



**The sexualisation of Black women in revealing western clothing in the media -  
a contributing factor to sexual violence in South Africa.**

by

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Declaration

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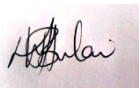
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## **Abstract**

Sexual violence against girls and women is a global problem and South Africa is regarded as having one of the highest incidences of rape in the world. Sexual violence is not limited to just the physical violation, it also includes verbal acts such as catcalling and groping. Many reasons (rape myths) have been given by the perpetrators of sexual violence, and they range from alcohol, 'misunderstanding' to lack of control. In most cases, the reason given is that the victim herself was tempting, provocative and seductive either in her actions or in how she presented herself. In South Africa, there have been a prevalent case of Black girls/women being stripped naked publicly for the way they were dressed (miniskirts or shorts). The men involved in these instances see this as a 'corrective' and deterrence measure that aims to uphold the dignity of traditions and cultures. These same men then turn around and applaud Black girls/women dressed in even more "revealing" clothes. The reason behind the men's negative thinking towards revealing western clothes is linked to how they perceive women, a perception that is often linked to the media.

Using the theory of objectification (and others), the study looked at the perceptions Black South African men have towards Black South African women when they are dressed in "revealing" clothes and whether it contributed to the high number of sexually violent crimes in the country. This was a qualitative study and used an online questionnaire with 120 participants taking part. The study focused on 34 critical questions in which participants answered questions on their perceptions of media and its influence on their views of Black women particularly in revealing clothes. The study showed over 80% of the participants agreed that western style clothes are revealing and 87% stated that women are sexually harassed by men because of the revealing western clothes they wore. The participants also viewed traditional clothes differently from western clothes with 78% stating that they do not hold the same value in society.

And so, a reduction of sexual content on all media platforms, education on sex that includes the acknowledgement of women as human beings at school, the re-introduction of traditional values and the use of the various traditional spaces to educate young men would assist in changing the perception that Black South African men have towards Black South African girls and women.

## **Key words**

Sexual violence, media, representation, South African women, traditions.

## **Acknowledgement**

*“I go forth alone but stand as ten thousand.”*

*-Maya Angelou-*

To all those who walked before me, for your love and support. For the foundation you put in and the blessings you sent my way. I thank you.

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## Contextual Definitions of Terms

**Black women:** In this study are women who share cultural and historical experiences. Those who are defined as indigenous to South Africa and the African continent.

**Western revealing clothes:** Cambridge dictionary defines revealing clothes as clothes that show more of the body than is usual.

**Traditional “revealing” clothes:** This definition is the same as the above however, it should be noted that in African traditions, the word “revealing” does not apply in the context of clothing. They are not seen as such and that is why the words “revealing,” “nude” and “nudity” will always be in inverted commas in this study.

**Jezebel:** This is a stereotype used to describe a Black female character in movies or television that is promiscuous, immoral, and lustful. The character is mostly seductively dressed.

**Sapphire:** This is a stereotype used to describe a Black female character in movies or television that is emasculating, loud and angry. The character is mostly portrayed as having an attitude.

**Mummy:** This is a stereotype used to describe a Black female character in movies or television that is a caregiver, loyal, non-threatening and submissive. The character is mostly dark skinned and overweight.

**Media:** These are the tools used for mass communication and include television, magazines, newspapers, books, the internet, and social media applications.

**Sexualization:** Placing an emphasis on a person’s sexual nature or behaviour.

**Objectification:** Seeing someone as only an object of one’s sexual desires. The complete removal of a person’s autonomy and humanity.

**Traditional “revealing” clothes.**



Umhlanga Reed dance (ourplanetinmylens.com, n.d.)



Mkhosi woMhlanga (Durban-direct.com, 2024)



*Koma ya basadi* (Southafrica.co.za, 2024)



Domba dance (Africa Online Museum, 2024)

**Figure 1** - Example of "revealing" traditional clothes.

**Western revealing clothes.**



(Pinterest, 2022)



(Herring, 2020)



(Pinterest, 2024)



(Pinterest, 2024)

**Figure 2 - Example of revealing western clothes.**

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## **List of abbreviations**

<b>APA</b>	American Psychology Association
<b>BBL</b>	Brazilian Butt Lift
<b>BCCSA</b>	Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa
<b>CDA</b>	Critical Discourse Analysis
<b>CREC</b>	College Research Ethics Committee
<b>UNISA</b>	University of South Africa
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>ZCC</b>	Zionist Christian Church

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

Sexualisation as an idea came into the public through feminists in the United States of America (USA). The term itself was used by Anglophones in the mid-nineteenth century, specifically by an English writer when referring to “assignation of a gendered frame to a particular object, such as the gendering of nouns” (Duschinsky 2013, p. 2). The term then grew popular during post-war in Britain and the USA to explain those moving into adulthood and procreation. In the 1970s, sexualisation was widely used in media and academic writing to describe persons or spaces identified by gender. The intersection of the two became known as “a form of socialisation received by young people, which resulted in inappropriate forms of sexual desire for adult love-objects” (Duschinsky 2013, p. 3).

The term sexualisation has managed to foster and grow due to the system in which the current society exists, which is patriarchy. Patriarchy is defined as “a form of mental, social, spiritual, economic and political organization/structuring of society produced by the gradual institutionalization of sex-based political relations created, maintained and reinforced by different institutions linked closely together to achieve consensus on the lesser value of women and their roles” (Facio 2013, p. 3). At its core, patriarchy believes that women are created to satisfy the needs of men and sexualisation of women is one of the ways this belief has manifested itself (Norman, 2015).

Globally, Black women are the most sexualised of all the races. From the initial contact between Black people and those of other races, throughout slavery, colonisation, and apartheid to modern times of different modes of communication, education and entertainment, the gaze on Black women through the eyes of their foreign owners and masters to now (Pilgrim 2002), their own men have been a sexualised one.

In pre-colonial times, African communities had no concept of nudity or nakedness.

Their knowledge, understanding and openness to sex as an act of reproduction and enjoyment existed however, the lust and sexualization of girls and women as a concept, did not exist. It was the Arabs and Europeans who came with the perception and concept of nudity and nakedness and through religion, spread it throughout the different African communities (Bidemi Badmus, 2017). This perception has over time through mediums such as media – with print media being the first - encouraged the sexualisation of Black women, and this continues today (Lundy, 2017). From Saartjie Bartman as the Hottentot Venus (Frenkel 2008), the current culture of women dressed in revealing clothing in music videos and objectified in movies and magazines and, the fetishization of the African bodies seen in the rise of specific plastic surgeries such as Brazilian Butt Lifts (BBL), clearly demonstrate continuous sexualisation of Black women (Pilgrim 2002).

African history has been heavily influenced by Europeans who colonized it and as a result many of the indigenous people's beliefs including those on clothing were changed. The new belief system which was largely from Christianity meant that many of the indigenous ways of life were considered heathen and the concept of clothing changed dramatically with Africans being told to cover themselves and their "nudity." Within the framework of western clothes, there are certain styles that are also not considered modest and are associated with a particular lifestyle, belief and as such they are seen as an invitation to either act or to be treated a certain way. These clothes are used on women who portray a certain image in the media. Women who are promiscuous, who want male attention and who are sexy are presented to audiences in this way and in most cases, those women are of African origin or Black (Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards and Stevenson, 2014). Media representation of Black women sends a message that when they are clothed in a specific way, they represent and communicate to the outside world the need for sexual attention (Adams-Bass, Bentley-Edwards and Stevenson, 2014).

The use of media as a tool to shock, create fear and shifting perceptions has been recorded. From its inception, mass media has aided in creating narratives in social and economic matters, building and uniting nations and emphasizing on beliefs about "others." Others in this case are indigenous populations across the world who are marginalized and stereotyped in their representation in all forms of media (Fürsich, 2010). In the 1960s and 1970s, sexualisation of women was brought to the forefront

by the feminist movement. Advertisements, beauty contests and sexualised images of women were put out in the open for criticism. The portrayal of women in pornography was linked to the socio-economic and gendered problems in society. As a response to the criticism, advertisers used the feminist slogans and outcry to redirect the sexual gaze from the timid, submissive woman to the free, loud and sexual aggressor who wanted to be seen as sexual and free (Hatton and Trautner, 2013).

Clothing can be a powerful tool that can be used to ensure an individual's conformity to a group or to rules. Clothing is categorized as fashion which is about consumption and social status. Historically, clothing is seen as the bridge to civilization in the western world. It was through the discovery of fabrics and ultimately garments, that humans covered their shame and evolved. Over time clothing was then divided into women and men clothing, rich and poor – this included the use of different fabrics and colours – and what can be worn outside and what were undergarments. The definition of undergarments has changed considerably over time however, what remains is the shame, provocation and seduction when clothing not meant for private spaces is seen in the public (Bohn, 2012). Clothing has been used to communicate one's status, gender, tribe and relationship status among other things across all races in the world.

Studies have shown us that communication can be both verbal and non-verbal. Non-verbal communication is a form of communication that does not use written or spoken words - fashion and clothing are examples of such forms of non-verbal communication (Todorović, Toporišič and Pavko-Čuden, 2014). Mc Guire (1995). states that “dress is a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication that aids human interaction in space and time” (Keenan 2001, p. 182) meaning that a person can share information about themselves without speaking or writing. However, it is vital to also note that the interpretation of clothing is influenced by social, cultural, and political implications (Keenan 2001).

In South Africa, a country that not only recognizes and protects African traditions but also continues to practice them, this has created confusion and cognitive dissonance amongst Black men. What it means is that there is a pre-conceived idea of women who dress a certain way in real life and this manifests in the daily lives of women.

Examples of these are the women who are harassed and stripped naked at taxi ranks because of their revealing clothes (Staff Reporter, 2008). On the other side, women in traditional clothes which would be considered equally “revealing” clothes in the western eyes, are praised, and encouraged by Black men (X (formerly Twitter), 2023;2024).

This study therefore seeks to show how the sexual abuse of women dressed in revealing clothing and the juxtaposition in relation to the lack of sexual abuse of women in revealing traditional clothing, intersects with the sexualization of Black women in media, gender and history.

## **1.2 Background of the study**

As a Black African woman in South Africa, my goal is to bring personal change in the country by creating healthy, respectful, and positive relationships between Black African men and women. In this study, I wanted to understand the influence that media and history has on the psyche of our society and to also show how different Black societies were before colonisation, slavery, and apartheid. I believe understanding the historical context, the stereotypes associated with Black women, the continuous and intentional replay of those stereotypes by the media all culminate to create a psyche and belief that encourages sexual assault on Black women in specific types of clothing. I also wanted to take this opportunity to record and give a voice to the oral history of Black people. To show the wisdom and advancement of our society pre-colonisation. My aim is to find real solutions that could assist in the reduction of such cases and assist in empowering the next generations to make better decisions and be better people. Although I am personally affected by the issues in the study, as an academic, I will allow the results of the questionnaire and available work to speak for themselves.

## **1.3 Problem Statement**

Herman Gray said in *Watching race: Television and the struggle for “Blackness,”* “*Black representation in commercial network television [is] situated within the existing material and institutional hierarchies or privilege and power based on class (middle-class), race (Whiteness), gender (patriarchal), and sexual (heterosexual) differences.*”

It was during colonisation that the stereotype of a Black woman as a “fiery, sexual, innately promiscuous” or popularly known as the Jezebel was created. Colonisers saw what they perceived to be “nakedness” and concluded that Africans in general were hypersexual individuals. It was this belief that justified the rapes and sexual abuse that took place on plantations against the enslaved Black women (Radcliffe, 2022). African slaves in North America are recorded to have been dressed in torn, partially exposing, old clothes and this reinforced the idea and belief that they were uncivilised, immoral and had no restraints sexually even though the nakedness was forced. In contrast, white women were clothed and covered, enforcing the notion that they were sexually inexperienced, pure and moral (Radcliffe, 2022).

The stereotypes continued from the plantations into the media. American television in the early days had one purpose only, to popularise Americans and white values as superior culture and this meant that other cultures in America had to be demonised. Black characters were always “coons, toms and bucks” if they were men and “mammies, sapphires and jezebels” if they were women (Radcliffe, 2022). The media’s purpose in modern times, has hardly changed. Black entertainers still conform to the idea of who they are according to white America to be able to work and survive. This idea still has its roots in racism and the belief that among other things, Black women are sexually promiscuous (Cashmore, 2006). In modern times, we see the sexualisation continuing through the dissection of Black women’s lips, buttocks, hips and breast and the rendering of her body as a thing used only for sexual gratification.

Although colonialism, slavery and apartheid have been abolished, the reality is that societies are left with remnants and trauma of all that was enforced upon them through the mentioned systems. Religions and belief systems enforced by colonisers are still practiced. To add to this, access to media has meant that majority of the population stays connected with the cultures, stereotypes and beliefs from western countries that are shown in movies, music, and magazines. Media as a means of communication is used to deliver information and is divided into three types: new media (media that is created for you such as an article in Forbes magazine), social media (digitally shared media), and web media (these are created by people such as podcasts, blogs, websites) (Ellicott, 2021). In South Africa, media is cheaper and easily accessible with

an estimated 41.19 million people having access to the internet in South Africa in 2022. During the same time, a total of 46% of the population was active in social media and a total of 38.2 million people watched Television (Labuschagne, 2019).

The influence of media on the everyday lives of people has been spoken about and studied intensively, especially regarding how it assists and/or influences how people construct meaning and identities. Similarly, clothing is an important part of identity creation as most professions are associated with a particular uniform (Awasthi, 2017). Media as a medium creates shared meaning through the different representations of culture, traditions, beliefs and how the world works. Media normalises view, opinions and beliefs (Fürsich, 2010).

Galdi & Guizzo (2021) state that when women are portrayed and objectified as overtly sexual in the media it leads to gender norms changing. Dressing provocatively, and in a manner deemed sexually suggestive, is viewed as “flirtatious, seductive, promiscuous, and sexually experienced—and as less strong, determined, intelligent, and self-respecting” (Koukounas and Letch 2001, p. 444). Women who have been objectified in media tend to be sexually harassed and be on the receiving end of unwanted attention from men (Awasthi, 2017).

South Africa is an interesting case because it exists in two realities. On the one hand the effects of apartheid and its ideologies are still in existence through laws, religions and societal norms and behaviours. On the other hand, traditions and cultures are alive and still exist in people’s minds. Many cultural events that aim to connect people with their history still exist. Indoni in which a young lady who is proud of her culture and heritage is chosen to represent the competition for a year is a popular event. It is broadcasted on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) with the pride and support of most of the Black people (Nkosi, 2019). UMKhosi Womhlanga (Reed dance) for example, is an annual event by young Zulu maidens attended by the King. It involves different activities with the main one being the young women dancing in front of the King and those in attendance. The young maidens are dressed in their traditional attire which would be considered “nude” in the western eyes. This contrasts with the harassment women face in public spaces, such as taxi, with cases of women being stripped naked for wearing western clothes that are considered too revealing

being reported (Staff Reporter 2008).

This study aims to show what is considered a disconnect and confusing stance of sexual harassment of women in revealing western clothes as the effect of the history and ultimately the influence that media has had on the perception of women in specific types of clothing.

#### **1.4 The rationale of the study**

As a country, South Africa experiences one of the highest levels of sexual violence. In 2021, the country saw more than “10,000 people raped in a period of three months” (Chabalala, 2021). Sexual harassment has spilled over and now affects women at taxi ranks. Men stripping them under the guise of shaming them for being dressed inappropriately. This is a form of sexualisation of women. An understanding of the reasons why sexual assault against women in particular clothing occurs means that recommendations can be put forward to assist in reducing those cases.

#### **1.5 The significance of study**

According to Fiske and Taylor (2008), dressing is considered a visual language which the wearer speaks meaning that other people will decide how to treat the wearer based on what is their interpretation of those clothes. Therefore, these authors also state that female dressing is used to justify male behaviour towards them. Based on this view, it is important to conduct this study to ascertain whether the high number of sexual violence in South Africa is partly due to the sexualisation of Black women in revealing western clothing - as opposed to revealing traditional clothing.

