DECLARATION

I declare that this report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters of Social Work at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It is not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University.

References have been duly acknowledged.

SIGNATURE

DATE: 16 OCTOBER 2015
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness; it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity...

-Charles Dickens

There are many people who have supported me throughout this long and hard journey. I am eternally grateful for their guidance, encouragement, and love during the best and worst of times.

First and foremost, I would like to thank God, whose grace and mercy made this accomplishment (and all others) possible.

I would like to thank my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Linda Smith, for her guidance and patience with me, not only on this dissertation, but throughout my education at Wits University. I am thankful Dr. Linda Smith for giving me the opportunity to work with you and challenge me to tackle the "bee in my bonnet" and for insightful advice, time, expertise and support.

I would like to thank my parents, Sisi and Gustav Nkwadi, for their unwavering love. They encouraged me to set high goals and fostered the confidence to achieve them. They have always been there physically, emotionally and financially.

I am blessed to have you. I would like to thank my sister, Ntoba, for sharing with me not only the joys and challenges of postgraduate studies, but of my entire life. I truly, truly, value our relationship. I would like to thank my brothers, Nthato and Kagiso, for believing in me (even when I didn't believe in myself).

Special thanks to Thapelo Kolokoto, I could not have made it through this experience without him. Thapelo always provided a shoulder to cry on and a sounding board to bounce ideas off. I have shared my many uncertainties, challenges and sacrifices for completing this dissertation. I love your devotion.
I would like to thank my aunt Nondumiso Mbundu, who has been like a mother to me, encouraging me to do my best and has told me countless times how proud I make her; those words have always echoed in my ears when times were tough.

Finally, dedicating this report to my late grandmother Ntoba Elizabeth Nkwadi, who passed away in 2014 while I was still finding my feet.
Abstract

Variations and differences in skin colour has been a complex phenomenon around the world. Issues of colour and identity in a postcolonial and post-Apartheid context, is also a significant field of interest. Popular stereotypes portray darker skin pigmentation as undesirable and inferior to lighter pigmentation. The process of ‘lactification’ (Fanon, 1968) remains a question today as much as during earlier colonial times. These stereotypes also bring to the fore, essential questions about hierarchies of power and oppression, culture and identity and how these are shaped to fit popular dominant culture. This study explored peoples’ perceptions around different shades of skin colour and attitudes towards various shades of pigmentation.

The study adopted a qualitative approach and explored perceptions around skin colour through in-depth interviews. Fifteen adult participants in Soweto, Gauteng were recruited for the study via purposive sampling. The data collected was analysed using thematic content analysis. The study found that the western idea of attractiveness is still highly regarded. Black women and men take various measures to conform to the western ideal simply to be acknowledged as attractive and stigma is attached to the dark complexion. Self-esteem is affected by the perception of beauty, high perception of attractiveness equals to the high self-esteem.

Key words:

Colonialism, colourism, identity, social perceptions, whiteness, blackness