ties into the fact that students have gained a broader knowledge throughout their education and obtained the ability to think critically, which would not be the case when interviewing a person that only has a high school diploma. If, as addressed in the interview sessions with Group 1 and 2, education and intelligence really make a difference in the perceptions of a person, further research should also contain participants from different backgrounds, which would also allow include the broader population.

## References

- Adorno, Theodor W.** (1971): *Fernsehen als Ideologie*. In: Rolf Tiedemann (Hrsg.): Theodor W. Adorno. Eine Auswahl, Frankfurt: Büchergilde Gutenberg.
- Alkon, Amy** (2010). *The Truth About Beauty*, Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/201010/the-truth-about-beauty> [07.03.2016].
- Alvesson, Mats/Billing, Yvonne Due** (1997). *Understanding Gender and Organizations*, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.
- Archer, John/Lloyd, Barbara** (1985). *Sex and Gender*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Athique, Adrian** (2013). *Digital Media and Society. An Introduction*, Polity: Cambridge & Malden.
- Bacchi, Carol Lee** (1990). *Same difference. Feminism and sexual difference*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Bailey, Kenneth D.** (1987). *Methods of social research*, Third edition. New York: The Free Press.
- BBC News** (2013). *Self-portraits and social media: The rise of the 'selfie'*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-22511650> [10.03.2016].
- Beasley, Chris** (1999). *What is Feminism? An Introduction to Feminist Theory*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Beauty Redefined** (2014). *Photoshopping: Altering Images and Our Minds*, Beauty Redefined: <http://www.beautyredefined.net/photoshopping-altering-images-and-our-minds/> [18.03.2016].
- Biagi, Shirley** (2015). *Media/Impact. An Introduction To Mass Media*, Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Bortz, Jürgen/Döring, Michaela** (2002): *Forschungsmethoden und Evaluation*, Berlin: Springer.
- Brady, Anita/Schirato, Tony** (2011). *Understanding Judith Butler*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Brand, Peg Zeglin** (2000). *Beauty matters*, Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press.

- Briggs, Helen** (2014). 'Selfie' body image warning issue  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/health-26952394> [21.10.2015]
- Butler, Judith** (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*,  
 Routledge: New York & London.
- Cambridge Dictionaries Online.**  
<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/beauty> [19.01.2016].
- Clowes, Rusty** (1994). *Think smaller: think mini focus groups:*  
<http://www.quirks.com/articles/a1994/19941201.aspx> [11.08.2016].
- Crossman, Ashley** (2014a). *Feminist Theory. An Overview*  
<http://sociology.about.com/od/Sociological-Theory/a/Feminist-Theory.htm>  
 [22.01.2016].
- Crossman, Ashley** (2014b). *Sociology of Gender. Studying The Relationship Between  
 Gender And Society* <http://sociology.about.com/od/Disciplines/a/Sociology-Of-Gender.htm> [22.01.2016].
- Dasgupta, Diptiman/Dasgupta, Rudranil** (2009). *Social Networks using Web 2.0*,  
 IBM: <http://www.ibm.com/developerworks/library/ws-socialcollab/ws-socialcollab-pdf.pdf> [24.03.2016].
- Diller, Vivian** (2011). *Is Photoshop Destroying America's Body Image?* Huffington  
 Post: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/vivian-diller-phd/photoshop-body-image\\_b\\_891095.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/vivian-diller-phd/photoshop-body-image_b_891095.html) [02.03.2016].
- Dove.** *The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty*, <http://www.dove.us/Social-Mission/campaign-for-real-beauty.aspx> [02.03.2016].
- Durkin, Sarah/Paxton Susan** (2002). *Predictors of vulnerability to reduced body  
 image satisfaction and psychological wellbeing in response to exposure to idealized  
 female media images in adolescent girls.* In: *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*,  
 Amsterdam: Elsevier publishing, P. 995-1005.
- Eaton, Marcia** (2000). *Kantian and Contextual Beauty*, In: Brand, Peg Zeglin (2000):  
*Beauty matters*, Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Elshtain, Jean Bethke** (1987). *Against Androgyny*, In: Anne Phillips (1987): *Feminism  
 and Equality*, Blackwell: Oxford.
- Explorable** (a). *Population Sampling Techniques:* <https://explorable.com/population-sampling> [02.02.2016].