#### **1.6 The purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate whether the sexualisation of Black women in revealing western clothing in the media contributes to the extreme numbers of sexual violence in South Africa. The study does this by looking at how Black women in “revealing” traditional clothes are treated. It asks Black male participants questions around their perceptions, beliefs and understanding of the images showing Black

women in revealing western clothes - which they consume through different forms of media. The study also asks participants their perceptions, beliefs and understanding of Black women in “revealing” traditional clothes and why, if they think they do differ in observation, they are different.

### **1.7 Assumptions of the study**

This study assumes that Black women are oversexualised in the various forms of media in South Africa. The over sexualisation is depicted with women in western revealing clothing leading to the association of clothing and women who wear them with sexual behaviour portrayed in media the (Gerbner 1998). This behaviour and association are of great contrast to that of women in traditional clothing, which are equally, if not more revealing - than the western. However, the number of women attacked and sexually assaulted when wearing their traditional clothing in the country is less to none. A desktop search revealed one case of a woman sexually assaulted at the reed dance (news24, 2024). This therefore suggests that men associate western clothing with a certain type of behaviour. It is behaviour that is depicted through the media, and they therefore enact and use clothing to justify sexual violence towards women dressed in this way (Kwenaite 2011).

### **1.8 Research questions and objectives**

The project aims to determine if sexual violence cases in South Africa maybe in part due to the sexualisation of Black women in media based on Black men’s perceptions of women dressed in revealing western clothes. Comparisons are drawn between Black women in revealing western clothing and those in ‘revealing’ traditional clothes to see if men perceive them differently and therefore treat them differently.

The objectives of the study are to:

- Determine whether Black South African men perceive if women are sexualised in the media in South Africa.
- Determine whether Black South African men perceive whether there is a link between the media’s portrayal of Black women and sexual abuse.

- Establish whether South African men's perceptions of women are influenced by the media.
- Establish whether revealing western clothing are perceived differently to traditional African clothing by Black South African men.
- Provide data and information that may guide policy and awareness education to restore the dignity of women, regardless of whether they dress in western clothing or traditional clothing.

To address this issue, these are the research questions:

- In what ways are (Black) women sexualised in South African media?
- What do Black South African men think of women in western revealing clothes and those in traditional revealing clothes?
- How does the media shape the views and perceptions of Black South African men with regards to women?
- In what ways are (Black) women in South Africa more vulnerable to sexual violence when dressed in certain types of clothing?
- What are the ways in which women's sexual harassment in relation to their dress code can be reduced?

## **1.9 Structure of the study**

The overview of the chapters in this thesis is as follows:

### Chapter 1: Introduction

The introduction chapter gives context to the research topic, the motivation, its importance, and real-life applications.

### Chapter 2: Literature review

A review on the available literature on the topic. It will provide some of the answers to who, what, how and why?

### Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This is the lens through which the study was developed. The theories provide a foundation for the data interpretation and analysis.

### Chapter 4: Research methodology

This chapter focuses on the research paradigm, method, and design. It explains what was done and how, giving credibility and validity of the research.

### Chapter 5: Research findings

This chapter provides that data and findings from the data collection process.

### Chapter 6: Findings and discussions

This chapter discusses the findings of this study together with supporting evidence from other studies and research.

### Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendation

The concluding chapter will provide the summary of the study, the findings and new knowledge gained from this research as well as recommendations.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

The recorded history of Black women and their hyper sexualisation starts in America, during the slave trade in 1619, where Black women were judged by their ability to reproduce and how they physically looked (Lewis, 2019). In Africa, residual colonial legacies can be seen in every aspect of daily lives - including clothing - and South Africa is not an exception. The country maintains its cultural and traditional heritages and ensures the people's rights to practice them in the constitution (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 1996), however, the cognitive dissonance created by colonisation and media regarding "nudity" has meant that women can be praised and vilified for revealing their bodies in the western context and "revealing" their bodies in the traditional context.

This chapter will study the literature on the history of clothes in pre-colonial Africa, the effects of religion as well as the stereotypes of African people. The chapter further explores how media have consistently contributed to the entrenchment of stereotypes and shaped the minds and realities of people across the world. Lastly, the chapter discusses how all the above may translate and contribute to sexual violence towards Black women in Southern Africa. The literature review draws on existing works and studies, but it also seeks to introduce new information on African studies, particularly clothing in pre-colonial times.

## 2.2 Pre-colonial Africa

*"A country that speaks against its heritage, is a dead country."*

*- Credo Vusamazulu Mutwa-*

In his article, 'Towards a post-conquest South Africa: beyond the constitution of 1996' (2018), Ramose states that "the aim of 'civilisation' was and continues to be the eradication of native civilisations and cultures" and that even in the current situation, South Africa has not received an epistemic justice and thus the indigenous sources of knowledge continue to be disregarded.

The term Epistemic justice is found in law, and it means a fair treatment of all receivers and sources of knowledge. Epistemic justice makes note of the fact that knowledge is power, and other's knowledge can be discriminated upon and ignored based on their social identity and position (Fuller,2007).

African history, like other societies, consisted of both written and oral forms of communications. The term oral literature is defined as literature that, "represent[s] elements such as language and belief systems that are shared by a group; that which gives a community its cultural and national identity" (Ibanga 2021, p. 118). Ibanga (2021) further states that oral literature personifies a people's identity and "as an embodiment of identity, it contains what I refer to as 'identity markers' of a people which include their language[s], beliefs, thought patterns, value systems, history, and more." Messages, lessons, historical events, values, and expectations are passed through to each generation orally with the primary custodians of these messages being the elders (Ibanga 2021, p. 119). Songs, poems, plays and coming of age ceremonies all form part of oral traditions.

Oral communication, as a form of history preservation in Africa, has been critiqued by the West. Its main argument is that human's memory cannot be accurate and dependable after a certain period (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2021). Trevor Roper once said, "the only African history is that of Europeans in Africa and the world should therefore not waste it's time with tales of barbaric tribes" (Trevor-Roper 1965, p. 11). However, in other parts of the world (e.g., Greece, Pakistan, and Britain) oral traditions have been proven through archaeology and the same can be done in Africa (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2021). There have been examples of how oral communication can be reliable and one of those was the case of the African American slave descent and her family who traced their roots back to Sierra Leone through a song passed down through the generations (Magazine and Kagavi, n.d.). In my own family, historical factors and traditions have been passed on through songs, praises, and stories.

Southern Africa used, both methods but the oral method was more utilised here than in other places on the continent (Abdullahi *et al.*, 2021). Evidence of the rich oral traditions can still be seen today through cultural and traditional practises that have

been present for hundreds of years. Moreover, in previous generations, knowledge was passed down from the different elders in the community. Knowledge about men was passed down through elder men. On the other hand, knowledge about women was passed down through elder women. The loss of indigenous knowledge over time, the migration of indigenous people due to trade and labour and the dismantling of indigenous traditions in favour of other religions, has meant the role the elders had has been assigned to specific individuals such as high-ranking traditional healers, poets and amakhankatha (traditional circumcision nurses).

The denial to acknowledge African indigenous knowledge serves as another layer of colonialism and oppression. The word colony itself is used to describe an “overseas possession” which is essentially a region that does not govern itself. In Africa, colonies were established through settlements, commercial enterprises, treaties, and invasions. The colonial period left African’s political and economic systems profoundly impacted and this extended to everyday aspects such as education, health, food, and clothing and even though colonialism has ended, the borders, practices and impact remain today (Sharkey, 2013).

With an increase in colonial education, more Africans were forced to change their views on what was appropriate to wear. Young people who attended school were exposed to European values and practices such as “body painting,” “head shaping.” Scarification was also seen as a backward practice (Heather 2010). In South Africa, missionaries who resided in the country as members of the Nonconformist mission, wanted to replace the “African savagery with European Fashions” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997, 225). Missionaries were often uncomfortable with Africans traditional clothes, which they viewed as coarse, and primitive as opposed to theirs as well as the lack of difference regarding social status (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1997). European dressing reflected the social status an individual belonged (Aust, Klein and Weller, 2019).

The introduction of Christianity and Islam encouraged ‘modest’ attitudes. Covering up the bodies in many African cultures which had no problem before was reinforced, because in colonial times, the government policed clothing and the naked bodies of black people. These attitudes of associating clothing and morality have persisted into

modern times. Black women bodies are now seen as the last stand for 'African morality' which men and women guard against what they deem to be modern negative influence (Lutwama-Rukundo, n.d).

Europeans passed laws that dictated how men and women should dress and in most cases these laws were in accordance with Christianity. Khan and Brown (n.d.), state that laws such as those in Massachusetts in 1651, as well as the southern British colonies were put to instil Puritan values, and this was because the British viewed the native American as "naked and therefore savage". This view of "nakedness" has its foundation in the bible which from the book of Genesis, relates nakedness to shame and belonging to those who are heathen.

## ***2.1 Clothing***

The insistence of change in dressing had another layer to the process of colonisation. Comaroff and Comaroff (1997, p. 222) state that "In different ways, power is represented, constituted, articulated, and contested through dress. Dress functions as a compelling political language, comparable in eloquence and potency to the words of the most skilled orator or the writings of the most persuasive propagandist." In Africa, colonial relations were enforced and challenged using dress and it was through dress that the "dimensions of political and social transformations" that could otherwise not be expressed verbally or by written language, were revealed (Fanon 1967, p. 35).

On the continent, the imposition of European cultures created confusion in the traditional African dress sense, or sense of style and identity. African women were particularly singled out and viewed as hypersexual due to their traditional dress code which led to the over policing of their sexuality and behaviours (McFadden, 2003). In South Africa, healers such as the great Isanusi Credo Vusamazulu Mutwa of the AmaZulu nation, who have throughout their life spoken and taught about the history and beliefs of AmaZulu and South Africans have refuted these stereotypes and beliefs. Through the knowledge passed on to him by his forefathers, he has stated that, both African women and men, girls and boys in pre-colonial times wore loin clothes that covered their private parts only. The upper body was covered during special events

and/or ceremonies by the leaders of the tribes only. There was no concept of nudity or sexualisation and the idea or acts of sexual assaults did not exist. Women and girls were respected, carried with great esteem, and viewed as fully functional members of society with important and valuable contributions (Mutwa, 2019).

In modern times, this view is still seen and echoed when girls and women are in their traditional clothing. In their short film *Ephasini Lamabhudango*, Director Ndumiso Sibanda and artists Tsholofelo Maseko celebrate a Ndebele woman in modern day Johannesburg by allowing her to be true to herself in her traditional attire. In the film, Tsholofelo walks in downtown Johannesburg and crosses the Mandela Bridge in her Ndebele attire which means she is completely topless. We also see her in taxis, in the front sit with the driver and other passengers and she does all this without any sexual assault through language or acts. The video in contrast, shows her celebrated and admired by those around her (Film Freeway, n.d.).

There are many other examples of men celebrating and protecting women in “revealing” traditional attire but criticizing and degrading those in revealing western attire. On social media, South African men show great support to women in traditional clothing, protecting them from sexualisation and encouraging the practise and showing pride in what their forefathers and mothers have passed on. Examples are provided in appendix 2.

In western culture, the view of women and nudity is different with the socialisation of women being of them wanting the male gaze and thus focusing on their appearance (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997). One of the ways this is done is through clothing. Women who are dressed in what is considered provocative, are often objectified and are considered less moral than those who dress ‘modestly’ (Gurung *et al.*, 2017). Black women are even more objectified in the western culture than women of other races. The stereotypical hypersexual representation of Black women and the “perceived eroticism’ of the Black women’s bodies has meant that her femininity is considered as ‘other’ which denies them their humanity and are seen as sexual objects (Kwenaite and van Heerden, 2011). In modern African cultures, women are represented swaying their hips, in barely-there clothes in music videos while described using words such as “hoes, skeezers and bitches” (Pilgrim, 2002). Although these images are seen as

empowering, modern, and successful (Posel, 2004), society's perception of them is negative.

Historically, the politics of clothing went above just the "misunderstanding" of the concept of nudity and into the desire and intent to enslave, subjugate and minimise a people. Seroto (2019) speaks of the concept of coloniality of power which is defined by (Quijano, 2000), "as racial and epistemological hierarchies that are entangled within structural hierarchies such as global capitalism". Seroto expands further by saying the body was used as a tool and symbol for conquest and domination and that enslaved people experienced exploitation, physical harm, and confinement. This reduced the indigenous people to objects that existed to satisfy the colonial need for economic and political power. Colonialism also created a perpetual state of "incompleteness" of those it colonised. By dehumanising and justifying their actions, they made hierarchies which put them on top and indigenous people at the bottom to always be seen as things that still need to evolve.

The Europeans who came to the Cape and encountered the Xam and Khwe women viewed them as naked and overly sexual individuals. In his writings Kolb (1968, p. 155) says *"Instead of the tail worn by men, the women had a sheep's skin that entirely covers the posterior part of the body from the waist to the calf of the leg, and just wide enough to strike the exterior part of the thigh. The rattling of this hard and dry skin announces the approach of the Hottentot lady long before she makes her appearance. The rest of the body is naked."* Barrow (2003, p.276), echoed this when he said *"Their only covering was a belt of springbok's skin, with the part that was intended to hung before cut into long threads like those before mentioned to be worn by some of the Hottentot women; but the filaments were so small and thin that they answered no sort of use as a covering; nor indeed did the females, either old or young, seem to feel any sense of shame in appearing before us naked."*

In Africa, the residual of the colonial legacies can be seen in every aspect of daily lives including the clothes that we wear, and South Africa is no exception. Even though the country maintains its cultural and traditional heritages and ensures the people's rights to practice them in the constitution (Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 1996), the cognitive dissonance created by colonisation and media

regarding “nudity” has meant that women can be praised and vilified for “revealing” their bodies depending on the context.

### **2.3 Black women representation in media**

*“The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story”.*

*-Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie-*

Media can be defined as a collection of technologies that assists in the communication between the sender and the receiver. Media has also been described as a fourth estate as it is viewed playing the role of socialising people, informing them of global and local events that shape cultural, social, and political landscapes. Media can either be television and the press (which are the traditional forms) or it can be categorised as new media which includes different forms of social media (Council of Europe Publishing, n.d.). Globally, more than half of the world’s inhabitants use social media on an average of 2 hours. The focus on social media applications is important because the world and technology has shifted from newspaper and television to the smaller cell phone. Statistically, 94% of internet users have a social media presence (Chaffey, 2024). In South Africa, media is now cheaper and easily accessible than before with an estimated 41.19 million having access to internet in South Africa in 2022. In 2022, a total of 46% of the population was active in social media and a total of 38.2 million people who watch Television (Labuschagne, 2019).

Culture is defined as a complex structure which includes “knowledge, art, faith, conviction, ethical standards, law etc” (Cultural Imperialism through Hollywood Cinematic Media on Pakistani Youth 2020, 91) which are taught, upheld, and practiced by all members of a particular society. Culture is then shared from generation to generation. Members of society are then expected to participate for them to be accepted and to belong. Throughout history dominant societies have imposed their cultures violently upon those who they conquered and/or deemed inferior, and this is known as Cultural Imperialism. Cultural Imperialism is spread and accomplished in different ways with some of them being laws, religion, and media (Cultural Imperialism through Hollywood Cinematic Media on Pakistani Youth, 2020).

Ike (2004) states that overall “we learn from observing the behaviour of other people and our attitudes are influenced by media content through attention, retention and motivation”. Culture Imperialism through the media ensures that conquered societies (developing and poor nations) continue to be dominated. Media is also owned and controlled by few companies, and this guarantees their influence is consistent. Socio-cultural developments in “inferior” countries are delayed, as they tend to express the beliefs and cultures of the “superior” countries (Stanislaus Iyorza, 2014). In modern times, the west and particularly America, has a monopoly on media which allows it to set the tone and direction of global issues including culture. The western world is the leading exporter of content into other countries thus creating homogenous influence which can be both positive and negative (Chen and Shen, 2021).

Although the experiences of Black women are not homogenous, there are many similarities and intersectionality’s because of the shared experience of colonialism, patriarchy, and race. In America, when Black women were taken into slavery, they were often exposed to various forms of abuse which included sexual violence. Their status as slaves meant that they were often and easily sexually abused with no consequence (Lewis, 2019). During this time, Black women were viewed as being either Jezebel, Mammy, or Sapphire. The Jezebel stereotype is embedded in the belief that Black women are inherently sexual and always ready to engage in sexual activities with anyone. Mammy is the nurturing and non-sexual stereotype and Sapphire is a bitter woman who is anything but soft and feminine (Lewis, 2019).

To understand the Jezebel stereotype, we first need to understand what a stereotype is. Stereotypes can be divided into two categories: descriptive stereotypes which show the recipient’s belief about members of a social group’s abilities, likes and other characteristics. Prescriptive stereotypes show the recipient’s belief on what is normal behaviour for a social group. The descriptive is known as the anchor and the latter as the fence. These mean stereotypes control people and can be used to maintain power over a particular group by limiting them within the stereotypes (Eddington, 2022).

The Jezebel stereotype was created as a justification for the rape and sexual violence towards enslaved Black women. Notions of Black women being inherently sexual meant that they cannot be raped as they were always ready and willing to engage.

Although there was an attempt to rebrand this image of the Black woman in 1980s and 1990s, the growth of other cultural phenomenon such as rap music, once again reintroduced and cemented the jezebel stereotype (Lundy, 2017). Loft (2020), states that “These visuals gave credibility to white people’s means of maintaining social, political, and legal control through violence, intimidation, and segregation.” In apartheid South Africa, perpetrators were only prosecuted if the rape involved a white woman, sexual crimes against Black women were taken to be part of life (Kalra and Bhugra, 2013).

The negative stereotypes have, over the years, been combined into these negative characters (Boylorn, 2008) and as technology became more accessible, the stereotypes were cemented (Loft, 2020). Woods (2013, p. 31) states that “All forms of media communicate images of the sexes, many of which perpetuate unrealistic, stereotypical, and limiting perceptions”. She further breaks media representation into three themes: (i) the underrepresentation of women which implies that men are the standard, (ii) the stereotypical representation of women and (iii) the emphasise of traditional roles and violence towards women. The violence towards women representation is often depicted as beautiful, sexy, passive, and powerless, which are the cultural representations of their femininity and the qualities that cause their victimisation. The men are depicted as aggressive, dominant, sexual, and strong which are characteristics often linked to the abuse of women.

Collins (2004) stated that all women are positioned as subordinate to men in the gendered power structure and the prescribed feminine behaviours are imposed by the different cultures and ideologies with the most ‘important’ parts of the prescribed femininity being beauty, conduct, race, and sexuality. In American mainstream culture, white women’s femininity is valued above other women (Cole and Zucker, 2007) and femininity ideology shows us that women are given the burden of being the gatekeepers in relationships and are punished for having sexual affairs outside of committed relationships (Parent and Moradi, 2010). This means that the portrayal of Black women as highly sexualised could not only lead to internalised sexual behaviours in young Black adolescent women (Tolman, 1999) but, also pose a risk of discrimination due to attitudes and opinions formed because of negative media representations (Givens and Monahan, 2005; Mastro, 2003).

In current times in the media, the sexualisation of Black women is both in the visual and lyrical aspects in music and videos have become an integral part of marketing. According to Loft (2020) the stereotypes created by the media become the reality of the person receiving the message and the person the message is based on once it is internalised. In a 2021 report by the *Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media*, it was found that Black women on film and television are more likely to be shown nude or semi-nude. They are also, more likely to be verbally abused and more likely to be portrayed as sexually promiscuous compared to women of other races. In America, it was found that Black teenagers were more likely than their white counterparts to watch music videos because they want to emulate the fashion and dance moves (Eddington, 2022). An analysis in 2005 found that sexual intercourse was referenced in two third of the songs. Two thirds of those references spoke of degrading sex. Degrading sex includes (i) the man having a huge sexual appetite, (ii) the woman being the sexual object and (iii) the woman's value being based solely on her looks (Eddington, 2022).

The influence of media on the everyday lives of people has been spoken about and studied intensively, particularly in how it assists and/or influences how people construct meaning and identities. Similarly, clothing is an important part of identity creation. Nurses, law enforcement, medical professions, and lawyers (to name a few), all have clothing that identifies them, their professions and by extension their personalities (Awasthi, 2017). Studies have shown that women in underwear or swimsuits are objectified more and viewed as mere bodies, compared to those who are covered. This coupled with the fact women in all forms of media are portrayed provocative and sexually focusing only on their body parts, reinforces their objectification (Awasthi, 2017).

One of the best examples of the objectification of Black women is that of Sarah Bartmann also known as Saartjie, who was taken from her home in South Africa in the 1800s and displayed in Europe. People went to see her "unusual buttocks" and touch her. This continued after her death where her remains were dissected and displayed for decades before she was brought back for burial (Loft, 2020).

There is not much research and statistics In Africa regarding the hyper sexualisation

of Black women in media and its effects. However, according to *Gender and Media in Africa -An Overview* (n.d.), African media also shows women in domestic and objectifying ways and constantly portrays women as sex-kittens which contributes to violence against women. In South Africa, the lack of research and data is the same. We can, however, draw parallels with the research and studies from America that speaks to African American women. The influence that America has in South Africa with regards to pop culture, politics, Christianity, and access to popular social media platforms can assist us in drawing parallels to understand the hyper-sexualisation of Black women in South African media.

#### **2.4 Clothing, sexuality, and sexual violence**

South Africa has one of the highest numbers of sexual assault cases against women (Chabalala, 2021) and this includes the sexual harassment of women at places such as taxi ranks because of how they are dressed in revealing and inappropriate clothes (Mashaba, 2018). The country is also home to many indigenous tribes that still exist and practise their traditions (Sa-venues.com, 2019). Throughout colonisation and apartheid, the dynamics and the cultural landscape of the country changed, and new belief systems and practises intertwined with the old (Fanon 1967) Over time and with the assistance of the various forms of media, this has led to a new way of life and thinking within the Black African population in the country, which is very different from its own (www.thirteen.org, n.d.).

The South African Police Service (SAPS) received 42,289 rapes and 7,749 sexual assault cases reports in 2019/2020, this translates to 115 rapes per day (Gouws, 2022). In South African law, rape is defined as “when a person forces another person to have sexual intercourse without their consent” and sexual assault as “when a person sexually violates another person without their consent” (www.gov.za, n.d.).

Evidence tells us that exposure to sexual objectifying in media may affect men’s sexual attitudes and behaviours toward women. Over time and with constant viewing, “activated constructs and associations become more accessible in memory, thus making the content acceptable” (Shrum 1996, p. 482 - 509). Bandura (2001) states that “social cognitive theory, viewers’ beliefs are shaped by their engagement with

media content, and these beliefs inform behaviour. Therefore, if men are regularly exposed to messages that women are sexual objects, they might internalize this belief and use it in making decisions during future interactions with women.”

In a study that used images of women wearing revealing and non-revealing clothes, Abbey *et al.*, (1987), showed that men view women’s sexual desires based on their choice of clothing. The study also showed that men believed they had a higher chance of getting a date and having sexual relations on the same night with the women in revealing clothes. The exposure to sexualised images of women has been proven to lead to among others: women’s tolerance of sexual abuse from men and the acceptance of myths about sexual violence and rape (Santoniccolo *et al.*, 2023).

In Bhuvanesh (2017), experiments demonstrated that women who were objectified were seen as less than human. They also stated that men’s focus moves on a woman moves from her personality to her body when she is objectified which triggers a dehumanisation process. In another study, it was found that it was easier to use animal related words on sexually objectified women.

Studies also indicate that people do not associate moral concerns towards objects for example, people want to see an elder person treated morally right but would not feel the same about a rock and therefore there is no desire for women who are objectified to be treated morally right (Loughnan *et al.*, n.d.). In the book ‘Understanding Violence Against Women’ (NAP.edu, n.d.) it is stated that one of the reasons for rape is the beliefs and attitudes endorsed by men towards rape and the myths about rape. Many of the convicted rapists often rationalised and justify their actions by stating that their victims wanted and/or deserved to be sexually assaulted.

Wright’s (2011, p. 353 - 385) acquisition, activation, and application model, also states that “sexual media exposure shapes the acquisition of new sexual scripts, the activation of existing scripts, and the application of these scripts to one’s own real-world sexual experiences. These theories would argue that regular exposure to mainstream media, which often sexually objectify women, might lead men to be “more accepting of notions that women are sexual objects, and to engage in sexually objectifying behaviour toward women, including dehumanizing sexual aggression.”

Although this is the case with women in revealing western clothes, it has not been the case with women in what is deemed “revealing” clothes when they are in traditional settings.

#### **2.4.1 Sexual violence**

As a crime, sexual assault is socially framed as an act of violence in which the blame is put on both the victim and the offender because of the victim’s state of being when the crime takes place; what she was wearing, where she was, what time it was, what she had consumed, her relationship to the perpetrator, her position and vocation, are all reasons given to justify the crime against her (Kwenaite and Van Heerden, 2011). Women in society are abused because of the unequal power dynamic between men and women. The fact that they are physically weaker means that they are vulnerable, and studies have shown us that, the act of violence is merely the promotion of hierarchies (Kwenaite and Van Heerden, 2011).

The hierarchy that is maintained during violence against girls and women has its roots in patriarchy which is a system not indigenous to the African continent. African societies did not have patriarchal systems in pre-colonial times. According to Saidi (2020), African women were not assumed to be inferior and enjoyed respect, status, and authority in their communities. Saidi also states that although both matrilineal and patrilineal societies existed in those times, women were not oppressed in either of those societies and this was a way to determine one’s identity. This is a contrast to the western structure of patriarchy - in which men enjoy absolute power - at the expense of women and maintain that control in every aspect of daily life. In a patriarchal society, being born male means you are superior and intelligent than those born female, and this extends to all aspects of social, political, economic and culture. Studies also show us that patriarchy as a system was introduced to African societies through colonialism, apartheid, and religion (Mazengwe, n.d.).

In her book *Rape: A South African Nightmare*, Gqola speaks of how the crime of rape is a foreign concept that was brought into the country during colonisation and apartheid. Gqola (2016, p. 48), speaks of how the British used rape as a war tactic and a weapon together with the killing of children. She quotes Edgerton who said “*In*

*response to British depredation that sometimes-included rape and murder, the Xhosa bought firearm and powder and made ready for war. Despite the escalating brutality of the British troops and white volunteers who often killed Xhosa children, throughout the entire century of warfare, the Xhosa were known to have killed only one white woman- perhaps by mistake- and they never killed any white children.”*

These facts are echoed by Credo Mutwa who said *“In African tradition, a man was not allowed to crash and dominate a woman, never! In African tradition, a man was not allowed to act unilaterally in the family. Everything he did, he had to do after having obtained his wife’s fullest blessing. In Africa, the woman was honoured and respected. In Africa, the woman was actually worshipped and honoured by people of all tribe and nations. To this day, when we pray to our ancestors, we always solicit most of all, the blessings of our female ancestors.”* (Ikhaya Labangoma Institute, 2020).

In modern day, the “culture” of violence towards women has been entrenched into society and clothes are used as a justification. In 2008, Nwabisa Ngcukana was sexually assaulted by taxi drivers at a Johannesburg taxi rank for wearing a mini skirt (Kwenaite and Van Heerden, 2011). In Botswana, the same happened to a woman at a taxi rank and she was told to “go back and get dressed” (Pinielo Correspondent, 2010). In 2020 again in South Africa, a video of girls being harassed for what they were wearing surfaced online. In it, one of the men pulls up her shorts to expose her buttocks (Reporter, n.d.). This again goes against the actions of taxi driver when artist Tsholofelo Maseko walked in downtown Johannesburg in her traditional attire and was received with pride (see Appendix 4). In her film, Ephasini Lamabhudango, she is seen walking in the city centre in Johannesburg, sitting in a taxi and being admired by all she meets ((FilmFreeway, n.d.)

Studies have shown us that clothes are a form of non-verbal communication that allows the wearer communicate information about themselves. This, however, means that it is always assumed that how we dress is premeditated and one cannot be free or have fun with their clothes, and it creates problems especially when the meaning is constructed based on the perceiver’s views; views which are accumulated through their socialisation and influence from religion, culture and the media they interact with (Kwenaite and Van Heerden, 2011). Entwistle (2000, p. 181), states that *“Modern*

*sexuality is rooted in our (sexed) body, making the things we use to decorate our bodies, potentially at least, sexually charged... However, it would be misleading to assume that bodily adornment such as clothes...reflect a pre-sexed and pre-sexual body... Materials [are] commonly used simultaneously to cover and reveal the body, adding sexual meanings to the body, that would otherwise not be there.*" The sexualisation of clothes is also dependent on a particular culture and the west puts a lot of emphasis on sexuality of the female body.

In their research, Selepe, Lindegger and Govender (2020), interviewed 19 sex offenders from five different correctional facilities in Limpopo to understand the reasoning behind their crimes. Their findings included *perceived victimhood* – where the offenders believed as men, they have uncontrollable urges, they could not live without sex and that it was a need. *They were tempted* – it was the women's fault because they wore alluring clothes. One of the participants was quoted saying "*Women today attract men with their clothes. Some of their clothes are short and transparent. Then when we propose to them, they refuse, forgetting that we have feelings, and we are tempted.*" *It is their culture* – men are taught how to read and see when a woman wants to engage in sexual activities because women are not allowed to ask men for sexual favours. They stated that women give off signs and cues to show their desires. *Access to pornography* – exposure to explicit content, also created a desire that had to be satisfied.

Sexual objectification and sexual harassment are a culture that has cemented itself in South Africa. The distinction between culture and traditions must be made in that culture reflects characteristics of a society and includes art, music, values, knowledge, language, and it evolves constantly. Traditions are passed on from generation to generation and its evolution takes place at a slower rate over a long period of time (Rangel, 2022). Africa has been a melting point of confusion because of the forceful inclusion of other countries and their need to cover what they deem "nakedness." This together with the system of patriarchy which is foreign has caused confusion and tension in many African societies across the continent. The objectification and sexualisation of Black women mean that their bodies are seen as "other" and outside of themselves. The "Black Venus" narrative which defined women such as Saartjie Bartman continues today. In South Africa, the Black body has been turned into a

product to be consumed and violated (Kwenaite and Van Heerden, 2011).

## **2.5 Conclusion**

Sexual objectification of Black women has a historical context. It started because of misinterpretations and the desire to forcefully colonise and rule over others. The forced morality imposed upon Africans – those within the continent and those who were taken – has had negative consequences. Traditional and cultural values which still linger in the memories and minds of the African people are now competing with not only the religious expectations but also the stereotypes created through time. A deeper look at the how modern societies in Africa digest, reflect upon and regurgitate what has been forced upon them for centuries is an important step into understanding how these effects can be reversed.

# Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

## 3.1 Introduction

The American Psychological Association (2007) defines sexualisation as the act of imposing a person's sexuality on them in an inappropriate way. As a term, harassment on the other hand, is "unwelcome pattern of behaviour that offends someone or leaves one feeling threatened or embarrassed" (Citizens Advice, 2019).

Throughout history, Africans have been confronted with racism and slavery leading them to be objectified and ultimately sexually harassed. Black women, have been viewed as objects to be sold, bought, and eventually be abused by their masters. This did not only emphasize the social understanding that men hold the power, but it also separated black women not only in terms of social and economic class but also worth (www.thirteen.org, n.d.).

In modern times, the media has become a leading source of not only entertainment, but education. Singh (2017, p. 5) defines media as "either it is printed, electronic or the web is the only medium, which helps in making people informed. It also helps in entertaining the public, educate and make people aware of the current happenings. Media has today become the voice of our society." It is believed that our thoughts and perceptions that happen outside of personal experiences are shaped and to some extent orchestrated through the different forms of media.

When it comes to gender representation of most women in media, expectations of femininity and feminine behaviours are socially constructed. In most societies, expectations of women largely tend to include them being warm, nurturant, self-conscious of their appearance and relationships focused. This expectation then extends into sexual relations, "where women are expected to be submissive", eager to please, faithful and sexually attractive in a modest way. When these expectations are not upheld, women are then at risk of being stigmatised, and can face discrimination, which often leads to victimisation and harassment (Cox, 2020).