**Explorable** (b). *Snowball Sampling*: <https://explorable.com/snowball-sampling> [12.08.2016].

**Fallon, April E.** (1994). *Body Image and the Regulation of Weight*, In: Adesso, Vincent/Reddy, Diane M./Fleming, Raymond (1994). *Psychological Perspectives on Women's Health*, Washington D.C.: Taylor & Francis, p. 127-168.

**Fell, James** (2014). *How The Media Makes Men Hate Their Bodies Too*, Time: <http://time.com/3086207/body-image-men-women-media/> [14.09.2016].

**Fern, Edward F.** (2001). *Advanced Focus Group Research*, Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks.

**Fiske, John** (2011). *Television Culture*, second edition, Routledge: London and New York.

**Fox, Kate** (1997). *Mirror, mirror. Motives: why we look in the mirror. A summary of research findings on body image*, Social Issues Research Centre: <http://www.sirc.org/publik/mirror.html> [04.03.2016].

**Freedman, Rita** (1989). *Die Opfer der Venus. Vom Zwang schön zu sein*, München: Heyne.

**Groupsplus.** *FAQs about Focus Groups. The Information you wanted about Focus Group Research*: <http://www.groupsplus.com/pages/faq.htm#6> [11.08.2016].

**Guest, Greg/MacQueen, Kathleen M./Namey, Emily E.** (2012). *Applied Thematic Analysis*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

**Harrison, Wendy Cealey/Hood-Williams, John** (2002). *Beyond sex and gender*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

**Haug, Frigga** (1987). *Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory*, London: Verso.

**Healthy Place** (2014). *Eating Disorders: Body Image and Advertising* <http://www.healthyplace.com/eating-disorders/articles/eating-disorders-body-image-and-advertising/> [17.02.2014]

**Higgins, Kathleen** (2000). *Beauty and Its Kitsch Competitors*, In: Brand, Peg Zeglin (2000): *Beauty matters*, Bloomington and Indiana: Indiana University Press.

**Jones, Meridith** (2013). *Media-Bodies and Photoshop*, In: Attwood, Feona/Campbell, Vincent, Hunter, I.Q./Lockyer, Sharon (2013). *Controversial Images. Media Representations on the Edge*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan. p. 19-35.

- Jung, Brian** (n. d.). *The Negative Effect of Social Media on Society and Individuals*, Small Business: <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/negative-effect-social-media-society-individuals-27617.html> [23.03.2016].
- Karpatitis, Christos & Kaniadakis, Antonios** (2015). *Social Media as Marketing Information Systems Co-Creation in Viral Video Advertising*, In: Tsiakis, Theodosios (2015). *Trends and Innovations in Marketing Information Systems*, Business Science Reference: Hershey. (p.176-196).
- Khamis, Jumana** (2015). *Could posting selfies be a sign of low self-esteem?* <http://gulfnnews.com/news/uae/society/could-posting-selfies-be-a-sign-of-low-self-esteem-1.1445546> [20.10.2015].
- Kite, Lindsay** (2011). *Sex Appeal and Thin Ideals: Are Men to Blame?* Beauty Redefined: <http://www.beautyredefined.net/are-men-to-blame/> [04.03.2016].
- Kolenda, Nick** (2015). *The Ideal Characteristics of a Visual Advertisement*. <http://www.nickkolenda.com/ad-characteristics/#ad-characteristics-t4> [29.02.2016].
- Komori, Michi**. Thematic Analysis: <http://designresearchtechniques.com/casestudies/thematic-analysis/> [16.08.2016].
- Konstantinovsky, Michelle** (2011). *The list of "Fat TV" shows keeps on growing*, About-face: <http://www.about-face.org/the-list-of-fat-tv-shows-keeps-on-growing/> [23.09.2016].
- Krashinsky, Susan** (2013). *What's behind the culture of Photoshop in advertising*, The Globe And Mail: <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/industry-news/marketing/whats-behind-the-culture-of-photoshop-in-advertising/article10111740/> [04.03.2016].
- Kromrey, Helmut** (2009). *Empirische Sozialforschung*, Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius.
- Krueger, Richard A./Casey, Mary Anne** (2000). *Focus Groups. A practical guide for applied research*, Third edition, Sage publications: Thousand oaks.
- Lauscher, Nicole** (2010). *Der Körper als Baustelle*. [http://www.focus.de/gesundheit/ratgeber/psychologie/tid-18617/schoenheitswahn-der-koerper-als-baustelle\\_aid\\_518409.html](http://www.focus.de/gesundheit/ratgeber/psychologie/tid-18617/schoenheitswahn-der-koerper-als-baustelle_aid_518409.html) [14.02.2014]
- Lazar, Michelle M.** (2013). *The Right to Be Beautiful: Postfeminist Identity and Consumer Beauty Advertising*, In: Gill, Rosalind/Scharff, Christina (2013): New

Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

**Mariella, Adriana** (2014). *How Instagram Is Affecting The Way We Perceive Ourselves And The World Around Us*, Elite Daily: <http://elitedaily.com/life/culture/x-pro-ii-valencia-instagram-choose-neither/614571/> [30.01.2016].

**Marschik, Matthias/ Dorer, Johanna** (2002). *Sexismus (in) der Werbung: Geschlecht, Reklame und Konsum*.

[http://www.mediamanual.at/mediamanual/themen/pdf/werbung/42\\_Marschik.pdf](http://www.mediamanual.at/mediamanual/themen/pdf/werbung/42_Marschik.pdf)  
[26.04.2014].

**Mayring, Philip** (2002). *Qualitative Sozialforschung*, Weinheim: Belz.

**Mayring, Philip** (2008). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. Grundlagen und Techniken*, Weinheim: Belz.

**Merriam-Webster:** <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/feminism>  
[22.01.2016].

**Milkie, Melissa A.** (1999). *Social Comparisons, Reflected Appraisals, And Mass Media: The Impact of Pervasive Beauty Images on Black and White Girls' Self-Concepts*, In: *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 62 (2), Special Issue: Qualitative Contributions to Social Psychology, Washington D.C.: American Sociological Association, p. 190-210.

**Morris, Anne/Katzman, Debra** (2003). *The impact of the media on eating disorders in children and adolescents*, Pulsus Group

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2792687/> [12.09.2016].

**Mullan, Eileen** (2011). *What is Digital Content?* EContent

<http://www.econtentmag.com/Articles/Resources/Defining-EContent/What-is-Digital-Content-79501.htm> [22.01.2016].

**Mulvey, Laura** (1989). *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Basingstoke: Macmillan.

**Mukherjee, Sumitava & Srinivasan, Narayanan** (2013). *Attention in Preferential Choice*, In: Pammi, Chandrasekhar & Srinivasan, Narayanan (2013). *Decision Making: Neural and Behavioural Approaches*, Progress in Brain Research Volume 202, Amsterdam & Oxford: Elsevier. (p.117-131)

**Nations, Daniel** (2016). *What is Web 2.0? How Web 2.0 Is Defining Society*, About Tech: <http://webtrends.about.com/od/web20/a/what-is-web20.htm> [24.03.2016].