For black women on television, this is different. Data indicates that Black women's

portrayal incorporates both gender traits (male and female). Their gender identities are more androgynous than white women. Although Black women are characterised as nurturing, always putting others first and the wearer of many hats, they are also depicted as Jezebels and Sapphires. The Jezebel character being an “attractive, flirtatious, hypersexual and manipulative black woman.” She is usually light skinned with European features and was created to justify the raping of black women by their owners during slavery. The Sapphire is, the “angry black woman” who emasculates black men, loud, controlling, and aggressive. Although these characters were created a long time ago, they still exist and are portrayed in media today (Cox, 2020).

This chapter explores the different theories that speak to the objectification of women in media and the sexualisation of Black women. Theoretically, this study will look at the Objectification theory, the Cultivation theory, Feminist theory, and Womanist theory.

### **3.2 The Objectification Theory**

Fredrickson & Roberts (1997) created the Objectification theory to explain the negative effects of the sexualisation of women in society. In Western society, women are seen as objects to be looked at, judged and used. Objectification of women is a consequence of patriarchy and oppression and can take on many forms including the sexualised portrayal of women in media. Fredrickson & Roberts (1997, p. 3) state that “the common thread running through all forms of sexual objectification is the experience of being treated as a body (or a collection of body parts) valued predominately for its use (or consumption by) others.” This means that women are not valued or seen for who they are but rather for what they are, sexually (Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr, 2011).

Over time, the constant sexual objectification can influence how women see themselves and they can start to objectify themselves. The self-objectification can be seen in the emphasis that women may place on their physical appearance. As stated previously, sexual objectification can occur in different settings however, it is mostly found in the different media representations of women. Studies have shown that in

magazines, movies, video games, music videos and lyrics, television and social media, women are more objectified than men in their clothing, poses and characters (Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr, 2011). In other environments such as waitressing, cheerleading and pageants, objectification is not only accepted but encouraged (Moffitt & Szymanski, 2010).

When women objectify themselves, it is called female self-objectification and this is defined as “regular exposure to objectifying experiences that socialize girls and women to engage in self-objectification, whereby they come to internalize this view of themselves as an object or collection of body parts” (Kroon & Perez 2013, p. 16). According to McKay (2013) Women are objectified in two ways (i) personal or social encounters which include sexual harassment and catcalling, and (ii) media representation which includes the highlighting and focus of women bodies and body parts. “Western societies tend to objectify people in general, treating them as if they are things, or commodities, because westernized societies are saturated with heterosexuality, whereby gender acts as a pervasive organizer of culture” (Calogero, Tantleff-Dunn, & Thompson 2011, p. 4).

Objectification can move from media into real life and become an interpersonal objectification. Interpersonal objectification includes unwanted sexual objectification and the sexual gaze which is also known as “ogle,” “leer,” or “check out,” and occurs in public areas. The sexual gaze is a major contributor to other interpersonal objectifications such as sexual harassment, rape, and abuse (Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr, 2011).

Sexual objectification also intersects with other social factors such as class, race, age, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. So, while women have similar experiences, they are not homogenous. For example, lesbian relationships are portrayed as male sexual fantasies, Asian women are seen as subservient and childlike, Black women’s stereotypes is them being seen as sexually aggressive and so on. Additionally, poor women are often seen as “immoral and irresponsible and therefore deserving of sexual exploitation” (Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr 2011, 6-38).

### 3.3 The Cultivation Theory

Television has become a part of our daily life, and it has been likened to “a key member of the family, the one who tells the most stories most of the time.” Cultivation theory was developed to show the effects that television viewing has on an audience. The theory holds the view that popular media, such as television, can influence our day-to-day reality through the pattern of messages (Gerbner *et al.*, 1980). Gerbner’s studies between individuals who consumed too much television and those who do not showed the former’s behaviour was influenced by television, and they had a misconception of the world around them (Gerbner *et al.*, 1980).

According to Gerbner and his colleagues, a moderator known as *mainstreaming* alters the relationship between the viewer and reality. Mainstreaming emphasizes the effects of television on a larger group of people who then develop commonality on views based on what they consume from television. They learn about the world, construct opinions and views based on the images they receive from television (Reyes, 2008).

Media portrayal of gender roles is often stereotypical feminine and masculine (Scharrer, 2013). A stereotype is defined as “cognitive structures that contain the perceiver’s knowledge, beliefs, and expectancies about some human group. Stereotypes ascribe characteristics or attributes about a certain group” (Fujioka 1999, p. 53). Stereotypes need to be repeated for them to have an effect and the media provides that. Television constantly shows images of the dominant culture (in this case white/western culture) and its beliefs about the different races, genders, sexes, classes, and ethnicities (Reyes, 2008).

Although there are few cultivation theory studies regarding the effects of media such as television, the existing ones have shown that people will in most instances behave in ways like those they see on media (Cox, 2020).

### 3.4 Feminist Theories

Feminist theories look at gender roles in society particularly through the eyes of

women. These theories aim to guide society as it seeks to remove the barriers that prevent women from succeeding, they suggest interventions for women's internal and external concerns, and they evaluate people's experiences from both sides of sex and gender (Chapter 3: Feminist Theories 1. Feminist Social Work Theories, n.d.).

Feminist theoretical solutions to inequality vary from each other even though they all centre on women's oppression. For radical feminists, women's oppression stems from sexuality. They argue that it is the lack of women's control over their bodies that leads to them being victimised and women owning their sexuality, motherhood and child rearing will eradicate oppression. For Liberal feminist, women's lack of access to "legal, social, political and economic institutions" is the cause of their oppression and they advocate for equal participation in the different spheres of the society. Marxist and Socialist feminists place the root of gender inequality on capitalism. They view patriarchy and capitalism as two different entities and believe that men exploit women's reproductive labour in households (Budig and Jones 2008, p. 370).

One aspect of oppression that all feminist theories believe in is that patriarchy is the root of women's subservient role in society. Patriarchy is defined as an "unjust social system that subordinates, discriminates or is oppressive to women." This system justifies men's domination over women due to the biological difference between the two sexes. Although some of these differences are scientific, the majority are non-factual beliefs or stereotypes (Facio 2013, p. 2). Patriarchy relies on the other sex to be kept in subordination. One of the ways this can be achieved is by perpetuating the different beliefs and existing power relations about women and men. The aim of sexual objectification is to keep those who are objectified oppressed - by having them viewed as less than human and research has shown that gender stereotypes assist in maintaining men's dominance (Norman, 2015).

### **3.5. Womanist Theory**

Feminist theories have come into question in recent times. In the hierarchy of power: gender, class and race all come into play; however, feminism only focuses on gender and class. Although there is a shared experience of being a woman in a patriarchal

society, white women cannot identify with the discrimination of Black women from the racial and to an extent, class, a point of view shared by many Black “feminists” (Head, Ba and Emecheta) as Amaefula (2021) writes.

It was Hudson-Weems (1993, p.294), who said “the Africana woman does not see the man as her primary enemy as does the White feminist, who is carrying out an age-old battle with her White male counterpart for subjugating her as his property. Africana men have never had the same institutionalized power to oppress Africana women as white men have had to oppress white women” and argued that feminism is the same as other white establishments that seek to put the interests of white people above those of black people.

The deviation of white feminism from black feminism is seen throughout history and particularly in the United States of America (USA) where black women were raped, and black men lynched to protect the white woman’s “purity and vulnerability.” In the 1920s white women supported the anti-lynching and once they got the votes, they however turned away from Black women and men, when they did not get empowerment (Brewer, 2020). We can find parallels between the USA and South Africa with regards to the different priorities of feminism. Inequality is a growing problem, and the laws and legislatures put in place to address the inequalities have done the reverse. In terms of those who have benefited the most, white women the biggest beneficiaries of Employment Equity policies (The South African Government, 2022). Black women are paid the least (Oxfarm South Africa, 2020), there is no outcry from white women to close the gap between themselves and Black women.

My personal interests in the women/gender studies which are the unification of Black women, men and children towards a common goal and the rebuilding of relations to reflect some of our values and beliefs prior to colonisation. It makes sense to align myself with Womanism. Womanism according to Amaefula (2021, p. 296), “... is black-centred. It is accommodationist. It wants meaningful union between Black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men will change from their sexist stand.”

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The aim of my study is to show that African men are not inherently sexist, and the modern view is because of religion and patriarchy which are agents of colonisation and apartheid. I believe that through understanding who we were and how we manage relationships as Africans men and women, we can find a way to better relate, understand and co-exist in the modern world.

It is against this background of theories that the research on the sexualisation of Black women in revealing western clothing in the media and its contribution to the high number of sexual violence in South Africa, will be viewed. The theories will show that men are influenced and impacted by how they see women being portrayed in the media and that influence is often acted out in various ways which includes sexual violence.

# Chapter 4: Research Methodology

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodologies used in this study. The population samples of the study, the geographical area and the instruments used to collect the data are also explained.

## 4.2 Research approach and design

The core of qualitative research is to observe how people make sense of their lives in their own mind and words and ultimately make sense of their behaviour (Cropley, 2022). According to Babbie (2007), qualitative research aims to find meaning and patterns in relationships which are then analysed through language. In contrast to quantitative data, which is collected numerically, qualitative data collection uses language in either its written, verbal, or visual form (Durrheim, Painter, and Terre Blanche, 2016). This study also uses an interpretive paradigm approach as it understands that humans do not exist in a vacuum and that their actions are rooted in culture and history. It relies on “interactions and relationships to define social realities and believes that “the researcher, the discipline and culture are all connected” (Quinlan, 2017).

Discourse analysis is also used because it speaks to the effects of language and power relations (Levett, Kottler, Burman, and Parker, 1997) between Black men and women in South Africa. Discourse analysis allows us to explore things that appear to be normal and how they produce culture and power dynamics in societies (Levett, Kottler, Burman, and Parker, 1997). The qualitative study has also drawn from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) which is “a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (Kamalu, Ikenna, and Osisanwo, 2015). According to van Dijk (2001), CDA, centres social and political issues by looking at how language breeds inequality, dominance, and power abuse.

The data collection will utilize an online questionnaire which includes open-ended questions. Together with the above approaches, a better understanding, interpretation, and context of the data collected will be provided allowing us to find connections in the language, patterns, power dynamics and historical context.

This research study will therefore use the qualitative method of data collection by distributing an online questionnaire to a targeted group of participants and analysing the findings to have a credible conclusion. The study will also be literature based and will use already existing work on the media and its representation of black women.

### **4.3 Research setting**

This study was conducted online using Google forms. It was open to South African black males, over the age of 18 years. The participants had to complete a questionnaire with a total of 34 questions (Appendix 1). The first three questionnaires required the participants to confirm if they were 18 years of age or older, black South African males and if they consent to voluntary participation. The Google form was shared on social media (X/Twitter and Facebook) for a period of four months.

### **4.4 Population and Sampling**

South Africa is made up of many groups of people from different races with 49% or 29,39 million of the population being male (The South African Government). Grounded theory aids researchers developing a theory to understand social and psychological occurrence after data has been examined (Morrison and Hamp-Lyons, 2007) and in his article, Sandelowski (2020) states that a sample size for a Grounded Theory may use 20 to 30 participants but may also extend to between 30 – 50 according to Jan Morse. The sample size for this study, however, included maximum of 120 black South African males from the age of 18 years old who had access to data and social media. The reason for this number was because social media has millions of users in South Africa with Twitter having 3,65 million and Facebook having 22,15 million users (CSA Digital, 2023) and therefore the suggested sample of 50 was too little. The 120 also includes those who might participate in the questionnaire but not meet the criteria and

their participation will therefore not be considered.

In South Africa, those over the age of 18 years are considered adults (Legal Aid, 2018) and are therefore allowed to make decisions and participate in any activities without the consent of their parents. This means the study only required consent from the participants. The questionnaire was shared through social media platforms – X/Twitter and Facebook - over a period of four months. The online survey was opened to all men over the age of 18 years, who are black and are South African citizen. The reason for the inclusion of all African adult males is (i) the age of sexual violence perpetrators varies and includes the young and old (ii) the study focuses on South African adult males. The online survey also increased the number of variables of the participants as it is a place where men from all walks of life are found.

It is also important to note that online surveys produce the lowest response rate out of all methods of data collection (Jia-Wu, Zhao, and Aime, 2022) however, they are more reliable than face to face interviews and are cost effective and require less time (Raju, Narayanaswamy, and Harinarayana, 2016).

## **4.5 The Questionnaire**

The research questionnaire was conducted online, and it was targeted towards black South African males over the age of 18 years old. The questionnaire consisted of 34 questions including the first three which required the participants to agree that they are black South African males over the age of 18 and they do give consent to participate in the study. The remaining 21 were categorised according to the four research questions and they were as follows:

### ***4.5.1 Are (Black) women sexualised in the South African media?***

The following questions fall under this question:

Open-ended questions:

- What is your understanding of sexualisation of women?

Closed-ended questions:

- Do you think Black women in the South African media are sexualised?
- Do you think girls/women in traditional clothing are sexualised and why did you give that answer?
- Do you think media sexualises girls/women wearing "revealing" western clothes?
- Do you think media sexualises girls/women wearing "revealing" traditional clothes?
- Do you think the high number of sexual assault cases against girls/women are due to them being sexualised in media?
- Do you sexualise girls/women in "revealing" traditional clothes?

#### ***4.5.2 What do Black South African men think of women in revealing western clothes and those in 'revealing' traditional clothes?***

The following questions fall under this question:

Open-ended questions:

- Which clothes would you consider "revealing?"
- Do you believe in traditional practices and why did you give that answer?
- Do you think that girls/women in traditional clothes are naked and why did you give that answer?
- How do you feel when you see a woman in "revealing" traditional clothes?
- How do you feel when you see a woman in "revealing" western clothes?
- Do you think some men intentionally sexually harass girls/women in "revealing" western clothes and why did you give that answer?
- Do you think some men intentionally sexually harass girls/women in "revealing" traditional clothes and why did you give that answer?

Closed-ended questions:

- Do clothes also form part of tradition?

- Do you think some traditional clothes are "revealing?"
- Do you think some western clothes are "revealing?"

#### ***4.5.3 Does the media shape the views and perceptions of Black South African men with regards to women?***

The following questions fall under this question:

Open-ended questions:

- Which forms of media do you consume?
- Do you think that media has an influence on how you perceive things, including women and why did you give that answer?

Closed-ended questions:

- Do you consume different forms of media?

#### ***4.5.4 Are (Black) South African women more vulnerable to sexual violence when dressed in certain types of clothing?***

The following questions fall under this question:

Open-ended questions:

- Do western clothes have the same value as traditional clothes in your society and why did you give that answer?

### **4.6 Data collection**

A single method of data collection was used; online questionnaire (please see Appendix 1) and the findings are supported by literature study. For the online questionnaire and purpose of the study, Google Forms was used as the tool. Google Forms is free and easy to use, it allows for an unlimited number of questions and responses, and once the survey is completed the data can then be saved as a

spreadsheet to allow for easy interpretation. The number of responses for each question were then added and conclusions were made based on that. The questionnaire included an introduction of the study and the details of the researcher, supervisor, and university. Participants were told their contribution to the research was anonymous.

The questionnaire was piloted to test for validity and reliability as well as trustworthiness. The Flesch-Kincaid Grade level test and Flesch Reading Ease test were carried out in Microsoft Word and the results showed 8.8 and 56.1, respectively.

#### **4.7 Strategy for data analysis**

As a qualitative research, theories – objectification, cultivation, feminist, and womanist-were used to analyse the data. The data analysis plan also included looking at the questions in the survey that ask respondents to answer the direct research questions. The number of respondents determined if the survey was a success or not. To gain more insightful understanding of the data, a table was created to group the questions to the research questions.

The inclusion requirements for participation in the study were:

- Race – only black South African will be allowed to participate,
- Sex – only males will be allowed to participate,
- Age – only those over the age of 18 years old can participate.

The exclusion requirements included those who fell outside of the main requirements of being over the age of 18 years, Black South African male and gave voluntary consent. The reasons for the exclusion were to allow the participant to give consent without the need for parents or guardians. Social media platforms were chosen as they were cheaper, accessible and have a wider range of participants from different backgrounds in terms of traditions, levels of education, age, income, and careers. This is consistent with the fact that sexual violence perpetrators come from all walks of life.

## **4.8 Ethical considerations**

According to College Research Ethics Committee (CREC) (Unisa, 2022) (i) research must have scholarly merit (ii) Respect and dignity to all those involved, (iii) social values, (iv) privacy and confidentiality, (v) favourable balance of benefits and risks, (vi) fair subject and community selection and (vii) professional competence.

The participants were required to be over the age of 18 and the online form will require participants to consent and confirm their age to the study before answering any of the questions the questions.

Research ethics clearance was granted by the College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee. Research certificate number Rec-240816-052.

### **Risk**

- The survey did not ask any personal details which can be used to identify a person.
- The survey was conducted on a reputable online platform Google Form and a period of four months was given to participants to complete the survey.
- The participants were not subjected to any harm and communication regarding the research was be done in an honest manner.
- The details of the researcher, the institution and the ethical clearance were provided before the survey began. There were no exaggerations of the questions and all and any funding was made known to the participants.
- There was no direct human participation involved.
- The study did not offer any remuneration to the participants and it was not funded by a third party.
- Information of the Principal Investigator and supervisor was made available.

The Principal Investigator of this study is MA candidate gender with experience working on projects that involve women and gender. She was guided by her supervisor who is a lecture at UNISA with experience in women studies. As stated before, the

sample and method of data collection was chosen because of the wide range of participants in terms of age, social economic backgrounds, education level and belief systems thus encompassing all the different types of Black, South African men. This research will be assisting in providing answers to some of the causes and reasons for sexual assault and recommendations.

#### **4.9 Conclusion**

Qualitative research was used in this study. One questionnaire was administered by the researcher to the participants using a social media platform and Google forms. Participants were all South African adult black males. Prior to the questionnaire, participants were required to consent and acknowledge their age and sex. The process was anonymous with no names or other means of identifying the participants present.

This following chapter describes the study results.

# Chapter 5: Research Findings

## 5.1 Participants description

A total of 120 participants completed the questionnaire and provided answers to all questions. Among these participants, 119 agreed they were older than 18 years and the one younger than 18 years was therefore removed (Table 1). Four participants did not provide their race and gender, and two did not give voluntary consent, they were also removed.

**Table 1** - Description of participants (N=114) using inclusion criteria

Variable	Frequency	Frequency
	n	%
Age was > 18 years	119	99
Race was Black South African	114	94
Consent to participate	118	98

## 5.2 Questionnaire responses

The following section provides the responses to the questions as listed in the questionnaire in section four and appendix/annex 1.

### **Are women are sexualised in South African media?**

Research question 1 dealt with 'If women are sexualised in South African media?' and it consisted of 11 questions in total where participants had to either give their opinions and respond to questions by either ***strongly agree/ agree/ neutral/ disagree and strongly disagree.***

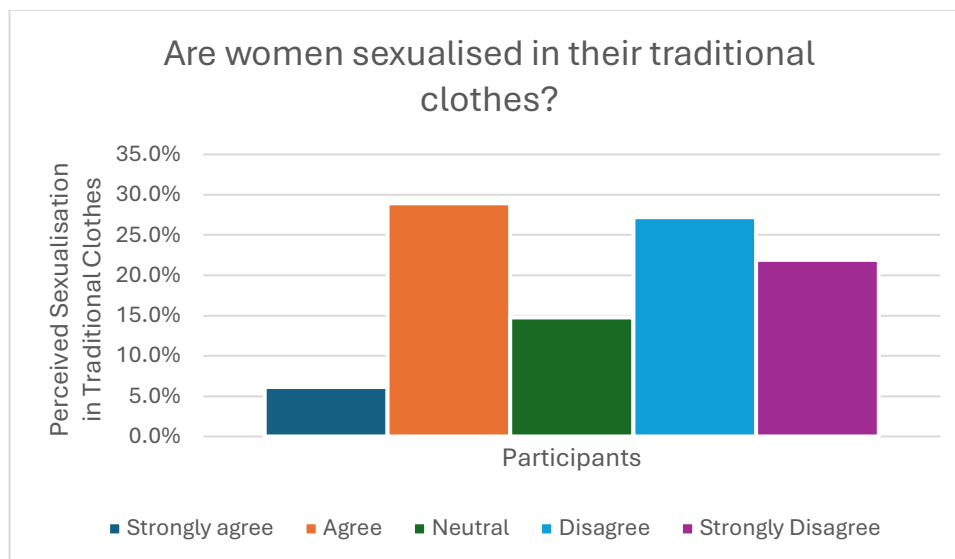
When asked what their understanding of sexualisation of women, 114 of the

participants responded to the question 'Are women sexualised in the South African media' and some of the responses included:

- *“Seeing women as sexual objects,”*
- *“Regarding women as sex objects in terms of their appearance,”*
- *“Using women in a demeaning way to achieve a non-aligned goal e.g. women in bikinis selling cars,” “Perception of women in a sexual way,”*
- *“The display of women in sexually explicit ways mostly to get social media engagement,”*
- *“The[accentuation] of Female features to create male arousal and/or interest,”*
- *“I think the sexualisation of women is a result of male [fantasies] about how women are supposed to [behaviour] towards us. I think these fantasies are perpetuated by the types of media we consume as young boys and that they condition us to sexually objectify women,”*
- *“Western media is at the forefront of the dehumanisation of women,”*
- *“Half naked Female influencers, Only fans models, Instagram models & music video models, it doesn't have to be as extreme as outright pornography, women particularly black women are highly specialised in today's society & men are guilty of its consumption as well,”*
- *“Looking at them with lusting eyes, make sexual remarks based on how they looked and are dressed,”*
- *“It stems from media specifically from television since in our cultures young women can wear revealing clothing without us feeling uncomfortable because it's culture to us. But when you see it on television the intent is normally to lure men and get them to be addicted into something or find a way to control them by making them lust over nudity. It's no coincidence that what we see on tv takes control of how we could feel because that the reason behind it, to make us addicts. But in our culture, it's just a way of life”,*
- *“Making it as though the best thing a woman can offer is sex. Most of the times women themselves are to blame for this”,*

- *“It's morally reprehensible”,*
- *“According to my understanding, sexualisation of women refers to the objectification of women's bodies and sexuality for the purpose of satisfying male desires. It is a pervasive societal issue that reduces women to sexual objects, and can lead to harmful consequences such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and low self-esteem”,*
- *“I believe viewing women as sex object, or having sexual fantasies whenever women are dressed in certain manner i.e. revealing clothes (expressive western clothes or even traditional attires,”*
- *“Patriarchal attachment of gender.”*

For the close-ended question about whether they believed that girls/women were sexualised in their traditional clothes, 114 of the participants answered, 30% agreed and 6% strongly agreed while 27% disagreed and 22% strongly disagreed. Fifteen percent of the participants were neutral (Figure 3).



**Figure 3 - Are women sexualised in their traditional clothes?**

The participants were also asked a follow up question to determine why they chose their answer and the reasons ranged from:

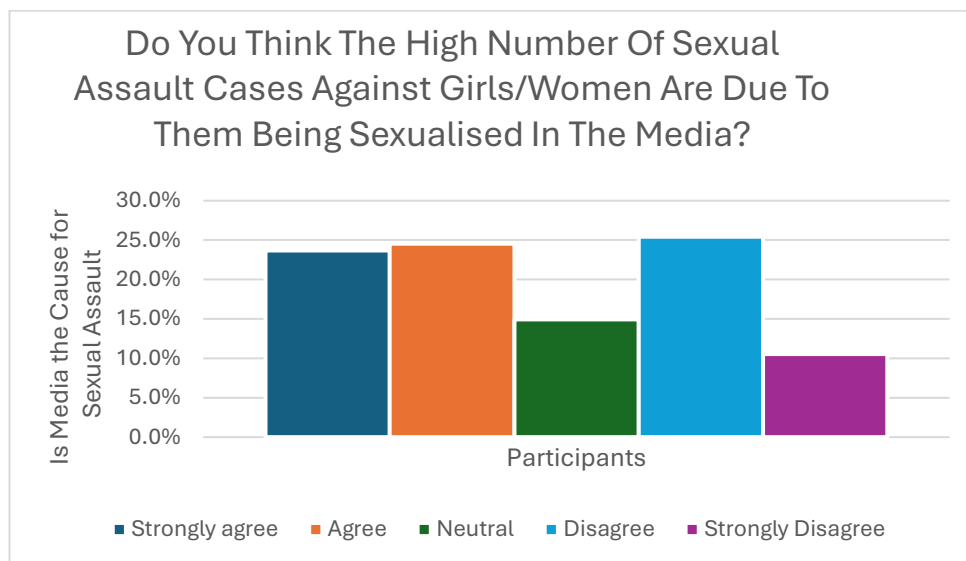
- *“Traditional clothing in and of itself does not objectify people. Yet people in traditional clothing may be [objectified]...as with people wearing non-traditional clothing,”*
- *“They are not sexualized because they are worn to represent culture unlike short skirt and dresses or bum shorts which are worn so that the person wearing them feels sexy or want to be viewed as sexy,”*
- *“The various festivals where African women dress traditionally in revealing clothing as well as being bare breasted as far as I know so not report sexual harassment. Typically, only when wearing western clothing,”*
- *“Naked bodies,”*
- *“Is rather dictated by culture and traditions how they must dress,”*
- *“Western sexualisation is not the same as traditional sexualisation. In tradition women are sexualised in more respectful, and dignified way and in ways that actually encourage young women and men to maintain their sexual innocence and preserve themselves for marriage. Whereas, in the west, the sexualisation of women is one that encourages promiscuity in both men and women, it also promotes the objectification of women, and some cases even leads to the brewing of sexual abuse culture,”*
- *“Although I think traditional clothes are revealing, I believe people tend to overlook that because they are part of tradition and them being revealing was normalized years ago,”*
- *“Our traditional attire is highly respected and has never been sexualized despite some of it being revealing. I have, however, seen pages on social media which have started to pervert it (our attire) and portray it with an intention to sexualize it,”*
- *“I am on the fence with this one personally, yes women's traditional attire although necessary & a part of our culture, it's also quite easy to blur the lines between cultural attire or an outfit to sexualise, perhaps I may have been corrupted by my western upbringing which leaves me at a dilemma when it comes to women's traditional attire,”*

- “Because before colonialism we did not sexualise women based on their clothing” and
- “No one get a hard one looking at the girls at the reed dance but [put] that titty on insta and [it is] a boner zone 🍆.”

It was clear from the responses that there was an understanding that traditional clothes although “revealing” were acceptable and the sexualisation of women in them is limited. When participants were asked if they have ever sexualised girls/women in “revealing” traditional clothes, 44% strongly disagreed, 33% disagreed while only 12% of the 114 participants strongly agreed and agreed.

When asked whether they think that media sexualises girls/women in revealing traditional and western clothing, 88% of the participants strongly agreed and agreed that women in western revealing clothing are sexualised while only 44% strongly agreed and agreed that those in traditional clothing were sexualised.

The participants were also asked if they thought that the high number of sexual assault cases against girls/women are due to them being sexualised in media (Figure 4). Almost ¼ of participants agreed that this was the case.



**Figure 4** - Is the high number of sexual assault cases by girls/women due to them being sexualised by the media?

When asked to further explain their responses, the participants gave reasons such as

- *“Media is very influential in how people see things.”*
- *“Men think it’s OK because it’s seen on TV and media. Media often portray women as sex object and nothing else.”*
- *“There are people with a tendency to harass women in revealing clothes.”*
- *“Although there are likely other factors that contribute to the problem, I think that the media’s sexualisation of women is a big part of it.”*
- *“I think media teaches young boys to treat women like sexual objects.”*
- *“Women are portrayed as sexual objects and at times places themselves as such and People tend to accept information in media as gospel.”*
- *“If the media sexualizes women, men tend to believe it & develop assumptions that all women are like those in the media.”*

### **What do men think of women in western revealing clothes and those in traditional revealing clothes?**

The second research question was, ‘what do men think of women in western revealing clothes and those in traditional revealing clothes?’ For the first question in this section, the participants were also asked which clothes they deemed as “revealing” and their responses ranged from *“bum shorts, short skirts and dresses, see through and tight-fitting clothes, anything that doesn’t cover the private parts to anything that shows the human body between the neck and the knees.”* Two of the participants mentioned traditional clothes and a few mentioned that when clothes are worn for the wrong occasion, they may be considered revealing. One participant said *“This one is a difficult and complex question. No clothing is revealing for me but some are inappropriate for certain places, etc: work.”*

The next question was if they believed in traditional practices. 114 participants responded to this, and majority did believe in traditional practices (Figure 5).



**Figure 5 - Do you believe in traditional practices?**

In fact, two-thirds of the participants do believe in traditional practices and the reasons for their belief ranged from *“I am an African”* to *“traditions serving a particular function in society”* and them having grown up in homes that practice traditions. There was also a connection that was made by a few participants regarding tradition being the corner stone of morality and good behaviour. As one participant puts it, *“Our traditions and culture are our identity and how you perceive yourself greatly impacts how you conduct yourself and interact with those around you. Most of the disfunction in our society is due to us, willingly or otherwise, abandoning our traditions and thus our identity.”*

The participants also believed that clothes form part of traditions and are an extension of them (73% of them agreed). This question was followed by participants explaining if they view girls/women in traditional clothes as being naked and over 69% of them disagreed. When asked why they did not believe that those in traditional clothes were naked, they said:

- *“The purpose of wearing the traditional clothes is to represent the culture not to look or feel sexy,”*
- *“They’re not. They’re dressed approximately in accordance with the norms of their cultures and traditions,”*
- *“Nakedness is a perception,”*

- *“It is in line with their culture not intentionally exposing themselves like is the case in today’s clothing,”*
- *“They are not naked but clothed to a respectable level as our African ethnicities are many and all coincidentally are crafted to groom respect amongst young boys and men,”*
- *“Not all traditional attire reveals women’s bodies, and if they do, maybe that lady is still a virgin, and it’s part of their being proud of keeping their virginity that they dress in particular traditional attire,”*
- *“Because they are dressed and the idea of nakedness (in a sexual manner) is foreign to our culture and has only gained prominence after colonization and westernization,”*
- *“Our women use to walk around with breaststroke out YET [WERE] NEVER sexualised,”*
- *“As I had mentioned in my previous reasoning, I am in between with question, cause logic & common sense tells me these women are naked cause their chests are exposed & sometimes their nether regions, but because it’s a cultural setting the lines are blurred again,”*
- *“I define “naked” in this case as having no clothing. Though traditional clothing doesn’t exactly cover all the important parts of women, you cannot truly say that they are naked when wearing traditional clothing,”*
- *“I think it’s because nobody sexualizes a women in traditional clothes. A [woman] in traditional attire is shown respect” and*
- *“I respect my tradition, that means respecting the attire that goes with it.”*

This section further asked the participants if they believed some of the western and traditional clothing were revealing. More than 80% agreed that some western clothing is revealing and 48% agreed that traditional clothing is revealing. Another question posed to the participants was, ‘how they felt when they saw girls/women in traditional clothes?’ These were some of the participants said they felt nothing and other expressed that they felt pride, admiration, pride, respect, and happiness. Some said

they did not feel anything because they were used to it, it was a common occurrence while others said they have never had the chance to see because of where they lived in urban areas.