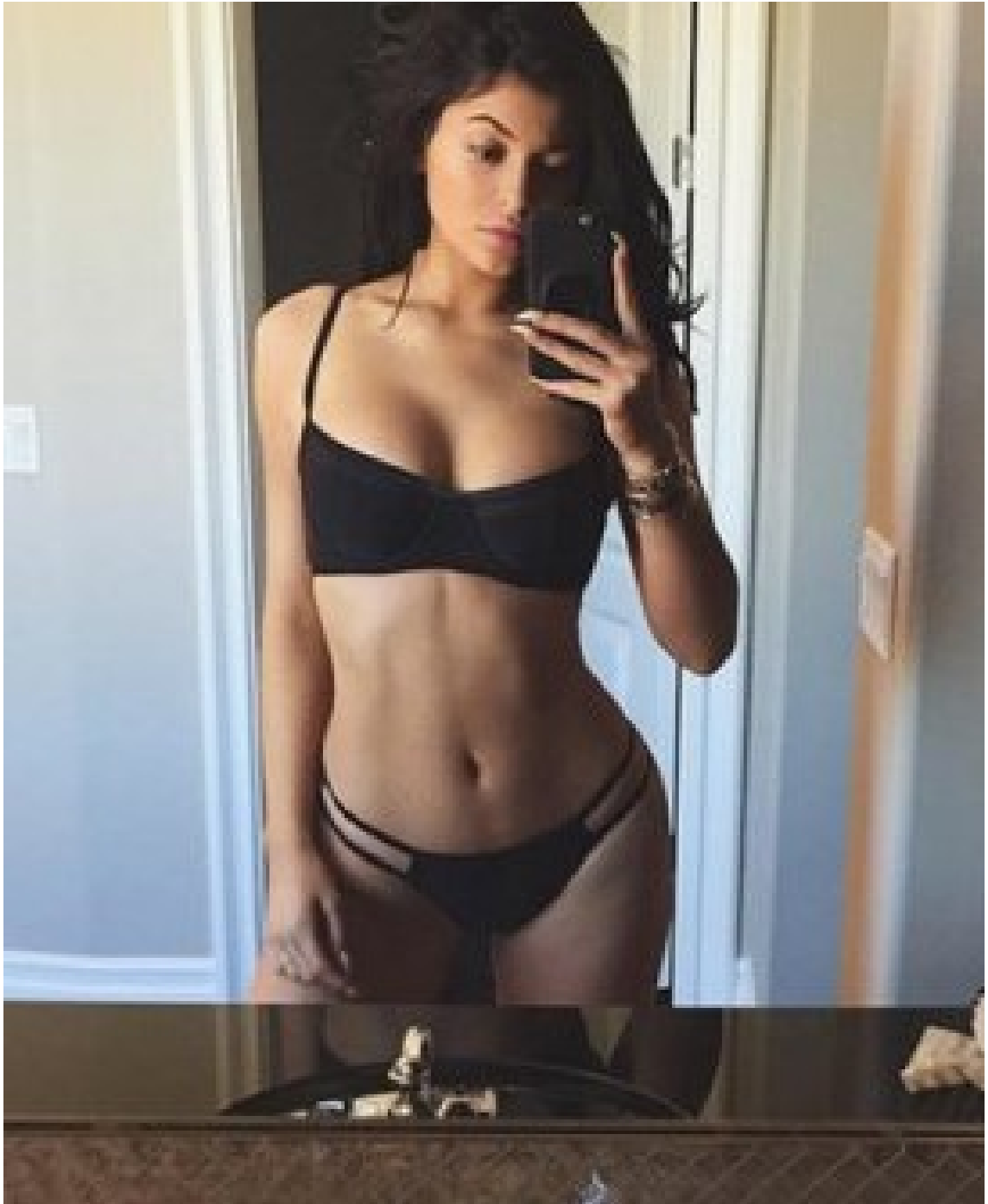
- Oxford Dictionaries.** <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/de/definition/englisch/beauty> [19.01.2016].
- Perrin, Andrew** (2015). *Social Media Usage: 2005-2015*, Pew Research Center: <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/10/08/social-networking-usage-2005-2015/> [08.03.2016].
- Postman, Neil** (1985). *Wir amüsieren uns zu Tode. Urteilsbildung im Zeitalter der Unterhaltungsindustrie*, Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag.
- Ried, Jens** (2010). *Passion, Pathologie, Kultur – Deutung und Stigmatisierung von Übergewicht und Adipositas*. In: Abraham Anke/Müller, Beatrice: *Körperhandeln und Körpererleben. Multidisziplinäre Perspektiven auf ein brisantes Feld*, p. 181-202.
- Rohr, Elisabeth** (2004). *Schönheitsoperationen. Eine neue Form der Körpertherapie?* In: *Körper und Identität. Gesellschaft auf den Leib geschrieben*. Königstein/Taunus: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, p. 90-114.
- Schooler, Deborah/Ward, Monique L./Merriwether, Ann/Caruthers, Allison** (2004). *Who's That Girl: Television's Role in the Body Image Development of Young White and Black Women*, In: *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 28, New York: Blackwell Publishing, p.38-47.
- Serdar, Kasey L.** (2005). *Female Body Image and the Mass Media: Perspectives on How Women Internalize the Ideal Beauty Standard*, <http://www.westminstercollege.edu/myriad/index.cfm?parent=...&detail=4475&content=4795> [01.03.2016].
- Sheehan, Kim Bartel** (2014). *Controversies in Contemporary Advertising*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Smith, Richard** (2013). *What is Digital Media?* Centre for Digital Media <http://thecdm.ca/news/faculty-news/2013/10/15/what-is-digital-media> [20.01.2016].
- Stiegler, Christian** (2015). *Selfies und Selfie Sticks: Automedialität des digitalen Selbstmanagements*, In: Stiegler, Christian/Breitenbach, Patrick/Zorbach, Thomas (2015). *New Media Culture: Mediale Phänomene der Netzkultur*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag. (p. 67-82).
- Social Media Defined** (2014). *What is Social Media?* <http://www.socialmediadefined.com/what-is-social-media/> [20.01.2016]