According to the participants, those women in revealing western clothing created feelings in our participants which ranged from nothing to disgust, aroused and enticed, disappointed (especially if they are black), loss of dignity and lack of morals, judgement, not raised well, looking for attention and some not thinking that these women deserve the same respect as those in traditional clothing. One of the participants said *“I feel overly excited at asking her out for the sole intention of sleeping with her. I do not care or feel guilty because media has made that way of dressing normal. The revealing outfit solidifies what media has been telling men all the time, that the woman is sexually frustrated and I'm going to help her get sum. So in my mind, the woman in western revealing clothes is looking for sex unlike the one in traditional attires who wasn't. No guilt is felt there.”*

The final questions were if the participants thought that some men intentionally sexually harass girls/women in “revealing” traditional and western clothing and what their thoughts were on each. Regarding men and sexually harassing girls/women in revealing traditional clothing, 54% agreed with this question and the reasons given for this were:

- *“Sexualised breasts and exposed thighs,”*
- *“Those who do not respect tradition,”*
- *“people walking around traditional clothing is not a common thing”*
- *“Some men do—those that don't understand Africanism or aren't African,”*
- *“I've never seen a women get sexualised in traditional clothing,”*
- *“Again this is because of the adoption of the hypersexual western lenses which then corrupt and [perverse] men towards any and everything,”*
- *“I don't know, me personally I have never heard of such where I'm from or even I the media,”*

- *“Wearing traditional clothes which are revealing by default won’t get any women [harassed] because most men respect culture and actually appreciate a women who is in tune with her culture,”*
- *“Disrespecting “traditional” anything is the same as disrespecting our culture and our forefathers, of which is enough to get you exiled/killed back in the days. You can’t be that disrespectful if you are black” and*
- *“I’m of the belief that traditional clothes are in no way “revealing”. I do not know what predators who sexually harass such women are thinking.”*

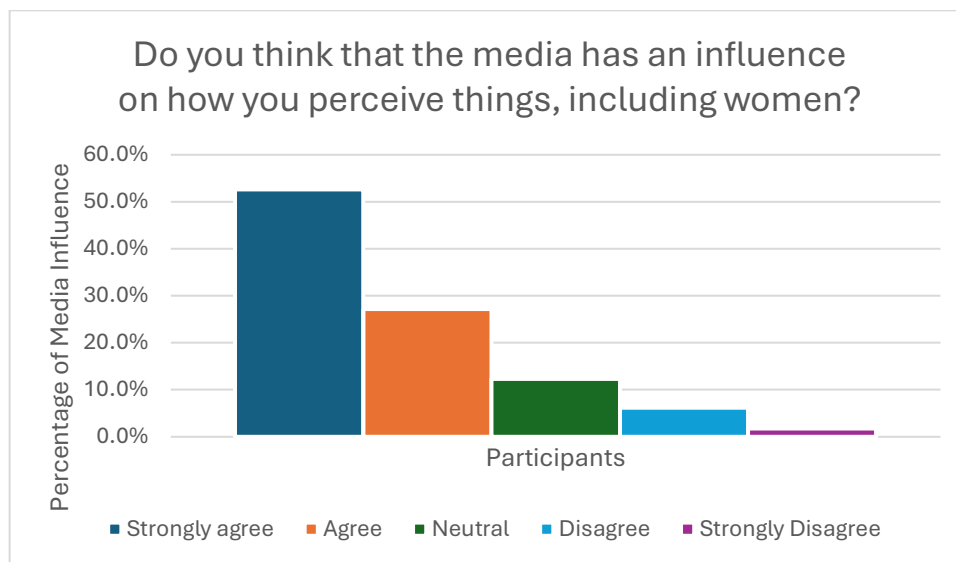
On whether some men intentionally sexual harass girls/women in “revealing” western clothing and why, 88% agreed with this questions and reasons included:

- *“I think they do it to give them the attention they think they are looking for,”*
- *“These are people with loose morals,”*
- *“I think media conditions young boys to expect sex from women in revealing western clothes and when these young boys grow up to be men, they tell themselves that they have the right to harass women in revealing western clothes because they believe that these women are asking for their attention,”*
- *“They associate them with prostitutes, subconsciously, so they do as they please,”*
- *“I have seen gents making women uncomfortable with their comments based on the woman’s attire,”*
- *“They see it as an invitation,”*
- *“it is the programming from media that brings out this [behaviour] and also the design style which evokes men into sexualizing such women, the brain might Remember a certain MOVIE where a similar attire was used in a sexual scene,”*
- *“It is association, you dress like a footballer, you either a player or a fan. Think porn” and*

- *“Because western clothes are deemed as a choice. [Traditional] clothes may differ in materials but [they] are cut the same and they tend to follow a similar design, however western clothes have a range, so anyone wearing [revealing] western clothes is seen as [having] chosen the response they receive from men.”*

### **Does the media shape the views and perceptions of men with regards to women?**

The third research question was on whether they thought the media shape the views and perceptions of men with regards to women. When asked if they think that media has an influence on how you perceive things, including women, 114 participants answered this question (Figure 6)



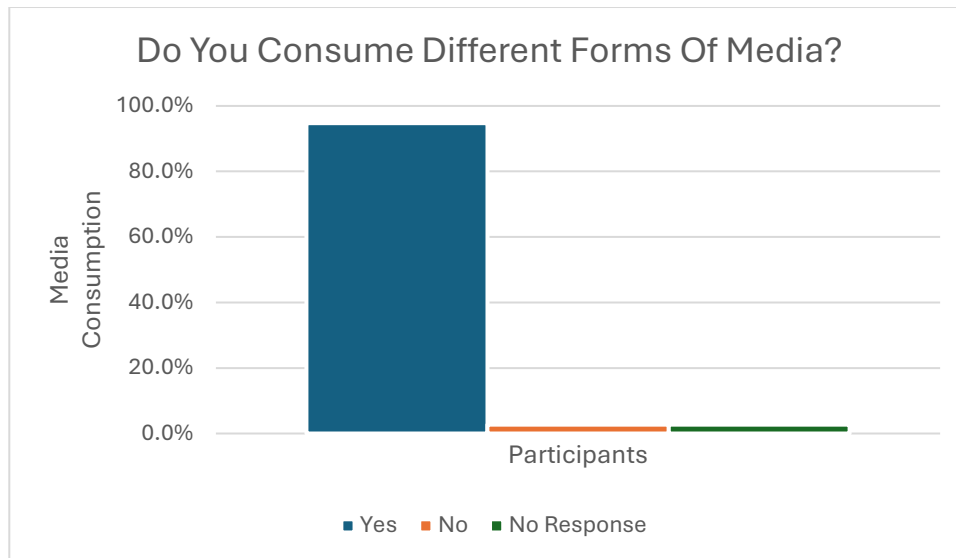
**Figure 6** - Does media have an influence on your perception of women?

Over 50% of the participants strongly agreed that media did have an influence on their perception of women and 27% agreed as well meaning, over 77% of the participants agreed to the above question. When asked to give reasons as to why they believed that 114 responded and said:

- *“Media is a form education. Education is influential,”*
- *“We are constantly flooded with images of women’s bodies,”*

- *“Media plays an influential role in public perceptions,”*
- *“The media is incredibly layered in our everyday lives and people trust and are influenced by its sheer ubiquitous presence in our lives,”*
- *“I think the way I see women and the world in general was strongly influenced by the media I consumed when I was younger. As a kid I watched a lot of TV and at the time I was convinced it represented the real world. I thought that what I saw there was how people in the real world [behaved]. That includes the women I saw in Movies, TV shows and music videos who were mostly sexually objectified,”*
- *“Media has no influence on how I perceive women, however at times it does [have] influence on how I see certain things,”*
- *“The clothing this generation wears, they try and copy what they see on the media, music videos, celebrity life,”*
- *“Most of my prejudices about women have been shaped by what I’ve been exposed too from an early age. Especially television,”*

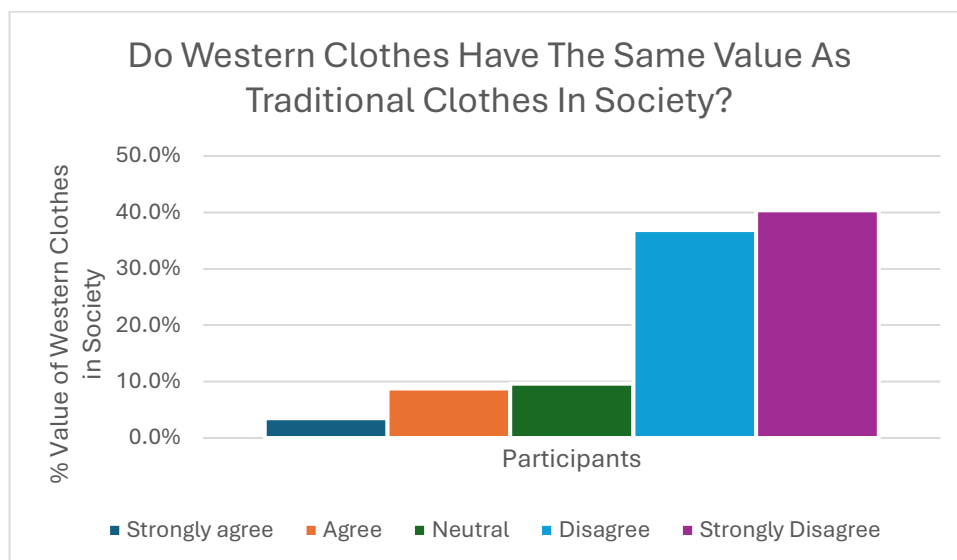
The participants were also asked if they consume different forms of media (Figure 7), and 114 of the participants responded to this question with over 96% saying they did consume different forms of media. In the second part of the question, participants were asked to name the different forms of media that they consumed and the most consumed was the different social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok). This was followed by Television, online news, radio, newspaper, and magazines.



**Figure 7 - Do you consume different forms of media?**

### **Are women more vulnerable to sexual violence when dressed in certain types of clothing?**

This part answered the question of whether men (in this case black South African men over the age of 18 years) believe that women are more vulnerable to sexual violence when dressed in certain types of clothing. More than 75% of the 114 participants who responded to this question disagreed that western clothes have the same value as traditional clothes in their society.



**Figure 8 - Do western clothes have the same value as traditional clothes in society?**

Some of the reasons given were:

- *“It is a colonial construct,”*
- *“It’s counterintuitive, Zulu taxi drivers harass women wearing western clothing like [miniskirts]. Same Zulu men allow their daughters and sisters to dress traditionally also showing their breasts and short skirts,”*
- *“No cultural association, just random clothing with no history or trading,”*
- *“Western clothes are not traditional clothes,”*
- *“Traditional clothes are not worn for commercial or commodity purposes,”*
- *“Western clothing is designed to be according to the purchasers want but traditional clothing is designed according to the wants/interests of the entire clan or culture,”*
- *“Traditional attire has historical significance, meaning and purpose. Western attire has very little if any and not in a good way,”*
- *“Society has sexualized western clothing, women use them when enticing men in the bedroom and to show off their bodies but that’s not the case with traditional clothing,”*
- *“The Western traditions and values are not the same as ours, and clothes are expressions of a culture or tradition of the society,”*
- *“There is an expected decorum and a sense of occasion associated with traditional clothing,”*
- *“Western clothing are for westerners and that is their culture not ours,”*
- *“Because women wearing short traditional skirt and a women wearing short [miniskirts] are treated differently,”*
- *“Western or should I say modern/pop culture perpetuates overtly sexualize manner so it can never be the same,”*
- *“Outfits from Port have become mainstream clothing, that industry dos nothing but degrade woman and their true power. The mainstream media i.e. MTV*

*through [R&B] and hip hop have empowered woman not only to look like hoes but speak like them to fully get the attention” and*

- *“Traditional cloths, however, are link to traditional values. Traditional values make us see woman as our other half rather than sex objects.”*

The following chapter discusses these findings in relation to the study objectives and research questions (see chapter 1) and theories described in chapter 3.

# Chapter 6: Discussion

## 6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to understand if the sexualisation of Black South African women in the media contributed to the sexual violence incidents in the country. South Africa has some of the world highest rates of sexual violence, specifically rape. One of the many reasons that are given by perpetrators when asked why, is how the victims were dressed in provocative clothes like short dresses, cleavage showing, see through clothing items and so forth. We have incidents of girls and women being stripped, harassed, and catcalled supposedly because of what they were wearing at the time which was deemed immoral and sexual. Many of these incidents took place when the victims were wearing what we deem as revealing western clothes (News24, 2012).

In contrast, as a country that practices and embraces its traditions and cultures, South Africans are comfortable in what will be called “nudity” in the west. Our traditional clothes (especially of young maidens) are “revealing” covering only the small private areas in front and leaving the rest as is. However, there are hardly any incidents of rape or sexual harassment that are reported during traditional events. During the period of conducting the research for this study, only one case was reported in media (news24, 2024). The former police minister’s spokesperson, Ms Lirandzu Themba was contacted, and she confirmed that the police do not keep disaggregated data that can indicate where a girl/woman was raped and that it would require one to physically go to every police station and manually search the files for such information.

This study therefore used the cognitive dissonance between how Black women in revealing western clothing are treated in comparison to those in “revealing” traditional clothing to understand if the difference be due to the portrayed of Black women in media.

An interpretation of the findings is presented below in terms of the four research questions in this chapter.

## **6.2 Are black women sexualised in South African media?**

There is not much research on the sexualisation of Black women in media in relation to their portrayal in films and videos in South Africa and Africa as a whole. We can, however, draw parallels with the studies conducted in the USA on Black women. Historically, Black women have been stereotyped since the arrival of white missionaries in Africa and their subsequent slavery in America and other parts of the world. During that time, white women were portrayed as the embodiment of femininity, innocence, and beauty. Black women were seen as the opposite, masculine, savagery, sexually depraved and ugly. These beliefs were then used to justify the inhuman treatment of black women and fuel the belief that they were mere objects to be abused and used as seen fit by their owners (Lewis, 2019).

Roles such as sapphire, the mummy and jezebel were created, attached to the image of Black women, and used to place them and their identities in boxes. Over time, these stereotypes developed into what we know today as the angry Black woman, the matriarch and freak/hoe, all of which are played out repeatedly in music lyrics, videos, movies, reality shows and other forms of media. The effects of the negative portrayal of black women in media has transcended the confines of audios and images and permeated into their daily lives. Young black girls are seen as adults who know about issues such as sex resulting in them being viewed in that context earlier and judged more harshly than their counterparts. Adult Black women carry the burden of the stereotypes into work and social settings with them being seen as either the mummy who is there for support and emotional labour or the jezebel who is not believed to be smart and deserving of the positions she gets. In social settings, studies show us that Black women are seen to always be sexually active with multiple partners and/or have children regardless of their age (Lewis, 2019).

Objectification theory is identified as a form of gender oppression in which girls and women are seen as objects to be used by others. In a heterosexual and patriarchal society men have been given an inherent right to sexualise women from all races and class. One of the ways that sexualisation expresses itself is through the gaze or the “visual inspection of the body” (Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts 1997, p. 176). The idea of sexualisation means that women’s bodies are dissected, focus is placed on the

private parts and their contribution and humanity is limited to what they can offer, physically. The objectification gaze occurs in three ways, firstly in interactive social meetings where studies have shown that women are gazed at in a sexual manner more than men. Secondly, the gaze occurs in visual media which enact interactive social meetings and an example of this is in advertisements where a man is shown staring at a woman. Lastly, is when visual media focuses on women's body parts and in relation to black women, this extends to racial undertones which can see them depicted as animals (Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts, 1997).

The research question in this study asked whether black women in South Africa are sexualised by the media and the participants were asked what their understanding of sexualisation was. The American Psychological Association (2007, p. 1), stated that sexualisation takes place when "a person's value comes only from his or her sexual appeal or behaviour, to the exclusion of other characteristics; a person is held to a standard that equates physical attractiveness with being sexy; a person is sexually objectified and made into a thing for others' sexual use rather than seen as a person with the capacity for independent action and decision making and when it is inappropriately imposed upon a person." Blake *et al.*, (2018, p. 35) went further and explained that cultural sexualisation was a "trend encompassing the sexual objectification of women and girls in mass media, shifts toward more permissive sexual attitudes, and preoccupation with sexual identities."

Some of the features of cultural sexualisation were the depictions of young women in extremely revealing clothes and it can take place within a structural and sociopsychological context. In a structural context, sexualisation can be seen as empowering, a way for women to self-determine and reject the norms that are set by society. In a sociopsychological context, it is a form of oppression created because women are seen as objects that can be used to bring pleasure to others and are only valued for their physical appearance (Blake *et al.*, 2018).