- Swinson, Jo** (2011) *False beauty in advertising and the pressure to look 'good'*, CNN: <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/OPINION/08/08/swinson.airbrushing.ads/> [18.03.2016].
- Tincknell, Estella** (2013). *Scouring the Abject Body: Ten Years Younger and Fragmented Femininity under Neoliberalism*, In: Gill, Rosalind & Scharff, Christina (2013). *New Femininities. Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Trampe, Debra/Stapel, Diederik A./Siero, Frans W./Mulder, Henriëtte** (2010). *Beauty as a Tool: The Effect of Model Attractiveness, Product Relevance, and Elaborating Likelihood on Advertising Effectiveness*, In: *Psychology & Marketing*, Volume 27(12), Hoboken: Wiley Periodicals Inc. (p. 1101-1121).
- Tuten, Tracy L.** (2008). *Advertising 2.0. Social Media Marketing in a Web 2.0 World*, Westport: Praeger.
- Urla, Jaqueline/Swedlund, Alan C.** (2000). *The Anthropometry of Barbie. Unsettling Ideals of the Feminine Body in Popular Culture*, In: Schiebinger, Londa (2000): *Feminism & the body*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walby, Sylvia** (1990). *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Werbewatchgroup Wien.** *Catalogue of Criteria for the Classification of Sexist Advertising*, [http://www.werbewatchgroup-wien.at/files/Catalogue\\_of\\_Criteria\\_Sexist\\_Advertising.pdf](http://www.werbewatchgroup-wien.at/files/Catalogue_of_Criteria_Sexist_Advertising.pdf) [01.03.2016].
- Winter, Jessica** (2013). *Selfie-Loathing. Instagram is even more depressing than Facebook. Here's why*, Slate: [http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2013/07/instagram\\_and\\_self\\_estee\\_m\\_why\\_the\\_photo\\_sharing\\_network\\_is\\_even\\_more\\_depressing.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/2013/07/instagram_and_self_estee_m_why_the_photo_sharing_network_is_even_more_depressing.html) [07.12.2014].
- Wolf, Naomi** (1991). *The Beauty Myth. How Images of Beauty are used Against Women*, London: Vintage Books.

## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

### Celebrity Selfie (Kylie Jenner)



## Appendix B

Non-celebrity Selfie (Lara Kelly) (source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2984851/Woman-lost-57-kilograms-left-shocked-photo-used-promote-weight-loss-scams.html>)