Most of the participants in this study, had a good understanding of what sexualisation meant and their responses ranged from (***objectifying them, using their nudity to promote or sell products, making them seem like all they can offer is sex and some even understood the context of nudity when it is in a cultural setting and***

**when it is in a western media setting to” to “Using women in a demeaning way to achieve a non-aligned goal e.g. women in bikinis selling cars.”** The participants were also asked what forms of media they used, and these included social media (YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok) radio, newspaper, and television. Majority agreed that media sexualises Black women in South Africa.

Their view that media sexualises women is supported by studies and there are several theories of how this affects girls and women as well (Santoniccolo *et al.*, 2023). Physical and mental health, sexualities and beliefs are some of the consequences. The ability of girls to develop into healthy, confident adults reduces due to sexualisation with most not having any form of sexual assertiveness in their own relationships. Their attitudes and beliefs also change, making them focus on their physical appearance and view themselves through the eyes of men (American Psychological Association (2007). In men, studies found that, the sexualisation of women increases their tendency to engage in uncontrolled sexual urges and reactions, harassment, as well as increasing conformity to gender role norms. Daily exposure to sexual content has also been linked to “sexist views in boys, tolerance to sexual violence in men and acceptance of sexual violence and harassment myths” (Santoniccolo *et al.*, 2023, p. 6).

When participants were asked which clothing items, they considered revealing, the responses varied. Answers included “short, **tight and see-through clothing**” to “**underwear, clothes that only cover private parts and none.**” Majority of the participants referred to western type of clothing and not the traditional ones. This belief shows that in African traditions, the concept of “nudity/revealing” does not exist and hence the interpretation of it comes when the viewer uses the western point of view. In his view of the Indian people in America Edward Johnson, stated that “The Indian people in these parts at the English first coming, were very barbarous and uncivilized, going for the most part naked” (Johnson 1910, p. 262). In this study, two-thirds of the participants believed in traditional practices.

Existing research (Pilgrim, 2002) and the results from this study show that Black women are sexualised in the different forms of media in South African through their clothing and portrayal.

### **6.3 What do men think of women in western revealing clothes and those in traditional revealing clothes?**

Dress is a way of telling the world of who you are and how you want to be treated, it is a non-verbal form of communication. Dressing is one way of showing the world one's identity and what we believe. The objectification theory tells us that women's bodies are magnified more than men's bodies and that the objectification gaze takes place both in social encounters and through media representation of women. Studies have shown women who are sexually objectified to be viewed as incompetent and more as objects than humans (Awasthi, 2017). Sexual objectification in media leads to women self-objectifying, body shaming, mental illness, and the reinforcement of women as objects. In social interactions, women revealing their bodies reinforces objectification and not sexual urgency (Awasthi, 2017).

Traditional wear is a representation of people's cultures and way of life. Just like language, food, and songs, it can represent age, gender, social status of the individual wearing it and to differentiate communities. Clothing is a source of pride and even though it is perceived as being "naked" through the western eyes, it is regarded as the most respectful way one can represent themselves (Mukwevho and Khosa, 2019). Young girls and women who take part in traditional events and ceremonies speak of how confident, proud, and dignified they feel when wearing their traditional attire (Charles and Lu's, 2015).

In South Africa, traditional practices are still a large part of everyday life. Traditional healers are constitutionally recognised and practice alongside western trained medical doctors (Government Gazette, Republic of South Africa, n.d.), the biggest Christian churches are African Independent Churches (AICs) that are mixed with traditional practices such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) (Government Communication and Information System, 2004). Traditional practices such as the Reed dance (AmaZulu), Domba (Vhavhenda), Koma (Bapedi), Intonjane (AmaXhosa) and many more continue today. Young girls and women participating in these ceremonies wear their traditional attire as close to their original form as possible appearing more "naked" than those in short dresses and cleavages. However, instead of receiving the same

negative reception, shame, and harassment they are praised and applauded for being a beacon of how a woman should carry herself and behave in society.

When the participants were asked if they believed that some western clothes are revealing, 82% of them agreed that they are and when asked the same about traditional clothes, 48% agreed that they too are “revealing.” When the same participants were asked if they view traditional clothes as “naked,” over 72% disagreed. Their reasons ranged from **“traditional clothes are not intended for such, they do not view that nakedness in a provocative sense, it is their cultural norms, they look dignified and traditional clothes are not about sexualised exposure.”** Other participants felt that **“they were half naked, although it was traditional clothes they were still provocative, and they are naked and get sexualised too.”**

Women in revealing clothes are often blamed for the objectification they face and the sexual violence that may occur. Terms such as ‘rape myths’ speak to how society believes that women contribute to the violence against them. The perpetrators use the excuse that victims were dressed in provocative ways which resulted in them not being able to control themselves. With an increase in portrayals of women as seductive, eager for sex and objects in the western world, men are constantly exposed to these stereotypes increasing the chances of women being targets of their lust (Moor, 2010). The current standard of female beauty is moulded from the western culture point of view and with the saturation of objectifying and sexualised imagery, it creates the impression that women need to follow these standards to be considered. In a patriarchal system where women do not have the power to wield, women might be forced to use their looks and sex appeal as a social currency (Moor, 2010).

In his study, Moor (2010) found that 82% of women who dressed in revealing clothing did so because they liked the clothes while only 5% meant to seduce men. A little over 2% indicated a desire to be touched and/or seduced while wearing the revealing clothes. Men on the other hand thought the opposite. Over 50% of those who participated in the study felt that “temptation and seduction” are the reasons why women dressed in revealing clothes. The participants also indicated that they felt sexually aroused when they view women in revealing clothes with, 30% feeling

aroused all the time and 58% saying they felt aroused most of the time.

Moor's findings are like those in this study. 50% of the participants agreed when they were asked if they sexualised girls/women in revealing western clothes. In contrast, only 3% strongly agreed and 9% agreed to sexualising girls/women in "revealing" traditional clothes. When asked why they sexualised women in revealing western clothes answers included "**perceptions, because the west see women as objects, sometimes it's sexual depending on the clothes, they only sexualise women who sexualise themselves.**" The participants were then asked to explain further what they feel when they see girls/women in "revealing" traditional clothes and their comments included "**nothing, pride, their intent is not to sexualise, they are representing their traditional values, and they are attracted to the women not because of what she is revealing but because they know the values they carry**". Some of the participants did mention that they get "**aroused, the need to override their reaction because they understand that is not what is being presented and they control the urges and approach the focus of their administration at a later stage with respect.**"

With regards to how the participants felt when they saw a girl/woman in revealing traditional clothes, the responses very different. They included "**nothing, disgusts, settling for less, not well raised, anxious for her safety because they know they might be sexually abused, they ask themselves if they would want to have sex with her and pursue, aroused and they sexualised them.**" They were also participants who said that they felt "**nothing, that it was their choice, they appreciate the beauty, and they don't pay attention or pass judgement as this was the women's choice.**"

It is clear from previous and current studies that men do view women differently when they are in revealing clothes. They see them as sexual objects ready and open to sexual attention and activities. However, it is also clear that in South Africa, where traditions and cultures are still practiced proudly, there is a cognitive dissonance that comes through in how men view the similar contexts differently. Women in traditional attire are afforded respect those in western do not receive. In social media, the difference in attitudes is seen in the comments (Appendix 2).

According to feminist theory, those who do not have power – women, minorities, the poor – are likely to be monitored, questioned and exploited based on their appearance (Levine and Smolak, 2020). Feminist's view sexualisation as an extension of patriarchy and a way to continue to reduce women to mere objects. Nudity, however, is not something that feminist view in a negative light in certain contexts. During protests in Africa for examples, women use their naked bodies as the final and ultimate form of protest. In African culture, women protesting naked has been taking place before colonialism and there was also shame in seeing a woman naked even then because no matter how “naked” traditional clothing is, the private parts are always covered (Tamale, n.d. 2019).

It should be noted that there is a difference between “naked’ and “nude.” Naked is about shedding clothes and nudity in its nature is sexual (Tamale, 2019). According to Berger (1972, p. 51), “A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become nude.” Therefore, “when women show their naked bodies in public, they are not trying to be sexual, but they are rather drawing attention to their plight” (Tamale 2019, p. 63).

The difference in how the participants view women in revealing western and traditional clothes is due to a western lens used to view the said women. The African perspective has never been given a chance to explain its stance and view on the “naked” body. In western cultures, male and female were distinct in that men were seen as the ones with the brain and women as bodies. Through colonisation – religion and patriarchy – this then became a universal truth. African societies pre-colonial times was a very fluid environment which allowed women to exist in their full potential with the support of their communities. This was because society was not about imposing and enslavement (Jimlongo, 2018).

The participants responses also speak to the view of womanists. African feminists' scholars have a different view to the “normal” feminist in that their intention is for men and women to work together to solve the problems in society as they did in pre-colonial times. Womanists point of view stems from the understanding of African history in which women help positions of power, family was at the centre of society, gender was not rigid (Udenigwe, 2024). This history and tradition are still strong in African societies

and particularly in South Africa.

#### **6.4 Does the media shape the views and perceptions of men with regards to women?**

The role of media is not to tell the public how and what to think however, the media does set agendas and can put a focus on certain issues ensuring that the public receives certain information more frequently than others (Happer and Philo, 2013). Media uses different themes to box and reinforce harmful stereotypes in society such as men are the providers, heroes, independent and authoritative while women are caregivers, dependent and incompetent. Media also shows men as the aggressive ones and women as passive, perpetuating and normalising violence against women (Wood, 2013).

The Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA) states “Broadcasting service licensees must not broadcast material which, judged within context, contains a scene or scenes, simulated or real, of any of the following: Page 6 6 (a) child pornography; (b) bestiality; (c) sexual conduct which degrades a person in the sense that it advocates a particular form of hatred...” (BCCSA, 2009). The debate about whether pornographic materials should be regulated or banned has been going on for decades. On the one hand, there is the acknowledgement that pornography can have negative effects on women such as exploitation, sexualisation and expectations within relationships and on the other hand, is the argument that porn can be a “displacement activity for sexual aggression” (Person, Hurka and Knill 2015, p. 1). The BCCSA does not regulate social media posts, printed news articles, DSTV Box Office, Showmax or Netflix programmes.

Pornographic materials are some of the products of media that are placed at the forefront as a contributing factor to sexualisation and sexual violence causes. Studies have shown that among non-rapists, there an increase in sexual excitement after they were shown images of rape where the victim displayed pleasure, and this also led to an acceptance of rape myths (Diamond, 2009). In America, other studies showed the rate of sex crimes does not increase with an increase in access to pornographic materials. Researchers have explained this as there may not be a possible link

between pornography and sexual crimes or that access to pornography may increase sexual crimes rates in particular groups and hence there is no increase in the overall population (Diamond, 2009).

In South Africa, among adults of 18 years – 92 years old, there was a 95% prevalence of pornography use (Koba, 2022). In this study, we have seen how men have attached sexual promiscuity and availability with women dressed in a particular way. The participants also spoke about images involving women and, in this case, Black women being very sexual and provocative. They stated their belief in the idea that sexual abuse takes place due to the constant display of sexual content of women in media and how the harassment and violence is mostly targeted to those dressed in a certain way.

Nielsen's (2016) study of media consumptions of American's showed that adults spent 10 hours a day consuming content through different forms of media. Gerbner *et al.*, (2002, p. 44) asserted, "the social function of television lies in the continual repetition of stories (myths, 'facts,' lessons, and so on) that serve to define the world and legitimize a particular social order" and Mastro (2015, p 1), stated that media contributes to people's perceptions and beliefs especially those about race and added that "for many, conceptualizations of race and ethnicity, as well as interracial/interethnic dynamics are defined (at least in part) by the characterizations presented in the mass media-including both news and entertainment offerings." If media portrayals are mostly negative towards a particular group of people, then negative consequences will be felt by them (Eddington, 2022).

There are a few theories that support the statement that media does shape our perceptions. Framing research speaks to how media plays an important part in shaping public discourse and Spiral-of-silence theory states that media can create narratives that can be confusing to the public (Fürsich, 2010). As stated previously, cultivation theory tells us that television provides us with a consistent inaccurate view of life and those who watch then form a distorted view of the life. Cultivation theory states that the type of media, the message being shown and how that message affects the receivers are all linked. Previous studies have shown a direct link between watching television and real-life fear of walking alone in the dark, negative beliefs of

the elderly and faith in some professions such as doctors. (Shrum, 2017). Other theories, such as the social learning theory, tell us that human model their behaviours through observing others so, children will look at what adults do and say for them to understand what is required in that society (Eddington, 2022). Television has been described as having another member of the family (Silverstone, 1994) and children can learn about social behaviours from media.

Social identity theory speaks on what it takes for one to belong to a particular group in a social setting such as race, class, and gender and how those groups are valued. In such identities, Black women are placed at the bottom (Eddington, 2022). Certain forms of media such as pornography, contribute greatly to the negative and harmful stereotypes. Pornography is a large industry which encompasses images and videos. A search on Google of the word “sex” results in 619 million hits (Bakker and Talaas, 2007). Pornographic movies are mostly cantered around themes of violent and dominating sex which help perpetuate rape myths such as “Rape is a sexual act that results from sexual urges, most rapes occur between strangers, the way a woman dresses affects the likelihood she will be raped and false reports of rapes are frequent” (Wood 2013, p. 38). South Africa is in the list of top 20 countries that consume the highest amount of porn (Koba, 2017).

In other theories such as the agenda-setting theory, less emphasis is placed on the impact the media has and more on what is covered by it. However, in both theories it can be agreed that the media does decide what is reported and how it is reported, and the stories then become part of the “emotional and cognitive structures of individuals readers and viewers” (Fields 2016, p. 3). In this study, most of the participants thought that media has an influence on how they perceive things including women.

Media influence on perceptions and beliefs is evident as perceived by the participants. With the increase in different forms of media and the easy access to technology means the stereotypes will continue to be passed down and upheld.

### **6.5 Are women more vulnerable to sexual violence when dressed in certain types of clothing?**

Women are often blamed for the violence that is inflicted upon them and how they dress is often seen as the cause. A police officer in Toronto in 2011, told students “Women should avoid dressing like “sluts” to avoid being raped” (Sapa-AP, 2011). In a study prepared for the Vermont Governor’s Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence Task Force in 2012, 60% of the participants agreed that “women who wear tight or revealing clothing are inviting sexual comments or advances.” In Brazil 59% of those surveyed agreed that women who are dressed in provocatively and revealing clothes deserve to be attacked. Other studies have also revealed that judges, psychiatrists, and jurors agreed that women dressed provocatively are most likely to be sexually harassed and that when they are, they too carry some of the responsibility (Wolfendale, 2016).

Other studies also show that both women and men consider certain clothing to be indicative of wanting to engage in sexual activities. In a study by Lennon et al., (2017, p. 1-21), found that both boys and girls believed that “when a woman wore a see-through blouse, low-cut top, tight jeans, or did not wear a bra, she was possibly indicating a desire for sex.” Selepe, Lindegger and Govender (2020), interviewed sex offenders in Limpopo and one of the reasons given when asked why they raped was that women dressed in a provocative way. The participants placed the blame on the victims and implied that they could not control their urges, and the revealing clothes were un-African and indecent.

Womanist theory speaks to relations between African women and men in pre-colonial times. The social and cultural dynamics that existed then show that women were not sexualised nor oppressed. This contrasts with the current status quo in which women are objectified. Womanist theory seeks to bring back some of the values lost and to establish the respect that existed.

Majority of the participants in this study agreed that men intentionally sexually harassed girls and women in revealing western clothes, with reasons and blame – it is an invitation, it arouses the men - being place on the women. There were participants who differed with these views and understood that responsibilities lie with the men and how a woman dressed is not an invitation to anything.

On the question whether they think the high number of sexual assault cases against girls/women are due to them being sexualised in media, a high percentage of participants agreed, and some remained neutral. Media sexualising women, men taking advantage of those who are less powerful (women) and how prolonged exposure to sexually charged visual can affect how one thinks are some of the reasons that were stated. The participants also emphasized that when sexual violence occurs, it is never the woman's fault, but the majority also put the blame on the influence that media has on people. Very few stated that men have a choice to not sexually violate women. The responsibility and burden of the violence is then still put on the victim because yes, the media portrays them in seductive, sexual, and provocative ways but the women's choice to dress in that way in public is what essentially pushes the men to act as such.

## **6.6 Study limitations**

While this study was carried out by applying good clinical practices and abiding by ethical principles, there were some limitations of the study including:

- The implementation of data collecting method due to lack of experience.

The researcher being a master's student and with limited experience in data collection was guided and led by her supervisor and other experienced researchers. The use of Google forms meant the data was collected and sorted seamlessly, making it is to interpret.

- Limited sample size because there were no pre-selected participants.

Face to face interviews is a more popular choice however, they can be expensive and time consuming. For study, an online questionnaire was the preferred method of data collection as it allowed for a diverse sample size. This method was allowed participants to be as honest as possible because it meant they cannot be identified.

Participation and sample sizes online are usually low and that was a risk in this study. To counter that, the sample size was increased to 120 participants and the period of data collection was set at four months. The online questionnaire was shared on two different social media platforms – X/Twitter and Facebook – and the posts were

continuously shared to ensure maximum reach.

In the end, a total of 120 participants took part in the study with five people being disqualified for being underage, not consenting and not being Black South African men.

- Few available studies on representation and media in Africa as well as limitations by geography.

While research on the sexualisation of Black women in the media is available globally and especially in the USA, it is not easily available in South Africa and Africa at large. This study therefore relied on the foundation set by researchers outside the continent and relied on the shared experience of slavery and colonialism of Black women – which is the foundation of the existing stereotypes - across the globe.

Media being a global phenomenon that connects all of us meant that most of what the Black South African men and women are exposed to are what is seen in the USA. American music, television, radio, and advertisement have permeated the global village, and this further deepened the shared experience.

- False data and information available on the internet.

The internet is full of both credible and false information. This study looked at research published in reputable journals, universities, and databases. Newspapers and books were also used as sources of information. Data from social media is on a public platform and it is therefore allowed to be used by all. Comments and conversations on these platforms were collected by the researcher. With regards to indigenous knowledge sources, only thoughts and opinions that could be substantiated by credible and known traditional guardians were used. These were found online and published books. There is also the risk of untruthful answers from the participants.

## **6.7 Contribution to new knowledge**

Scholars have conducted studies on the topic of sexualisation of women – particularly Black women – in society in general as well as the media. There have been theories that explain what objectification is and how media influences the psyche of those who

consume it on a regular basis. Scholars have shown us that men view women dressed in a particular way as sexual and that they use this view to justify the sexual assault and harassment they unleash upon women.

History has shown us how the idea of sexualisation began, from where it came and how it has affected those upon which it was imposed. We have research, data and records of women being blamed for their harassment in public places because of how they were dressed. Research, data and records also show us how women in traditional clothing are treated differently in South Africa. As a country, there are high levels of sexual violence. Men have been known to use rape myths; women are undressed at taxi ranks and people still practice and uphold traditional practices either directly or under the umbrella of African churches.

Although a link between the portrayal of women in media and how men treat them in real life has been shown, it should be noted that showing women in conservative clothing alone will not be enough. In Muslim countries with strict Sharia laws, women are still targeted and faced with sexual harassment and assault. With stricter laws, less visibility of women and a silent society, much of the abuse goes undetected and unreported (Tønnessen, 2016). Research has shown that in countries like Egypt, public sexual harassment – more verbal than physical - and catcalling are widespread and highest in the Arab countries (Donia and Bouhlila, 2018). Muslim countries are strict in how women dress and women are rarely seen in public after hours alone.

Research has shown us that sexually liberated societies and those that are less liberated have similar incidents of sexual crimes which means that there is no link between the two. However, links have been found in societies with “urbanization, poverty, high percentage of divorced men” (Kalra and Bhugra, 2013). Cultural difference could also pose risk and misunderstanding between genders. Men from sexual conservative culture can misinterpret asexual behaviours and openness from women in sexual liberated cultures/mindset which could lead to sexual aggressive behaviours (Kalra and Bhugra, 2013).

Women who are covered being sexually harassed means the cause is deeper than just the images shown and that there is an intersectionality between sex and gender

that comes into play (Wood, 2013). Underneath the immediate sexualised images are the stories being told of women as helpless, dependent, and seductive vixens waiting and wanting to give themselves completely to men (Wood, 2013).

This study has shown that there is a change in the way men perceive women when they are in revealing western clothing versus when in “revealing” traditional clothes. The change in attitude does not mean that women who are traditional do not experience sexual harassment or violence, but it does mean that they experience it less often to none. In public spaces, women who are deemed to be exposed – in the western standards – are sexualised, harassed, and often violated because their clothing is interpreted as provocative, inviting and signals sexual promiscuity.

This study has shown that in South Africa, since Black people still practise their traditions and culture in parallel to those of the west, there is a cognitive dissonance on how words such as “revealing and nudity” are perceived. This disconnect together with the perceived influence that media has through its messaging creates opportunities for misunderstandings of intentions and misguided attempts to uphold what is deemed “proper.”

The concluding chapter provides answers to the research questions, concludes the study and gives recommendations.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study aims to provide insights into why Black South Africa men treat Black women in revealing western clothes differently to those in “revealing” traditional clothes. The study also provides insights into the reasons why there is a cognitive dissonance and whether the perceived difference contributes to the high number of sexual assaults incidents in the country.

At the beginning of the study, I set out five research objectives and the first one were to determine whether Black South African men perceive if women are sexualised in the media in South Africa. I found that Black South African men do perceive that women are sexualised in the media. Most of the participants in the study confirmed this in their responses and this was substantiated by the literature. The second objective was to determine whether Black African men perceive there is a link between the media’s portrayal of Black women and sexual abuse. Results showed that Black South African men do perceive a link between the portrayal of women in media and sexual abuse in real life. Participants further explained that their perceptions are a result of what they see and the messages they receive from the media. Theories supported this perception and provided insights into how and why media can be an influence in people’s lives.

The third was to establish whether men’s perceptions of women are influenced by the media. Participants thought that their perceptions of women are influence by the media they consume. In their explanations, participants stated that the persistent negative stereotypical images of women they are exposed to on a regular basis become reality over time. This concurred with the theories provided. The fourth objective aimed to establish whether revealing western clothing are perceived differently to traditional African clothing. Male participants did perceive western clothing differently from traditional African clothing. Traditional clothing was held in high regards and words such as “pride,” “pure,” “respect’ and “admire” were used. There was also an emphasis on the fact that the word “revealing” is not used to describe traditional clothing and there are not sexual. Western clothing’s perception was the opposite. Many the participants felt these types of clothes conveyed messages of a sexual nature and

they did consider them to be revealing.

To be able to change the perception of Black South African men on the sexualisation of women depending on the types of clothing they are wearing will require a holistic approach. The BCCSA provides clear guidelines on what is permitted on television and radio; however, it does not regulate social media posts or other platforms such as Showmax or Netflix. This allows for sexually charged content to still be accessible to millions of internet users in the country. It has been shown that negative visual images of women in the media are not the only factor that should be seen to have an influence. In both liberal and conservative countries (Islam), women carry the same risk – catcalling, stalking, and groping - of public sexual harassment.

The final objective was to provide data and information that may guide policy making and awareness education to restore the dignity of women, regardless of whether they dress in western clothing or traditional clothing. The study has provided data that shows Black South African men have negative perceptions of women in revealing clothing. This perception is amplified by the portrayal of women in the media. It has also shown that the perception is subjective and that only clothes that fall under the western category are considered revealing. Those that are classified as traditional are never seen as “revealing”. This study also showed that women in more conservative countries – such as Islam countries – still experience sexual harassment in the streets. This tells us the problem goes beyond just the physical images of women that men see.

The psychological impact of colonialism, slavery and apartheid in the minds and thought process of indigenous peoples has been immense. To take a society that was a model of social cohesion and relationships and turn that into one that thrives in chaos, ruins, violence, and dysfunctionality required centuries of targeted effort from all fronts. Although the economic results are more tangible and linked to the many societal issues that African people face, factors such as media influence are overlooked. Constant consumption of information and content that was originally created with the intention to destroy you, is in essence a form of suicide. However, repackaging and continuing with that same formula and feeding your own people, that is betrayal.

While we are in a new era and we too demand and deserve the right to tell our stories and our truths, it is important for us to be cognisant of the effects that certain forms of storytelling or entertainment has on our people. We can no longer feign ignorance, no can we leave it to “others” to fix the problems we co-exist with in our daily lives, we need to take charge by creating content from the perspective of our people. There must be an intentional and direct refusal for that which doesn’t feedback positively into our children, families, communities, nations, and people.

Where the research questions answered?

- In what ways are (Black) women sexualised in South African media?  
The study showed Black women in South African media are sexualised through their portrayal in films, advertisements, music, and other forms of media.
- What do Black South African men think of women in western revealing clothes and those in traditional “revealing” clothes?  
The study showed that majority of Black South African men do not value or respect Black women in revealing western clothes in the same way as they do those in “revealing” traditional clothes.
- How does the media shape the views and perceptions of Black South African men with regards to women?  
The study showed media shapes views and perception by maintaining and repeating the same stereotypes of women that were originally created by the western countries. It perpetuates the myths.
- In what ways are (Black) women in South Africa more vulnerable to sexual violence when dressed in certain types of clothing?  
The study has shown that Black South African men view women in certain types of clothing as less. The study showed the participants perceive women in western revealing clothes as sexual, provocative, and tempting. Most participants expressed they do/have sexually harassed women in revealing western clothes.
- What are the ways in which women’s sexual harassment in relation to their dress code can be reduced?

The study's recommendations section provides answers to this research question.

My recommendations are as follows:

- Clear rules and guidelines - which include all forms of media – on what can be broadcasted. These guidelines can also speak to the negative depiction of women.
- A reduction of sexually charged violent and negative stereotypes on television, radio, and advertising. Content can be allowed to suggest a sexual act rather than explicitly showing it.
- Prohibiting minors from certain social media platforms to assist in preventing children from accessing inappropriate material.
- The inclusion of sex and gender sensitive education at schools, cultural/traditional and religious events. The Reed dance and others like it would be more effective if there was a parallel one that speaks to boys and young men. Initiations schools can also be better utilised by communities to explain and instil in men that all women, regardless of how they are dressed, deserve respect.
- Government should also include sports, arts, and culture across all schools. Activities have been known to create focus and discipline amongst the youth.
- Using the positive aspects of African traditions that celebrate and hold women in high regard and translating those into modern day context allowing Black African men to recognise their own cognitive dissonance.
- Traditional leaders to be educated on their own values that existed before colonisation for them to not only go back and engage their communities directly but to also live in a way that is reflective of those values.

Future studies:

- In future, the studies can focus on specific Black men (in certain professions, in different educational groups) to see if the cognitive dissonance is more prevalent on specific group of Black men.

- A deeper look into how African societies in pre-colonial times guided young men during their transitions into manhood. The methods they used to shape their views on women which can be applied in modern times.
- A look at sexual crimes in African communities that are far away from “civilisation” and compare those with those that are to have a clear idea of the contrasts.

***“Any changes, even a change for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomforts.”***

-Arnold Bennett-

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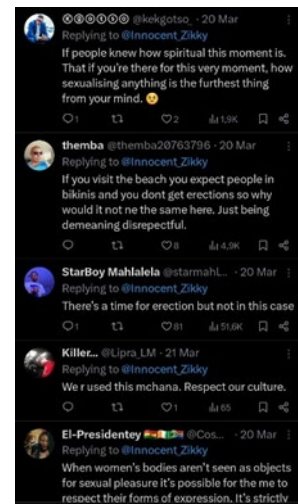
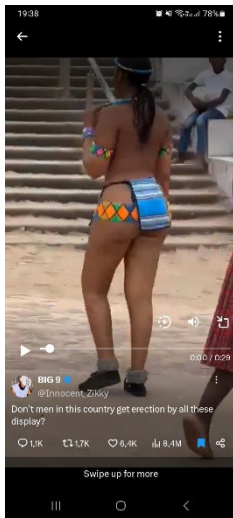
# Appendices

## Appendix 1 - Research questionnaire

<b><u>QUESTIONS</u></b>	<b><u>YES</u></b>	<b><u>NO</u></b>
Do you give consent to voluntarily participate in this study?		
Are you over 18 years?		
Are you a male?		
Are you a South African Citizen?		
Do you consume different forms of media?		
Do you believe in traditional practices?		
Do you believe South Africans should practice their traditions?		
Do you believe traditional practices also include clothes?		
Do you believe that traditions are important and should be maintained?		
Do you believe that women in South African media are sexualised?		
Do you believe that girls and women in traditional clothes are naked?		
Do you consider girls and women in traditional attires to be nude?		
Do you associate girls and women in traditional clothing as sexual?		
Do you believe traditional clothes are revealing?		
Do you believe western clothes have the same value as traditional clothes?		
Do you believe some women's western clothes are revealing?		
Do you associate women in some western clothes as sexual?		
Can you name the type of western clothes that you consider sexual?		
Do you associate women in certain western clothes as sexual? Why?		
How do you feel when you see a woman in revealing western clothes?		
How do you feel when you see a woman in revealing traditional clothes?		

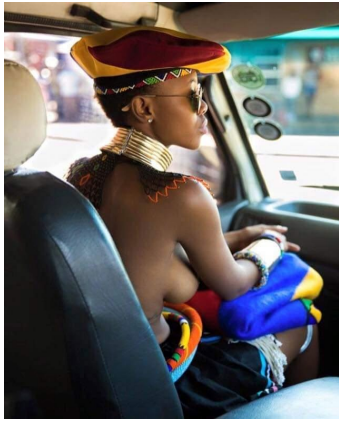
Do you understand why men sexually harass women in revealing western clothes? Why?		
Do you understand why men sexually harass women in revealing traditional clothes? Why?		
Have you ever sexualised a girl/woman in revealing western clothes? Why?		
Have you ever sexualised a girl/woman in revealing traditional clothes? Why?		
Do you consider yourself a traditional man?		
Do you think the high number of sexual assaults against women is due to them being sexualised in media? Why?		
Do you believe media has an influence on how you view things including women?		

## Appendix 2 - Social media comments on revealing traditional clothes.



(X (formerly Twitter), 2024)

**Appendix 3 - Tsholofelo Maseko.**



Tsholofelo Maseko

## Appendix 4 - Social media comments on revealing traditional and western clothes.

The screenshots show a series of posts and replies on X (formerly Twitter) from December 2023. The main post, by user 'From River to Sea', compares two images: a woman in traditional South African attire (labeled 'Respectable') and a woman in revealing Western-style clothing (labeled 'Lack of morals'). The post asks if it's acceptable for a woman to wear traditional attire with her breasts showing, and why it's suddenly sexual when she wears a 'see-through dress'. It also notes that men hate women having control over their bodies.

Replies include:

- Users like 'ubothi Mnguni' and 'ghost' replying to the main post, with some calling the comparison 'foolish'.
- 'Honourable Member' replying to the main post and another user, discussing 'Heritage vs prostitution' and choosing 'Heritage'.
- 'MaShandu Omuhle' replying to the main post, stating 'There's a place and time for everything' and that the woman's confidence is 'rock'.
- 'Nonduku' replying to the main post, stating 'First frame is culture, so yes it's acceptable. Can't say the same about frame 2. What a disgrace!!'.
- 'Jack Napier' replying to the main post, stating 'Eithe you're dumb or you're stupid'.
- 'Amandl'omsindi' replying to the main post, stating 'Your argument is weak'.
- 'Thabiso' replying to the main post, stating 'I don't think you can compare the 2'.
- 'TheRealQueenBee' replying to the main post, stating 'First thing let's establish your culture and history the we can move to the next debate'.
- 'A Commoner' replying to the main post, stating 'You're comparing apples and oranges but since you want to be politically correct, go ahead'.
- 'Angle's Son' replying to the main post, stating 'So breasts are not Sexual just because you said so?'.
- 'Lekker Ding' replying to the main post, stating 'Men respect cultural women, not prostitution sorry about that'.
- 'AfrikanChef\_ZA' replying to the main post, stating 'There is nothing disrespectful here wena'.

(X (formerly Twitter), 2023)